LOUISIANA RECOVERY AUTHORITY

PROGRESS REPORT SECOND QUARTER 2009

COVER PHOTO Workers place a new roof on the building of Andrew H. Wilson Elementary School in New Orleans, which is being restored and should be ready for the 2009-2010 school year. Wilson is one of the four "quick start" projects the Recovery School District is funding with pooled Public Assistance funds from FEMA. (More information, page 3)

cover photo courtesy of Recovery School District

VISION Hurricane-impacted regions of the state are rebuilt and revitalized to be physically safe and economically strong, providing a high quality of life while maintaining Louisiana's rich cultural heritage.

MISSION The mission of the Louisiana Recovery Authority is to ensure that Louisiana rebuilds safer, stronger and smarter. There are five areas of focus: securing funding and other resources needed for the recovery, establishing principles and policies for redevelopment, leading long-term community and regional planning efforts, ensuring transparent accountability in the investment of recovery funds, and communicating progress, status and needs of the recovery to officials, community advocates and the public. Throughout its initiatives, the LRA is committed to a recovery process that is fair and equitable to everyone.

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LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater addresses Louisiana's farmers at the annual Farm Bureau Convention in New Orleans. Governor Bobby Jindal, state Agriculture Commissioner Mike Strain, DVM, and Rainwater were at the convention to announce the $44.5 million Agriculture Recovery Program using hurricanes Gustav and Ike recovery funds.

Letter from the Executive Director

The end of the second quarter of 2009 brings the state closer to the fourth anniversaries of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the first anniversaries of hurricanes Gustav and Ike and the last year of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. We have much work to do in order to begin the final transition of recovery programs from the LRA to the Division of Administration and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

In the second quarter we welcomed the appointments of Janet Woodka as FEMA's Federal Coordinator of Rebuilding in the Gulf Coast Region and Craig Fugate as the new FEMA administrator. Ms. Woodka brings a strong knowledge of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, as she is a graduate of Tulane Law School and a former legislative director for Sen. Mary Landrieu. Mr. Fugate was the director of Florida's Division of Emergency Management for eight years before being chosen by President Obama to head FEMA, so he has a strong understanding of and appreciation for hurricane recovery at the state level. We anticipate a successful, collaborative relationship with the new leaders in these critical offices.

One encouraging step has been FEMA's amended policy for funding projects in High Velocity Flood Zones, or V-Zones. An announcement made in June will allow most, if not all, of the 34 affected projects in coastal parishes to move forward, an investment of $33 million in Louisiana's recovery.

While we continue to make steady progress in our recovery efforts from hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we are using the lessons learned from those storms to improve our processes in recovering from hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

HUD recently announced its second allocation of funds for states affected by disasters in 2008, and $620 million was dedicated to Louisiana. This brings the total Community Development Block Grant funds for the state's Gustav and Ike recovery to $1.058 billion and allows us to fully fund recovery programs for agriculture, fisheries and coastal restoration, as well as provide more than $565 million to the parishes to create their own local programs.

Additionally, in June FEMA allocated $177.6 million to the state for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding following Gustav and Ike. Of that, $125.6 million will be split among the 53 affected parishes. Together with the CDBG allocations, this brings the total amount of funds going directly to the affected parishes to nearly $700 million. This sends a bold message that we trust local and parish officials to know best what their communities need to rebuild and return.

Even as we work to implement new recovery programs and see existing programs to fruition, June 1 marked the beginning of another hurricane season. While we all hope to be spared from facing a storm this year, we encourage everyone to have a plan for their families should it be needed. The citizens of Louisiana have shown incredible resiliency in facing four storms in three years, and it is our privilege to represent them at the federal level and to help them rebuild safer, smarter and stronger.

Paul W. Rainwater

Paul Rainwater
Executive Director
Louisiana Recovery Authority

Construction is well underway at the four RSD "Quick Start" schools (clockwise from top left): Andrew H. Wilson Elementary, Langston Hughes Elementary, Greater Gentiliy High and L.B. Landry High.

photos courtesy of Recovery School District

Construction of schools gets boost from combined FEMA grants

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced in May that nearly $150 million of pooled Public Assistance funds had been obligated to the Recovery School District to rebuild four public schools in New Orleans.

The funds represent a consolidation of more than 100 separate FEMA grants to the RSD for repair or replacement of schools throughout Orleans Parish. Combining the grants into one lump sum simplifies the reimbursement process for the RSD and allows the district to apply the money to its Quick Start Initiative, which was launched in 2007 to jump start construction of schools in New Orleans.

