

# WITH A DISASTER, PAIN IS INEVITABLE, BUT SUFFERING IS OPTIONAL

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## **ABSTRACT:**

*Hurricane Ike's winds and storm surge devastated rural coastal communities of Texas and Louisiana, many still recovering from severe damage caused by past Gulf Coast hurricanes, particularly Hurricane Rita in 2005. Rural coastal community leaders, still in the midst of repairing Hurricane Rita's damage, faced swiftly restoring basic critical infrastructure and residential services as well as longer-term political, social, and economic recovery and redevelopment efforts. Lack of progress at any level could hold back community resurgence. Despite "bare bones" rural-area government structure and personnel capacity, these rural coastal communities have factors that can mediate or mitigate the impact of a large storm or other disaster. This article draws on the experiences of Cameron Parish, Louisiana, to illustrate the factors of (1) a history and culture of self-reliance and independence; (2) close-knit, committed individual communities; (3) the continued blows of devastating hurricanes; (4) a leader and organization point for resiliency efforts; (5) a robust recovery and redevelopment plan; (6) restoration of housing; and (7) visible recovery, rebuilding, and re-visioning.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the early morning hours of September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike made landfall over Galveston Island, Texas. The National Hurricane Center described Hurricane Ike as a very large

and dangerous storm. Its winds extended outward from the storm's center up to 115 miles, with tropical storm-force winds out to 275 miles. Storm surges ranged from ten to twenty feet above normal tide levels. The hurricane-force winds and storm surge devastated local rural coastal communities in Texas and Louisiana, many still recovering from severe damage caused by past Gulf Coast hurricanes, particularly Hurricane Rita in 2005.

Rural coastal community leaders, still in the midst of repairing Hurricane Rita's damage, confronted a Gordian knot of issues and problems after Hurricane Ike. Conflicting community stakeholder perspectives and desires, government land-use and rebuilding expectations, funding limitations and delays, and uncertainty over the return of residents and businesses displaced by the storm presented ongoing challenges. In practical terms, immediate recovery following Hurricane Ike required swiftly restoring basic critical infrastructure and resident services, as was the case after Hurricane Rita. Sufficient basic services, such as water and sewage, and other necessary infrastructure such retail establishments and close-by temporary housing, were vital if displaced residents were to quickly find or keep jobs and rebuild.

Longer-term political, social, and economic recovery and redevelopment efforts clearly would be complicated by another set of factors. Competition with other devastated communities for scarce resources so soon after other major storms, intricate insurance claim processing and ultimate payment, and government disaster and high-risk policy changes and interpretations at all levels could hold back community resurgence. At the “point of the spear” for disaster recovery and redevelopment was what even in the best of times was a “bare bones” rural-area government structure and personnel capacity. Still, rural coastal communities have factors that can mediate or mitigate the impact of a large storm or other disaster. Indeed, the communities may aggressively take advantage of the disaster’s “window of opportunity” to build a new community future through recovery and redevelopment, not simply restore the past.

The rural coastal region of Cameron Parish, Louisiana, is a good illustration of lessons other communities might consider. This article draws on the experiences of Ernest Broussard, the executive director of the Cameron Parish Planning & Development Office and responsible for parish recovery and resilience consensus building, planning, and strategy implementation. The article also reflects graduate student recovery research projects headed by Sharon Caudle, a faculty member of The Bush School of Government and Public Service, for Cameron Parish and Bolivar Peninsula, Texas. The research projects were funded by the Bush-Clinton Coastal Recovery Fund.

Hurricanes Rita and Ike devastated the parish in two ferocious blows a few

years apart. The parish operated from a position of strength in that it took advantage of Hurricane Rita experiences and planning. After Hurricane Ike, the parish immediately moved from short-term, basic service recovery activities to longer-term recovery and redevelopment strategies. As Mr. Broussard said, the parish and individual communities agreed that an overarching principle should be, “with a disaster, pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.”<sup>1</sup> The parish certainly knew Hurricane Ike would cause extensive immediate pain to residents and businesses, but there was no need to have prolonged suffering. What emerged was an entirely new vision of Cameron Parish’s future and opportunities for a better quality of life, starting with a significantly changed economic development plan.

