

JEFFERSON COUNTY, ALABAMA

Concord, McDonald Chapel, North Smithfield Manor
Long-Term Community Recovery Action Strategy
November 2011



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Long-Term Community Recovery Action Strategy
November 2011



LETTERS OF SUPPORT

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROBERT BENTLEY
GOVERNOR



STATE CAPITOL
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130
(334) 242-7100
FAX: (334) 242-3282

STATE OF ALABAMA

November 4, 2011

The Honorable David Carrington
President of Jefferson County Commission
Jefferson County Courthouse
716 Richard Arrington, Jr., Blvd., North
Birmingham, AL 35203

Dear President Carrington:

RE: Long Term Community Recovery Strategic Action Report - Jefferson County
Communities of Concord, McDonald Chapel and North Smithfield Manor

The tornado of April 27, 2011, may have changed the landscape of some of Jefferson County's communities, but it has also given the world an opportunity to see your spirit in working together to develop a strategy for your future.

With great destruction comes opportunity; you are seizing this opportunity to create communities that will shine in the future. This Recovery Plan will serve as a guide as the citizens carry their vision forward. Each community will make this plan its own, selecting and further developing the projects that most closely fit your vision for Concord, McDonald Chapel and North Smithfield Manor. The partnerships fostered over the last six months, through the Long Term Community Recovery process, with state and federal agencies, local stakeholders and the private sector form the firm foundation for this new vision and stronger, more resilient communities in the future.

Extraordinary circumstances have demanded extraordinary resolve. Faced with the daunting tasks of rebuilding home and hearth, many of you have also devoted energy, thought and creativity to envisioning the new Jefferson County communities. I am pleased that FEMA has been able to assist you by providing technical expertise and a staff devoted solely to the development of this plan over the last six months.

I commend you on the progress you have made thus far toward your recovery and your vision for the future of each community. It is with great pleasure that I pledge my support for this plan and look forward to a full recovery of Jefferson County's Concord, McDonald Chapel and North Smithfield Manor communities.

Sincerely,

Robert Bentley

RB:RM:cf

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROBERT BENTLEY
GOVERNOR



STATE OF ALABAMA

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC
AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

JIM BYARD, JR.
DIRECTOR

November 4, 2011

The Honorable David Carrington
President of Jefferson County Commission
Jefferson County Courthouse
716 Richard Arrington, Jr., Blvd., North
Birmingham, AL 35203

Dear President Carrington:

RE: Long Term Community Recovery Strategic Action Report - Concord,
McDonald Chapel and North Smithfield Manor

It has been six months since a devastating tornado struck the communities of Concord, McDonald Chapel and North Smithfield Manor, severely disrupting the lives of the people who live and work there. At that time the State of Alabama's emergency response agencies moved swiftly to assist in rescue, debris removal, security, and restoration of essential services. Now the emergency clean-up effort is complete, but there still remains the long process of rebuilding and repairing businesses, homes and public property. I want to assure you that the State's Long Term Community Recovery staff will continue to offer assistance as you work to recover and rebuild.

This rebuilding effort, while painful and difficult, does present some opportunities for the affected communities. Local officials are already considering the best way to approach a long term recovery plan. To succeed, that plan must involve all levels of government, as well as local businesses, private organizations and, most importantly, the citizens of Jefferson County. Together, you have a great opportunity to develop a vision for the communities' futures, and to create a comprehensive plan to make that vision a reality.

To help Concord, McDonald Chapel and North Smithfield Manor develop their Long Term Recovery Plans, an Alabama Long Term Community Recovery Team representing several agencies throughout the State of Alabama and elsewhere are working closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I strongly endorse this effort. I have directed the participating agencies to identify potential sources of funding to implement and complete projects proposed in the plans. I commend you and the citizens of Jefferson County for the dedication and willingness you have demonstrated by working together through this difficult time, and I look forward to working with you as the long term recovery effort continues.

Sincerely,

Jim Byard, Jr.
Director

JB:RM:cf

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Weather Service identified 62 tornado strikes across Alabama on April 27, 2011. Six of these tornadoes touched down in Jefferson County, destroying or damaging nearly 700 homes and completely devastating several neighborhoods. The unincorporated communities of Concord, McDonald Chapel, and North Smithfield Manor endured a powerful EF-4 storm that caused seven fatalities.

Shortly after the tornadoes, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) program began working with the Jefferson County Commission and Jefferson County Department of Land Planning and Development Services. Through this partnership, the program learned more about the disaster impacts and began assessing level of support that FEMA's LTCR team could provide. In August, a LTCR Team of technical specialists began working with the three unincorporated communities in Jefferson County. LTCR, partnered with community members and county officials, helped the three communities with their recovery planning processes. The objective of the process is to build local capacity and help the communities identify their visions for recovery.

The LTCR partnership expanded to include community members and local, regional, and state officials familiar with the community. After considering comments from the communities, county officials formulated strategies to address the need for capacity building and reduce blight in the three unincorporated communities. Each community's recovery strategies are captured in this report and will be used in the county's updated comprehensive plan. Specific projects that meet the unique needs of each community are described in this report.

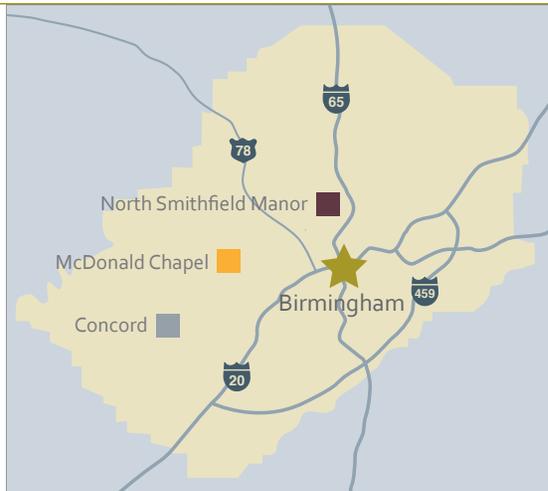


“We pray that no disaster in our time or any time in the future will mirror the storms that tore across our state in April.”

–Governor Robert Bentley



INTRODUCTION



JEFFERSON COUNTY

Since 1950, west Jefferson County has been hit five times by large, destructive tornadoes (EF-4 or EF-5, or the equivalent). On April 27, 2011, six tornadoes touched down in Jefferson County. Nearly 700 homes in the county were destroyed or damaged. Seven people in the unincorporated communities of Concord, McDonald Chapel, and North Smithfield Manor perished in these powerful storms, which ranged from EF-2 to EF-4.

Jefferson County, with nearly 660,000 residents, is the most populated county in Alabama. The county's jurisdictional responsibilities extend to all unincorporated areas and communities, excluding Birmingham and 37 incorporated cities and towns. Concord, McDonald Chapel, and North Smithfield Manor are small bedroom communities of Birmingham with primarily single-family homes. All three suffered extensive damage to their housing sectors; destruction and damage ranged from 27 percent in Concord to 19 percent in McDonald Chapel and nearly 100 percent in North Smithfield Manor.

