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Executive Summary

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on the Gulf Coast, damaging 134,000 homes and displacing 400,000 people in the City of New Orleans alone. For many of these families, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, it was a life-altering tragedy, the impact of which is still felt today.

In the wake of this disaster, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) made a controversial decision not to repair and reopen four large public housing complexes. Instead they took the opportunity to utilize disaster recovery funding for redevelopment. Following the storm evacuation, they set out on a path to demolish the old structures and redevelop the sites.

In 2006, Enterprise Community Partners and Providence Community Housing were jointly selected to lead the redevelopment of one of these sites, the Lafitte public housing complex, into a low-density, mixed-income community that would be called Faubourg Lafitte.

The process was far from easy – the project encountered delays, protests and numerous political and logistical challenges. Yet the development team solicited and adapted to community feedback, and ultimately transformed 78 dilapidated, aging public housing buildings into what is now a vibrant community centerpiece. As of May 2015, 535 units of the new development were completed, housing 389 families in total, including 133 former Lafitte residents. The Sojourner Truth Neighborhood Center, a renovated community center operated by Providence, now offers an expanded suite of services and classes for residents and the community at large.

Drawing on news reports, community interviews and a variety of data sources, this report tells the story of Faubourg Lafitte and the impact that it has on residents and the community in the first years of its redevelopment. More than just a physical transformation, the redevelopment has helped catalyze a renewal in the neighborhood and provide residents with new opportunities, connections to jobs and a safe, stable place to call home.
Before the Storm

Built in 1941, the Lafitte public housing complex ("Lafitte") spanned 27.5 acres in the center of the Tremé/Lafitte neighborhood, a community long celebrated as the heart of Black American history and culture in New Orleans. The complex consisted of 896 homes in 78 large brick buildings, which were arranged in U-shaped clusters with interior courtyard space on large "superblocks."

Part of a legacy of segregation in New Orleans, Lafitte was built to house black families, while the nearby Iberville public housing complex was designed to serve white households. The neighborhood has close access to New Orleans' Central Business District and historic French Quarter, but is separated by major roadways. The Sojourner Truth Neighborhood Center (STNC) was built adjacent to Lafitte in 1999 to serve residents and offered "modest" programming, such as exercise classes and Girls Scouts meetings.

Depending on who is speaking, the old Lafitte is remembered very differently. Many former residents recall it fondly as a focal point for community and family life. It was a place where neighbors "looked out for one another" and people valued the music and history so central to New Orleans culture.

On the other hand, the complex suffered from isolation and concentrated poverty. During community meetings, residents recalled "memories of drugs, crime and violence, as well as racial tension, segregation, and inequality of economic opportunities." Michael Kelly, a former director of the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), described the city's public housing as centers for drug dealing, where frightened mothers would "put their babies in bathtubs at the sound of gunfire."

By the time Katrina hit, the Lafitte buildings had fallen into physical disrepair. Although HANO spent millions on surface renovations prior to Katrina, including replaced windows, doors and ironwork, they failed to address more serious building and mold issues. Lafitte was only one example of severely dilapidated public housing throughout the city. According to HANO, most the city's stock, built in the 1940s, had failed to meet "basic living standards" since the 1970s. A 1994 HUD audit found issues such as "missing ceilings and holes in walls, loose and peeling paint, steady leaks from faucets, and roach infestations" in every unit that was inspected.
Weathering Hurricane Katrina

Despite the physical problems, the Lafitte buildings held a reputation as a safe haven during storms, where residents and their extended families would retreat to ‘shelter-in-place’ during hurricane season. Affectionately referred to as “The Bricks,” the public housing buildings were considered better protection than flimsy single-story wood homes.

