

## Resources

A group of eight Florida counties participated in a pilot program to develop disaster preparedness plans through rigorous planning. These Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plans (PDRPs) identify policies, operational strategies, and roles and responsibilities to guide decisions that affect long-term recovery and redevelopment of the community after a disaster. Issues include housing recovery, financial administration, environmental restoration, health and social services, and economic redevelopment. Pilot communities that have developed the plan include: Hillsborough County, Manatee County, Nassau County, Panama City, Polk County, and Sarasota County. The guidebook developed by Florida to help communities prepare their own PDRPs can be accessed at:

<http://www.floridadisaster.org/Recovery/IndividualAssistance/pdredevelopmentplan/Index.htm>

**Post-Disaster Recovery Planning Forum: How-To Guide (2007)**—The Partnership for Disaster Resilience’s guide provides a process for communities to start pre-planning for catastrophic events by engaging partners in identifying the critical issues the community will face in a post-disaster environment. The guide is available for download at: [http://www.crew.org/sites/default/files/Post-Disaster-Recovery-Planning-Forum\\_UO-CSC.pdf](http://www.crew.org/sites/default/files/Post-Disaster-Recovery-Planning-Forum_UO-CSC.pdf)

**Economic Development When Rebuilding – Fostering Growth after a Disaster (1999)**—Published by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, this paper gives brief direction on both pre- and post-disaster planning. It is available at: <http://disaster.ifas.ufl.edu/PDFS/CHAP04/D04-30.PDF>.

**FEMA’s Emergency Support Function #14’s Long-Term Recovery Annex**—This document identifies and facilitates the use of recovery funding and provides technical assistance (such as impact analyses) for community recovery and recovery planning support. The document is available at: <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/nrf-esf-14.pdf>.

**Disaster Recovery: Experiences from Past Disasters Offer Insights for Effective Collaboration after Catastrophic Events (July 2009)**—Published by the Government Accounting Office (GAO), this report reviews five catastrophic disasters—the Loma Prieta earthquake (1989), Hurricane Andrew (1992), the Northridge earthquake (1994), the Kobe earthquake (1995), and the Grand Forks flood (1997)—to identify recovery lessons and make some recommendations to the federal government. The report is available at: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09811.pdf>.

**Louisiana Speaks: Long-term Community Recovery Planning**—This tool provides pre- and post-disaster planning resources for the citizens of southern Louisiana and beyond. The tool is available at: [http://www.louisianaspeaks-parishplans.org/PlanningProcess\\_Homepage.cfm](http://www.louisianaspeaks-parishplans.org/PlanningProcess_Homepage.cfm).

**Grand Forks, ND’s Flood Disaster Recovery and Lessons Learned (2011)** – Prepared by the City of Grand Forks, ND and regularly updated every year since the 1997 floods, this material introduces you to the Grand Forks community, provides a brief overview of the 1997 flood and recovery process, introduces the strategies and action steps deployed, and identifies lessons learned for the community. The document can be downloaded at: <http://www.grandforksgov.com/Reports/lessonslearned.pdf>

**Association of Bay Area Governments’ Earthquake and Hazards Program**—This program provides valuable resources on long-term recovery planning for various city government services and programs, and it includes a section on business recovery. These resources are available at: <http://quake.abag.ca.gov/>

**Policies for Guiding Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction**—This is a discussion on factors that should be considered as part of planning for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, including: enabling legislations at the provincial and local level, economic recovery, hazard mitigation, and strategies that have worked in post-disaster recovery. Its section on economic recovery provides useful information on economic impact analysis as well as how to build a more resilient/sustainable economy. The paper is available at: [http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/ltrc/fema\\_apa\\_ch3.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/ltrc/fema_apa_ch3.pdf)

**RestoreYourEconomy.org**- With funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, IEDC has developed a website, [www.restoreyoureconomy.org](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org), devoted to disaster preparedness and post-disaster economic recovery. The website’s purpose is to disseminate economic recovery information such as best practice knowledge, training resources, events, and news items to economic development practitioners. The site presents critical issues and challenges, highlights lessons learned in response and recovery processes, and suggests resources and best practices to use in restoring the local economy after a disaster. The site also provides an opportunity to network with other communities.