Jefferson County provides services and operates facilities in numerous unincorporated communities across more than 1,100 square miles. The county faced unforeseen financial challenges during the 2008 national recession. Since then the county has been struggling with a 3.2 billion dollar debt and it declared municipal bankruptcy in November 2011. The extensive destruction caused by the April tornadoes has added to this burden.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLANNING

In response to the devastation in the county, the Jefferson County Commission adopted a resolution on August 9, 2011, asking FEMA's Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) Team to work with county staff and residents on recovery in the communities directly impacted by the disaster. The FEMA LTCR Team, in conjunction with the county's Department of Land Planning and Development Services (referred to as the county planning department throughout this document), determined a need for targeted technical assistance. LTCR and the county planning department engaged Concord, McDonald Chapel, and North Smithfield Manor in a joint planning process to develop strategies that will facilitate recovery in the three communities. Jefferson County will incorporate the recovery strategies into the county's updated comprehensive plan.

The partnership of LTCR and the county planning department resulted in a series of public meetings with an initial focus on housing recovery. LTCR held small group discussions in the three communities to get a sense of their issues. The county planning department and LTCR then hosted three open-house community meetings in each community to collect residents' thoughts about existing conditions, desired improvements in their respective communities, and strategies. The following issues were identified:

- Lack of community and residential safe rooms.
- Permitting and inspection issues.
- Communication.
- Financial difficulties of the under-insured.
- Lack of neighborhood amenities, such as recreational facilities, community centers, parks, sidewalks, and improved lighting.
- Blight, or fear of blight.
- Loss of trees.
- Lack of capacity to effect their community's recovery.

After identifying the issues and ideas with the residents, the county developed strategies to be included in the update to the county's comprehensive plan. The communities continued to meet, discussing the strategies to address their issues and potential projects to aid in their recovery. This report captures community-specific strategies and projects as well as county strategies to support local community recovery.



CONCORD



COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Concord, located southwest of Birmingham, suffered extensive damage from the April tornado. The tornado devastated the Concord Highlands neighborhood, taking the lives of six people, including two elementary-school students. More than 100 homes, 13 percent of the community's housing units, were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. Most of those homes were 20 – 50 years old. One church was destroyed. Four businesses were destroyed and eight damaged, including the main store and gas station as well as Cliffs Natural Resources' processing plant. Cliffs Natural Resources and nonprofit organizations have reached out to Concord residents to help with tornado recovery.

Concord is a mining community. Residents express pride and satisfaction in their community and have a strong desire to maintain Concord's stability, affordability, semi-rural nature, and bedroom community status. For many generations, Concord Elementary, beloved by residents, has been an institution in the community. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Concord has 1,837 residents, which is a slight increase since 2000. All 817 housing units are single-family detached houses, and approximately 87 percent are owner-occupied.

COMMUNITY RECOVERY ENGAGEMENT

The county and LTCR staff arranged a small group discussion with community leaders to get an initial picture of conditions in Concord. A series of three meetings designed to gain input from the community at-large followed. At the first community meeting on September 6, 2011 community members shared their ideas about existing conditions, community assets, and desired improvements. The county planning department and LTCR continued to gather information from participants at the second community meeting on September 20, 2011. The community identified several issues that need to be addressed. Some issues focus on recovery, while others are long-standing community challenges exacerbated by the storm. The issues and challenges include:

- Zoning and permitting issues.
- The inability of residents, especially the elderly, to afford rebuilding.
- Lack of residential and community safe rooms.
- Limited voice in decisions affecting their community.
- Lack of its own identity, especially when shadowed by its larger neighbors.
- Dust from the Cliffs Natural Resources processing plant, which is no longer hidden by the pre-tornado tree line.
- The fate of the old elementary school after the new school opens in 2012.

Participants prioritized the issues at the second community meeting. The community-generated issues and ideas formed the basis of the proposed recovery strategies.

At the final community meeting on October 18, LTCR presented an outline of the recovery report and the county planning department presented the county's comprehensive plan strategies for the Concord area. Residents

voted on the comprehensive plan strategies. After the community meetings, LTCR met with county planning department staff and residents interested in forming a neighborhood association or community nonprofit organization. The county planning department expressed its support of the community organization effort and willingness to help implement the strategies and projects for Concord's recovery and prosperity.

RECOVERY STRATEGY

Form a Community Organization

During community meetings, Concord residents were confident that rebuilding will occur at a reasonable pace, without the need for a specific housing plan. Community members pointed to signs of recovery that are underway, including the reopening of the destroyed church in a temporary facility and the intention of the businesses at the Warrior River Road retail center to repair and reopen. Nevertheless, Concord residents need to work together more formally to recover fully. Therefore, Concord's primary recovery strategy is to form a community organization to address the community's issues and lead the recovery effort.

A community organization may begin as a neighborhood association and evolve into a charitable nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. A neighborhood association provides the community with a voice and a means to undertake community initiatives or projects. A nonprofit goes a step further to create a legal entity that can accept tax-deductible donations and seek a wide range of grant funds. Refer to the *Funding + Capacity Building* section for specific information about neighborhood associations, 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporations, and different types of community development organizations that may benefit Concord.

Once organized, the neighborhood association/nonprofit organization can develop and pursue residents' ideas for improvement. Concord's proposed initiatives or projects include:

- Create community welcome signs to emphasize Concord's distinct identity.
 - ◇ Form a committee to develop a community process to design signs and determine locations.
 - ◇ Consult with the county regarding local sign ordinances.
 - ◇ Construct signs.
 - ◇ Erect and maintain signs.
- Improve relationship with fire district.
 - ◇ Form a committee to communicate and negotiate with the fire district.
 - ◇ Participate in mediation if necessary to repair the community's relationship with the fire district.
- Develop a partnership with Cliffs Natural Resources.
 - ◇ Form a committee to research the issues related to air quality.
- Support the community center, making it a real point of interest in Concord.
 - ◇ Form a committee to manage the use, maintenance, and marketing of the existing community center.
 - ◇ Research funding options and other support for the center.
 - ◇ Form a separate committee to begin studying the possible acquisition and reuse of the historic Concord Elementary School.
 - ◇ Consider developing parks on the grounds around both existing and new community facilities.





McDONALD CHAPEL

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

The April tornado ripped across the southern section of McDonald Chapel, located almost ten miles east of Birmingham. The tornado destroyed 28 residences and rendered another 11 uninhabitable in this small community. At first, county officials and local media did not realize how badly the area was damaged. Churches and nonprofits stumbled across McDonald Chapel in early May and began providing support. People helped each other clean up after the storm. This storm exacerbated the blight that remains after the 1998 F-5 tornado that hit the community.

