

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

RAY NAGIN
MAYOR

KENYA J. SMITH
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE MAYOR

January 25, 2010

Reverend Lois DeJean
Gert Town Revival Initiative
2823 Broadway Street
New Orleans, LA 70125

Norman C. Francis, President
Xavier University of Louisiana
Office of President
1 Drexel Drive
New Orleans, LA 70125-1098

Dear Rev. DeJean and Dr. Francis:

The City of New Orleans is prepared to transfer the balance of funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between the City of New Orleans, Xavier University, and Gert Town Revival Initiative (GRI) to GRI upon the fulfillment of the following conditions.

The City is requesting that GRI document how it has fulfilled its responsibilities stated in the contract. If GRI were unable to fulfill any of the items listed in the scope of services because of the hurricane, please let us know and we will take that into account.

Please let us know your intentions for the use of the balance of funds. Of course, the use of the balance should be consistent with the original agreement for the benefit of the Gert Town community. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Anthony Faciane at 658-4215.

Sincerely,



Kenya J. H. Smith
Executive Assistant to the Mayor

cc: Brenda Breaux, Chief Deputy City Attorney
Anthony Faciane, Deputy Director, Neighborhood Stabilization



Gert Town Revival Initiative, Inc.
"THE Community of GREAT Possibilities"
2828 Broadway Street
New Orleans, LA 70125

April 7, 2010

Mr. Kenya J. H. Smith
Executive Assistant to the Mayor
City of New Orleans
1340 Poydras Street, Suite 100
New Orleans, LA 70112

Dear Mr. Smith:

The Gert Town Revival Initiative has been involved in a major problem involving the construction of the Earhart Corridor that took precedence to my replying to your letter of January 25, 2005. As vital as this letter is to our continued operation, the possibility of the community's health being at risk had to be addressed. The matter is not resolved; we are still in conversation with EPA. I do have time now to reply to your letter.

I am in receipt of your letter of January 25, 2010 notifying me that the City of New Orleans is prepared to transfer the balance of funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between the City of New Orleans, Xavier University, and Gert Town Revival Initiative (GRI) on the condition that GRI provides the following information: (1) documentation of GRI's fulfillment of its responsibilities as provided in the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement and (2) a statement of GRI's intentions for the use of the balance of funds. This letter provides the requested information below.

Please be advised that your letter follows actions taken by the City of New Orleans after the notification by Xavier University on September 18, 2006, that its fiscal sponsorship expired under the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement and want to be released as the fiduciary for Gert Town Revival Initiative (GRI) Instead of releasing the balance of funds to Gert Town Revival Initiative, which was suggested in the Xavier University notification letter, Dr. Edward Blakely, who was then the Executive Director of the City of New Orleans Office of Recovery and Development Administration, imposed a competitive grant award process for the balance of funds. Under protest, GRI submitted a proposal that was selected by Dr. Blakely to receive the "grant award" of the balance of funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement on April 23, 2008. However, the funds were never transferred to GRI. Consequently, GRI met with Mr. Anthony Faciane, Deputy Assistant of the City of New Orleans Office of Community Development to urge action on transferring the funds pursuant to Dr. Blakely's decision and, more importantly, the terms of the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement that designated GRI as the beneficiary of the funds. Following this meeting with Mr. Faciane, he communicated with a GRI Board Member, October 30, 2009, stating that the City of New Orleans was prepared to transfer the remaining funds to GRI. On November 2, 2009 GRI sent a letter to Mr. Faciane acknowledging his decision. However, once again, the funds were not transferred. Because of the communications with Mr. Faciane in 2009 indicating that the transfer would be executed, GRI did not submit any reimbursement requests to Xavier University for expenses incurred in 2009 related to community improvement activities. This has created a financial hardship on GRI, which is forced to submit the reimbursement requests to Xavier University, (who still has the funds in its investment account, see enclosed) notwithstanding the fact that its fiscal sponsorship has expired.

I provided you with this history to make you aware of the prior agreements by the City of New Orleans to transfer the balance of funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement to GRI that have not been fulfilled. Since the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement was signed in 2004, GRI has not stopped working to improve the Gert Town community. GRI has been more than patient and flexible in trying to resolve the delay in the transfer of funds. However, given the fact that more than four (4) years have elapsed since Xavier University's notification of its fiscal sponsorship expiration, GRI is prepared to seek recourse in the event that the City of New Orleans does not transfer the balance of funds in response to GRI's fulfillment of the conditions stated in your letter.

Taking under consideration the Hurricane Katrina posed severe damage to the Gert Town Community, this intensified GRI's work in the community. Thousands of dollars were issued to residents especially to the elderly and families with children for materials, beddings, personal supplies, restorative services, etc. GRI matched a \$25,000 donation from a private donor to restore Ms. Gloria's Restaurant, a local "moms-pops business" and partnered with University of Arkansas Architectural School to design and assist in its restoration. This effort contracted two of Gert Town's small businesses to utilize their skills: Gibson Electrical and & J& L Plumbing.

