

**Gert Town Revival Initiative, Inc.**

3102 Broadway Street  
New Orleans, LA 70125

November 5, 2007

Dr. Edward J. Barkley  
Executive Director  
Office of Recovery Management  
City of New Orleans  
1300 Perdido Street 8W03  
New Orleans, LA 70112

Dear Dr. Blakely:

Enclosed, please find Gert Town Revival Initiative's proposal for use of the dedicated funds based on the Cooperative Agreement. We have included a history, a list of partners and listed proposed projects with time-frames and an itemized budget.

We hope that this meets all requirements and that the monies can be released to allow us to achieve some of the objectives that are still pending for this year. We are certain that with these resources in hand, we will be able to leverage other resources and bring the community together to restore one of the city's great neighborhoods—Gert Town.

For the Good of the City

  
Rev. Lois V. Desjean  
Executive Director

**GERT TOWN  
REVIVAL  
INITIATIVE**

**"THE COMMUNITY OF GREAT POSSIBILITIES"**

**3102 BROADWAY • NEW ORLEANS, LA 70125**

**PROPOSAL FOR RELEASE OF THE REMAINING FUNDS ALLOCATED PURSUANT  
TO THE COOPERATIVE ENDEAVOR AGREEMENT OF DECEMBER 1, 2004**

**November 5, 2007**

---

## **Introduction**

The Gert Town Revival Initiative ("GRI") submits this proposal to gain release of the funds designated for use by GRI pursuant to the December 1, 2004 Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the City of New Orleans through its Department of Housing & Neighborhood Development and Xavier University. As Xavier University noted in a letter to the City dated September 18, 2006 "[w]e encourage and support direct dispersal of these funds to the governing body of GRI . . ."

The activities described in this document reflect GRI's objectives for the next three years. Attached to this document, you will find the detailed Strategic Plan 2008, with relevant performance measures clearly delineated. Obviously, much of GRI's energy will be directed at attracting resources to supplement these initial funds. The actual cost for each project will not be definite until the appropriate consultants have provided estimates. GRI is certain, however, that the total costs for all current projects will run in the low millions, which we are prepared to either raise or leverage. That is the reason GRI is committed to continuing to build an organization that has the capacity, framework, and resources to drive a cohesive, rational, long-term process of development for the Gert Town community.

## **GRI CORPORATE STATEMENTS**

### **GRI VISION STATEMENT**

To be a viable and healthy community, built on the inherent cultural heritage of the area.

### **GRI MISSION STATEMENT**

To maintain a repository of inherent cultural heritage and be a catalyst for education, social and economic development services, as needed for our community.

### **GRI ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES**

We value our cultural heritage and educating our community youth. We explore and respect diversity, embrace ethical behavior, and propagate community wide education. Accountability and responsibility are the primary principles practiced in all endeavors.

### **GRI POSITIONING STATEMENT / STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE**

To be the leading catalyst for unified revitalization of the community – "Gert Town: The Community of Great Possibilities"

## WHO IS GRI?

### **GERT TOWN REVIVAL INITIATIVE, INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS** Mr. Ivan Detiege, Chairman

Ms. Audrey Pierce  
Ms. Annie S. Jackson  
Rev. L. T. White  
Mr. Jared Hueter  
Mr. Mack Slan  
Rev. Elenora Cushenberry  
Rev. Lois Dejean, Executive Director

### **PARTNERS**

Gert Town Community Development Center  
Greater King Solomon Baptist Church  
Freedman Baptist Association  
CityBuild  
Advocates for Environmental Human Rights  
Little Zion Baptist Church

#### **Student and University Volunteers:**

Xavier University  
University of Arkansas  
Tulane University  
Harvard University  
La Technical College  
George Washington University  
MIT  
Vanderbilt University  
University of Oregon  
University of Illinois

### **BACKGROUND AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

GRI is a coalition of neighborhood organizations and community residents working to improve a low-income, inner city section of New Orleans. The GRI Board of Directors has representatives from three area churches and its bylaws stipulate that 51% of the Board comes from Gert Town. The GRI Board has recently grown from six to eight members, and will soon be adding an additional member.

