

Rebuilding in the Face of Global Warming

John P. Klingman, RA, Favrot Professor at the Tulane School of Architecture

Carey Clouse, Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Tulane School of Architecture, Rose Architectural Fellow

Charles Allen III, President of Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, Assistant Director for External Relations at the Tulane/Xavier Center for Bioenvironmental Research

New Orleans is a city with many unanswered questions about its social and structural sustainability as well as the future of the surrounding environment in which it inhabits. It would seem on first glance that rebuilding New Orleans and saving our environment might be two separate issues, but this session suggests they are interconnected. In this session, professors from the Tulane School of Architecture as well as a representative from a heavily damaged area of New Orleans came discuss the issue of the rebuilding this city in the face of global warming.

The session began with a slide show by professor John Klingman. He presented a variety of architectural structures from Stonehenge to brand new, state of the art, architectural designs. Klingman emphasized the idea of sustainable design. It is not only about making a building “environmentally friendly”, but building a smart structure that is efficient from all angles. “There are five billion square feet of building and five billion square feet of remodeling every year, which gives us a great opportunity to make a change in the way we build,” he said. New Orleans is no exception to this rule. The rebuilding of this city offers a tremendous opportunity to pave the way for sustainable design beyond the region. Looking back, neighborhoods like the 9th ward do not follow the ideas of sustainable design because building in the ‘right place in the first place’ is part of the theory; But now that people have built their lives in these risky areas, changes in future designs can help to create sustainable structures in areas like the 9th ward. Klingman heavily suggests that architecture needs to become part environmental dialogue. City officials, architects, developers and residents need to consider more carefully “how the architectural picture fits into the bigger picture” of recovery.

Professor Carey Clouse specifically focused on environmentally friendly and affordable housing. She is a Rose Architectural Fellow, a research program that matches architects with communities that have few avenues to design expertise. Clouse specializes in the construction of affordable housing and is currently working on the design for the Providence Housing Project. Affordable housing is defined as housing priced so that low to moderate wage earners can afford it. The problem is that many believe that in order to keep the prices of these domiciles low, concern for the environment cannot be considered. It has to be one or the other. But according to Clouse, affordable housing can be environmentally friendly with the proper forethought and planning. With 350,000 homes lost in Katrina, there is a great opportunity to start over employing the ‘green building’ concept. Clouse recognizes that building with ‘the environment in mind’ can be costly, but she believes that it could prove to be a wise investment in the future. She suggests that the only way to make these adjustments is for public policy to change. By requiring ‘green building’ for affordable housing in New Orleans, the city could become a model for the region.

President of the 9th Ward’s Holy Cross neighborhood association, Charles Allen III had much to share. Since hurricane Katrina hit, he has been working to bring back a sense of normalcy to the lives of those who returned to rebuild in the 9th Ward. Occasionally, Allen wonders, “Will we ever be able to bounce back”? He realizes the importance of sustainable design and green building and wants others to realize its importance as well. Residents of the Holy Cross neighborhood are talking about sustainability and they want to rebuild in an environmentally friendly way. Allen says that sustainable recovery is happening in his neighborhood, thanks to efforts by Brad Pitt’s ‘Make It Right’ organization. If it catches on in other parts of the city, Allen envisions a future New Orleans that is “better, smarter [and] more sustainable.”

Discussion

In the Q&A session, an emphasis was put on the idea of improving as opposed to rebuilding. One audience member asked whether sustainable development is still considered sustainable development when built in an unsustainable place. The panel responded that the culture of New Orleans

obligates the community to rebuild despite the fact that some areas of the city should not have been built upon in the first place. Allen added that stakeholders in his neighborhood are considering alternative uses for portions of the land located in unsustainable areas. Klingman added, "three to seven tons of waste is created by every construction project." This underscores the importance of recycling as well as building new construction with environmentally friendly materials. At the close of the session, Klingman, Clouse and Allen reiterated that hurricane Katrina represented an opportunity to re-evaluate re-building strategies that favored more sustainable and environmentally friendly structures in New Orleans.

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