When Katrina struck in August 2005, many residents ignored calls to evacuate and chose to prepare as they had for many storms in the past. Like millions of others, they were blind-sided by the ferocity of the hurricane and subsequent flooding caused by the failure of the federal levees. Lafitte took in 2-4 feet of water on the first floor, trapping residents on the upper floors. By the next day, residents and their families were swimming and wading their way toward the now-infamous New Orleans Superdome and Convention Center.¹¹

As former Lafitte resident Mary Johnson remembers, “Katrina disrupted everything. Everything had to shut down and we all just had to wait and see about our relocation, about getting out.” Johnson’s family walked to the Convention Center, and was eventually relocated to Texas – one of 450 former Lafitte households who were evacuated there.¹² Displaced Lafitte residents were scattered nationwide to 36 states, with the majority in Texas, Arkansas, Georgia and Louisiana.
Katrina took a tremendous toll on families in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast. The storm and subsequent flooding damaged more than 134,000 housing units in the city – 70 percent of occupied housing – and displaced more than 400,000 people. In 2009, the American Housing Survey found that 82 percent of New Orleans households (283,300), vacated their homes for more than two weeks.\textsuperscript{13}

Low-income families and households of color – black, Latino and Asian families – were the most vulnerable to the storm’s effects and aftermath. They were more likely to live in the most severely flooded neighborhoods, received fewer dollars in recovery aid relative to the severity of damages, and were slowest to return home.\textsuperscript{14,15} In fact, in 2009 there were 31,500 displaced households who still were not permanently settled; these households were majority black renters earning a median income of just $25,000.\textsuperscript{16}

Former HANO public housing residents were eligible to receive federal disaster housing assistance vouchers to help with deposits, housing searches and rent. This support was temporary and the program went through five short-term extensions between 2006 and 2009, leaving recipients in a constant state of uncertainty about their futures.\textsuperscript{17}
Former Lafitte families, who were dispersed across the country, struggled to maintain some semblance of community ties. Many tried to keep in touch with each other and longed for news from home. Resident Travis LeBlanc, who helped conduct outreach to her former neighbors, said her phone was ringing off the hook with heartbreaking stories of displacement and separation. A summary from the outreach team hired by Enterprise and Providence in 2006 reported that residents were “still grieving, and living day-to-day is a struggle, especially for people who are sick or are separated from sick family members by thousands of miles.”

**New Plans for Public Housing**

Back in New Orleans, the future of Lafitte and the other large public housing complexes was uncertain. HANO rented steel plates to shutter the doors and windows, and in 2006 it announced that it would demolish the “Big Four” complexes – St. Bernard, C.J. Peete, B.W. Cooper and Lafitte. More than 5,000 units – over half the public housing in the city – would be replaced with mixed-income developments.

This plan was not unprecedented – prior to Katrina, HANO had begun redeveloping four public housing sites under HUD’s HOPE VI program, in partnership with private developers and property managers.

The announcement was immediately met with controversy and debate. Residents were frustrated by the added delay in returning home, anxious that they would have no home to return to. HANO had recently torn down more than 1,500 units at the St. Thomas public houses and redeveloped the site into the “shiny new mixed-income River Garden neighborhood,” which in 2005 included 80 percent market-rate units and only 59 homes set aside to re-house former residents.

In June 2006, housing advocates filed a class action lawsuit against HUD on behalf of public housing residents. They argued that the national and local housing authorities had violated the Fair Housing Act by failing to repair and reopen the buildings. The suit was dismissed the following year, but further complicated the ongoing debate over the future of the sites.

Finally, in December 2007, the New Orleans City Council voted unanimously to authorize demolition of the Big Four sites and move forward with redevelopment. The Lafitte demolition permit was the last to be signed by Mayor Ray Nagin in March 2008. With a small number of picketers still protesting outside the fences, crews began to take down the old Lafitte on April 10.
Enterprise in New Orleans

Although Enterprise Community Partners did not have a full-time presence in the Gulf Coast prior to Katrina, the disaster served as a call to action.

As a national housing organization, Enterprise moved to help with short-term housing recovery efforts in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Staff partnered with the National Center for Healthy Housing to create a guide for mold remediation, and helped relocate displaced residents to temporary housing in Dallas, San Antonio and Austin. Over time, Enterprise became involved in local discussions over how to accommodate those families for the longer-term.28

With the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Habitat for Humanity and other national housing organizations, Enterprise began to evaluate the role of federal funding sources for housing, including Section 4, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTCs) and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Drawing on the organization’s experience as a financial intermediary, Enterprise began connecting various players in the recovery effort. Enterprise Senior Vice President Ali Solis, who was heavily involved in the post-Katrina policy work, says Enterprise was “instrumental in getting the housing community to talk with the disaster community, [which had] never really been done before.”29

After HUD announced its decision to demolish the “Big Four,” the agency approached Enterprise and Providence to submit a redevelopment proposal. Providence Community Housing had been formed in the early days after Katrina by several existing faith-based community organizations. They united to create a new high-capacity development organization – one that could access federal recovery resources, attract private investment to repair flooded properties and bring families home. Doris Koo, then Enterprise Senior Vice President, provided guidance and technical support.