GRI'S mission is translated as a focused attempt to revitalize and develop Gert Town and its adjacent areas through programs, activities, and services that will enhance the total quality of life of the community.

Along with representatives of the neighborhood's homeowners, renters, small businesses, churches, social service agencies, Xavier University, and other educational institutions, GRI has committed itself to helping implement community planning priorities in the following areas:

- Economic development ✓
- Area revitalization vis-à-vis housing stock
- Social services and support systems
- Environmental concerns
- Recreational & cultural services
- Educational enhancement

### **Gert Town**

Located in the geographic center of the City, the physical boundaries of GRI's target communities are South Carrollton Avenue to Pontchartrain Expressway, to South Jefferson Davis Parkway to Walmsley, back to South Carrollton Avenue.

Gert Town's origins date back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The present neighborhood was once the site of a property known as the McCarty Plantation. By 1833 the plantation had been sold to the New Orleans Canal and Banking Company. Subsequently, many of the major rail lines that served New Orleans passed through the area. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the area was urbanized and developed as a community neighborhood. Commercial and Industrial activity continued to drive the development of the neighborhood well into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Gert Town neighborhood also figures prominently in the musical history and folklore of New Orleans. Many African-American musicians began moving to the neighborhood in the early 1900s, when legendary jazz and blues performances took place regularly in Johnson and Lincoln parks, two now defunct green spaces. Celebrated musicians, Mardi Gras Indians, and other artisans have continued to be nurtured in Gert Town.

Despite the neighborhood's excellent location and the fact that it is located in close proximity to some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in New Orleans, there are consistent indications of persistent poverty and social distress in Gert Town, whose current population is 95% African-Americans.

According to the 2000 US Census, the permanent population of 3,677 in Gert Town lived in 1,541 households with an average household size of over 2.3 residents per household. Almost 76% of the occupied units in the neighborhood were rental households in 2000 - as compared to 54% citywide and 32% statewide. Of households with children, approximately 50% of children lived without one parent present - compared to 29% statewide and 23% nationwide.

*2008  
outside level  
of the text*

Average household income for the area was just over half of that of the City, 50% of the State, and 40% of the nation. Almost 50% of the residents of Gert Town were living in poverty, compared to fewer than 20% for the State and less than 13% for the nation. Most troubling was the fact that more than two-thirds of children under the age of five in the neighborhood lived in poverty compared to 18% for the nation.

Overall, despite its strong location, attributes, and access, the neighborhood has historically been among the poorest in the City and largely housed low and moderate income renters.

## The Gert Town Revival Initiative

Since commencing the Initial Cooperative Endeavor Agreement for \$404,000.00 with the City through its Department of Housing & Neighborhood Development and Xavier University, GRI has accomplished a great deal.

GRI's structural accomplishments to date include:

- obtaining 501(c)(3) tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service
- hiring an Executive Director
- establishing and training a Board of Directors
- opening an office in Gert Town
- securing pro bono legal counsel
- hiring an accountant an external accountant to work with the organization on a quarterly basis to ensure budgetary accuracy and transparency
- establishing an Advisory Board
- contracting a housing consultant to coordinate a community mapping of Gert Town
- securing a fund raising development consultant to assist in grants solicitations and submissions
- hiring a consultant to assist in creating a comprehensive organizational strategic plan

GRI has been equally effective in substantive areas. GRI has partnered with Xavier University under its URAP Grant from HUD to establish a computer training program for Gert Town residents, which is now housed at Little Zion Baptist Church in Gert Town. GRI has successfully applied to the Neighborhood Registry, a necessary step for the submission of a SuperNOFA grant proposal, and GRI submitted a grant proposal for SuperNOFA funding for the Gert Town Senior Village, which would create six units of affordable housing for families in which a senior is the head of household.