GRI's Fulfillment of Responsibilities Provided in the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement

1. Partner with Xavier University.

- GRI partnered with Xavier University to develop and draft the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between GRI, Xavier University, and the City of New Orleans.
- A representative of Xavier University served on the GRI Board of Directors, 2004 - 2006.
- In partnership with GRI, Xavier University provided technical support in the form of a series of board development training workshops for members of the GRI Board of Directors.
- GRI partnered with Xavier University under the URAP Grant from HUD that was awarded to Xavier University to establish a computer training program for Gert Town residents, which also provided technical support to the community.
- Xavier University assigned a toxicologist to assist GRI on environmental projects that included the remediation of the Thompson Hayward site.
- GRI worked with Xavier University to develop a web page.

2. Adopt a Gert Town Strategic Plan.

- In 2006, GRI initiated a process to develop a strategic plan to address both pre- and post-Katrina issues affecting the Gert Town community. GRI hired the firm AEGIS Systems for this endeavor. GRI conducted community meetings to introduce and discuss the strategic planning process; and conducted community surveys to collect opinions and gather input to inform the strategic plan. The *GRI Strategic Plan* was adopted in 2007 and is enclosed.
- GRI partnered with MIT to produce the Gert Town Community Assets Map that presents historical data and identifies cultural, economic, and other neighborhood assets. Data was later updated by Princeton University and computerized through the Google Program by a student from the University of Berkley.
- GRI convened a neighborhood meeting with the City Planning Commission and consultants working on the City of New Master Plan, in which residents gave input on various aspects of the draft Master Plan, such as zoning and community development.

3. Organize a Letter-writing and Petition-signing Campaign around the Thompson-Hayward Issue

GRI has surpassed this goal by organizing Gert Town residents to advocate for remediation of the Thompson-Hayward site, and enlisting the support of the law group Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, Wilma Subra, an award-winning chemist, and Dr. Marcus Iszard, Xavier University

- toxicologist and professor, to compel the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to initiate environmental remedial action to remove several tons of contaminated soil and debris. GRI led the effort to require the use of innovative dome covers to prevent exposure to excavation at the site, air monitoring devices, and terms to collect runoff. As a result of these efforts, the former Thompson-Hayward site is now clean. At a meeting with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Shaw Group, which was contracted to conduct the remediation, GRI was thanked for its advocacy on requiring dome covers and other precautions to ensure the safe removal of the contaminated soil and debris. See enclosed Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, "No Further Action Report," June 5, 2008.

4. Hire an Executive Director with Specified Responsibilities.

- The GRI has employed an executive director since 2005.
 - Resident participation and community capacity building are a central part of all GRI projects undertaken by the executive director.
 - The GRI executive director acquired IRS 501(c)(3) charitable tax status for the organization.
 - The GRI executive director conducted significant community outreach and participation in the environmental remediation of the Thompson Hayward site.
 - Since Hurricane Katrina, community organizing has focused on surveying the impacts of the storm on the lives of senior citizen, children, and adult residents of Gert Town. Residents who participated in this survey identified their needs and their future plans regarding place of residence. The GRI executive director contacted agencies and organizations to assist residents with needs identified in the surveys, which included gutting 35 homes and providing one (1) business and 5 homes with sheetrock wall construction, exterior painting, and complete electrical wiring and repair. The executive director coordinated the rebuilding work with student-volunteers from several universities that included Xavier University, University of Arkansas, Tulane University, Harvard University, Louisiana Technical College, George Washington University, MIT, Vanderbilt University, University of Oregon, Princeton University, University of Berkley, William and Mary University and the University of Illinois. In addition, GRI raised funds to provide residents with home furnishings, appliances, clothing, as well as financial assistance with transportation, utilities, and rent, as indicated above. GRI has also provided temporary contractual employment for 25 persons who worked on various GRI projects.
 - The GRI executive director has initiated community efforts to cleanup the Norwood-Thompson Park, advocate on zoning issues, re-open the Mary Church Terrell Elementary School, and conduct an environmental assessment of post-Katrina sediment and particulate matter released by the LaFarge facility.
 - The GRI executive director took the initiative to engage the Environmental Protection Agency and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to launch a best practices management review of facilities in the Gert Town community.
 - The GRI executive director organizes annual Christmas toy give-a ways, Thanksgiving baskets, and food drives to benefit Gert Town senior citizens and children.
 - The GRI executive director has developed partnerships with diverse organizations working to improve our quality of life and support community capacity building. These partner organizations are as follows: Gert Town Community Development Center, Greater King Solomon Baptist Church, Freedmen Baptist Association, CityBuild, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, The Subra Company, and Little Zion Baptist Church.
 - The GRI executive director reached out to developers of the Blue Plate building to support their efforts of revitalizing this building.
- Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the GRI executive director engaged local businesses in the Gert Town Partnership in which local businesses supported community projects and events and addressed community concerns. Steps are being taken currently to resume this partnership.