## Chapter X: Distressed Neighbourhood Revitalization Post-Disaster

In disaster-impacted communities, economic development organizations (EDOs) and chambers of commerce lead economic recovery efforts by helping local businesses respond to and recover from disaster. In addition to helping businesses, economic organizations should take into account a business's affected neighbourhoods and take opportunities to revitalize distressed neighbourhoods in the wake of a disaster. A "distressed" neighbourhood is an area of a city that has experienced a decline in economic activity (including reduced purchasing power and reduced per capita income compared to surrounding areas). Increased crime, blight, and vacant parcels and properties often characterize distressed neighbourhoods.

This chapter introduces the challenges and opportunities that accompany the revitalization of a distressed neighbourhood. Next, this chapter addresses neighbourhood beautification and local communication needs. Finally, the chapter outlines recovery processes, including the following:

- Mobilizing the community/neighbourhood for change
- Assessing the needs of the neighbourhood
- Developing a vision for the neighbourhood
- Identifying and implementing new strategies
- Monitoring performance of planning activities

Note that all implemented strategies must be tailored to the contexts of their respective communities. Not all disasters present the same challenges to communities, and distressed neighbourhoods are frequently characterized by particular, pre-existing economic development challenges.

### *Distressed Neighbourhood Revitalization*

The revitalization of neighbourhoods in the wake of a disaster requires economic development projects at a local level to nurture and accrue individual and collective assets for the community. Often, a holistic approach, utilizing both traditional and non-traditional economic development activities, is required. Such an approach requires a revitalization plan that addresses socioeconomic needs, including a focus on local points

of social conflict, barriers to entrepreneurship, and barriers to affordable housing, infrastructure status, chronic vacancy, crime rates, unemployment rates, workforce issues, and the neighborhoods' history. The following challenges and opportunities provide a baseline of questions and criteria that are useful when conducting a holistic assessment of the neighborhoods' post-disaster needs.

### Challenges

Distressed neighbourhood revitalization post-disaster presents a unique challenge in that it requires the combination of what are often two separate complicated economic development undertakings of neighbourhood revitalization and disaster recovery. Challenges unique to this situation include:

- **Pre-Disaster Conditions** - Pre-disaster conditions and issues of a distressed neighbourhood are exacerbated post-disaster, making revitalization challenging. A disaster brings stress to those who were impacted directly or indirectly. This added stress can elevate tensions, pushing previous issues to a heightened level, such as crime or class and social issues. A disaster can also increase blight with increased vacancies, crime, and closing of neighbourhood businesses or activity centres.
- **Lack of Capacity** - If a neighbourhood was in need of revitalization before a disaster; many times it is because there was a lack of community capacity to do so. Some may have lacked formalized, active neighbourhood groups. This could then present barriers to recovery, due to the fact there are no pre-existing organizations or networks to disseminate information or provide the necessary leadership it requires to foster recovery.
- **Neighbourhood-oriented Commercial Activity Overlooked** - Neighbourhood commercial activity has to compete with the public and private sectors' attention when an active central business district exists. A downtown is seen as a highly visible symbol to the public sector, so programs or efforts pre-disaster and post-disaster are often directed to downtown(s) and not the neighbourhood commercial activity. This presents the challenge

of developing awareness of neighbourhood needs, including funding, capacity, or other issues.

- **Difficulty in Seeing Revitalization Potential** - A distressed neighbourhood post-disaster can present a challenge in that the image of the neighbourhood is that of its past and overcoming that image may be a barrier in determining what it can be. Local residents of a distressed neighbourhood will require further efforts to get involved, as many could not see the neighbourhood as anything other than what they know.
- **Small Neighbourhood Businesses Hit Hard**- The majority of neighbourhood businesses are locally family owned businesses. This presents a series of challenges in recovery, especially if the family's home is in the same impacted area. Taking on additional debt for recovery may not be appealing, forcing families to abandon the business. This is especially true if the neighbourhood is impoverished, where businesses cash reserves are low, and their sales cannot support additional debt.
- **Divisive Social Lines** - In many distressed neighbourhoods social and class issues exist, and during recovery the increased tensions can make a neighbourhood more divisive. One class may yearn for a different sort of recovery or focus on social issues (such as educated vs. non-educated), and they can push recovery in a direction that doesn't represent the neighbourhood equally. These challenges require identifying divisive lines or broken social networks, and developing programs to address these issues.