GRI successfully advocated for the clean up efforts of the highly toxic, abandoned industrial Thompson-Hayward chemical site in the Gert Town neighborhood. This advocacy included organizing a march on the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality ("DEQ") to push for the remediation, and numerous meetings between DEQ and the community to explain the remediation process. GRI played an instrumental role in the design of the remediation plan. As part of this effort, GRI retained the pro bono legal services of Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, and the scientific expertise of Wilma Subra of the Subra Company. The clean-up has recently been completed, pending a final report. (GRI's initial post-Katrina survey, discussed below, which was delivered to homes where residents had returned, included information about the status of the Thompson-Hayward cleanup and the implications of post-Katrina flooding at the Thompson-Hayward site.)

GRI has partnered with the Community Action Council (CAUCUS) of Tulane University to conduct neighborhood clean-up projects, including debris removal, in Gert Town.

*post Katrina*  
In the wake of the devastation by Hurricane Katrina, GRI's programs were adapted to meet the massive and urgent need for immediate relief, including things such as providing refrigerators for families and cash for basic necessities. Further, GRI conducted a door-to-door survey of residents to find out who had returned, where in the neighborhood they were living, and the condition of their housing. On the basis of the first survey, GRI followed up with a second survey to assess the residents' needs, as well as their awareness and assessment of GRI's goals. After Katrina GRI also contacted 45 families for a toy giveaway at Christmas and distributed toy and gift cards to 166 children and youth. Further, GRI undertook an extensive Neighborhood Mapping and Inventory Project. Every piece of real estate in Gert Town has now been documented regarding its current physical condition, environmental integrity, market value, and legal status (ownership and tax compliance). This mapping effort has

resulted in a comprehensive database containing all the relevant information. As part of the Mapping Project, substantial volunteer assistance was provided by faculty members and students at Tulane University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and, through the Student Hurricane Network, Temple University, the University of Illinois, the University of Richmond, the University of Oregon, Villanova University, and George Washington University. In addition, Invaluable support and expertise have been provided by CITYbuild Consortium of Schools, which is based at Tulane's School of Architecture.

In addition, GRI partnered with Louisiana Technical University, another member of the CITYbuild Consortium of Schools, to design architectural prototypes for homes consistent with the historic character of the Gert Town neighborhood. These prototypes have been completed and are available to anyone in Gert Town or elsewhere who plans to construct or restore housing post-Katrina. Louisiana Tech is currently seeking funding to build some of these model homes in Gert Town.

The Gert Town property database is a vital tool to aid in the accelerated redevelopment of the area. It helps GRI be more knowledgeable about opportunities for the clustered and strategic deployment of resources to rebuild the neighborhood. This body of information will permit property owners, developers, and neighborhood businesses and organizations to coordinate efforts more easily and to achieve more synergistic results from their endeavors.

Furthering its hurricane recovery efforts, GRI also partnered with the First Presbyterian Church of New York to assist in rehabilitating two senior citizens' homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

GRI continues to raise funds to leverage the initial funding provided pursuant to the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement.

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Gulf Coast Ecological Health and Community Grant Fund	\$30,000	received	Assist community residents with repair and rebuilding efforts
Environmental Support Center	\$4,000	received	Replace equipment and supplies destroyed by Hurricane Katrina
First Presbyterian Church of New York	\$40,000	received	Rehabilitate two (2) senior citizens' homes destroyed by Katrina
Neighborworks America	\$1,000	received	Hire housing consultant for technical assistance in building GRI's housing development capacity
Neighborworks America	\$1,000	received	Purchase equipment for Gert Town community mapping project

*\$ 76,000.00*

In addition, GRI solicited and presented to the Ford Foundation in December 2006, and anticipates funding from the Ford Foundation early in 2008. GRI will also be applying in the near future for SuperNOFA funding for senior housing, and funding from the Greater New Orleans Foundation and the Gert Town Community Fund.