Established in 1866, McDonald Chapel was named after William McDonald who gave one-and-a-half acres of land to a small congregation and helped to erect a church building of hewn logs. Because this one man gave so freely of his time and means, area residents fittingly named the community after his efforts. A historical marker sits in the community's old cemetery.

Traditionally an agricultural community, McDonald Chapel now has an area of 1.08 square miles, primarily residential with affordable single-family detached homes. U.S. Steel property surrounds the community to the south and west. According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, McDonald Chapel has a population of 717, which is a decrease of 32 percent from the 2000 U.S. Census data. Before this year's storm, there were 371 housing units. Approximately 77 percent of the homes were owner-occupied, and 17.5 percent were vacant.

COMMUNITY RECOVERY ENGAGEMENT

The LTCR Team and county planning staff outlined a joint planning process and identified potential community leaders and stakeholders, which included church leaders, Volunteers of America representatives, and the neighborhood watch group of 15 – 20 residents. The planning team arranged a small-group discussion with the community leaders to get an initial picture of conditions in McDonald Chapel. A series of three meetings designed to gain input from the community at-large followed. At the first community meeting on August 30, residents and community leaders shared their ideas about existing conditions, community assets, and desired improvements. The community identified several issues that need to be addressed. Some issues focused on recovery, while others are pre-existing community challenges exacerbated by the storm. The issues and challenges include:

- The inability of residents to rebuild
- Residents who have relocated
- Landlords not rebuilding
- Lack of community safe rooms
- Communication
- Neighborhood instability, safety issues, and the influx of crime
- Better access to a bus line
- Better schools
- Lack of a local organization with a voice heard by decision-makers

These issues form the basis of the proposed recovery strategies. At the second community meeting on September 13, 2011 participants voted on the strategies that the county planning department developed to address the primary issues. LTCR and county planning staff engaged the participants in a general discussion about capacity building and community organizations, such as neighborhood associations.

At the final community meeting on September 27, 2011 LTCR presented an outline of the recovery report, and the county planning department presented the county’s comprehensive plan strategies for the McDonald Chapel area. Participants provided their feedback and support. After the community meetings, LTCR met with county planning department staff and concerned residents interested in forming a neighborhood association or nonprofit community organization that can help them create community identity and manage communications and the recovery process.

RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Despite all the challenges that McDonald Chapel faces, residents are enthusiastic about working together to recover. Natural leaders in the community are bolstered by the local churches and Volunteers of America, which are invested in the community and have provided a lot of support since the storm. Given the broad range of recovery issues, McDonald Chapel developed three local strategies:

- Form a community organization.
- Adopt a rebuilding program to attract new and displaced residents.
- Purchase vacant and abandoned properties for redevelopment.

Form a Community Organization

A neighborhood association provides the community with a voice and a means to undertake community initiatives or projects. A nonprofit goes a step further to create a legal entity that can accept tax-deductible donations and seek a wide range of grant funds. Refer to the *Funding + Capacity Building* section for more specific information about neighborhood associations, 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporations, and different types of community development organizations that may benefit McDonald Chapel.

Immediately after the topic of effective community organization was introduced, McDonald Chapel residents volunteered to help organize a neighborhood association. At the public meetings, residents identified several projects that could be started quickly, even before they form a community nonprofit organization. One leader of the neighborhood association has an established nonprofit organization, which will serve as an umbrella organization for McDonald Chapel's neighborhood association and successor nonprofit for the standard three years. At the final public meeting, the officers of the new neighborhood association sought pledges for project implementation, particularly catalysts projects to jumpstart the recovery. Interested residents want to improve quality of life and rebuild their community. Some of the project ideas generated at the McDonald Chapel community meetings follow.

- Establish neighborhood cleanup days to remove litter.
 - ◇ Coordinate volunteer cleanup days.
 - ◇ Seek guidance and assistance from Jefferson County Public Works Department.
- Develop a partnership with the County Sheriff's Office to reduce crime further.
 - ◇ Form a committee to bolster the efforts of the neighborhood watch program.
 - ◇ Work with the sheriff's office to identify and implement actions that can improve results.
- Plan for a community center and park.
 - ◇ Form a committee to explore the feasibility of a community center, either new or redevelopment of the abandoned park site off Vicksburg Street.
 - ◇ Seek guidance and assistance from the county's parks and recreation department.
 - ◇ Engage the community in the decision-making process.

- ◇ Complete park design and seek funding.
- ◇ Organize a "Build the Park" days.
- ◇ Consider developing parks around existing and new community facilities as well as community gardens and pocket parks in vacant lots.
- Create community welcome signs to emphasize McDonald Chapel's identity.
 - ◇ Form a committee to develop a community process to design signs and determine locations.
 - ◇ Consult with county regarding local sign ordinances.
 - ◇ Construct signs.
 - ◇ Erect and maintain signs.

Adopt a Rebuilding Program to Attract New and Displaced Residents

McDonald Chapel leaders are concerned about residents displaced by the storm. A number of residents are facing financial difficulties because of job loss and inadequate or no insurance coverage. Therefore they are unable to rebuild. Property values are less than when many residents purchased their homes. Reconstruction costs likely will exceed insurance coverage and may exceed current fair market values, which will make rebuilding less affordable for some working families. The blight that began after the 1998 tornado will worsen if residents choose not to return to McDonald Chapel. The strategy is to coordinate a rebuilding program with design and building professionals, suppliers, homeowners, and nonprofit organizations that help families build homes to reduce construction costs.

A number of agencies and organizations exist to help residents with home repairs and construction, such as Habitat for Humanity, Volunteers of America, faith-based organizations, and associations of building and design professions like American Institute of Architects (AIA) or Home Builders Association of Alabama. Local architects and homebuilders have developed

a program to deliver housing designs that create more housing value for the dollar and reduce operating and maintenance costs over the life of the structure. The goal of the program is the production of quality, cost-effective, aesthetically pleasing, contextually appropriate, and environmentally sustainable home plans.

Plans for the building components — kitchen/living room, bedroom/bathroom, and porch — can be combined in several arrangements to create a variety of houses, ranging in size from 1,100 to 1,400 square feet. If built to plan, the homes will be ENERGY STAR compliant and have interior safe rooms. This approach would eliminate the need for a design professional, saving the costs associated with design fees.

If building supply stores and local home builders agree to participate in the program, then they can construct houses according to the plans within a predetermined price range. If a number of residents coordinate rebuilding, bulk purchasing may reduce costs further. In addition, volunteer agencies that rebuild houses in McDonald Chapel could use the building plans if property owners agree. The Jefferson County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) may be able to coordinate donated building materials for residents in need.

McDonald Chapel's neighborhood association or nonprofit organization may consider coordinating this strategy with the strategy to purchase vacant property. A coordinated effort to rebuild on individual home-owner sites and developing housing on vacant or abandoned sites could reduce construction costs for residents committed to rebuilding and staying within the community.