### Opportunities

While distressed neighbourhood revitalization post-disaster presents many challenges, it also presents unique opportunities. These opportunities, which can be used to an advantage in recovery, include the:

- **Opportunity to re-group, re-connect, and re-focus a neighbourhood** - A disaster presents an opportunity in that everyone impacted can relate to the issues and pains of recovery. This common bond provides an opportunity to have people work together, reconnect with each other and to re-focus a neighbourhood to address neighbourhood issues. In many jurisdictions, a neighbourhood in need of revitalization does have programs and services it can receive including a designation of a business improvement area.

- **Ability to prevent the economic impact of a disaster from spreading within and/or to other neighbourhoods** - The economic impact of a disaster can easily spread with many people who are tired of the neighbourhood abandoning houses and businesses. A recovery program or plan presents an opportunity to stop and eliminate this spread. This is especially appealing to surrounding neighbourhoods and residents who may be concerned with their property values declining.
- **Ability to rehabilitate/repurpose existing neighbourhood assets for new purposes that meet both neighbourhood and city needs** - Every neighbourhood has assets, and in a post-disaster situation these assets can serve new purposes. This can include vacant spaces or buildings, which can be used to house (temporarily or permanently) city services, offices, or businesses. Increased vacant land can allow for large development projects in a city that may have a lack of large parcels. Another example is increasing green space for the neighbourhood and the city to utilize.
- **Ability to improve quality of life for existing residents and adjacent neighbourhoods** - A blighted neighbourhood hurts the city and residents in many ways, including reduced property values for adjacent properties and neighbourhoods, which affect the city's tax base. A disaster can present the opportunity to revitalize the area and therefore increase property values and the tax base.

### *Getting Started - Mobilizing for Change*

In a post-disaster situation, efforts need to be organized quickly, while the disaster is still front and centre and before valued parties lose interest. The daunting task of recovery and revitalization will require a collaborative effort from multiple parties. These stakeholders include residents, merchants, local organizations, and government agencies. Expressing the ambition to revitalize is a start in organizing efforts. From these interested parties, or a neighbourhood meeting, or government sources, ideas for revitalization strategy will begin to form. Committing to a specific recovery strategy is not required right after a disaster, but ensuring the neighbourhood is included in recovery efforts and that the needs are brought to the attention of stakeholders during redevelopment are beginning steps for neighbourhood revitalization. Efforts to organize include:

## Identify Relevant Stakeholders

It is important to know who to involve so that the neighbourhood is properly represented and recovery efforts can be easily organized. Identify local groups and charities involved in the neighbourhood, religious organizations, prominent business owners in the neighbourhood, and contacts at the city, regional, and provincial level. Gathering contact information through formal networks can bring many stakeholders to light, but informal discussions on the goal to revitalize the neighbourhood can spur interest and bring forward additional contacts.

- **Identify a Revitalization Champion(s)** - Whether it's your organization, another organization, or individuals, a champion of the revitalization should be identified. This allows for an individual or organization to be a point of contact and resource providing one stream of clear communication. Identifying local residents as a champion can occur at neighbourhood meetings and can empower individuals who have a vested interest in their neighbourhood.
- **Gather Residents to Spur Interest and Educate** - Gathering local residents of the distressed neighbourhood doesn't have to require long prep and man-hours. A gathering right after a disaster can allow the opportunity to educate residents on resources available for recovery and on the goals to revitalize a neighbourhood. This can help ease abandonment of properties in the neighbourhood by showing property owners that revitalization is in the works and plans to improve the neighbourhood will be developed. Just knowing efforts will happen to improve the neighbourhood can be a powerful enough message to persuade residents to stay, as seen in the spotlight box below.
- **Roles and Responsibilities** - Neighbourhood revitalization strategies require a commitment of numerous participants, including residents, neighbourhood institutions and organizations, and economic developers. These roles and responsibilities may have changed from the pre-disaster situation, and the adaption to the new environment will enable a more cohesive revitalization.