## **BACKGROUND: RECOVERY AND REDEVELOPMENT**

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Recovery and redevelopment – resiliency – following a major disaster has received extensive coverage in the literature and in government policies and guidelines at all levels. Books such as those of Brian Walker and David Salt,<sup>2</sup> and Charlie Edwards,<sup>3</sup> join journal articles and other government material, including the National Infrastructure Advisory Council’s 2009 report on critical infrastructure resilience and the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s draft *National Disaster Recovery Framework*.<sup>4</sup> These sources and others touch on shock absorption and functionality as central to resiliency or, for purposes of this article, recovery and redevelopment. Walker and Salt, and Sonia McManus and others,<sup>5</sup> talk of

a system's capacity to absorb sudden change or disturbances and still retain its structure and functionality. Edwards defined resilience as "the capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure, and identity."<sup>6</sup> Fran Norris and others describe resilience in terms of dynamic resources, including robustness in withstanding stress without degradation, redundancy where disruption or degradation is countered with substitutable elements, and rapidity to achieve goals in a timely manner.<sup>7</sup> These definitions implicitly recognize the need to identify and understand what sudden changes, disturbances, or shocks might be encountered.

Timothy Beatley emphasizes the characteristics of adaptation, arguing that creative adaptation, learning, stronger social and community systems, and processes and mechanisms support effective response and recovery.<sup>8</sup> Past

responses such as "armoring" a community must give way to resilience and adaptability. Both he and Thomas Birkland highlight the learning opportunity of focusing events like disaster and policy failures in responding to the event.<sup>9</sup> Beatley also emphasizes resilience as the principle guiding decisions of development, growth, and infrastructure that do not return to a former condition, but instead move to a new, hopefully improved, and decidedly different set of circumstances.

### **Recovery and Redevelopment Characteristics**

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Specific characteristics of organizations, communities, or systems appear to provide very useful guides to better understand a community's recovery and redevelopment goals and strategies, such as those of Cameron Parish. A summary of characteristics is shown in Table 1. These characteristics were drawn from a variety of sources.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1. Recovery and Redevelopment Characteristics

<b>Category</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<i>Vision and Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A compelling vision of the future</li> <li>• Planning ahead for long-term community sustainability and unusual post disaster opportunities; account for interdependencies of key risk factors</li> <li>• An integrated, multi-hazard approach to disaster risk reduction recognizing relevant hazards and when they are imminent</li> <li>• Redevelopment fundamentals and practices minimizing the community's risk, such as guiding growth and development away from high-risk locations and decentralizing infrastructures</li> <li>• Phases of relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction used as windows of opportunity to build community resilience to future disaster risks</li> <li>• Individual and recovery system-wide learning for future events</li> </ul>
<i>Institutional, Economic, and Environmental Vitality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical infrastructure, ecosystems and ecological infrastructure, and culture resources preserved, restored, and protected</li> <li>• Adequate performance of vital structures, systems, and functions</li> <li>• Key production and generation resources shifted to viable alternative sources</li> <li>• An economic process to recover/generate income and tax revenue after an event</li> </ul>
<i>Leadership and Management Capacity and Policies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed, coordinated, and facilitative leadership in all sectors and throughout phases of the recovery process</li> <li>• Tribal, state, and local governments with primary responsibility for community recovery and the lead role in planning and authority</li> <li>• Effective functioning, interaction, coordination, training, and policy guidance unity of effort between levels of government and other sectors</li> <li>• The community's crisis situation management and operational capabilities measured, tested, and assessed</li> <li>• Adequate resources in reducing risk, including investment in risk assessment and early warning systems</li> </ul>
<i>Individual, Family, Community, and Regional Impact and Capacities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic view of a disaster's impact on the daily environment, society, economy, and social networks and institutions</li> <li>• Individual self-sufficiency, voluntarism, and participation</li> <li>• Strong family relationships and neighborhood ties</li> <li>• Continued operations of religious and social institutions important to community life</li> <li>• Equal chance of recovery for all, including those with special needs</li> <li>• Restoration what makes daily life enjoyable in the community: neighborhoods, culture, taxes, and other features</li> </ul>
<i>Engagement, Communication, and Learning Processes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective planning for and communication of critical recovery information and assistance inclusive of and accessible to the general public and stakeholders</li> <li>• Communities and local authorities access and share necessary information, technology, lessons learned, expertise, best practices, resources, and authority</li> <li>• Opportunities, tools, and resources for meaningful participation of all stakeholders in planning and recovery process</li> </ul>