The $147.8 million will support completion of:

Langston Hughes Elementary
The new 96,000-square-foot school will include technology-ready classrooms, special education areas, media center and gymnasium.

Andrew H. Wilson Elementary
A complete restoration of the original building along with new construction will add a gymnasium and extra art and music classroom space.

Greater Gentilly High
The new three-story, 165,000-square-foot facility will have several innovative features, including a flexible floor plan with retractable walls to allow for team teaching, systems to accommodate a one-to-one computer ratio and an outdoor classroom.

L.B. Landry High
The new three-story, 210,000-square-foot school will have a total of 52 teaching stations, including career technology labs, visual and performing arts labs, rehearsal spaces and a black box theater.

All four schools are being restored or constructed to be energy efficient. Langston Hughes and the first phase of Andrew H. Wilson will welcome students to classes in the fall. Gentilly High will be complete for an early 2010 occupancy, while L.B. Landry High is scheduled to open in the fall of 2010.

"We have worked with state Education Superintendent Paul Pastorek, RSD Superintendent Paul Vallas and FEMA on streamlining this process for the last three years, but had it not been for Sen. Mary Landrieu's tenacity and vision, the process would still be mired," said Paul Rainwater, executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. "A lot of credit also goes to Tony Russell (FEMA's Louisiana Transitional Recovery Office Director) and his team's efforts to bring this project to fruition. He understands the need to move quickly to help put vital pieces of the city's recovery in place."

Sen. Landrieu pushed for a change to a federal appropriations bill in 2007 that allows for the consolidation of multiple repair grants for school construction. In 2008, Landrieu also pressed legislation in the federal omnibus appropriations bill that restructured the way FEMA assesses penalties for hurricane-impacted school districts that did not participate in the National Flood Insurance Program prior to a disaster.

This modification brought in more than $58 million to the RSD and also impacted school districts in Orleans, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, Plaquemines, Vermilion, Cameron and Calcasieu parishes. There are currently 112 schools in the RSD in New Orleans, 66 of which are open. The RSD also includes 12 schools in East Baton Rouge Parish, two in Caddo Parish and one in Pointe Coupee Parish.

St. Bernard Parish school system owes much to local heroine

Not too long ago, the St. Bernard Parish school system served approximately 8,800 students at 15 schools. Then along came Hurricane Katrina, and every building in the parish either was damaged or destroyed. Since then, Doris Voitier, the district's unsinkable school superintendent, has led the recovery from a zero-population mark to approximately 4,800 students at eight schools.

On the night Katrina made landfall, Voitier and a handful of staffers were operating a shelter-of-last-resort for elderly and infirm local residents at Chalmette High School. Huddled together on the first floor, they watched as the roof blew off the elementary school across the street and listened as windows shattered around them. Finally, there was calm. "When the wind died down, everyone breathed a sigh of relief, because no one had been injured and property damage was minimal," Voitier said. "Then the wall of water came. You could see it getting closer and closer. It was unbelievable."

Voitier, Principal Wayne Warner and Assistant Principal Carole Mundt moved the evacuees upstairs. Many were in wheelchairs, on oxygen, on ventilators, in need of dialysis and in various stages of dementia. "The water leveled off at about eight feet, but not before we lost most of our provisions to the murky brew," she said. "We were surrounded by a lake and could hear cries for help echoing off the roof tops."

The number of evacuees swelled to 1,200 people with more than 100 pets, as citizens performed rescue operations and victims were pulled to safety through second-story windows. Two days later, the group waded to the Mississippi River levee, boarded boats and headed upstream. Voitier landed at the Exxon Mobil dock in Baton Rouge.

Using nothing but a borrowed computer, Voitier and her staff set up temporary offices in Baton Rouge within one week. She withdrew all the district's federal, state and local monies, issued payroll to employees and dispatched records to students scattered across the United States. "Our focus remained clear, to reopen the St. Bernard Parish schools. Our first responders never left the area, and oil and sugar refinery workers who were living on river barges and in travel trailers wanted to bring their families back," she said. "We needed to get our schools up and running or our community would die."