Together, Enterprise and Providence submitted a joint proposal to redevelop Lafitte, and on August 21, 2006, HUD and HANO announced that the two organizations had been selected.
A New Vision for Lafitte

Given the controversy over the redevelopment of the Big Four, and building off best practices in public housing redevelopment, Enterprise and Providence made three core commitments from the start of their work:

1. The development team would incorporate community voices in the redevelopment process, working closely together "to plan a vibrant community that is equitable, affordable and sustainable."30

2. Every one of the 865 former Lafitte families and individuals would have the opportunity and first priority to return to the newly built housing.

3. The project would include 900 subsidized homes, the same number as the Lafitte development prior to Katrina, integrated in a mixed-income community on and around the site.

Enterprise and Providence also pledged $2.5 million in private funds to provide case management, counseling and direct assistance to support former Lafitte families who remained displaced by Katrina.31

Engaging Former Residents

With former Lafitte residents scattered across 36 states, addressing the development team’s first core commitment presented significant logistical hurdles. Providence and Enterprise created a regular newsletter to send to displaced families and the local community, and engaged All Congregations Together (ACT) to run an outreach phone bank. In September 2006, ACT made 600 phone calls and reached 125 households that had moved locally. By August 2009, they had located 550 of the 865 families to solicit input on the redevelopment process.32 The team also held three week-long community design workshops in New Orleans and Houston in 2006, and 64 local resident meetings between 2007 and 2012.33

By getting engaged in both the political and planning processes for Lafitte, residents had an opportunity to shape the future of their community in a way that had not existed before Katrina. Enterprise Senior Program Director Monica Gonzalez said the rebuilding process after Katrina “challenge[d] residents to be more vocal” and become “better advocates or leaders.”34 Dominee Matthews, who works for Providence at the Sojourner Truth Neighborhood Center, agreed that residents who got involved had gained new sense of confidence through the process. “[At] the residents’ meeting, if something’s not right or they want to see something changed, they’ll find a way,” said Matthews.35
Design and Development

With input from residents and the community, and the goals of HUD’s HOPE IV approach in mind, the design team created a plan that would open up Lafitte’s inward-facing ‘superblocks’ and integrate the site into the surrounding street grid. The lower-density design featured larger individual or duplex homes with more rooms and architectural details in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. To meet the commitment of creating 900 affordable homes, the design included redevelopment of scattered site rental and homeownership properties throughout the surrounding neighborhood.

The development team determined that all buildings would meet Enterprise’s Green Communities Criteria – for healthy, sustainable and affordable home construction – and be outfitted with modern amenities. All would be raised at least three feet to comply with new flood protection regulations, and windows and shutters would be wind- and storm-resistant.

“[With Lafitte], we wanted to prove what it could look like if done well,” said Solis. “The signature work of Lafitte as a community of opportunity for all will be one of Enterprise’s legacies in rebuilding the Gulf.”

Enterprise and Providence broke ground at Lafitte in August of 2009, and the first residents began to move back into the redeveloped properties in January of 2011. Work is still ongoing, but as of May 2015, 535 units have been completed. Of the total, former Lafitte residents have occupied 133 rental units. Even more are expected to move back with the mid-2016 completion of a 100-unit apartment building for seniors.
The homes range from one to three stories, with front porches and balconies. Keeping with local architectural styles, many of the single-story homes are built with narrow widths but long bodies, also known as “shotgun” houses. The units also sport varying architectural details, with different shutters and wooden details under the eaves, and are painted in neutral pastel shades.

In interviews, residents said that the new design blends into the character of the surrounding neighborhood, making it easier to grow as an integrated mixed-income neighborhood – without segregating the lowest income residents into a separated space.

“In [the old Lafitte], you knew when you rode past it, it was the projects,” said Matthews. “When you say you’re from the projects, people think abandoned buildings, broken windows, trash on the ground – and that’s how it was…. [The new Lafitte] is not the projects. This is not what the projects look like.”