## **Barriers to Recovery and Redevelopment**

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Of course, these recovery and redevelopment characteristics are presented as positives, from exhibiting a compelling vision of the future to the meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the planning and recovery process. Numerous barriers exist that can hamper or even prevent the full achievement of these characteristics. Beatley argues that barriers are substantial for coastal communities and points out that low political importance is given to natural disasters and hazards vulnerability.<sup>11</sup> Natural disasters have a lower priority than problems of managing development, unemployment, crime, housing, and education. Coastal communities have a limited ability or willingness to confront big issues looming in the future, exacerbated by the short electoral cycle facing officials. Often, resources are limited and priorities compete for attention and funding. The coastal planning culture, capabilities, and systems may be limited and weak, particularly if mandates are lacking to prepare local comprehensive plans. In addition, special interests may counter desires to address risks, such as the power of real estate and development interests to oppose limits on development in high-risk locations. Private property rights and individualism might counter rezoning and safer and more resilient land use patterns and the need for collective or community action. Finally, there are concerns over the upfront costs associated with recovery and redevelopment strategies, even though

they promise considerable return on investment in the long term.

## **CAMERON PARISH RECOVERY AND REDEVELOPMENT**

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Mr. Broussard said Cameron Parish officials and community representatives would see these general characteristics as important and germane to their own recovery and redevelopment efforts. They also recognize that there are considerable barriers to overcome achieving these characteristics in a rural coastal community. However, a number of supportive factors smoothed the road on the parish's recovery and redevelopment journey. The next section describes Cameron Parish and the factors central to supporting the parish's efforts after Hurricane Ike.

## **Cameron Parish and Recent Hurricanes**

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Located in the southwest corner of Louisiana, Cameron Parish is one of the most sparsely populated areas in the state. With large bodies of water and marshland, the parish is close to the Gulf of Mexico and the mouth of the Calcasieu Ship Channel. Economic activity focuses on fisheries, oil and gas exploration and operations, chemicals, and agriculture (cattle, horses, and rice). The Cameron Police Jury – the formal governing body for the parish – is composed of seven jurors elected every four years. The jury has both legislative and administrative responsibilities, ranging from enacting ordinances to preparing and executing the budget. The police jury can appoint special districts, boards, commissions, and other

organizations to provide specific services for a designated area within the parish. Presently there are six districts in the parish. The organizational structure for the Cameron Police Jury includes a parish administrator, a number of parish entities (such as ambulance, recreation, and hospital service districts), an Office of Planning and Development, and an Office of Emergency Preparedness.

Before Hurricane Ike, the parish was slowly recovering from 2005's Hurricane Rita, where communities in the south half of the parish were devastated and the northern half suffered considerable damage. Hurricane Rita's aftermath created a number of major challenges for the parish because of the destruction of or heavy damage to approximately 90 percent of the parish's buildings, including homes, businesses, and other facilities such as schools and churches, as well as critical infrastructure. Many residents from the southern half of the parish relocated to the northern area. The fishing fleet was heavily damaged. Cameron Parish was thus faced with rebuilding commercial and industrial sector activity; dealing with major changes in government restrictions and higher costs impacting rebuilding the coastal areas; and confronting the loss of essential public services such as fire protection and sewer service. Only a short few years later, Hurricane Ike overwhelmed the recovering parish with 115 mile per hour winds, heavy rains, and high storm surges overtopping dunes or berms and flowing into low-lying marshlands.<sup>12</sup>