Action Steps

- Contact the Birmingham AIA to discuss opportunities to partner for housing.
- Establish a partnership with the county building division to get housing plans pre-approved for permitting.
- Provide information to displaced residents and others individuals and organizations interested in helping the community rebuild.
- Help schedule the first coordinated building blitz that uses the plans.

Purchase Vacant and Abandoned Property

Given low property values in the McDonald Chapel area, some owners of dilapidated houses have abandoned their properties. The abandoned properties have created havens for drug-related criminal activity, which has led to further decline and blight in the area. McDonald Chapel's neighborhood association or nonprofit organizations can organize and seek opportunities to purchase and redevelop properties to reduce, and eventually eliminate, blight.

A tool for property acquisition is tax foreclosure. When owners abandon property, they often quit paying property taxes. Property taxes that remain unpaid offer an opportunity for the community or county to acquire the property through tax foreclosure. Typically the cost to purchase the properties is very low, equal to the taxes owed by the owner. Once the community organization purchases the vacant and abandoned property, it gains control over the condition, use, and redevelopment of the property. The goal is to transform vacant and abandoned properties into public parks, single family residences, or some other beneficial use.

Building partnerships with the county and other organizations is a method to help with fundraising for property acquisition. Another possibility is property donation, which generally is tax-deductible for the property owner if made to a nonprofit organization.

Action Steps

- Research state statutes for tax foreclosure procedures.
- Establish a local system for monitoring property that may be acquired.
- Seek donation of properties or begin fundraising to purchase tax-delinquent properties.
- Develop a plan for the property according to the community's strategies in the county's comprehensive plan.





NORTH SMITHFIELD MANOR

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

In its few decades of existence, North Smithfield Manor has experienced three significant storm events, in 1977, 1998, and 2011. Each of the previous occurrences was followed by rebuilding and renewed growth. The 2011 tornado, though not as devastating as the 1977 tornado, left plenty of damage in its wake. Nearly 100 percent of the residences sustained damage, and the area lost many of its trees. The small volunteer fire station that serves the community was destroyed, as was the pumper truck. Many residents have recovered from the disaster, but others have not begun to rebuild yet. Residents fear that some people will not return after this storm.

North Smithfield Manor is an unincorporated neighborhood on the outskirts of Birmingham that formed during last century's postwar boom. It is a predominantly African-American middle class community. The area is adjacent to Interstate-65 and is about to gain another highway boundary as Interstate-22 nears completion. North Smithfield Manor is a quiet bedroom community of Birmingham, less than 6 miles from downtown. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, the community, combined with Greenleaf Heights, has 381 households and a population of almost 1,100. Residents take pride in the community's location, history, low crime rate, and good schools.

COMMUNITY RECOVERY ENGAGEMENT

On September 2, 2011 a small group of North Smithfield residents met with Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) and county planning staff at the temporary fire station. The group discussed conditions in North Smithfield Manor since the storm. Because the community is comprised almost entirely of residences, all concerns were housing-related. A series of three joint planning meetings designed to gain community input and feedback followed. At the first community meeting on September 8, community members shared their ideas about existing conditions, community assets, and desired improvements. The community identified several issues that need to be addressed. Some issues focused on recovery, while others are focused on community challenges exacerbated by the storm. The issues and challenges include:

- Debris
- Permitting
- Lack of community safe rooms
- Inadequate neighborhood access
- Safety lighting, sidewalks, drainage
- Sound abatement against interstate traffic
- Lack of a unified voice
- Lack of capacity to effect recovery

At the second community meeting on September 29, the county planning department engaged the community in a project-identification mapping exercise. The residents located specific spots on the map where issues have manifested, which helped determine the importance and feasibility of solutions. Many ideas involved improved safety and quality of life, which help with sustainability. What began as a housing-based recovery effort soon evolved to address holistic community concerns. These issues, ideas, and maps from the community meetings formed the basis for the proposed recovery strategies.

At the final community meeting on October 27, LTCR presented an outline of the recovery report, and the county planning department presented the county's comprehensive plan strategies for the North Smithfield Manor area. Residents voted on the comprehensive plan strategies. After the community meetings, LTCR and the county planning department discussed with the residents the existing neighborhood association's need to overcome past challenges to lead the recovery. The county planning department expressed its support of the community organization effort and willingness to help implement the strategies and develop projects for North Smithfield Manor's recovery and prosperity.

RECOVERY STRATEGIES

During community meetings, North Smithfield Manor residents emphasized safety and quality of life concerns and attracting new residents for a prosperous future. To achieve the community's goals, residents need to work together more effectively to recover fully and grow. The residents share the same goals and have similar project ideas in mind. Therefore, North Smithfield Manor's primary recovery strategy is to reinvigorate the neighborhood association to lead the recovery effort.

Community Organization – Reinvigorate the Neighborhood Association

North Smithfield Manor is looking beyond tornado recovery and rebuilding to neighborhood stability, safety, and quality of life issues. A strong leadership group is necessary to achieve these goals. Establish a community organization with credibility, transparency, and the full support of the community will create an advocate with a unified voice for residents' needs and concerns.

This neighborhood association exists and provides an organizational structure for the community, but the civic league needs to be unified and strengthened to lead North Smithfield Manor past the tornado and into the future. The association must resolve existing conflicts and challenges, using a mediator

if necessary, to work together to attain the vision the residents have for the community. Once this has been achieved, the neighborhood association may consider forming a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporation to have even greater capacity to pursue recovery and community improvement projects. Refer to *Funding + Capacity Building* section for more specific information about neighborhood associations, 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporations, and different types of community development organizations that may benefit North Smithfield Manor.

Action Steps

- Identify a local mediator who can help resolve long-standing conflicts within the neighborhood association.
- Encourage more diverse participation by getting more people involved.
- Choose and implement a new organizational structure, including committees.

New organizations and existing organizations taking on new activities need good mentors to help them plan, negotiate new situations, and strategically address political issues. The Jefferson County Department of Land Planning and Development Services is a great resource for North Smithfield Manor and supportive of the community organization concept. The residents of North Smithfield Manor bring significant skills, abilities, knowledge, and experiences to the table as well, and should continue to seek out other resources.