Voitier and her staff forged ahead, locating portable classrooms, travel trailers, a disaster clean-up team and scavenging for building and educational materials. On Nov. 14, 2005 – just 11 weeks after the storm – the team welcomed 334 students to portable classrooms on the football field parking lot at Chalmette High School, with the teachers living across the street in travel trailers.

continued on following page

(Left) St. Bernard Parish School System Superintendent Doris Voitier never waivered in her determination to rebuild the parish's schools.
(Right) A $3.5 million walkway will link Chalmette High School's main campus with the new 9th Grade Academy being built across the street. The climate-controlled walkway crosses over the four-lane Judge Perez Drive and allows students to access both campuses safely.

walkway photo courtesy of Karen Turni Bazile

ST. BERNARD PARISH SCHOOLS

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Today, Voitier still oversees the school district's disaster recovery effort, which has seen eight of the parish's 15 schools reopen, the consolidation of three high schools into one and the construction of a $50 million infrastructure project at Chalmette High School. The project will use Community Development Block Grant funds, FEMA Public Assistance funds and private investments to build an athletic facility for football, softball, track and tennis; a gymnasium for wrestling, fitness and swimming; an arts center with a 400-seat theater, music room, dance studio and choral studio; a 150-seat technology theater with computer hookups; a school library; and a public library with a coffee shop.

Second allocation of funds brings Louisiana's total to $1 billion for Gustav/Ike recovery

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced on June 10 that Louisiana was awarded $620 million in the second allocation of its $6.1 billion Community Development Block Grant funds for states affected by disasters in 2008. Together with the first allocation of $438 million, this brings the state's total to $1.058 billion in Gustav and Ike recovery funds.

Governor Bobby Jindal said, "Louisiana has been struck by four major hurricanes in three years, and this assistance is critical for helping our parishes support their housing, economic development and infrastructure priorities. We are absolutely committed to building back stronger than ever before, and this funding will give communities the vital assistance they need to rebuild and encourage growth in their local economies."

To use federal CDBG funds, states must present action plans for federal approval. HUD already approved Louisiana's first action plan for using these funds, giving the state the ability to draw down administrative and other funds. The projected plan is estimated as follows:

- State-level set aside - $212 million
- Agriculture - $54.8 million
- Coastal restoration - $27.4 million
- Fisheries - $27.4 million
- Affordable rental housing - $118.6 million
- Parish-level allocations for housing, infrastructure and economic development - $565.5 million
- Local and state administrative costs - $52.9 million

HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan also announced the creation of a $312 million Disaster Recovery Enhancement Fund that is available to states that spend their existing funding on programs that reduce the risks of loss of life and extent of future damage. States must demonstrate that their current CDBG funding is being spent on such damage-reducing activities, which may include:

- Buyout payments for homeowners living in high-risk areas;
- Optional relocation payments to encourage residents to move to safer locations;
- Home improvement grants to reduce damage risks, such as elevation, reinforced garage doors and windows;
- Improving and enforcing building codes; and
- Developing forward-thinking land-use plans that reduce development in high-risk areas.

"We look forward to competing for these dollars and demonstrating Louisiana's innovations in recovery," said Paul Rainwater, executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority.

Since the allotment of initial funds last fall and approval of the Gustav and Ike Action Plan in March, LRA staff have held several outreach events for parish leaders and already have signed Cooperative Endeavor Agreements with 30 of the 43 parishes receiving funds, as well as the state Department of Agriculture and Forestry, which will allow these entities to act as sub-grantees of the state and administer their own programs. The CEA with the Agriculture Department was approved in June, clearing the way for the agency to begin requesting funds and to launch the farm and agribusiness recovery programs.

Many parishes, working in conjunction with municipalities, have started holding required community participation meetings to obtain citizen input on their recovery proposals and critical needs. The state anticipates beginning to approve individual parish proposals this summer.

State officials unveil recovery program for Louisiana farmers at Farm Bureau Convention

State officials unveiled details of the $44.5 million Agriculture Recovery Grant and Loan Program to Louisiana's farmers at the annual Farm Bureau Convention in New Orleans on June 26.

The program has two essential components: The Farm Recovery Program, which is designed to help farmers and ranchers affected by hurricanes Gustav and Ike with their 2009 production costs through a 20 percent grant and 80 percent low-interest loan process; and the Agribusiness Recovery Program, which provides low-interest loans for agribusinesses like aerial applicators, cotton gins and elevators.

Funds will be administered through the Agriculture Department's Louisiana Agricultural Finance Authority office, and applications for the programs will be taken from July 13 to Aug. 21. This is the first time that federal Community Development Block Grant funds will be spent on agricultural programs. The LRA set aside the dollars due to the tremendous damages suffered by the industry as a result of the 2008 storms: more than 76 percent of cotton, 73 percent of sweet potato and 10 percent of sugarcane crops were lost.