**Individual Residents** - Driver(s) of redevelopment and primary stakeholders. Participate in neighbourhood organizations. Provide input for planning efforts, including attending neighbourhood meetings and

hearings. Support local economy and businesses. Embrace or work against a negative neighbourhood image or identity.

**Neighbourhood Groups and Associations** - Include local development companies, local business development organizations, religious groups and local community centres. Represent neighbourhood interests, provide capacity for redevelopment, reach out to local professionals for skills, and provide knowledge of neighbourhood to community and other parties.

**Economic Development Professionals** - An ED professional can have a variety of responsibilities post-disaster. Serves as an analyst of the needs and conditions of the neighbourhood, a catalyst and advocate for change, an educator to the public and other officials, and a visionary to assist in visioning a revitalized neighbourhood and connecting resources to do so.

**Local Government** - Various departments and agencies have many responsibilities in neighbourhood economic development. Provides resources for disaster recovery, support strategies for revitalization, and collaborates across departments and agencies. Recognizes the individual needs of each neighbourhood, enforces housing codes to fight blight and vacancy, streamlines permitting process, and works with community organizations to stimulate neighbourhood confidence.

## Assessing Neighbourhood Revitalization Needs

Assessing revitalization needs can begin during the initial organization of efforts, visioning process, or recovery planning process. Ideally, it would occur immediately after a disaster, before people and businesses leave a neighbourhood permanently. Assessing the revitalization needs of a distressed neighbourhood post-disaster will require additional assessment needs as compared to just post-disaster assessments. An assessment doesn't have to be a long process or require intensive hours, but should be done on a local level to the ability that resources allow. Be wary of over-assessing. People may get weary of having multiple assessments post-disaster and may be tired of the assessment process. If this happens, assessment results will not be true, and other informal evaluations can occur, such as casual one-on-one meetings.

The goal of assessing revitalization needs is to understand what specific needs or barriers may exist in a neighbourhood in order to complete the

revitalization. This should be completed as soon as possible after a disaster and followed-up during recovery, such as a year later, to see if needs have changed or still need to be addressed. Generally, information collected can include key neighbourhood assets to reopen/preserve, neighbourhood values, prior issues/barriers that may arise again, neighbourhood-wide recovery needs, and property status. One unique way this was done was using volunteers to identify all properties' vacancy status by the organization Beacon of Hope. To learn more, please see the profile of Beacon of Hope in [Case Study Appendix 8](#).

### **Tools to Assess Revitalization**

#### ***Reaching out to businesses***

Businesses require special attention during recovery to identify their needs and issues. Means to identify their needs and issues can include electronic or paper surveys or in-person meetings. Examples of information to collect, no matter the format, include:

- Estimates of property and equipment damage,
- Economic activity loss,
- Workforce disruption and loss,
- Utility disruption,
- Loss of suppliers,
- Loss of customers,
- Financial and technical assistance needs.

#### ***Business and community survey***

A business or community survey is a great method to gather the needs and current issues facing the neighbourhood. Qualitative and quantitative information can be used to formulate issues, gather ideas for redevelopment, and gauge what is valued in the neighbourhood. Many different groups can implement the survey, such as an EDO, chamber or business group. Whoever implements the survey should have a level of trust and some relationship with the recipients to ensure a better, truthful response. A sample business survey can be seen in [Resource Appendix 9](#).

#### ***Large group meeting with businesses***

It is important to meet with business owners in an impacted area. Meeting with owners will divulge needs and information that may be missed from a survey or online form. Meeting in person, whether in small groups, at neighbourhood business meetings, or through other forums will open the communication channels of needs and issues and allow your organization to build, mend, or create a relationship that will be useful in building trust throughout revitalization.

