
Introduction

by Lt. Gen. Clark Griffith (USAF Retired)

Chairman, "Reviving the Renaissance" Committee

As part of his "State of the City" Address delivered just months after Biloxi and the Mississippi Gulf Coast suffered the worst natural disaster in American history, Mayor A. J. Holloway announced that he had established a "Reviving the Renaissance" Steering Committee.

This committee, the mayor instructed, would utilize the same structure as the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal. Appropriate issue teams would be used to research and develop specific recommendations that he and the City Council could use to "Revive the Renaissance" that was taking place in Biloxi before Hurricane Katrina.

His charge — and our mission — was simple, but clear: develop a realistic plan, with a realistic timetable, and a realistic price tag.

This document contains the plan developed by our volunteer committee. It addresses the immediate challenges to bring Biloxi back to its pre-Katrina prosperity, while realizing that the devastation left behind by the storm presents unique opportunities. It clearly points out Biloxi's true potential and identifies specific recommendations that will get us there.

...Our mission was simple, but clear: develop a realistic plan, with a realistic timetable, and a realistic price tag.

How it all started

For 35 years, I had the honor and privilege to serve our country in the United States Air Force. During that time, I saw combat, accidents, disasters, personnel/policy changes, and many other things that presented leadership challenges. None of these, however, compare to the leadership challenges we all face as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Soon after the storm, we got our first glance at how our President, Governor, and elected officials planned to respond to these challenges. It would take everyone working together toward a common goal if that was going to happen. We needed a plan that everyone could agree with and support. The initial meeting of the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal was held in a tent outside of Gulfport on September 20. The Governor was very clear in his vision for the Commission and later stated it

If we build the Coast and South Mississippi back just the way it was, we will have failed.

GOVERNOR HALEY BARBOUR

in a letter to each Commissioner. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild the right way and make the Coast bigger and better than ever. What we do now will decide what the Coast will look like in 10 years, 20 years, and beyond. If we build the Coast and South Mississippi back just the way it was, we will have failed". He introduced Jim Barksdale, former CEO of Netscape, who was appointed Chairman of the Commission's Executive Committee. Jim expanded the vision of the Commission to include:

- The ability and charter to revitalize and revolutionize over the next several years:
 - > What the Gulf Coast and South Mississippi can look like;
 - > What it can produce in the way of jobs and income; and
 - > What it can change and improve in people's lives in all levels of society.

He summarized the task at hand with these words: "We have been asked to do this. We will do this, because if we fail, we will have no one to blame but ourselves. Our State, the nation, and the world stand ready and willing to help us in this noble goal after such a tragic disaster. We will not let them down."

At this point, if there were doubters in the audience about the importance of this effort, all doubt disappeared when the President of the United States walked into the meeting. President Bush was very supportive of all that had been presented and pledged his support to the effort. From the outset, the point was made that this Commission was ADVISORY ONLY! It

would provide information on choices, options, and alternatives, along with recommendations for recovery, rebuilding, and renewal. The decisions, however, would be made by the local governments, state government, and the private sector...not the Commission.



Jim Barksdale and his staff put together an aggressive organizational structure and timeline. This included several key issue committees that included transportation, infrastructure, education, health care, housing, tourism, defense and government issues, small business, finance, agriculture, forestry, and marine resources. All of these committees began their initial meetings to explore what recommendations would be made.