Gov. Jindal announces $177.6 million in federal funding for post-Gustav and Ike hazard mitigation

Gov. Bobby Jindal announced in June that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has granted Louisiana $177.6 million in Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding to support projects to protect the state from future damage following hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

The Louisiana Recovery Authority's board of directors voted to approve priorities for this funding, setting aside the majority of the money for parishes to support local hazard mitigation programs, which could include home elevations and other measures to protect areas of the parishes from loss in future storms.

A portion of the funds will be set aside for state-run programs. The broad allocations are:

- $125.6 million to be split among affected parishes
- $33.3 million toward a pilot coastal restoration program and/or community safe houses
- $17.7 million to fund five-percent state initiative programs

The five-percent state initiative programs are typically designed by the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness to fill an unmet mitigation need.

The $177.6 million is FEMA's initial allocation of HMGP funds, which could increase as the scope of the post-Gustav and Ike Public Assistance program grows in Louisiana.

Unlike HMGP funds given to the state after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, this HMGP funding comes with a requirement for local and state governments to pay matching costs, meaning the federal government pays 75 percent of the costs, with local or state government required to pay for 25 percent of the cost of the projects. Louisiana repeatedly has requested that the federal government waive or lower the state and local match requirement, given the scope of the destruction wrought by four storms in three years.

Parish allocations for Gustav/Ike Recovery

Parish	CDBG ($)	HMGP ($)	Parish	CDBG ($)	HMGP ($)
Terrebonne	123,270,148	16,410,684	Orleans	1,982,628	2,105,105
Cameron	53,148,217	9,109,896	St. Helena	3,402,232	651,585
Iberville	44,197,877	4,378,891	East Feliciana	3,011,481	713,888
East Baton Rouge	34,223,293	8,617,740	Acadia	2,513,759	947,364
Lafourche	33,633,297	6,425,787	Evangeline	2,237,170	879,632
Jefferson	27,143,935	5,782,573	Catahoula	2,277,264	569,423
Assumption	26,879,387	3,168,226	Plaquemines	1,929,632	491,305
St. Mary	19,461,923	4,734,133	West Feliciana	1,441,783	509,910
Calcasieu	17,707,489	6,472,204	East Carroll	1,203,307	518,886
Ascension	19,370,564	4,637,789	Richland	684,802	425,188
Rapides	16,362,354	4,576,489	Beauregard	704,534	291,436
Pointe Coupee	15,916,088	2,243,648	Concordia	470,415	491,915
Tangipahoa	10,032,566	7,317,345	Allen	498,193	334,914
St. Landry	12,769,792	3,651,095	Grant	424,360	389,917
Livingston	11,264,828	4,032,859	Morehouse	361,753	283,071
Iberia	11,035,502	4,084,945	Jefferson Davis	334,500	289,494
St. James	10,533,467	1,962,311	St. Bernard	250,549	273,264
Vermilion	8,369,081	3,463,504	West Carroll	179,056	321,902
West Baton Rouge	8,197,025	1,424,831	Washington	228,287	206,492
St. John the Baptist	6,984,655	1,576,838	LaSalle	154,738	150,000
St. Martin	5,312,648	1,811,242	Madison	150,000	150,000
Franklin	4,471,702	1,567,165	Sabine	150,000	150,000
St. Charles	4,809,266	883,375	Tensas	150,000	150,000
St. Tammany	3,794,007	1,451,577	Union	150,000	150,000
Avoyelles	3,906,483	1,275,352	Vernon	150,000	150,000
Ouachita	3,709,549	1,468,380	Winn	150,000	150,000
Lafayette	3,845,537	1,303,687	TOTAL	565,541,123	125,577,257

(Upper) The first 10 single-family units at Jackson Barracks in New Orleans are scheduled to be complete in July.
(Lower) The exteriors of most of the 42 cottages at the Hidden Cove site in Baton Rouge are complete.

Deadline for Alternative Housing Pilot Program moves to January 2010

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has extended the deadline for Louisiana's $74.5 million Alternative Housing Pilot Program, commonly known as Katrina Cottages from Sept. 30, 2009 to Jan. 31, 2010, to allow the state more time to complete environmental clearances needed to begin construction.

When the Louisiana cottages are finished, individuals who still are receiving housing assistance from the 2005 hurricane season will get first priority for occupancy.

The cottages are part of a four-year federal pilot program created to identify better solutions to housing disaster victims than FEMA's standard approach of providing trailers. At the end of the program, FEMA's Joint Housing Solutions Group will go before Congress to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects.