#### ***Neighbourhood asset mapping***

Asset mapping shows the assets of the neighbourhood and highlights the interconnections among them. This can also be completed in conjunction with the city at the city level. This effort doesn't have to be very detailed as staff time post-disaster is already stretched thin. Identifying assets and how they are interconnected reveals how to access those assets. These assets are not only physical assets, but also include relationships, cultural mapping, and human capital. There is no one way to complete neighbourhood asset mapping, but for a sample structure and more information, look at resources from The Asset-Based Community Development Institute: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/introd-building.html>





### *One-on-one meeting with business owners or managers*

If your organization has the capacity, or a limited number of businesses were impacted by the disaster, having a one-on-one meeting with the business owner can provide a wealth of knowledge that a survey cannot. Hearing personal anecdotes or needs can be fruitful in identifying needs you can immediately address and other needs to address during a revitalization planning process.

### *Neighbourhood gatherings or meetings*

A fruitful means to gather input in a neighbourhood is with a gathering or meeting. Especially post-disaster when neighbourhood members are looking for answers on how to recover, a meeting can be a great tool to gather feedback on the needs and issues of revitalization. This is also an opportunity to distribute a business or community survey and receive immediate personal feedback.

### ***Developing a Vision for Neighbourhood Revitalization***

To build support for neighbourhood revitalization, all stakeholders, especially existing local residents, need to start to build a vision for neighbourhood revitalization. Without the engagement of local residents, the sustainability or success of any revitalization attempts faces grim survival odds. Gaining an authentic desire to change amongst the community and residents is important for the revitalization process to be successful. Building a vision and engaging local residents throughout the revitalization process can create a sense of ownership of a neighbourhood, its challenges and implementation interventions.

A distressed neighbourhood can have divisive lines or a “shattered” social network. A shared experience of a disaster gives a common ground for neighbourhood residents to connect. It allows them to begin the rebuilding process of not just the physical neighbourhood, but of the identity and connectedness of a neighbourhood.

To jump-start this process, a meeting or gathering should be organized to engage residents and revitalization partners in a visioning, or similar process. An example of this is highlighted in the spotlight box of Broadmoor. This can be tied in

with assessing revitalization needs (discussed later in this chapter), and help rally residents around the neighbourhood to be catalysts for change. Potential exercises include charrettes or other activities that get attendees identifying issues in their neighbourhood, and begin developing a vision of what it can become. Tips can be taken from Chapter IX on strategic planning. Additionally, including individuals from the communities with professional skills, such as moderating public meetings, can assist in engaging conversation without imposing additional work on weary staff.

### **Potential Organizations to Drive Planning Strategies for Revitalization**

The first two steps of recovery are mobilizing the neighbourhood and community for change and assessing revitalization to help develop a planning strategy. For more information refer to Chapter IX.

The fundamental purpose of a planning strategy is to guide the vision and provide a framework from which revitalization decisions can be made. Many of the strategic planning processes as outlined in the strategic planning chapter of this toolkit can be tailored to neighbourhood revitalization. Below a few select strategies are discussed. Choosing one of the model strategies will not be enough to facilitate revitalization alone, but this coupled with neighbourhood support and other local stakeholders can be a start. Other organizations can undertake a recovery planning process such as a business improvement district or special assessment area. Choosing which organization works best for you should be completed in the “identifying initial stakeholders” stage. After a disaster, many things will change, but a planning strategy and the lead delivering organization should account for this by being flexible while outlining a framework for the revitalization to continue.

### **Neighbourhood Redevelopment/Revitalization Task Force**

A redevelopment or revitalization task force is a group of key neighbourhood stakeholders and community stakeholders. Developing a task force/coalition of neighbourhood-based actors that can pool financial and human resources is one way to take advantage of the neighborhoods’ existing resources. The scope of the task force can vary depending on neighbourhood need, but it can be used to oversee revitalization efforts, or bring neighbourhood needs to the attention

of agencies and local governments. A task force is beneficial in that it can provide local insight on neighbourhood issues and work specifically to address these issues.

One of the first steps in creating a redevelopment task force is to identify the stakeholders who will be members. This can include residents, neighbourhood organizations, government officials, and professionals with potentially relevant skills. Residents can be gathered from the visioning meeting or a neighbourhood rally meeting. If there is no interest/lack of stakeholders, bring in nearby neighbourhood stakeholders or organizations and explain how issues in this neighbourhood will affect/spread into the surrounding area and city unless work is done. Another important step is to define the scope of the task force work. This will enable the task force to stay on track, and defines goals that can be described to outside parties.