The neighborhood association, or eventual nonprofit organization, can address issues of importance to the community, developing and pursuing residents' ideas for improvement in cooperation with the county. Several projects can be undertaken quickly, while others require significant planning. North Smithfield Manor's proposed initiatives or projects include:

- Improve community facilities.
 - ◇ Prioritize the desired improvements: sidewalks, street lighting, and walking trails.
 - ◇ Work with the county planning department and/or other professionals to design improvements and determine costs.
 - ◇ Begin fundraising to implement the projects.
 - ◇ Develop an implementation program.
- Improve the park.
 - ◇ Form a committee to work in conjunction with the county's existing improvement program for the park.
 - ◇ Work with county and other professionals to evaluate drainage problems.
 - ◇ Coordinate with county staff and a landscape architect to redesign the park to include a main entrance, handicap accessibility, walking trails, new sports courts, lighting, and parking.
 - ◇ Develop a park maintenance program with assistance from the county.
- Improve the relationship with the volunteer fire department.
 - ◇ Negotiate or mediate with the fire board about fees, community support, ratings, etc.
 - ◇ Help facilitate rebuilding and hardening of the fire station, including fundraising to meet the local cost share.
 - ◇ Support training and other actions to improve the fire department's rating, which lowers insurance rates.
- Improve Neighborhood Access.
 - ◇ Form a committee to explore other feasible options regarding access points, working with the county.
 - ◇ Engage in a public decision-making process with the residents to select the best option.

- ◇ Develop scope of work and cost estimate.
- ◇ Begin fundraising to implement the project.
- Beautify the community and abate noise.
 - ◇ Form a committee to research noise abatement options and negotiate with transportation departments, especially regarding the Interstate 22 construction plans.
 - ◇ Seek technical assistance to determine extent of damage to natural environment.
 - ◇ Survey property owners about their interest in replanting.
 - ◇ Contact a nursery about options and discounts associated with a neighborhood planting initiative.
 - ◇ Begin fundraising to help residents in need purchase trees.
 - ◇ Conduct planting days to help residents replant trees.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS



Tornado recovery and rebuilding are only part of the challenge a community faces after a disaster. A lack of capacity to recover is common in small communities. To achieve local recovery more quickly, residents need to organize and work collaboratively to develop and implement recovery and community interest projects. A community has two basic options for organization:

- Structure as a formal community association.
- Form a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporation.

Forming a community organization is a tool to provide residents a unified voice. Community organizations, such as neighborhood associations, greatly improve the two-way communication between the county and its residents. Community organizations help create a sense of identity and address important issues, such as land use, neighborhood improvements, urban design issues, crime, and other disturbances. The organizational structure that works for a community now may change in the future because neighborhoods change over time as they grow, conditions change, and populations shift. Therefore a community organization may begin as a neighborhood association and evolve into a charitable nonprofit organization. The county planning department supports the community organization effort and is willing to help build local capacity, implement the strategies, and develop projects for community recovery and prosperity.

STRUCTURE AS A FORMAL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

A neighborhood association is a community-based committee of neighbors who work cooperatively to make the neighborhood a better place to live. A strong neighborhood association establishes a committee structure and officers to accomplish the goals of the association with assistance from its members, addressing issues or completing projects. The association can charge dues or raise funds to support its activities. Donations to a simple neighborhood association are not tax-deductible. A neighborhood association can work with an existing nonprofit, using it as an umbrella organization to access more funding opportunities.

FORM A 501(C)(3) CHARITABLE NONPROFIT CORPORATION

A 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporation is a legal entity that requires formal organization, start-up costs, and more oversight. A nonprofit can accept tax-deductible donations and apply for grants that are restricted to corporations with a 501(c)(3) designation from the Internal Revenue Service. Some grantors limit funding to established 501(c)(3) nonprofits with a three-year financial track record. Therefore, a new nonprofit may partner with an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to maximize funding opportunities until it has a three-year financial history. A nonprofit may structure itself as one of a number of community development organization types, depending on what best meets the needs and goals of the community for both its recovery and future development. Please see the *Funding + Capacity Building* section for additional information.

Actions Steps

- Form a small core group of community residents and leaders whom share a common vision, aspire to improve the community, and inspire others to participate in the shared vision — this group may become an advisory board as the association/organization progresses.
- Identify meeting time and place for the first organizational meeting and develop a well-planned agenda.
- Widely distribute information about the first meeting — include everyone who owns property within the community’s boundaries.
- Hold a community meeting to gather input and develop a community vision.
- Determine organization’s structure, leadership, committees, and meeting schedule.
- Identify and partner with an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to help with fundraising and guidance, operating under a Memorandum of Agreement.
- Develop, prioritize, and implement initiatives or projects to facilitate recovery and community improvement.
- Seek capacity building opportunities, such as trainings and workshops on nonprofit-related subjects, grant writing, fundraising, grants management, communication, etc.
- Keep everyone informed about association activities through a newsletter or website.

New organizations, and even existing organizations taking on new activities, need good mentors to help them plan, negotiate new situations, and strategically address political issues. The Jefferson County Department of Land Planning and Development Services is a great resource for its unincorporated communities.

Public involvement is essential to this process. Always keep in mind that, as board members, you are serving your neighborhood and working for the common good. Success builds on success; immediate accomplishments strengthen the organization, attract additional members, and build momentum for future projects.





COUNTY APPROACH

SUMMARY OF CONCERNS

As Concord, McDonald Chapel, and North Smithfield Manor engaged in the joint planning process with the Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) Team and the county planning department, more than disaster-related issues surfaced. Common issues relate to insurance, debris removal, mortgage disputes, loss of residents, community improvements, communication failures, and lack of capacity. The capacity issues are at both the community and county levels. The small, unincorporated communities are ill-prepared to address recovery in a concerted fashion, while the county has cut services to a bare minimum due to severely constrained resources. The coupling of these issues creates a gap in the capacity to respond and recover. Because of the county's financial situation, that gap in capacity must be addressed directly by the communities, leaving residents to advocate for and secure better public and private community services.

The community meetings revealed two other common concerns:

1. Blight – the lingering presence of unrepaired, damaged houses after the 1977 and 1998 storms.
2. The lack of community and residential safe rooms as well as stronger structures in this area where severe tornadoes regularly occur.

Small communities generally lack the financial capacity or jurisdictional authority to address these concerns in an effective manner, and the county is severely restricted in its current financial circumstance.

Therefore, the communities and county must work together to rebuild, recover, and grow in a safer, smarter, and more sustainable way.

COUNTY STRATEGIES

To help the communities recover and plan for a sustainable future, the county planning department has adopted the following strategies to be included in the update to its comprehensive plan. The strategies are:

- Support community organizations
- Address blight
- Reduce risk – mitigate to reduce future damages and loss of life

Support Community Organizations

Each community faces unique challenges. Residents of McDonald Chapel express the need for a strong voice to be heard by county government and others. Concord residents seek an identity distinct from their larger neighbors. North Smithfield Manor residents want unity between neighborhood factions and equal representation within the community. To achieve these diverse goals, recover fully, and reach their full potential, these communities all need organization and communication. Residents in each community identified a need for a strong community organization to identify and address issues, develop and implement solutions, and communicate effectively in a transparent manner.