### **Parish Facilitating Factors**

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Earlier, this article described the recovery and redevelopment characteristics of a community, organization, and system. Planning calls for a compelling vision of the future and the presence of redevelopment fundamentals and practices to minimize the community's risk. Relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction should be used as windows of opportunity to build community resilience anticipating subsequent disasters. Individual and recovery system-wide learning should occur. However, in the Cameron Parish experience, demonstrating these characteristics and successful recovery and redevelopment after two disasters were not a given. Where does the vision come from? Who ensures there are redevelopment fundamentals and practices in place? What decision process takes advantage of windows of opportunity? What feedback process captures learning and ensures it gets back to decision makers?

Our experiences and research indicate that Cameron Parish's demonstration of the characteristics were greatly aided and guided by a number of key factors. These included (1) a history and culture of self-reliance and independence; (2) close-knit, committed individual communities; (3) the continued blows of devastating hurricanes; (4) a leader and organization point for resiliency efforts; (5) a robust recovery and redevelopment plan; (6) restoration of housing; and (7) visible recovery, rebuilding, and re-visioning.

*"Too Much Ear."* Mr. Broussard notes that one of the well-used phrases in the

parish is “too much ear.” This refers to the long ears of Brahman cattle that are one of the cattle types raised in Cameron Parish. The folklore is that the Brahmans are quite independent and very difficult to manage unless crossbred with Hereford and Angus breeds. Like the Brahman cattle, parish residents have a long history and culture of independence and self-reliance, including a historical legacy of what some might even call lawlessness. The geography has aided seclusion and limited access. Marshes, cheniers of raised land that were once beaches, and prairies to the north provided havens for those avoiding the law. Ongoing disputes regarding the boundary between the United States and Mexico was not settled until 1819 and before then created a disputed area of “no man’s land” and a hideout for criminals. During the Civil War, the parish mostly supported the Confederacy, a support grounded in beliefs of the right to govern itself and solve problems locally.<sup>13</sup> This cultural mind-set continues to this day and is considered a facilitating factor in the community’s resilience.

*“The Great Louisiana Melting Pot.”* Jambalaya is a spicy, mixture of meats, vegetables, stock, and rice. Each component is individually critical, but it is the mixture of the components that creates a simple, yet tasty dish. So it is in Cameron Parish. The parish has several distinctive community areas that are basically unincorporated settlements: Cameron, Little Chenier, Grand Chenier, Southeast Cheniers, Hackberry, Lone Pine, Grand Lake/Sweet Lake, Johnson Bayou, and Lowry and Klondike. Each of these community areas are close-knit

and have strong ties to their individual institutions and residents. To illustrate, Cameron, the heart of the parish, is one of the most populated areas and is the focal point for government and business. Cameron is close to the Gulf of Mexico and the mouth of the Calcasieu Ship Channel and supports maritime-related economic activities such as fisheries and offshore oil and gas operations. Lone Pine is isolated from the rest of the parish by limited accessibility and minimal infrastructure. Urban land use is negligible and the area is characterized as range and pasture land.

Each parish area is very independent of the others, Mr. Broussard said, and that creates challenges for an overall Cameron Parish perspective. However, for recovery and redevelopment, each community took on the “heavy-lifting” of individual community assessment and designing its own future. Then, like jambalaya, those efforts were combined and brought together within the general framework of the overall parish plan. The planning effort, initiated after Hurricane Rita and then enhanced after Hurricane Ike, brought together the exhaustive community and economic development assessment – past, present, and what were the better choices for the future, all done through a consensus process with multiple stakeholders. Decisions were made about what might be best for the individual communities, and for the parish as a whole (such as basic service medical facilities and schools) and economic development needs (such as port development).