Financing Lafitte

Even with the influx of funding to the region for post-Katrina recovery and rebuilding, financing the redevelopment of Lafitte was an incredibly challenging endeavor – made even more difficult by the market crash of 2007.

To date, the largest source of financing ($72.58 million) has come through the Gulf Opportunity Zone (GO Zone) Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) equity, specially authorized for Gulf Coast recovery efforts in 2005. Initially, housing funded though these tax credits was required to be completed and put in service by the end of 2008. However, the political and legal battles over redevelopment delayed the process, casting doubt as to whether the funding conditions could be met in time. In 2006, after
extensive advocacy led by Enterprise and other local and national industry groups, Congress granted an extension in the Tax Relief and Health Care Act. This gave developers until 2010 to complete construction and place new units in service. A second extension, passed in 2010, pushed the deadline back another year to December 2011.

The Lafitte redevelopment project was also made possible by $27 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding from the State of Louisiana Office of Community Development, along with over $14 million in infrastructure support from HANO.39

The beginning of the nationwide recession in 2007 significantly complicated the project financing. Federal tax credits plummeted in value, and many investors lost any appetite they may have had for tax credits, let alone taking on risk in the Gulf Coast.40 Few large, national financial institutions were active in the region, and interest in real estate deals was dampened by uncertainty about the market, unstable land and construction costs, unavailability or prohibitively high cost of insurance coverage, uncertain flood elevation requirements for new buildings, and a short-handed local construction workforce.41

To strengthen financial guarantee capacity, L+M Development Partners joined the development team in fall 2008. A New York-based developer that focuses on urban revitalization, L+M works with government and non-profit partners to create affordable and market-rate housing. The development team also chose to divide the project into six separate phases, to increase the likelihood of finding an investor and reduce the risk to any one investor.42

At Lafitte, all apartments built with GO Zone LIHTC equity were completed on schedule for the December 2011 deadline, with the first apartments ready for lease-up in January 2011.
Creating a New Center for the Community

The physical transformation of the buildings at Lafitte is only one part of the community change undertaken by Enterprise and Providence. A large part of the story focuses on the Sojourner Truth Neighborhood Center (STNC), which sits directly adjacent to the Lafitte housing site.

The community center served Lafitte with a modest number of social programs prior to Katrina, then served as a makeshift Section 8 office for HANO immediately following the storm. In 2009, it was reopened as a community center, managed under contract by Catholic Charities. The center focused primarily on supportive services and case management, funded by a portion of the $2.5 million that Enterprise and Providence had committed.

As more families began to move in to new housing at Lafitte, however, the development team began to reexamine the use of the center and its role in the community. Providence conducted a Community Supportive Services Plan (CSSP) and community needs assessment in the first half of 2012. The assessment concluded that they should make recreational and educational youth programs a priority, as well as develop partnerships with local schools and employers, and provide supportive services for seniors. The CSSP also recommended restructuring operations at STNC with a smaller,
The new vision for STNC focused on five key community needs – services for youth, services for seniors, job readiness skills, health and wellness, and community building. More than anything, the center would strive to be a hub of community support.

“[STNC is] the heartbeat of this community,” according to Claudette Austin, Program Coordinator for Adult and Senior Programming. “We not only serve the residents but the surrounding community. [When we] have certain events, everyone gets to come together and socialize, kids and adults.”

Supporting Economic Stability

For residents, the center provides the type of wrap-around services that help improve quality of life and economic stability. The philosophy of STNC programming has been to help residents access all of the resources they might need, from “food stamp applications, childcare applications” to “getting their kids into high school or college.”

Job readiness programs range from soft-skills training, to job search and resume workshops, to computer literacy classes. Based on statistics tracked by the STNC, 50 people completed the financial literacy training and created a financial plan in 2014, and 26 successfully reduced a targeted debt by 25 percent. Another 74 Faubourg Lafitte residents were able to obtain jobs or improve their employment situations. When Whole Foods held a series of job fairs at the STNC for their nearby store opening, one workshop drew over 800 participants. Following the event, three residents and one local community member were hired.

One of the success stories is Juanita Billizone, who does not have a computer at home, but was able to use the STNC computer lab to apply for her job online. Whole Foods employees stationed at the center helped her navigate the application process. Without the job and affordable housing at Lafitte, Billizone said she’d be homeless or fully dependent on her children.