- The production of the GRI newsletter and website development has been hampered by the displacement of individuals who relocated after the storm. The GRI executive director plans to identify other individuals to produce the GRI newsletter and website.

5. Commit to Raising and Leveraging the Funds to Implement GRI's Mission

- GRI has successfully raised \$30,000 from the Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health (2006); \$4,000 from the Environmental Support Center (2006); \$40,000 from the First Presbyterian Church of New York (2007); \$100,000 from the Ford Foundation (2007-2009); \$1,000 from NeighborWorks America (2007); and \$12,000 from the Common Counsel Fund (2007).
- GRI has developed relationships with philanthropic institutions through conferences and workshops focused on community development and environmental justice.
- To receive the remaining balance of funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement, GRI submitted a grant proposal as required by the City of New Orleans. In 2008, the GRI was notified that our proposal was selected to receive the funds, but the City of New Orleans has yet to transfer the funds.

6. Build Relationships with Housing Agencies

- GRI has engaged NORA in providing data on blighted housing and structures in the Gert Town neighborhood. The data are useful in developing the *GRI Strategic Plan* and providing input to the City of New Orleans draft Master Plan.
- GRI has also worked closely with the City of New Orleans Community Development Office and other agencies to create economic development plans for a four-square block in Gert Town. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, these plans were to be financed with funds from the Housing and Urban Development in 2005, but were halted by the City of New Orleans due to post-storm recovery needs.

7. Partner with the Renewal Community Program for Economic Development Opportunities

- GRI worked extensively with consultants hired by the City of New Orleans to develop a plan for economic development opportunities. Specifically, the plan involved the development of the four-square block area in the Gert Town community that would be funded through HUD and various agencies. However, after Hurricane Katrina, GRI learned from the City of New Orleans that the funding for the economic development plan was diverted to hurricane recovery needs. McIntyre report Columbia University.

8. Explore Options for Housing Rehabilitation Assistance

- After GRI received the IRS 501(c)(3) charitable tax status, GRI applied for the DHND's Super NOFA to develop and rehabilitate housing for senior citizen residents. Unfortunately, GRI's application was denied. GRI plans to re-apply with a request to DHND for technical assistance in preparing the application.

9. Pursue Partnerships with Entities for Land Banking Opportunities

- GRI partnered with the Lawyers' Committee on Civil Rights, which has a good track record in helping community organizations develop land banks. Through this partnership, GRI has learned of the various land banking models and is studying the applicability of these models to address the community needs in Gert Town.

10. Funnel All Correspondence with City Agencies through DHND Staff

- GRI has maintained communications with DHND staff, and has brought the staff into its efforts to not only pursue economic development, but also to clean up the Thompson Hayward site, Norwood Thompson Park, and Tree Medics.

11. Focus on Cluster Block Development

- As described above, GRI has worked on an economic development for the four-square block in the Gert Town neighborhood that would be a visible sign of improvement. GRI is also pursuing improvements on the Broadway Street section of Gert Town that has resulted in the restoration of Miss Gloria's restaurant. GRI is willing to partner with the Community Development component of the City of New Orleans in Cluster Block Development in the four block area originally approved that certainly needs restoration.

Future Plans for the Balance of Funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement

GRI continues to work with its residents and other non profits in the area. William Mary University, Princeton University, and the Neighborhood Partnership have returned to paint 7 homes for the elderly who cannot afford to pay someone to do so.

GRI plans to use the balance of funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement to leverage resources for community revitalization that focuses on cluster block development and land banking. GRI will continue to dedicate a substantial portion of the funds to establish an office in Gert Town, hire staff, and use the funds to contract with consultants who will assist with planning and development of Gert Town. In addition, GRI would use the funds to continue quality of life programs for residents in need of educational and employment opportunities, as well as social services.

The fund balance according to Morgan Stanley Smith Barney which houses the Xavier University of Louisiana Gert Town Revival Initiative account statement balance at \$195,458.21 as of February 2010. The transfer will be minus approximately \$89,000 owed GRI for cost reimbursement from January 2009 – February 2010, as state in the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement. I am hopeful that the City of New Orleans will approve a check to be issued pending Xavier approval of invoices.

In conclusion, it is my hope that this letter will result in the transfer of funds from the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement to GRI, as intended by the agreement. I look forward to your prompt response and action to end the delay in the transfer of the funds.

Very truly yours,

Rev. Lois Dejean, Executive Director
Gert Town Revival Initiative

Enclosures

Cooperative Endeavor Agreement
Strategic Revitalization Plan
Situation Analysis Report
GRI Strategic Plan 2007
Letter to Mayor Nagin 7/3/07

Dr, Blakely's Letter to GRI & GTEEFI 9/24/07
Letter to Dr. Blakely 10/9/07
Proposal for Release of Remaining Funds 11/5/07
Congratulation Letter to GRI 4/23/08
Letter to Mr. Anthony Faciane 11/2/09
Letter to Mr. Anthony Faciane 11/10/2009

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