## **GERT TOWN REVIVAL INITIATIVE PLANS FOR USE OF REMAINING FUNDS FROM THE COOPERATIVE ENDEAVOR AGREEMENT**

### **MAPPING/SURVEY**

Although GRI sponsored a thorough survey of the neighborhood prior to and shortly after Katrina, there is a need for an updated house-to-house survey to determine:

- Who has returned? GRI needs to know the precise number of people and a demographic breakdown, focusing in particular on the number of school children and senior citizens.
- Who is trying to return and what help do they need?
- What special needs exist for those who are either back or on their way back?
- What are the total current assets of the neighborhood?

This survey will be conducted by hired contractors and volunteer partners from local universities who will also assist with compilation and analysis of the data. Total cost to GRI will be based on the level of volunteer participation and sponsorship by partners. The survey will be finished in January 2008.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

A number of businesses have returned to the general area but more are needed. Some of the projects to address this need include:

- Miss Gloria's Kitchen - GRI, CITYbuild and the University of Arkansas are working to restore this economic institution in the community by May of 2008. The building has been gutted, the architectural plans are completed, GRI has obtained some funding to begin the construction work, and additional funding for completion of the project is underway.
- Worker training programs - GRI is committed to attracting or creating programs that will allow residents to participate in the rebuilding of homes and businesses in the area. The first such program will begin in the summer of 2008.
- GRI will initiate the formation of a Gert Town Area Business Association to facilitate support and development of the area by the summer of 2008.

\$241

Soil 1-17-08  
Norwood Thompson Park

## REVITALIZATION AND CLEAN UP OF NORWOOD THOMPSON PARK

The Norwood Thompson Park is the primary recreational facility in Gert Town. Unfortunately, it is not a safe place for our children to play. In July 2005, GRI forwarded to the City laboratory test results for soil sampling conducted at the park by Dr. Marcus Iszard, Professor of Toxicology at Xavier University. The test results showed the presence of dangerous pesticides in the Norwood Thompson Park and other areas in the community. Specifically, these tests revealed that DDT, DDD, DDE, and chlordane have been detected in the playground soil at very shallow levels, where children can be directly exposed. The scientifically known health effects of these chemicals include cancer, child developmental damage, and reproductive system damage. In spite of this fact, the park is being used by families, children, and even sports teams. The cost of a soil-replacement cleanup is less than \$50,000 and should happen immediately. Even with fencing and barriers it won't be possible to keep people out of the park for long. GRI is ready and able to get this clean up done through either direct payment or leveraging of funds. This will be completed by January 31, 2008.

## HOUSING GOALS

GRI is committed to addressing the need for housing in the area. A drive through the area shows that there are many structures that have been destroyed or abandoned. GRI will conduct a thorough structure survey to determine the level of funding required to bring the area back better than before. Some of the major activities that will engage GRI during the next six months include:

- Established a partnership with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and the University of California at Berkeley Law School (Boalt Hall) to develop a land trust for the residents of Gert Town in order to develop a pool of permanently affordable housing. #0
- Establish a partnership with the City in rebuilding 12 houses that were previously designated, and have them completed within 2 fiscal years. Rebuild 12 homes \$2
- Funds to rehabilitate seniors homes - GRI staff will identify government and private resources available to renovate homes of seniors who have not been served through the Road Home or other processes to date. GRI will have 10 such homes completed by December 2010 and a process in place to increase that number in each subsequent year. Major Renov? What's \$ max per home
- GRI will present a plan for purchasing blighted houses from the City by January of 2008. in Gert Town? for resale?

ehab  
Senior  
Homes

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION/LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

For the recovery of Gert Town to succeed, the community must be organized with a clear vision and an agenda with specific objectives. This collective sense of vision must be developed by bringing the community together and engaging in planning and capacity building activities.