STNC is building additional partnerships to prepare residents for employment, including apprenticeships for welding, plastering and electrical positions, training for Dialysis Technicians, Certified Nursing Assistance and Medical Assistance licenses, and securing commercial driver’s licenses. These partnerships are developed strategically, with an eye towards growing industries in the area. The focus on medical careers, for example, is linked to the development of the New Orleans BioDistrict, where a number of hospitals and research centers are located only 10 minutes by bus from Lafitte. In the summer of 2013, 20 individuals participated in a three-month medical assistant training program provided in partnership with Ochsner Health System and Delgado Community College.
The center also plays a role in supporting local community organizations and businesses. It has hosted an average of two events or meetings for local organizations every week since 2012, and allows local nonprofits to use its computer lab and other spaces to augment their own facilities.\textsuperscript{52}

**Opportunities for Youth and Seniors**

Based on the assessment of community needs, the STNC offers a variety of programs that focus specifically on the needs of youth and seniors in the community. Providing regular services and stability to youth is particularly urgent for families displaced by Katrina, since the trauma caused by the hurricane has been found to have serious negative consequences. A 2010 study by the Children’s Health Fund and the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health found that a majority of displaced children had experienced long-term housing instability following Katrina, and struggled with higher rates of emotional and behavioral challenges.\textsuperscript{53}

The centerpiece of youth programming at the STNC is a two-hour after school program, begun in 2012. The program provides academic support and arts enrichment (including drum line, modern and African dance, art and hip hop) to students each weekday afternoon. Children in the program also receive healthy dinners and time for sports. The program has seen steady participation, with an average enrollment of 43 Faubourg Lafitte children per month and eight children from the broader community.\textsuperscript{54}

“There are kids who come every day who’ve been with us since 2012 when we started that first program. We’re looking for that kind of continuity to break the cycle of poverty, to show the kids there’s a different way out.”

Andreanecia Morris
Providence Vice President of Homeownership and Community Development
A number of research studies have demonstrated the positive effects of after-school programs on children's developmental and educational outcomes, but the program serves another function as well: helping working parents, who otherwise wouldn’t have an afterschool childcare option. Without the program, “the kids would have nowhere to go,” said Billizone, whose grandchild is also a participant.

For seniors, STNC offers comprehensive, holistic support around health and wellness. They offer social and creative activities, healthy eating and cooking demonstrations, and provide monthly boxes of commodities – such as spaghetti, rice, fruit and canned food – to supplement seniors' limited incomes. The program also includes workshops on health and safety issues, such as how to properly track and follow their medication regimens.

The senior programs have grown in popularity over time, from an average of 70 monthly participants in 2012, to 137 participants per month in 2014. Part of the attraction is the opportunity to socialize and get away from the monotony of days stuck at home, explained Program Director Claudette Austin. “Their mind is being active, their body is being active, and emotionally they’re much more stable. They get to socialize in fellowship with each other.”
As the Lafitte housing development has progressed, the neighborhood around the site has undergone significant changes as well, transforming from an area of blight and high vacancy rates to a growing hotspot for new businesses and rising rents.

Historically, Tremé has long been a hub of Creole architecture, art and music. Prior to Katrina, in 1994, the area was targeted for city-sponsored improvements and selected as the site for the New Orleans African American Museum. It received a local historic district designation in 1998, but interest in new development remained modest.

Immediately after Katrina, vacancy in the neighborhood skyrocketed. As late as 2010, the Lafitte/Tremé neighborhood still had 37 percent vacancy, compared to 25 percent throughout New Orleans overall and 11.4 percent nationally.

Slowly, residents who could move back did, and historic establishments like the Carver Theater and Circle Foods – said to be the first black-owned and operated grocery store in New Orleans – were repaired and reopened. New businesses followed – in part with the support and cooperation of the Lafitte development team.
One of these new developments is the ReFresh Project – a retail and nonprofit center located just blocks from Faubourg Lafitte. ReFresh is operated by Broad Community Connections (BCC), a Main Street organization focused on revitalizing nearby Broad Street. ReFresh houses a relatively low-cost Whole Foods supermarket – which primarily stocks the store’s economical “365 Everyday Value” brand. The space, which was vacant for years prior to Katrina, is now also home to several nonprofits focused on health and wellness. Enterprise helped connect BCC with L+M Development to advise them through the process and add financial and development capacity, and the STNC provides classroom and computer lab space to the teaching nonprofits at ReFresh.