As discussed in *Funding + Capacity Building*, communities can organize as a neighborhood association or nonprofit organization. This local organization effort is very important given the current economic climate in Jefferson County. Communities can help to fill the gap left by the county when it was forced to cut services. Community organizations provide a vehicle to build capacity for problem solving, fundraising, project implementation and management, and community improvements and development. Community organizations have a voice at the county level. The county's strategy is to

support the formation and capacity building of community organizations, with effective leaders, that can address many of the community issues in an inclusive, effective, measurable, grassroots, and transparent way.

Action Steps

- Conduct neighborhood association formation meetings in Concord and McDonald Chapel.
- Arrange for a community-type mediation or other process in North Smithfield Manor to address lingering civic league issues.
- Facilitate the leadership selection and committee development processes — at least a chair, secretary, and initial action team(s) to address specific issues.
- Provide members of new neighborhood organizations with a community organization guide and resource directory.
- Establish a point of contact with a government or nonprofit mentor for each community.
- Organize a leadership training session conducted by Auburn University's Alabama Community Leadership Network, or similar program.
- Form an advisory board and/or network for the community organization members to discuss their experiences and issues.

Address Blight

Residents in all three communities have concerns about the uninhabitable buildings in their neighborhoods that remain unrepaired for long periods of time. McDonald Chapel residents are fighting the criminal element that has moved into the dilapidated buildings left after the 1998 tornado. Concord residents fear the effects of even a few abandoned buildings. North Smithfield Manor residents note the existence of the lots vacant since the 1977 tornado and are concerned about the few homes that have not been repaired since the April tornado. With applications for mobile homes already submitted to the county for approval, residents are concerned about the

presence of “trailers” in their neighborhoods, where structures are primarily stick-built, building-code-compliant, single-family detached houses.

Blighted buildings pose a variety of health and safety problems. They harbor rodents and other pests. The damaged structures are unsafe and an attractive nuisance that may entice children and other trespassers. The abandoned buildings invite criminal activities, as has happened in McDonald Chapel during this joint planning process. Vacant, unsightly properties tend to reduce property values and discourage families who otherwise might want to relocate to and invest in their neighborhoods.

The primary tool for removing damaged buildings and reducing blight is enforcement of county nuisance regulations.

Action Steps

- Undertake an enforcement program of the county weed and litter ordinance.
- Identify unsafe and abandoned buildings.
- Coordinate the enforcement program with the community organizations.
- Share the list of target properties and schedule for enforcement actions.
- Notify the community organizations of program progress.
- Seek cooperation of property owners to remedy the nuisance situation without legal action.

Reduce Risk — Mitigate to Reduce Future Damages and Loss of Life

At least one resident has survived four tornadoes in her 90 years in that neighborhood. Her house was one of the structures destroyed by the April tornado. Volunteers of America is rebuilding her house, and it will include a safe room.

Residents in all three communities desire a greater sense of safety and security in future storms, specifically mentioning a need for more safe rooms in their communities. Safe rooms designed to FEMA guidelines provide near-absolute life safety protection from wind speeds as high as 250 miles per hour, which exceeds the requirements of the local building code. Other mitigation measures help structures to resist the winds of less severe tornadoes, which are more common than an EF-4 or EF-5 tornado. The county’s strategy is to seek mitigation funding for safe rooms, and possibly other mitigation measures to strengthen structures, and encourage home builders to include residential safe rooms during the rebuilding process.

The residents’ desires are consistent with the Mitigation Action Program found in the Jefferson County 2009 Interim Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, which includes the following objectives:

- Promote good construction practices and proper code enforcement to eliminate most structural problems during natural hazard events.
- Evaluate building code standards for roof construction to ensure protection against wind damage from hurricanes, tornadoes, and windstorms; encourage installation of “hurricane clips.”
- Construct freestanding public safe rooms in vulnerable locations.
- Encourage the construction of safe rooms within existing buildings.
- Provide technical assistance to owners of vulnerable buildings to advise on available building retrofits to protect against natural hazards damages, including flooding, high winds, tornadoes, hurricanes, severe storms, and earthquakes.
- Promote the use of weather radios in households and businesses.

Jefferson County has applied for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding for several community safe rooms. The new elementary school in Concord will have a safe room that can accommodate students and faculty. The rebuilt fire station in North Smithfield Manor will have a safe room sized for the first responders of that facility. Nevertheless, the communities need additional safe rooms to protect the lives of more residents.

Action Steps

- Provide mitigation and safe room information and community education to community organizations, county residents, and design and building professionals.
- Support mitigation-related continuing education opportunities for building officials.
- Submit grant applications for mitigation projects as funding opportunities become available.



NEXT STEPS + IMPLEMENTATION



The Jefferson County communities affected by this disaster must continue to think strategically and work cooperatively. The strategies in this document represent the first step toward project development and implementation. As the development of each strategy is considered, it is important that the committee and stakeholders think about some questions that will help guide the development projects. Since the strategies involve multiple components it is important for the community to continue to work cooperatively. Breaking the effort into smaller parts will help streamline development. The following questions have been developed as a tool for the committee as they continue toward plan implementation.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is there a strategy or project that will make other projects easier to accomplish?

Some strategies included in this report — for example, capacity building — will help the community to see strategies and projects move forward. There is no recommended order of strategy development and project implementation, but stakeholders should consider the capacity of the community to develop strategies further, undertake projects, and consider how those projects will positively impact their ability to take on other projects.

2. Are there any high visibility strategies or projects that should happen sooner rather than later?

Strategies and projects that have high visibility will maintain momentum and enthusiasm towards community recovery. Housing projects will raise community morale because they have a direct and

visible impact on residents. As mentioned previously, there is no prescribed order in which to develop strategies or implement recovery projects, but their visibility should be considered, especially in the early stages of the long-term community recovery process.

3. Does the strategy or project address a priority issue in the community?

Strategies and projects that address priority issues for the community are likely to have the most support. For example, if reducing blight is a priority issue, projects that contribute to that strategy may be considered first.

4. Do stakeholders currently have the capacity to develop the strategy further or undertake the project?

Consider the resources the community has at its disposal in terms of technical expertise, funding, and the availability of stakeholders to invest time in a project. Also, consider whether the community has the right group of stakeholders to address the strategy or project. If all of the necessary resources are in place, taking on full development of a strategy and its project might be a good decision. If the resources are not in place, seeking those resources or the appropriate stakeholders should be considered before attempting to develop fully or implement a strategy's projects.

MAINTAIN MOMENTUM AND OPEN COMMUNICATION, BUILD ON SUCCESS

In order for recovery strategies to be successful, momentum must be sustained. Community organizations and stakeholders should meet regularly to keep projects moving forward. Regular meetings will also ensure continued collaboration among stakeholders because communication is critical to keep projects on track and to maintain accountability among stakeholders and partners. In addition to regular meetings, the stakeholders should conduct periodic open house meetings to maintain community buy-in to the process. Communicate progress to the public regularly so that they understand that community recovery is continuing. Emphasize the successful development

of strategies and implementation of projects and how they contribute to the recovery of the community, regardless of their profile or scope.