Guiding steps for forming a task force:

- Involve stakeholders of the public and private sector with varying skills. Liaisons to other recovery strategies and neighbourhood representation are just as important.
- Identify clear goals and scope of the task force (who they report to, who reports to them).
- Give the task force a voice: Identify representatives who can speak on behalf of the force to city, regional, and provincial officials.
- Partner with an enforcing power: Partnering with a city office or other organization allows the task force to use established organizations' representations to enforce planning steps and reach out during the planning effort.

### **Neighbourhood Revitalization Plan - Short and/ or Long Term**

One of the most common strategies for revitalization of a distressed neighbourhood is to develop a neighbourhood revitalization plan that can guide and organize efforts. A revitalization plan will help in identifying the current issues, capturing the neighborhoods' vision, defining action steps to revitalization, and defining a structure for revitalization for existing and new stakeholders. This plan and framework can be referenced by the city, new developers, or organizations and can assist in the revitalization. A plan can follow the strategic planning

process, but additional guidelines should be noted with a neighbourhood revitalization plan.

#### ***Connect plan with broader citywide recovery plan and policies***

When possible, it is important to connect a revitalization plan to the broader citywide recovery plan and policies. Not doing so can induce consequences such as being overlooked by developers or other groups who are looking at the city plan alone and can create disinvestment of the neighbourhood. The revitalization plan, however, should not just conform to the city/region plan, but should work to inform the plan. Being able to provide neighbourhood level perspective, action items, and other decisions informs the plan and city on subject matter that may otherwise not have been discovered.

#### ***Engage the public and private sector***

A revitalization plan that has not engaged the private and public sector will not garner support for adaptation and can be left unrecognized by key players who support and facilitate the revitalization. Continuing initial meetings during the mobilization for change will provide an opportunity to engage the public.

#### ***Make sure the plan reflects an understanding of new market realities after the disaster***

The economy of any area after a disaster will be different than pre-disaster. Clientele can change with the changing neighbourhood; businesses may no longer serve neighbourhood needs, and social or physical needs of a neighbourhood may change as well. A plan should avoid utopian ideals and recognize the changed market of the neighbourhood. This change can be identified during the initial needs assessment.

#### ***Ensure plan identifies action steps to fight prior issues/barriers***

Acknowledging why the distressed neighbourhood was the way it was before the disaster is the first step to identifying solutions. Identifying action steps to combat these issues, and barriers that existed before, is critical to the revitalization. A common issue of vacancy or blight is addressed later in this chapter and provides example strategies to tackle this problem.

### Initiatives and Strategies for Revitalization

- Identify and map blight to better understand the sprawl over time and use as a tool for advocacy. Beacon of Hope in New Orleans used volunteers and donated software to map all parcels in the neighbourhoods ([See Beacon of Hope Profile in Case Study Appendix 8](#))
- Organize vacant property tours for developers and the public to raise awareness of available properties. ([See NewBo Case Study Appendix 7](#))
- Find creative uses of vacant spaces - urban farming, pop-up art installations, pop-up cinemas/ event venues, temporary parks.
- Partner with the city to create a vacancy program. Examples include Newark, NJ: Adopt-a-Lot and Pittsburgh, PA: Vacant to Vibrant program.
- Work with city for re-zoning or overlay to ease/ speed new commercial activity.

### *Follow up with implementation and monitoring*

The implementation of the plan is the “make or break” of the plan’s effectiveness. Without properly outlining implementation steps in the plan and identifying those responsible for the implementation, the plan can easily be shelved with strategies and ideas never being brought to fruition. During the implementation, it’s important to hold previously identified implementers accountable and follow up with these parties frequently to ensure implementation occurs.

### Areas of Neighbourhood Redevelopment and Beautification

#### *Improving Infrastructure*

Distressed neighbourhoods pre-disaster often face issues with infrastructure, such as broken sidewalks, insufficient street lighting, or older water and sewage systems that can be causation for economic stagnation or decline. Without proper infrastructure, commercial activity cannot function to a degree of normalcy and may relocate within the community to an area with better infrastructure. This holds true post-disaster when infrastructure can be severely damaged. Using the disaster as a benefit, work with the city and identify

funds or grants that can help in revitalization of the neighbourhood and its infrastructure. Infrastructure is also important if a redevelopment vision has been completed that sees different use of an area, which may require different infrastructure. More details on infrastructure redevelopment opportunities are outlined in Chapter X.