Providence also helped form the NEWCITY Neighborhood Partnership, a coalition of local community groups, businesses and other stakeholders in Tremé/Lafitte, Tulane/Gravier and the Seventh Ward. Meetings are regularly held at STNC, and members of the groups come together to share information, discuss issues and build partnerships.

“[The Lafitte team has been] very deliberate about partnering with projects, even if it’s just supporting them and opening doors,” said BCC Executive Director Jeff Schwartz. He added that the redevelopment of Lafitte has made it easier to attract new private and public investment. “Making the case [to invest in ReFresh] would have been so much harder if you couldn’t point to Lafitte and the hospitals as the two big anchor developments in the area.”

The hospitals are part of the nearby BioDistrict New Orleans, a new 1,500 acre economic development district intended to serve as a hub for health and biosciences industry. Two major hospitals are under construction – Louisiana State University Medical Center and the Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center – along with the completed Louisiana Cancer Research Center and the New Orleans Bioinnovation Center, a business incubator for biotechnology companies. The BioDistrict is expected to generate jobs and draw high-skilled workers to the area, and to provide new access to health services in the area.
Another change in progress is the construction of the Lafitte Greenway, a 2.6 mile linear park set to open in summer 2015. Running adjacent to the STNC, the Greenway will provide a trail for cyclists and pedestrians, along with new greenspace and landscaping. The park is a product of effective local advocacy towards the city, but also a ‘domino’ decision that followed investment in Lafitte.

“I think seeing the redevelopment at Lafitte made it a lot easier to say it’s worth putting scarce recovery dollars into this amenity. They both complemented each so well,” said Schwartz. “New parks, new jobs, new housing, new grocery stores, other goods and services coming in... it’s so easy to draw a five mile radius and show all the different assets being developed in the community.”

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### Changing Demographics

New development, new housing and the proximity to popular New Orleans districts, like the French Quarter, have led to increased interest in the area from higher income households.

“[There’s a] buzz from everybody who lives throughout the city,” said Cyril Saulny, president of a local nonprofit consortium group, called Tremé4Tremé. “[They say:] I’m looking for some property. Where you looking? Oh, maybe close to Tremé.” As a result, he said property values, including his own, have gone “through the roof.” Indeed, the median home values in the census tract immediately adjacent to Lafitte has increased significantly from pre-Katrina levels, from $87,122 in 2000 to $115,400 in 2013.*

Data reported by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center also show a much wider distribution of incomes in the neighborhood in 2012, compared to 2000. While more than 44 percent of households in Tremé earned less than $10,000 in 2000, only 20 percent of households fell into that category in 2012. Similarly, only 5 percent of Tremé households earned $50,000-$75,000 in 2000, but that share jumped to over 13 percent in 2012.66

Saulny, like a number of other local leaders interviewed, worried that the changes can be a double-edged sword. As the neighborhood becomes wealthier – and whiter – it could threaten to displace lower-income black residents who have long called Tremé home. Saulny said his organization was formed in 2012 to help keep long-time residents in the neighborhood, and help newcomers understand and embrace the unique culture of the area.

Despite some rapid changes, it’s undeniable that the area still faces significant challenges. Just over 39 percent of the neighborhood’s population was living in poverty in 2012, according to the Census department definition, and the average household income ($33,409) was barely half the average income for New Orleans ($60,280).67

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*I Based on 2008-2013 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey. Both years reported in 2013 dollars.
An Ongoing Commitment

Though the Faubourg Lafitte development team has encountered challenges and obstacles throughout the redevelopment process, those challenges pale in comparison to what residents of Lafitte have faced and overcome since evacuating their homes 10 years ago. For many, it’s been a hard road back to a safe and stable neighborhood.

For some, the rebuilding of Lafitte has been a part of their personal journey home. “We’ve had a partnership – we worked with Providence on rebuilding this place,” said LeBlanc, who left a temporary apartment and her mother in Dallas to come back to New Orleans and help Providence find and engage her former neighbors. Despite many tough hours spent listening to heartbreaking stories of displacement, she helped draw them into the community feedback and rebuilding process. “We told [Providence and Enterprise] how we wanted stuff done, like bigger rooms,” she said. “Now I love my house.”