Be Adaptable

Community needs and priorities will evolve over time. This evolution may affect organizational structure as well as the strategies and projects in this report. If a strategy needs to be updated to meet changing community needs, revise the strategy and its projects. This community-owned document represents the final product of what was discussed in meetings that took place in August, September, and October of 2011. But, even as a final product of each community's long-term recovery efforts, this document will never be truly finished because community recovery needs and priorities can and will change. The committee and stakeholders must work together to revise this document as necessary to ensure that changing community needs and priorities continue to be addressed.

Be Optimistic

Recovery is a long process and there will be challenges along the way. It is important that the community members and stakeholders remain optimistic through challenging circumstances. This optimism will help maintain momentum and assure the public that the community is recovering, despite potential setbacks. In time, a full recovery can happen as long as rebuilding efforts remain on the forefront of the community's mind and community members remain vested in the long-term community recovery process.

FUNDING + CAPACITY BUILDING



GUIDE AND TOOLS

Alabama Resource Guide and Resource Matrices — Federal, State and Regional Resources

The matrix of resources, entitled *Alabama Project Categories — Potential Resources* that supports this document, identifies specific agencies and organizations that the community can approach about potential funding or technical assistance resources to implement community recovery and revitalization projects. The matrix references the *Alabama Resource Guide* (included as a companion disc) that provides an overview of hundreds of federal, state, and regional funding sources, both public and private. In addition, each Project Development Guide (included on a separate companion disc) is paired with a project-specific matrix of resources that are suggested starting points in researching potential funding sources. Unless otherwise noted, these project-specific matrices also refer to funding sources listed in the *Alabama Resource Guide*.

All grant programs have specific eligibility requirements for applicants. Some grant programs fund only 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit organizations, while others fund only governmental units, such as towns or cities. Some grants are available to both types of applicants. Therefore, public-private partnerships are important to maximize funding, capacity building, and other opportunities.

Some grant programs restrict their funding to communities that meet certain eligibility criteria, such as falling within a certain geographic area or possessing certain demographic characteristics like high poverty or unemployment rates. Meeting the specified program criteria could result in a special designation that allows the community to participate in programs and apply for grant funding unavailable to communities that do not meet the program criteria. Some designations specifically target more urban areas for assistance, while others specifically target rural areas. Examples of designations, often referred to as designated areas or zones, that provide funding opportunities include:

- Food deserts in metropolitan areas
- Distressed communities
- Housing or economic development hot zones
- Health professional shortage areas and/or medically underserved areas
- Brownfields

Many specific programs exist to support different types of designated zones or areas. Designations can be part of a successful strategy to secure funding to develop recovery strategies and implement projects that affect a community's economy and vitality.

The census tract matrix, *Census Tract Information for LTCR Communities* that supports this document, shows how the use of designations can help secure funding. This matrix identifies federal grant and financing opportunities, many of which are based on designations that can serve as a core part of the community's grant application, make the project competitive, and facilitate funding. It should be noted that even if a census tract is not designated as eligible for funding or presents a financial resource opportunity, the governing federal agencies do have waiver procedures, especially when it comes to such factors as loss and devastation from disasters.

For more specific information about designations and related funding, contact your regional council of governments or planning commission.

IMPORTANT PARTNERS

Forming alliances and partnerships can increase grant-writing and project implementation success. Partnerships, especially public-private partnerships, can maximize funding, capacity building, and other opportunities. Alliances and partnerships can exist between two communities and/or communities and other organizations. For example, if two or more adjacent communities each submit an application to fund a medical center, they will compete against each other. Conversely, if they submit an application together for one shared facility, they will have a stronger application, less competition, and may even receive more funds. Programs that fund economic development activities often favor a regional approach to overcome challenges. A community and its recovery committee or nonprofit organization may partner with other local, regional, and statewide organizations to build capacity or develop, fund, and implement recovery strategies and projects.

Regional Councils or Planning Commissions

Regional councils are quasi-governmental organizations and another important resource for communities. A regional council or planning commission is a public organization that encompasses a multi-jurisdictional regional community. The governing bodies of councils are primarily composed of local government elected officials and appointed representatives of local communities and state government. The Alabama Association of Regional Planning Councils includes 12 regional planning councils/commissions to support Alabama communities. Five of these councils/commissions serve Alabama's communities that are engaged in the long-term community recovery planning process.

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) serves Jefferson County including the communities of Concord, McDonald, and North Smithfield Manor.

Through communication, planning, policymaking, coordination, advocacy, grant writing and technical assistance, the commission/council serves the local governments and citizens in the region. These commissions/councils frequently deal with issues and needs that cross city, town, and county boundaries. Also, each region can provide special services as determined by its board of directors. The services and programs offered depend upon local needs and priorities within the region. These needs may exist currently or be based on projected growth, changing lifestyles and demographics, and technological innovations.

Regional councils and planning commissions are an important asset for long-term community recovery work and are well-versed on recovery challenges and needs. They have resources and information that help a community to make decisions about implementation strategies, especially as they pertain to designations, alliances, and grant applications. Additionally, each regional council or planning commission has a comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS), which offers a detailed view of the opportunities, needs, and challenges within the region to promote and sustain economic growth.

Community members may visit the RPCGB website (www.rpcgb.com) for a full list of the programs and services offered by the regional commission.

501(c)(3) Charitable Nonprofit Corporations

A 501(c)(3) refers to a charitable nonprofit organization that is incorporated in a state and designated by the Internal Revenue Service as a charitable entity. Nonprofits do not pay federal taxes on programs and services related to their charitable mission. Nonprofit missions can include aid to vulnerable

populations; construction, erection and/or maintenance of historic buildings, monuments, or works; reducing the burdens of government; community development; youth programs; and other charitable purposes.

Many grant programs offer funding only to 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporations. A community's recovery committee may decide to incorporate as a charitable nonprofit corporation and partner with the local government to strengthen the recovery effort and opportunities. Depending on the recovery goals and future development plans, the community may choose to structure its charitable nonprofit as a certain type of community service or development organization. These types of organizations are described below.

Community Development Corporations

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are community-established organizations that anchor local capital through residential and commercial development, ranging from affordable housing to shopping centers and businesses.

Community Housing Development Organizations

Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) earn designation through the federal HOME program and serve as a means to finance housing projects. A CHDO generally is defined as a nonprofit, community-based community service organization that develops affordable housing in the low-income community it serves.

Community Development Financial Institutions

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) earn designation from the U.S. Treasury Department. A CDFI is a private-sector financial institution that focuses on personal lending and business development efforts in local communities. They are primarily funding sources to support

small business growth and development. CDFIs can be an important source for the use of New Market Tax Credits to finance economic development efforts.