*“When You Take a Punch, You Must Change.”* Fresh with memories of past storms, Mr. Broussard said that he and

other parish officials believed that the “punch” from Hurricane Ike’s devastation actually provided an opportunity to not only recover, but to recapture economic prosperity that had eluded the area for almost fifty years. Hurricane Audrey in 1957 caused devastation similar to that of Hurricane Rita and Hurricane Ike. The impact of Hurricane Ike, so close to Hurricane Rita, had severely dented the confidence of the population and businesses in a full recovery if past strategies remained in place. The facilitating factor was that it was no longer acceptable to be stubborn and parochial, and simply rebuild the existing settlements and infrastructure without a vision of a different future. Mr. Broussard said the storms had radically changed the playing field and created pressure for the parish’s future to be based on a series of strategic areas, including housing, road planning, port feasibility, and the development of beach areas. Old, new, and emerging industries had to be courted and supported through the port system. Tourism would encourage visitors to explore the parish and its culture, but they would not come without good roads, lodging, and restaurants.

*“A Champion in Waiting.”* Another key factor was a leader to direct and champion the recovery and redevelopment planning and implementation, housed in a central organizational point. Parish business interests after Hurricane Rita believed that funding a dedicated planning position would better protect their considerable investment in the parish. The end result was the hiring of an executive director responsible for

Cameron Parish’s planning and development with strong credentials in economic development, urban planning, and smart growth. Mr. Broussard, selected for the position, also had other attributes that strengthened his impact. He was the self-described “cowboy on a palomino” who easily fit into the culture of the parish and was seen as a trusted partner of local government officials and businesses of all kinds. Although a thirty-year resident of nearby Lake Charles, Louisiana, Broussard came from a sugarcane background and was inherently familiar with the parish’s rural marine lifestyle, from its special languages to its industries. He is an avid hunter and fisherman but also enjoys competitive rodeo and its applications to ranch and farm life. This background augmented his educational and professional suites in planning, land development, and economic development. He brought these skills and knowledge to the parish assessment studies, recommendations for action, and implementation plans, including relentlessly tracking down and securing funding for recovery and redevelopment projects large and small. He understood, and constantly worked with the individual parish areas, to present concrete, measurable recommendations in the form of goals and objectives, to secure commitment, and then, in turn, to build a business case for funding and completing planned projects. This work also included involvement with the East and West Cameron Ports and implications for the liquefied natural gas, offshore oil and gas, commercial fisheries, and maritime sectors.

The organizational point was the parish’s Office of Planning and Development (OPD). OPD is responsible



for physical development and post storm disaster recovery. OPD's mission includes housing, transportation, economic development, land use administration, capital improvements, and overall community development, supplemented by other functions related to strategic planning initiatives. OPD provided the visible structure for recovery and redevelopment efforts accessible by the individual community areas. Housed in OPD, the executive director for planning and development could aggressively pursue any and all funding opportunities available from the federal government and non-profit sources. For example, OPD secured FEMA funding and resources from sources such as the Bush-Clinton Coastal Recovery Fund.

*"The Making of Quality, Livable Coastal Communities."* Mr. Broussard firmly states that is not enough to lead and champion. In his view, the difference between mediocrity and zeal in the road to recovery and redevelopment success is the clarity of the roadmap and commitments, another facilitating factor. The parish's future success was clearly tied to explicit, measurable strategic goals developed from the ground up and actually implemented in line with the expected goals. Setting the goals and implementing them called for quality commitment and simply being smart about the roadmap to the future. The recovery and redevelopment agenda-setting document clearly was the 2005 *Cameron Parish Redevelopment Plan*.<sup>14</sup> The *Plan* provided the groundwork for the future of the Cameron Parish economy and lifestyle. It represented a combination of information from previous parish

planning attempts and programs designed in part to accelerate recovery efforts following the devastation of Hurricane Rita in 2005. It also drew on other guidance and information, such as from FEMA and Louisiana state studies. Previous plans for rebuilding focused on the immediate needs of the parish and lacked a more regional vision for recovery, redevelopment, and economic growth. In contrast, the *Plan* presented a holistic regional vision for the parish based on the appropriateness of land use for residential and industrial growth, focusing on economic development and considering new state and federal regulations established post-Hurricane Rita.