A big part of this gigantic effort took place in Biloxi from October 12 through October 17, 2005. A Rebuilding and Renewal Forum was held where each of the 11 hardest-hit towns on the coast got access to the best architects, engineers, and planners from Mississippi and around the world. Teams of professionals visited each town and asked the people what they wanted their towns to look like when they rebuild. These ideas were put together in a massive brainstorming/designing

charrette, which was presented to local officials for their comments. These included ideas on community redevelopment, rerouting of streets and highways, and actual architectural designs to retain the historical beauty and charm of each community. This also included proposed FEMA flood zone advisories and recommendations on where and how to rebuild stronger/storm resistant buildings and homes. The biggest question becomes... how do we get any or all of this done? Plans are interesting, but how do you make it happen? This is a work in progress as the Governor, Mayors, elected officials, and community leaders work this very hard. Some very positive results have already happened. These include:

- > Our State Legislators passed and the Governor signed a modified “on-shore” casino rebuilding law which help revitalize a stronger and more storm resistant casino industry.
- > A Federal relief plan has been worked out in Congress and signed into law by the President which will provide disaster relief to communities, businesses, and individuals for rebuilding.
- > The final recommendations from the Governor’s Commission have been completed and published which will provide solid recommendations to all communities on how to proceed toward the future.
- > The Rebuilding Forum has published and distributed two books that provide communities and homeowners a blue print for reconstruction. These books are full of ideas of how to rebuild and how to retain the rich tradition of the Gulf Coast architectural beauty, and heritage.
- > Federal money will help in the short-term, but long-term development will require good plans that attract private investment. If we do it right, we can expect 30 to 40 billion dollars to pour into the region in the next 10 years. We’ve got a great start on the plans. We have proven ourselves self-sufficient and motivated. We are blessed with superb leadership that will make this happen. Therefore, we have every reason to believe

that together we can create communities that are more beautiful and economically vibrant in Biloxi and the Gulf Coast.

Biloxi Mayor A.J. Holloway has described this South Mississippi Renaissance this way: *We survived an unprecedented event and it has made us a stronger community. We are now in a position where we can realize unprecedented potential. Personally, these are tragic times, but exciting times. Working together, we will make our home the envy of the nation.* To make this happen, the Reviving the Renaissance Steering Committee was activated.

Committee work

The committee chairpersons were selected from some of Biloxi's most knowledgeable leaders. The call went out to all citizens of Biloxi to join this effort. Over 500 people attended the first public meeting at the Saenger Theater. We had over 200 in that group to volunteer to serve on the 20+ committees/sub-committees to work all issues. We immediately got to work since the deadline was just a short time away.

Committee chairpersons were very innovative. They scheduled their meetings around already hectic schedules of work and recovery. We had a lot of meetings in the evenings and during lunch hours. Soon, the pressing issues and potential recommendations began to surface. At that point, these potential recommendations were taken to the people in three separate town hall meetings that covered all the Wards of the City. These comments were returned to the committees to re-visit and revise the recommendations accordingly.

The product

As stated, this report summarizes countless hours of discussion, deliberation, and research by over 200 of your neighbors and friends. Therefore, we respectfully present our conclusions and recommendations to the Mayor and City Council

We survived an unprecedented event and it has made us stronger as a community. We are now in a position where we can realize unprecedented potential. ...Working together, we will make our home the envy of the nation.

MAYOR A.J. HOLLOWAY

as they lead us in the recovery of our wonderful city. There are more than 160 recommendations in this report.

A special thanks to all who participated. You were thorough, deliberate, and innovative in your work. You also left any personal agendas, personal bias, and pre-conceived conclusions out of the discussions. Bottom line, you accomplished your mission with excellence and you can all be proud of what you have done for your City.

A second report, entitled *Moving Forward*, represents the work of Living Cities and Goody Clancy and contains recommendations for the rebuilding of East Biloxi. This Reviving the Renaissance committee is responsible for developing plans for the entire city of Biloxi; Living Cities was charged with developing specific plans of East Biloxi. As you read both plans, you'll notice there is a great deal of duplication — and that is by design. It was anticipated that most of what can work in East Biloxi can be applied throughout the city, and vice versa. Where there are specific needs, the separate approaches allow those issues to be addressed.

The results

History will reflect what the committee and others have accomplished. History will also reflect the results. The hard choices we ducked after Camille await us today. Will we get it right this time? We firmly believe the recommendations will help guide our City to the right decisions this time. We owe it to our people.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clark Griffith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clark Griffith
Chairman