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## **Mississippi Governor Enlists Congress for the New Urbanism in Historic Coastal Planning Effort**

Working with Gov. Haley Barbour, a national team of 100 architects, planners, development experts, and other professionals organized by the Chicago-based Congress for the New Urbanism, will gather in Biloxi, Mississippi Oct. 11 for a post-Katrina planning effort unprecedented in its scope and intensity.

Calling this “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to rebuild the Gulf Coast “the right way” in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Gov. Barbour has made the CNU initiative an integral part of his post-hurricane strategy of “recovery, rebuilding and renewal.”

The CNU team, headed by leading Miami architect-planner Andres Duany, will join with local colleagues, elected officials, and others citizens in the region for an intensive, weeklong set of workshops, dubbed the Mississippi Renewal Forum. Over its six and a half days, the forum will produce planning and architectural tools that can guide local and state officials in rebuilding 11 cities in three counties along the entire length of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

“Governor Barbour has made it clear that he wants the people of Mississippi to come out of this stronger than ever,” says John Norquist, President and CEO of CNU, a membership organization of 2500 professionals committed to adapting traditional city and town planning principles to today’s community building challenges. “These workshops create the opportunity to focus on the future and on rebuilding communities of vibrant neighborhoods.”

The effort is unprecedented. Never before have so many resources been assembled so quickly to aid rebuilding across a broad area. But the process behind the forum is familiar to New Urbanists, who use collaborative meetings, called charrettes, to achieve community consensus in complex planning efforts. Among the participants in the forum are experts in environmental protection, road and transit planning, social issues, economic development, and the design of residences, neighborhoods, and town centers. The group also will include urban designers and town planners who have devoted years to studying the architecture and layout of traditional Southern towns.

“What we do now,” says Gov. Barbour, “will decide what the Coast will look like in 10 years, 20 years, and beyond. We must seize this opportunity to do this right.”

“The tools that emerge from the forum will be valuable, but optional,” Duany said. “Nothing will be imposed. We have a tremendous opportunity to improve communities while rebuilding them. We want to give Mississippians the tools to create places that are more visually pleasing, more environmentally friendly, more diverse, and more secure from hurricanes.”

In addition to sessions examining multi-jurisdictional issues in South Mississippi, individual workshops will focus on the communities of Waveland, Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, Long Beach, Gulfport, Biloxi, D’Iberville, Ocean Springs, Gautier, Moss Point and Pascagoula.

“I look forward to welcoming everyone to Biloxi who will be a part of this process,” said A.J. Holloway, Mayor of Biloxi. “I’m eager to see what ideas they bring, and how our local people respond. We want people to remember not the storm’s damage, but to remember the Coast for how great our recovery effort was.”

From a base of operations at the Isle of Capri Hotel, the teams will work to create the planning building blocks for neighborhoods that feel like longtime Mississippi favorites. Tools include neighborhood-based plans, simplified codes and approval procedures for buildings, and the design of low-cost buildings of character that can be built quickly but retained for permanent use. There also will be designs for redeveloping land once occupied by vacant or blighted commercial strips into walkable districts that echo the much-loved older parts of the affected communities. Other design concepts will look to integrate gracefully the formerly water-based casinos, now likely to be built on land, into the fabric of the towns where they are placed.

While the logistics and some expenses of the charettes will be covered in part by a grant from the Knight Foundation, the CNU professionals are donating much of their time at greatly reduced rates, or for free in many cases.

**Follow the Mississippi Renewal Forum at <http://www.mississippirenewal.com> .**

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