Construction on the homes at the 6th Avenue site in Lake Charles began in April and is expected to be complete in September.

The progress to date is as follows:

- Jackson Barracks in New Orleans: 93 units; construction under way.
- Hidden Cove neighborhood in Baton Rouge: 42 units; construction under way.
- Sixth Avenue in Lake Charles: 34 units; construction under way.
- Scattered sites in Lake Charles: 46 units; construction under way.
- Ephesus neighborhood in Westwego: 27 units; construction under way.
- Scattered sites in New Orleans: 100 units; environmental clearances in progress.
- HANO-Fischer in Algiers: 100 units; groundbreaking in July.
- Treme neighborhood in New Orleans: 60 units; environmental clearances in progress.

Case management program, collaboration helps residents find housing solutions

The Louisiana Recovery Authority is working to help residents still in the Disaster Housing Assistance Program – and also in Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers – find more permanent housing solutions.

In February, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development agreed to extend assistance to those in DHAP through Aug. 31 and requested that the state administer the case management component. The DHAP Transitional Closeout Case Management program was launched in April to assist the 12,500 eligible families still in temporary housing.

Through the program, a statewide hotline – 1-866-202-3487 – was launched for families to call, and outreach efforts were made to public housing authorities as well as directly to eligible families. More than 300 case managers have been trained by the state to assist the households, and they currently are working to connect households to available programs and resources.

Since the program began, more than 11,000 DHAP clients have registered for case management services and approximately 4,000 permanent Housing Choice Vouchers have been issued by public housing authorities statewide. Through Housing Choice Vouchers, a family can choose where to live, and a subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the local public housing authority. The family pays the difference between the actual rent charged and the amount subsidized.

The state will continue to work closely with providers throughout the summer, connecting clients to appropriate programs and developing a plan to ensure a safety net for vulnerable families after the Aug. 31 deadline.

FEMA's trailer and hotel/motel housing assistance for those affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita officially ended on May 1, although the agency has committed that there will be no actual evictions of tenants working on a post-trailer housing solution. FEMA also made changes to its mobile home sales and donations programs, announcing in early June that it would reopen these programs and reduce the price of trailer sales to $1 for park models and $5 for mobile homes. As of June 29, 290 trailers had been sold, with 394 sales pending. Additionally, nonprofit groups are working with FEMA to donate trailers to those unable to purchase the units. Currently, more than 340 families are eligible for donations.

LRA staff has been collaborating with FEMA officials in reviewing households on a case-by-case basis to ensure that no residents are left homeless, and also to connect eligible applicants with available resources. One such resource is the Rapid Re-Housing program, run by the state Department of Social Services, which provides three to 12 months of rental assistance to families in need. LRA staff has connected trailer households to Continuum of Care agencies that can help the families identify suitable rental units.

Families who were in hotels or motels receiving FEMA assistance are now being helped through the state's Rapid Re-Housing program, which will also be a valuable support to families exiting from DHAP.

LRA staff will continue to work with HUD and FEMA officials to ensure that families using DHAP and living in FEMA trailers are successfully transitioned to a stable living situation.

FEMA denies the state's appeal for full replacement cost of Charity Hospital

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has denied Louisiana's appeal for full replacement cost, $492 million, for Charity Hospital in New Orleans. This decision affirms the original judgment by FEMA's Transitional Recovery Office in New Orleans that the hospital did not suffer more than 50 percent damage during Hurricane Katrina. FEMA has offered to pay $150 million for storm damages.

In response to the denial, the Office of Facility Planning and Control formally submitted its second appeal for the full replacement cost of the hospital to the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, where the appeal will be reviewed before it is submitted to FEMA. Now that OFP, as the Public Assistance applicant in the case, has submitted the appeal to GOSHEP, the state has 60 days to take action.

LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater expressed his hope that FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security would formalize rules for the arbitration process which Congress established in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in February. With the arbitration process in place, the state would have the option to choose between a traditional appeal and arbitration.

Rainwater issued the following statement regarding the progress of the state's appeal:

"This is a crucial next step in the process. For years, the state and FEMA have debated the merits of this project, and the state has presented three studies that show the damage to Charity Hospital exceeds 50 percent, which under federal law means that the fair action is for FEMA to award Louisiana $492 million. The level of damage and the replacement cost of the hospital are the central issues of this appeal, rather than the future location and governance of the hospital.