The *Plan* development included an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), intended to examine the anticipated land use characteristics, demographics, and industrial base of the parish. The analysis facilitated the identification of parish-wide goals and objectives as well as a long-term vision for the future. It then paired these goals and objectives with feasible reconstruction and new development projects. The *Plan* was different from former plans in that it focused on the distinctiveness of both parish and community characteristics and took advantage of specific natural assets. It also reduced land use in high risk areas, but allowed those who could afford the risk the opportunity to develop within state and federal standards, such as those in the southern reaches of the parish. The vision constantly put forth in the *Plan's* development and in Cameron Police Jury meetings was "to build safer, to build smarter, to build stronger."<sup>15</sup> The *Plan* emphasized that the parish's

approach was not rebuilding communities just as they were before the storm, but selecting new, high priority economic development projects that would serve as a catalyze to a new Cameron Parish, one that would be recognized as a leader along Louisiana's Gulf Coast and a destination in and of itself.

*"There Will Be Places to Live."* Parish officials were adamant that there be temporary and permanent places to live for residents and those coming to rebuild. Priority housing restoration, a facilitating factor, was absolutely vital as without housing, residents could not easily return and rebuilding would be very slow. Cameron Parish traditionally was composed of large, single family lots that were held as ancestral homes for hundreds of years. There were also long-term leases. Compliance with building codes and elevation requirements was very expensive, most often requiring pilings to elevate the house structure. The new parish would look to elevated, modular housing. Insurance could replace old structures, but did not cover the rebuilding required for the new standards. New insurance also could not be secured if the rebuilding was not to the code and elevation specifications. Parish officials believed that an immediate first step was assessing housing services and features such as size and affordability, including a multi-family market. Now was also the time to consider how to bring "outsiders" to the parish, with the attractions of a working coast, recreational opportunities, and a vibrant life style. Thus, another important resiliency document was the 2009 *Cameron Parish Housing Plan*.<sup>16</sup>

The *Housing Plan* drew on previous planning efforts and programs designed in part to accelerate recovery efforts following Hurricanes Rita and Ike. The Cameron Police Jury was very interested in permanent housing solutions that could withstand future storms. Through its Office of Planning & Development, the jury established a Parish Housing Program and the Cameron Parish Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Housing Assistance Office to implement the Parish Housing Program. This office employed five temporary full-time staff members with extensive experience in CDBG, finance, real estate, and other necessary fields. The *Housing Plan* offered an inventory and analysis of historical data as well as current conditions, goals, and visions to replace and infill the parish housing stock. For example, the *Housing Plan* discussed ways to mitigate hazards in low-lying areas, provide mortgage assistance with little or no interest, and offer transitional housing for industry personnel.

The housing recovery followed a tiered approach. The first tier offered compensation for those residents who wished to rebuild. A second tier consisted of new rehabilitation and reconstruction of housing in line with code and elevation requirements. The third tier focused on the first time home buyer, including transferring state property, mortgage assistance, and replacement of older housing. The fourth tier was comprised of rental rehabilitation, including assistance with apartments. A special problem was the loss of a significant number of the parish's elderly population. The elderly were particularly impacted by the costs to rebuild and insure. Parish officials

wanted those elderly residents to return and spend their last days on ancestral land. Those with property want to come back.

*“We Are a Community Coming Back.”* Parish officials and local business leaders recognized that there must be a clear message and visible signs that the parish was, as Mr. Broussard said, “a community coming back.” Parish officials had to quickly deal with initial recovery and clean-up, and also energize the community and find ways for residents return, centered on housing and economic development. Still grappling with Hurricane Rita recovery, the new damage from Hurricane Ike meant that again the economic base and housing radically shifted outside the parish. It was clear that the latest blow from Hurricane Ike intensified the hurricane fatigue and lack of confidence in full recovery on the part of parish residents. Basic services, such as fire services, schools, and medical services had to be restored. Debris, destroyed houses and trailers, and wrecks in the shipping channel had to be removed quickly. Throughout the parish, Mr. Broussard emphasized, there had to be tangible, visible signs of normalcy.