Economic Development Organizations

Economic Development Organizations serve as the primary sources of grant funds from federal agencies involved in economic development.

Certified Development Corporations

Certified Development Corporations earn their designation from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and offer any form of SBA loan assistance. Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) are partnerships primarily between the government and colleges to provide educational services for small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs.

Housing Resource Centers

Housing Resource Centers (HRCs) are central points for technical assistance and a resource for stimulating new housing construction as well as rehabilitation. HRCs help existing and potential homeowners to locate resources to repair, build, or purchase a home.

A community or committee should explore all options to determine the best vehicle to develop its recovery strategies and projects. It may choose to structure as, or partner with, one of the community development organization types. Alternatively, the community or committee may elect to incorporate as a charitable nonprofit corporation but not structure it specifically as one of these organizations, based on what best meets the needs and goals of the community for the both its recovery and future development.

Agencies, Universities and Associations

State agencies, universities, and associations provide a broad range of financial and other support to communities and organizations of interest to them. They are an excellent resource for capacity building support, technical

assistance, studies and projections, and sometimes even funding. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) is the coordinating agency under the Governor's Office for long-term community recovery efforts. There are numerous supporting state agencies that assist in long-term community recovery. A list of links to State agency websites is included in Section V of the *Alabama Resource Guide*.

Examples of Other Potential Partners

- Alabama Association of Nonprofits
<http://alabamanonprofits.org>
- Alabama Communities of Excellence
www.alabamacommunitiesofexcellence.org
- Your Town Alabama
www.yourtownalabama.org
- Alabama Home Builders Association
www.hbaa.org
- Local university centers and programs
- Local chambers of commerce
- Local development authorities

This is by no means a comprehensive list, but it does illustrate that numerous agencies and organizations can partner with communities to gain needed support during the recovery process. The regional council or planning commission that serves the region is an excellent resource for cultivating and strengthening relationships with these key partners, both public and private. Typically, the regional council or planning commission has existing relationships with the organizations and agencies that are active in the region and can provide insight and resources to help identify and secure critical support for projects. Assembling a strong team of partners to provide support is essential to holistic recovery.





JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMISSION



DAVID CARRINGTON - PRESIDENT
GEORGE BOWMAN
SANDRA LITTLE BROWN
T. JOE KNIGHT
JIMMIE STEPHENS

Tony Petelos – County Manager

Department of
LAND PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
Frank E. Humber, AICP - Director
Room 280 - Courthouse
716 Richard Arrington, Jr. Boulevard North
Birmingham, Alabama 35203-0005
Telephone: 205-325-5591 Fax: 205-325-5224

October 28, 2011

To The Community:

I wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge and express our sincerest gratitude to the FEMA Long Term Community Recovery team (LTCR) for not only *their* work throughout the development of your Plan, but also for their assistance in helping us to get *our* work done in such a thorough and timely manner. You should be aware, just as Jefferson County has been battling financial adversity through all of this, so too did the LTCR folks have to battle their own funding and assignment issues – many not knowing, from day to day, where or if they would be employed the next. We keenly felt the loss of two key members of their team already, right in the middle of the project, and will be losing their assistance altogether the first week in November.

The County team, too, had already been cut in half by our own lay-offs earlier in the year. Yet we put together a plan to expedite our planning efforts in the storm-stricken communities because we wanted to help them pull themselves together, coordinate the rebuilding process, and look ahead by helping you create a vision for your futures. We had included help from FEMA in that proposal, but had *no* idea just how much help they would turn out to be – and how much we would be able to rely on them for both out-front and behind-the-scenes support work.

The LTCR team was instrumental, almost single-handedly, in getting word of the many meetings out, which is such a critical part of the planning process if you truly want the community to be involved and provide the direction – which we did. They set up meetings, established lines of communication, sought out resources for funding and other forms of assistance available to people, helped process the data received at the meetings, and did so much more while our mere three County planners were having to tend to our other duties and responsibilities in the courthouse. And, the LTCR team provided us with the additional “bodies” we needed in order to be able to run all of our meetings, as there was no way we could have covered everything all by ourselves. We seriously needed their knowledgeable assistance – knowledgeable not only in setting up immediate action projects, but in the whole planning process and its purpose overall – to make sure every voice was heard and every concern was documented.

In that same vein, LPDS would further acknowledge that we could not have carried out this program in as nearly an efficient and effective way – if, in fact, *at all* – if we had not partnered with the LTCR team. But with their participation, we were able to take an already ambitious program, compact it into a very tight timeframe, and present you with a superior quality document that will help make your community what you’ve said you want it to be. And yet even as they leave us, the LTCR folks are providing one last critical component of your plan: that of setting up and training an effective community association, which is the only realistic means by which you can really expect to accomplish the goals you’ve set.

So as we bid farewell to our LTCR partners, I would like to express our deepest gratitude on behalf of Jefferson County and each of the communities they worked in with us. And I would very much like to believe that FEMA will see the value of the LTCR program, the outstandingly positive effects it has had in helping our stricken communities, and that they will *keep* this program in place so these folks will be here the next time (God forbid) we need them.

Dan Voketz
Chief Planner
Jefferson County, Alabama

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jefferson County Commission
Jefferson County Department of Land Planning and Development Services
Jefferson County Emergency Management Agency
Jefferson County Department of Health
Jefferson County Department of Community Development
Concord Elementary School
McDonald Chapel United Methodist Church
Faith Chapel Christian Center
Katherwood Baptist Church
St. John Baptist Church of Edgewater
North Birmingham Recreation Center
North Smithfield Manor Fire Station
McDonald Revitalization Partnership
United Way of Greater Birmingham
Alabama Gas Company
Salvation Army
Project Rebound
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Birmingham
Volunteers of America

JEFFERSON COUNTY, ALABAMA

WHEREAS, Jefferson County, Alabama, within the unincorporated areas and within the municipalities, received major devastation as a result of multiple tornadoes which devastated out area on April 27, 2011; and,

WHEREAS, the impact of the tornadoes resulted in loss of life in Jefferson County as well as losses to its housing, business, and institutional facilities; and,

WHEREAS, this tragic event occurred at a time when Jefferson County is under severe financial hardship, which will impact the County's ability to recover and rebuild following this event;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the County Commission of Jefferson County, Alabama requests that FEMA's Long Term Community Recovery group and its partner agencies, otherwise known as Emergency Support Function Fourteen (ESF-14), be deployed to fully support Jefferson County in eligible areas in order to work with County staff in recovery and rebuilding as quickly as possible; and that said Commission encourages its citizens to participate in the recovery activities coordinated through our process, in partnership with the County and Municipal Officials of Jefferson County, the State of Alabama, FEMA's Long-Term Community Recovery group, and other recovery partners.

**APPROVED BY THE
JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMISSION**

DATE: 08-09-11

MINUTE BOOK: 162

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