"This project will be a shot in the arm for New Orleans recovery from Hurricane Katrina and will ensure world-class health care and medical training for the region. Should the arbitration panel never materialize, the state will submit its appeal directly to FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate and exercise our right to argue an oral appeal before FEMA, which is something the state fought for, and won, last year."

The Road Home program has provided more than 124,000 homeowners funds to restore and elevate their homes, such as this Lakeview Home in New Orleans.

Management of Road Home program moves to multiple contractors

During the second quarter of 2009, the state successfully transitioned the management of the Road Home program from ICF International to four separate contractors. While ICF's contract did not officially end until June 11, the transition took place in early April.

Hammerman and Gainer, Inc. now manages the homeowner portion of the program, administering the last of the Road Home grants and assisting applicants.

ACS State and Local Solutions, Inc. is managing the Small Rental Property program, and The Compass Group was chosen to run the Piggyback program. CGI Technologies and Solutions, Inc. provides information technology services.

As of June 30, 124,219 homeowners received nearly $8 billion through the program, and almost 29,000 received $831.3 million in Road Home funds to elevate their homes.

Recent V-Zone decisions benefit parishes, residents

Many concerns about Louisiana's recovery progress have arisen since the Federal Emergency Management Agency released its new Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps, which significantly increased the amount of coastal areas identified as being at high risk for future flooding.

The state has continued to fight to save communities in these high velocity flood zones, or V-Zones, winning two recent victories: the extension of temporary housing in Cameron Parish and a change in FEMA's policies regarding Public Assistance projects.

Temporary Housing

Cameron Parish storm victims now have until March 13, 2010, to vacate their FEMA park-model, disaster-housing trailers. The decision affects 41 households living in V-Zones, who had not been able to receive a FEMA trailer in that area until January 2009.

Cameron Parish, hit hard by Hurricane Rita in 2005 and again by Hurricane Ike in 2008, had a scarcity of rental options that makes trailers crucial for those who need a place to live while re-building their homes.

The new deadline – the standard 18 months from the date of the presidential disaster declaration – brings Cameron Parish in line with other Ike-impacted parishes.

Public Assistance Policy

Most hurricane recovery project previously stalled because they are in V-Zones can now move forward, thanks to a revision of FEMA's Public Assistance policy.

FEMA had disapproved the rebuilding of many fire stations, recreation centers, schools and other facilities over disputes about construction in high-risk flood areas.

As many as 34 projects across south Louisiana will be helped by the change. The 34 projects totaling $33 million are in Cameron, Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines and St. Tammany parishes.

Mitigation Analyst Jennifer Richard consults with New Orleans resident Jimmy Kenny on an expense reimbursement application for work completed at his Lakeview home.

State boosts HMGP elevation award to $100,000

Offered through the Office of Community Development's Disaster Recovery Unit, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for home elevations now pay ups to $100,000 for eligible costs not paid for by other government-funded elevation programs. Previously, HMGP capped out at $30,000.

Three federal sources supply funding for home elevations: the National Flood Insurance Program's Increased Cost of Compliance program, the Road Home program and the OCD-DRU HMGP award.

Lara Robertson, deputy director of OCD-DRU, said, "This award will help bridge the gap for Road Home participants who had flood damage from hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Since most elevation projects cost more than the $30,000 available through the Road Home program, we hope the increased HMGP award will encourage additional elevations."

She cautioned that homeowners first must use all their money from the NFIP-ICC and Road Home elevation programs. "But if elevation costs exceed that amount, homeowners can apply for up to $100,000 in HMGP funding."

The OCD-DRU HMGP award is a reimbursement grant, unlike the Road Home's upfront grant, so homeowners only get paid for work that already has been completed. They receive one payment at the mid-point and a final check at the conclusion of the project.

However, homeowners need to be aware of certain requirements before they begin the elevation process:

- Before starting, all elevation projects must have environmental and historical preservation clearance letters from FEMA.
- Anyone can perform work on projects costing up to $7,500.
- Only registered contractors can perform work on projects costing from $7,500 to $75,000.
- Only state-licensed contractors can perform work on projects costing more than $75,000.

In addition, home raising projects fall into two types: elevation projects and reconstruction projects. Each category has unique standards.

The elevation category refers to lifting the lowest floor of the home so that it will comply with local floodplain ordinances. The finished project provides a higher first floor, allowing the floodwater to flow under the house rather than through it.

The reconstruction category refers to demolishing and rebuilding a home in compliance with the highest elevation level on federal flood maps. In addition, the reconstruction must conform to the International Residential Code's minimum requirements for one- and two-family dwellings, with the total square footage exceeding no more than 10 percent of the original home.