Part of the facilitating factor was that rebuilding and restoration proceeded at the same time as the clean-up efforts. Officials were fortunate in having the existing *Redevelopment Plan*. The foundational concepts in the *Plan* included: (1) focus intently on re-stabilizing the fishing fleet and oil and gas operations to pre-storm levels; (2) establish the feasibility of developing a port complex to create a permanent base and stable link within the deep water and shallow water oil and gas operations

and cargo transfer industries; (3) initiate feasibility analysis for improved surface and air transportation; (4) identify the costs and benefits of implementing a parish sales tax for additional funding supporting economic growth and development; (5) manage growth and development utilizing tools such as a GIS; and (6) develop parish-wide zoning models for land use controls involving residential, public sector, and industrial growth development. Officials recognized that work had to go forward on the current market plan as well as introduce different housing types. The community never before had to provide business incentives, now a very real possibility. Cameron Square – a project in the lower parish – was a key feature with a community center, including a courthouse and recreational services, and would provide legitimacy, stability, and a government presence. Moreover, parish officials believed that if there was the right infrastructure, the parish could compete with the rest of the Gulf Coast in doing deep water work. Thus, waterfront projects emphasized maritime facilities and higher-quality fishing.

## **CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES**

Reflecting on these facilitating factors and the barriers to recovery and redevelopment mentioned earlier, Cameron Parish provides an example of a coastal community coming back and becoming stronger. Overall, Cameron Parish has given high importance to natural disasters given its track record of major storms and minor problems with “normal” issues such as crime and education. The parish has confronted current, near-term, and longer-term

community viability issues. While resources are constrained, the parish has aggressively pursued funding and partnerships, from federal sources to nonprofit opportunities. The parish took advantage of Hurricane Katrina's stronger locality plans, but also built institutional planning capabilities in its Office of Planning and Development. Working in an unincorporated area has generally mitigated political opposition and the power of real estate and development interests. However, governance through the Cameron Police Jury might not be as robust as that in a more urban, incorporated area. Community outreach is very active and ongoing with business and community interests fully engaged. Private property rights are mitigated by building codes and insurance costs; market value generally is not an issue and land use restrictions actually aid in creation of a new vision and acceptance of return-on-redevelopment investment within the parish. The distinct communities within Cameron Parish retain their identity and interests, but are working for the common good of the parish.

Other rural communities might find these observations useful. Observations from the recovery research in Bolivar Peninsula, Texas, mentioned earlier, confirm the importance of these key factors in a smoother recovery and redevelopment effort. For example, Bolivar Peninsula experienced a more challenging recovery process because there was not a central leader and organization point for resiliency efforts. Working through committees, the peninsula developed a recovery and redevelopment plan, but additional work was needed to add specific projects for action. The restoration of housing

was not aided by a housing plan. Visible recovery, rebuilding, and re-visioning were sluggish; very important as the Bolivar Peninsula relied heavily on a tourist industry.

Cameron Parish is now in the implementation phase of its many multi-faced recovery and redevelopment goals and objectives. Considerable progress is evident in a range of areas from housing programs to critical infrastructure rebuilding. The Cameron Square project and related waterfront development continues to move forward. Economic development projects also are making headway.

The parish also faces ongoing challenges. External funding has slowed or wound down with time, although the parish has sustained an aggressive approach to securing available funding. The national and state economy and overall financial crisis has exacerbated the funding environment. The parish and other unincorporated coastal areas have garnered less attention than more populated areas such as Galveston and New Orleans. Hurricane fatigue increases with each new hurricane season, which may mean many former residents or part-time residents will never return. The longer it takes to restore housing and jobs, the more difficulty there will be with issues that are factors of daily life such as commuting costs, access to grocery stores and gas stations, and the ability to participate in neighborhood, social, and religious activities. In addition, the historical resistance to planning and structured development remains a factor.