#### *Streetscape and Facade Improvements*

Along with infrastructure, the streetscape in a neighbourhood and commercial area can speak loudly to an image of a neighbourhood. Seizing the opportunity to rebuild post-disaster, funding for streetscape improvement (e.g. benches, street-lights, banners, planters etc.) should be actively pursued. Infrastructure and streetscape improvements can be a critical impetus for reinvestment from developers in an area if completed in conjunction with a revitalization strategy.

Similar to the benefits of streetscape improvements, a facade improvement program can bring about a sign of recovery with improved faces of local commercial establishments. Working with local organizations and businesses to identify funding opportunities, connect volunteers, or address other barriers to improving the facade is a great means to start an improvement.

An example of a successful facade program is with the Czech Village and New Bohemia Main Street Organization in Iowa. A local organization gave a \$50,000 donation to the organization for a matching facade program. This money was used to match what local businesses could pay to improve facades. This started with a few neighbourhood businesses taking advantage of the program and word of mouth accelerated the number of participants. The program was a great means to improve many of the historic facades that otherwise would be financially difficult for business owners to complete on their own.

Another example of facade improvements comes from New Zealand. A “Facade Squad” works in distressed neighbourhoods to repaint vacant or other buildings in need of repair. Made up of local volunteers with donated materials, they are able to give a fresh look to buildings.

#### *Changing Zoning and Easing Permitting For Commercial Activity*

As part of the recovery process, it is important to work



with local businesses and the city to ease the permitting process for rebuilding, renovating, or creating new businesses. Post-disaster city staffs are often overwhelmed with duties, so a large influx of permit applications often creates a backup. In addition, current zoning in the neighbourhood may be detrimental to development due to the delay in the permitting process. As seen the spotlight below, Feret Street residents saw this and identified a solution to speed redevelopment.

### Case Study: Encouraging Business on Feret Street:

In post-Katrina New Orleans, Feret Street neighbors were looking for a means to revive the neighbourhood. Like many areas post-disaster, they were dealing with a commercial street with little business activity. Local neighbourhood leaders launched multiple efforts, including starting the Feret Street Market. More notably though, neighbourhood leaders successfully encouraged the City Council to designate Feret street as an "arts and cultural overlay district," welcoming nighttime establishments that meet certain standards, such as limited operating hours. This fueled a small-business resurgence with 20 new small businesses opening from 2008-2012. This city planning designation, put into effect in 2008, eases the permitting process for restaurants, entertainment venues, and galleries, bringing these businesses to the area at a faster pace than if they had not rezoned the neighbourhood. The street is now seen as a "restaurant row" destination for the community and activity continues to flourish as businesses continue to redevelop and open on Feret Street.

Source: [http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2012/11/feret\\_street\\_resurgence\\_conti.html](http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2012/11/feret_street_resurgence_conti.html)

### Neighbourhood Revitalization Funding

Neighbourhood revitalization post-disaster has additional opportunities for funding in that it can leverage its prior distressed status and the disaster impact for more resources. Establishing a sheet or flyers of resources as seen in the example below can provide useful material to neighbourhood commercial activity. Some strategies for funding opportunities include:

- Seek donations of money and professional services

from organizations and businesses in the community who were not affected by the disaster;

- Tap volunteer networks for labour, organizational work, such as updating social media pages;
- Seek out donations from local foundations and organizations See façade improvements section for an example;
- Seek grants that apply to your neighborhoods' circumstances, such as low-income or historic preservation grants/tax credits;
- Work with the city to establish tax incentives. Examples include an "opportunity zone", "enterprise redevelopment zone" or a "revitalization overlay."