Not everyone qualifies for the OCD-DRU HMGP elevation grant. To be eligible, homeowners must have applied for the Road Home program and selected Option One. Additional restrictions also apply, although projects are considered on a case-by-case basis.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HMGP

visit the Louisiana Recovery Authority's Web site at www.lra.louisiana.gov and click on the "Hazard Mitigation Grant Program-Elevation" link at the bottom of the home page.

LRA board approves plans to enhance housing assistance programs

In June, the Louisiana Recovery Authority's board of directors took action on $29 million worth of housing programs, including enhancing existing programs to prevent homelessness and expanding an initiative to help nonprofits working with homeowners to complete their home reconstructions.

PILOT REBUILDING PROGRAMS

The board voted to increase the amount of funding for the Nonprofit Rebuilding Pilot Program from $5 million to $20 million. The board had offered preliminary approval to this plan in April, but following input from the community during the required public comment period, the LRA increased the amount of this funding because of the great need for housing and the strong work of nonprofit groups assisting those struggling to rebuild.

The program will award competitive grants to nonprofits and other organizations that have a proven track record in assisting homeowners to meet gaps in their rebuilding resources. After receiving LRA board approval, the Louisiana Legislature, during its 2009 Regular Session, approved the program by passing Senate Concurrent Resolution 150. The state now will submit an action plan amendment to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for final approval.

The board also approved a pilot program to allow Plaquemines Parish to use $4 million of its $13 million in Small Rental Program funds for a Homeowner Rehabilitation Program. Plaquemines had a very small number of landlords participate in the Small Rental program and will use the money to address the parish's urgent housing need. This program now goes to HUD for final approval.

EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE

The board of directors also reallocated $5 million in unallocated funds from the Small Rental Property program to the state's Rapid Re-Housing program, which is run by nonprofit agencies under a contract with the state Department of Social Services. The additional funds will bring the program's total available funding to $12.7 million.

Rapid Re-Housing funds are used to offer temporary rental assistance, pay utility connection fees and other costs necessary to assist families threatened by homelessness. Following a federally required public comment period, the state will submit its plan to add funds to the program for HUD approval.

State's Long Term Community Recovery program approves infrastructure projects

The state's $700 million Long Term Community Recovery program supports implementation of local governments' long-term recovery plans in the most heavily impacted communities.

The Community Development Block Grant funds are distributed among the parishes through the Louisiana Recovery Authority/ Office of Community Development according to a formula based on estimated housing and infrastructure damages inflicted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS RECEIVED APPROVAL THIS QUARTER:

$5.3 million for revitalization of the Lakefront Area in Lake Charles: (Below) The funding will enhance the Lakefront Promenade and provide infrastructure improvements. City officials held a groundbreaking ceremony on June 1.

continued on following page

An artist's rendering of how the enhanced Lake Charles waterfront promenade will look upon completion.

graphic courtesy of Lake Charles Mayor's Office

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$2.7 million for First Responder Communications Equipment in Washington and Tangipahoa Parishes: Washington Parish will receive $1.3 million for the purchase of 563 new 700 megahertz radios and $778,948 for construction of a new radio tower. Tangipahoa Parish will receive $625,000 for the purchase of 338 new 700 MHz radios. The equipment will allow interoperable communications between first responders both locally and across the state.

$4.4 million for 10 bridge replacements in Vermilion Parish: Ten bridges in Vermilion Parish will be replaced to increase the load capacity and safety of the bridges, allowing them to handle more water during future storm surges and river flooding.

$3 Million for Nuisance Abatement in New Orleans: As part of the city's neighborhood stabilization plan to protect the public interest by alleviating slum appearance and blight on unoccupied properties while the city recovers and rebuilds, the state approved $3 million for a nuisance abatement program that will clean and maintain vacant lots in New Orleans.

$11 Million for Recreation Center in Chalmette: (Below) The funds will be used to build a recreation center on 33 acres of enhanced green space Val Riess Park in Chalmette. The center will accommodate 80 percent of the parish's sports, recreational and festival activities and will increase tourism by 15 percent.

St. Bernard Parish Recreation Director Donny Bourgeois monitors new sod being applied at one of the new baseball fields at Val Riess Park.

photo courtesy of Karen Turni Bazile

$2.6 Million for Lafitte Greenway in New Orleans: The New Orleans Office of Recovery and Development Administration will use the funds to develop the 3.1 mile Lafitte Corridor Revitilization Plan and Greenway Trail Design and Construction Project in the Treme and Mid-City neighborhoods.