Another challenge is simply unanticipated events. The parish is currently dealing with the Deepwater

Horizon Gulf of Mexico oil spill and its aftermath, from environmental degradation to ongoing federal decisions regarding offshore drilling. The parish recovery and redevelopment plans anticipated new and sustained commercial and recreational fishing, tourism, and support for the oil and gas industry on the coast and in the Gulf of Mexico. The oil spill's impact on the fragile coastal areas and political decisions have had immediate and long-term impacts on marine life, fishing, the oil and gas industry, and the ability to develop a strong tourism industry.

However, parish officials remain very optimistic, said Mr. Broussard. They are used to the cycle of disaster and recovery and taking advantage of what is available to them as they create their future. A simple anecdote from the oil spill crisis makes the point. The federal response to the immediate oil spill was to put workers in the marsh with towels to mop up the oil. This clearly was a highly inefficient and costly strategy with minimal benefit. Those who live in the parish know that each year the marshes are burned to be restored and promote new growth. The resiliency lesson is practical, yet profound – to set meaningful goals, respond with measurable and effective strategies, and concretely work toward a robust future for the parish. For the first time in its history, Cameron Parish will remain a working community, but with a new outlook for diversifying its economy and being more resilient when the next hurricane or disaster comes along.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations attributed to Mr. Broussard are drawn from that individual's conversations with Dr. Caudle and/or her students from July 2009 through August 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Walker and David Salt, *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Charlie Edwards, *Resilient Nation* (London: Demos, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), *National Disaster Recover Framework* (draft), FEMA-2010-0004 (Washington, DC: February 5, 2010), <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=50366>; National Infrastructure Advisory Council, *Critical Infrastructure Resilience Final Report and Recommendations* (Washington, DC: National Infrastructure Advisor Council, September 8, 2009), [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/niac/niac\\_critical\\_infrastructure\\_resilience.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/niac/niac_critical_infrastructure_resilience.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Sonia McManus and others, "Facilitated Process for Improving Organizational Resilience," *National Hazards Review* 9, no. 2 (May 2008): 81-90.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, *Resilient Nation*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Fran H. Norris and others, "Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (2008): 127-150.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Beatley, *Planning for Coastal Resilience: Best Practices for Calamitous Times* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*; Thomas A. Birkland, *After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events*. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> These sources are: Beatley, *Planning for Coastal Resilience*; Susan L. Cutter and others, *Community and Regional Resilience Perspectives from Hazards, Disasters, and Emergency Management*, CARRI Research Report 1 (Oak Ridge, TN: Community & Regional Resilience Initiative, September 2008), <http://www.resilientus.com/publications/reports.html>; Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, *Concept Development: An Operational Framework for Resilience* (Arlington, VA: Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, August 27, 2009); Jerome H. Kahan, Andrew C. Allen, and Justin K. George, "An Operational Framework for Resilience," *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 6, no. 1 (Article 83, 2009), <http://www.bepress.com/jhsem/vol6/iss1/83>; McManus, "Facilitated Process"; Philip J. Palin, "Resilience: The Grand Strategy," *Homeland Security Affairs* VI, no. 1 (January 2010), <http://www.hsaj.org/?article=6.1.2>; Brenda D. Phillips, *Disaster Recovery* (Boca Raton, FL: Auerbach Publications, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009); United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster* (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2005); and the draft *National Disaster Recovery Framework*.

<sup>11</sup> Beatley, *Planning for Coastal Resilience*, Chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> For a description of this event, see Kara S. Doran and others, *Hurricane Ike: Observations of Coastal Change: U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2009-1061*, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2009/1061/pdf/ofr2009-1061.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> The Cameron Parish Police Jury's website discusses the inhabitation of the parish: <http://www.parishofCameron.net>.

<sup>14</sup> Cameron Parish Police Jury, *Cameron Parish Redevelopment Plan* (Cameron Parish, LA: Cameron Parish Police Jury, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ES-5.

<sup>16</sup> Cameron Parish Office of Planning and Development, *Cameron Parish Housing Plan* (Cameron Parish, LA: Cameron Parish Office of Planning and Development, 2009).



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