Ten years after Katrina, New Orleans is still recovering, and the work of rebuilding Lafitte is still ongoing. Enterprise and Providence remain committed to replacing every subsidized apartment that existed in the original Lafitte public housing complex, making sure every former Lafitte resident who would like to return is able to do so, and connecting residents with high quality services and programs to increase their opportunities in life.
Timeline of Development

2002

HUD takes over HANO after several years of mismanagement. HANO is returned to local control in July 2014.69

August 29, 2005
Hurricane Katrina makes landfall in Louisiana, causing massive flooding when the federal levees break.70

December 16, 2005
Congress passes the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005, which includes a placed-in-service deadline of December 2008 for projects funded with Low Income Housing Tax Credits.71

June 2006
Residents and activists file a fair housing lawsuit against HANO and HUD, arguing that HUD and HANO violated the Fair Housing Act by failing to repair and reopen public housing units at the Big Four. The suit is dismissed in July 2007.72

August 2006
Enterprise and Providence selected by HUD to redevelop the Lafitte public housing complex.73

September 2006
All Congregations Together (ACT) hired to track down as many Lafitte households as possible. Contact is made with over 550 families in 2006.74 A letter also goes out to residents, and a toll-free hotline established.75,76

October 3-7, 2006
Two community workshops held, gathering feedback from over 300 participants, including many former Lafitte residents.77
October 20, 2006
The Lafitte redevelopment is submitted to the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency (LHFA) for Gulf Opportunity Zone (GO-Zone) low-income housing tax credits, to support 568 rental units and 244 for-sale homes, and in December the project is awarded $12.8 million in credits and $27 million in Community Development Block Grants by the State of Louisiana Office of Community Development.

December 2006
The Tax Relief and Health Care Act extends the GO Zone LIHTC placed-in-service deadline two years, to December 31, 2010.

December 2, 2006
A charrette is held in Houston with former Lafitte households to gather feedback and update families about the redevelopment process.78

December 20, 2007
City Council votes to unanimously approve demolition permits for the Big Four.79

April 10, 2008
Demolition begins at Lafitte.80

Fall 2008
Lafitte project split up into six phases to address financing difficulties; L+M Development Partners added to development team to strengthen financial guarantee capacity.

January 2009
Sojourner Truth Neighborhood Center reopens, managed by Catholic Charities.

August 2009
Construction begins at Lafitte – initial work includes construction of new streets and other infrastructure.
March 2010
First phase of Lafitte residential financing closes; construction of first 134 homes begins.

December 2010
Congress extends the GO-Zone LIHTC placed-in-service deadline to December 2011. Construction on the majority of the first phase is complete.

January 2011
Lease-up begins on the first 134 homes at Lafitte.

March 2011
Financing closes and construction begins on 142 rental homes at Lafitte.

October 31, 2011
First 134 homes are fully leased.

December 2011
Construction is completed for 142 second-phase homes at Lafitte, meeting placed-in-service deadline for all units built with GO Zone LIHTC.

February 14, 2014
Financing closes for 89 market-rate rental homes.

March 25, 2014
Construction starts on Lafitte Greenway.81

February 25, 2015
Groundbreaking ceremony for the Lafitte Senior Building.82 The 100-unit, 96,000 square-foot facility is expected to be complete by summer 2016.

August 2015
Lafitte is visited on 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina by President Barack Obama, Office of Management and Budget Director Shaun Donovan, and HUD Secretary Julian Castro.
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Yolanda Anderson; Gilda Burbank; Allen Harris; Odessa Lewis; Emelda May; Sylvia Moten; Hilda Johnson; Cynthia Bell; Judith Watson; Gloria Williams; Mary Ann Wright; Linda Degruy, Plaintiffs–Appellants, v. Alphonso Jackson, Secretary, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development; United States Department of Housing and Urban Development; Housing Authority of New Orleans; C. Donald Babers, Board of Commissioners, Housing Authority of New Orleans; William C. Thorson, Executive Administrator Appointing Authority Housing Authority of New Orleans and each individual defendant in his official capacity, Defendants–Appellees (United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit 2009).