$2 Million for Purchase of Former Holy Cross School in Lower Ninth Ward: Acquisition of the 12 acres of land is the first step in the city's plan to establish a National Center for Community Health and Research facility on the site.

$842,695 for Drainage Projects in Abbeville, Gueydan: The state has approved two drainage projects in Vermilion Parish. The approved projects include $674,156 for construction of an Abbeville pumping station and $168,539 for upgrades at the Gueydan pumping station.

$500,000 for Sewer Improvements in Kenner: Sewer Lift Station No. 4106 lost electricity for two weeks after the storm, causing backflow of wastewater that damaged the station's pumping equipment. The CDBG funds will be used to install a 135 kilowatt backup generator, three flood suction pumps and other improvements.

$395,000 for Temporary Library in Gentilly Neighborhood of New Orleans: The state approved $395,000 for a three-year lease on a commercial space that will provide a temporary library in the Gentilly neighborhood of New Orleans. The temporary library will be within walking distance of the damaged Norman Mayer Library at 2098 Foy St.

$4.3 million for the purchase of Gentilly Woods Shopping Center in New Orleans: (Below) Purchased by the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority with $4.3 million from the state, the decaying shopping center either will be rehabilitated or torn down, depending on market conditions and interest from potential tenants.

The New Orleans Redevelopment Authority will use funding from the Long Term Community Recovery program to either repair or demolish the Gentilly Woods Shopping Center, which has remained shuttered since Hurricane Katrina.

St. Bernard parish fire stations No. 3 and No. 10 hold grand openings

In April, federal, state and local officials attended grand openings at two fire stations in St. Bernard Parish, which were repaired using Federal Emergency Management Agency Public Assistance funds and the parish government's insurance proceeds.

Repairs to Fire Station No. 3 at 9240 W. Judge Perez Drive in Chalmette cost about $400,000 and repairs to Fire Station No. 10 at 3901 Bayou Road in Verret tallied about $500,000.

The work included interior renovation and exterior refurbishing. Also, emergency generators at both stations will be provided by a grant from the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

Louisiana Recovery Authority Board Member Walter Leger, Jr., said, "As we look at the improvements to these fire stations, as we see the new buildings and the greenness of this parish, it doesn't take long to understand how much progress we have made."

Heralding the grand openings as "another great day" for the community, St. Bernard Parish President Craig P. Taffaro Jr. said, "When we are celebrating the rebirth of community, I don't think we can ever get tired of the celebrations. Having permanent fire stations is critical to the safety and economic development of the parish."

FEMA has provided $783 million in Public Assistance funding to St. Bernard Parish, of which nearly $7 million is earmarked for firefighting equipment, fire house contents, a temporary fire station and replacement or repair of 10 fire stations.

Although all of St. Bernard's fire stations were damaged by Hurricane Katrina, firefighters have been stationed in temporary facilities throughout the parish in order to provide continuous fire protection. Fire Station No. 1 in Arabi was the first renovated station to open in August 2008.

St. Bernard Parish Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Col. David Dysart cuts the ribbon at the grand opening of Fire Station No. 10 in Verret. Helping him celebrate (from left to right) are Fire Chief Thomas Stone, LRA Board Member Walter Leger, Jr. and St. Bernard Parish President Craig Taffaro, Jr. (Right) Fire Station No. 3 in Chalmette also reopened in April.

photos courtesy of Karen Turni Bazile

Four years later - progress in Katrina/Rita recovery

Four years later, recovery from Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita continues to impact Louisiana's economy as it progresses, and funds flowing into the state after Gustav and Ike are positively affecting Louisiana as well:

- From Jan. 1 to June 30, 2009, the state spent almost $1.2 billion on Katrina and Rita recovery from Community Development Block Grant and FEMA Public Assistance funding: that is an investment of almost $7 million a day.
- For the first half of 2009, the state has paid more than $500 million in FEMA Public Assistance funds for Katrina and Rita Recovery.
- When combined with funds paid through the smaller Gustav and Ike PA program, Louisiana has paid out more than $750 million to state and local PA applicants in just six months, representing infrastructure investment unheard of in many states.
- In total, for all four storms, the PA program has more than $8.2 billion worth of work funded by FEMA. This number is expected to grow as the scope of work on individual projects changes.
- Since the state launched its "Express Pay" program last year, it has quickly paid more than $1.1 billion to PA applicants. The average turnaround time for payment is currently five business days, as opposed to the 45 to 60 day it took previously.

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