To this end, GRI plans to call together a Gert Town community meeting of those who have returned and those who are seriously attempting to return. This meeting will allow the community to organize a Community Congress or Commission that will divide labor to address the most critical needs for the recovery and advancement of Gert Town into a healthy, prosperous

community. GRI will seek an agreement with the City to mandate that any plans or projects slated for this area be reviewed and approved in advance by this community body.

The first such meeting will be held no later than January of 2008. Further delays will result in more deterioration and more people simply giving up on the idea of returning and rebuilding. Ultimately, GRI wants to bring together every elected official and all of the agencies that serve the area to gain the most holistic assessment possible of the resources available to develop the area.

For the community to recover and advance, GRI needs trained and committed leaders. A process for board and leadership training will begin by December 15, 2007.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

- GRI will meet with DEQ in November 2007 regarding the final report pertaining to the clean-up of the Thompson-Hayward facility, and GRI will work with a team of its partners to evaluate that report. GRI will consult with urban planning professionals to determine what the best use of this site would be for the community, and identify resources needed to make this happen. GRI will engage the owners of the property in this process. GRI will have a credible plan for the site in place by the fall of 2008. Initial meetings and consultations with professionals should begin no later than February 2008.
- GRI will engage the owners of the currently defunct cement facility in discussions regarding clean-up of the facility, and alternative, community-enhancing uses of the property. GRI will begin this process by March of 2008.
- GRI will engage the owners of the Tree Medic facility in discussions regarding clean-up of the facility, which currently is providing a breeding ground for rats, roaches, reptiles, and other vermin. GRI will also negotiate with the owners regarding alternative, community-enhancing uses of the property. GRI will begin this process by March of 2008.
- GRI will conduct a series of community gatherings beginning in November 2007 in order to devise an overall clean-up strategy for the community, including a potential beautification adoption of Broadway Street.

## **TERRELL SCHOOL CLEAN UP**

The Mary Church Terrell School has been part of the heartbeat of Gert Town and needs to be cleaned up for use. Many of those considering returning to the area have delayed because of the lack of facilities such as schools that are accessible for small children. The Terrell School was a model for the school system because of its use of the popular Workshop Way method of classroom management, which was developed by a nun at Xavier University. It is currently being used as a public toilet and flophouse by some of the city's homeless population.

GRI will engage professionals in obtaining a plan for proper rehabilitation of the school, including appropriate remediation of mold and other toxicants left in the wake of Katrina, and a cost estimate for the rehabilitation. GRI will present its plan to the recovery school district, and lead negotiations with the recovery school district to accomplish the plan. GRI's goal is to have the school in operation by September of 2008.

## **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS**

- GRI Summer camp - the first camp will begin during the summer of 2008 at a site to be determined.
- GRI will meet with recovery school district leaders regarding the Mary ChurchTerrell School by January, 2008
- GRI will immediately begin active collaboration with Kaboom and the National Basketball Association to upgrade parks in Gert Town.
- GRI will begin holding regular youth activities in the Norwood Thompson Park commencing immediately after remediation of the contaminated soil at the park.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE FACILITIES**

- Community Center - GRI will partner with Greater King Solomon Baptist Church to develop a community center to serve the entire area by January 2009. GRI will help secure resources for this project.
- Detiege Health Center - GRI will work with the City and Xavier University to revitalize the Detiege Health Center by August of 2008.
- Senior recreation facilities - GRI staff will identify sites, partners, and resources to have ground broken on a senior recreation facility by June of 2009.

## **EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE**

Since Hurricane Katrina, Gert Town residents have come to GRI and other organizations with special and unanticipated emergency needs. GRI has been able to respond to some of these needs with funds from various sources. At other times GRI has been able to make referrals to groups that could help. It is vitally important that GRI have a reserve of emergency funds that can be used to help residents maintain their basic quality of life. This is an ongoing need. GRI will set aside at least \$5,000 per year for this purpose.

*\$5,000.00  
for support*

### **Attachements:**

**\*Situation Analysis-Summary of Findings**

**\*Strategic Plan-2008**

**\*Supp. + letters**