### Communications

With any post-disaster recovery situation, communications are important for recovery. Chapter VII shows how many strategies can be applied in the post-disaster portion of recovery. It is important post-disaster to communicate specifically with neighbourhoods to:

- Combat misinformation by acknowledging false information and providing correct language or directing to the correct agency/office
- Having a trusted and visible platform to deliver this information is important. Communities can use social media like Twitter and Facebook accounts to dispel rumors and misinformation.
- Use neighbourhood-level grassroots network to share information (e.g. group listservs, meetings, events etc.). This can establish or build the reputation of your organization as an agent of information and partner in recovery by using established groups.
- Use multiple avenues of media (e.g. newspaper, television, flyers, newsletters, social media, websites etc.)
- Tap informal networks in the neighbourhood (e.g. posting meeting notices in a key neighbourhood business) to reach those who may not be part of a formal network such as a neighbourhood group.

### Recognition - Marketing the New and Improved Neighbourhood

Part of revitalizing a neighbourhood is building an identity for the neighbourhood. Distressed neighbourhoods tend to have an associated identity

in the community, but celebrating recovery efforts can showcase development and spark interest to bring in additional businesses or residents. It's important to celebrate neighbourhood achievements not just amongst neighbourhood residents, but to use the media to raise community awareness of the development of the neighbourhood.

- Host large neighbourhood events at anniversaries (i.e. 1 year post-disaster)
- Host ongoing celebrations for re-openings, or new business/ ribbon cuttings
- Feed "feel-good" recovery stories locally, regionally, and nationally, even if not requested. These feel-good stories can include a business that has excelled post-disaster, new neighbourhood assets such as parks or infrastructure, or a proposal for new development.

An example of this can be seen in the following spotlight of Goderich, Ontario.

### **Social Media and Online Presence**

Communication has taken on an additional role in the age of technology with new avenues to distribute information. Using social media and websites post-disaster can provide a quick, real-time opportunity to deliver information that traditional communication doesn't allow. This delivering of information builds your reputation and raises awareness of recovery efforts that may have otherwise been uninformed.

- Update information and provide useful links regularly to keep readers engaged
- If you do not have social media accounts, as you build your social presence you can:
  - o Deliver information to partnerships to post to social media sites
  - o Co-sponsor events with established partnerships and gain credibility via their social media presence.
- Build an online presence. Easy interfaces allow simple site building and free hosting, such as with Google sites.
- Ensure your neighbourhood is recognized by major map sources. For example, Google maps allow neighbourhoods to appear on their maps.
- Visit Google Map Maker (<http://www.google.com/mapmaker>) to build and submit your neighbourhood.

### **Case Study: Goderich, Ontario - Marketing Recovery**

In August of 2011 a F3 ripped through the town of Goderich, Ontario, severely damaging the city's historic downtown. Through recovery efforts, 137 out of 158 businesses opened up again in their original location within a year. This is in part due to many efforts from the city, the citizens of Goderich, and the province of Ontario. This is important not only to the local economy, but to the thousands of tourists that visit the city every year.

Goderich claims to be "Canada's prettiest town" and this is shown by the droves of tourists every year. To make sure Canada knew that Goderich was "open for business," media campaigns were organized. Todd Letts, the Community Economic Revitalization Committee Executive Director, and Susan Armstrong with the Business Improvement Area, tackled two media campaigns. The first was a "Thank you Ontario" and a "Thank you Canada" campaign that told stories of the recovery while giving thanks for assistance. This went out to numerous media outlets and was seen by over 300,000 people. The city also invited one of Canada's national morning shows to host a show in the historic town square, which displayed recovery efforts.

To not let these efforts go to waste, a second campaign leveraged the current efforts of outreach, and the Rediscover Goderich Campaign was launched. This campaign built an Internet presence through [www.rediscovergoderich.com/](http://www.rediscovergoderich.com/) and social media sites such as Facebook. This focused on showcasing to people and businesses how resilient the city is and why they should rediscover the city for life or business. Both Todd and Susan stated that these campaigns were effective in feeding positive news stories to the media.

Post-disaster, much of the news, especially around the year after, can be negative. Feeding news outlets, even if they didn't ask for them, positive stories of recovery can help shine a light on the city and raise awareness that the city is "open for business."

Source: Interview with Todd Letts and Susan Armstrong, December 2012.