



Hurricane Michael: Key Takeaways – Community Recovery Planning

June 11 – 22, 2019

City of Panama City, Florida

www.rebuildpc.org/

Week 1: Town Halls and Focus Groups

- **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ARE INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT** for the residents of Panama City. Rebuilding needs to be focused on physical, mental, and emotional stability, and not just one.
- The City should embark on projects that have a positive rippling effect throughout the community; the City should prioritize activities that maximize co-benefits.
- Many of the problems seen in schools reflect the precarious housing situations of students and their families. Restoring housing and **ENSURING HOUSING SECURITY FOR STUDENTS** is a necessary first step.
- Schools help to provide a sense of stability for students. Ensuring their functionality by the beginning of the school year should be a priority.
- One participant stated, and the rest of the group agreed: **“WE DON’T LIVE HERE, WE LOVE HERE, OR WE WOULD HAVE LEFT.” THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE AND THE COMMUNITY IS DETERMINED TO SUPPORT THE RECOVERY PROCESS.**

Week 2: Master Planning, Town Halls, and Focus Groups

- **MILITARY FAMILIES ARE EAGER TO SEE PANAMA CITY BECOME ONE OF THE PREMIER MILITARY DESTINATIONS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES.** To realize this vision, military families and personnel see the need for restored and improved housing stock, and support for higher-performing schools.
- Military spouses have challenges finding employment opportunities; increasing opportunities for spousal employment would help amplify the attractiveness of the City to military families.
- Anchor institutions should play an important role in attracting people from out of town, especially leveraging public-private partnerships and engagement with academia.
- Participants discussed the need to restore and build more medical facilities. Participants discussed the detrimental effects of the storm on the community, how the storm was particularly hard on children, and a greater need for emotional and mental health care.
- Citizens are **CONCERNED WITH THE LACK OF COUNSELORS, PSYCHIATRISTS, AND TRAINED SPECIALISTS TO SERVE CHILDREN**; mobile healthcare units, particularly in schools, were discussed as a potential opportunity to increase healthcare services.
- Participants agreed that mental health services should be publicized and de-stigmatized.
- There is an existing rich fabric of the arts in Panama City. Modifications to building standards and zoning codes, and **CREATING AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS THAT WELCOME BACK THE CREATIVE CLASS** will spur the City’s growth and distinction as a unique gem in the Panhandle.



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- The community identified the need to implement economic incentives to attract new businesses and encourage existing businesses to return.
- A **KEY PRIORITY FOR PARTICIPANTS WAS AFFORDABLE AND WORKFORCE HOUSING**, as the root of many problems stem from this issue (e.g., safety and security, jobs, schools). De-stigmatize housing that is affordable for all.
- With the number of destroyed or heavily damaged affordable/workforce housing in the city, an opportunity exists to pilot a project providing sustainable and affordable housing solutions. Building homes with sustainable, cost-saving measures (e.g., solar power, recycling, and water reclamation systems) can offer overall cost savings to residents, resilience to housing stock, and can have a positive impact on the quality of life in Panama City.
- **RENT PRICES HAVE JUMPED** significantly after the storm; housing has become unaffordable for many people who live and work in Panama City.
- **THE TITLE TRANSFER SYSTEM HAS ESTABLISHED BARRIERS THAT COMPLICATE TRANSFER OF TITLE** and proof of ownership. These challenges are particularly burdensome for City residents after major disasters when clear title is required for many assistance programs (e.g., FEMA IA, SBA).
- Participants discussed the need to increase the economic diversity in Panama City. This would include attracting different types of businesses in order to attract different types of workers and create a more resilient economy.
- The **AVERAGE INCOME IN PANAMA CITY IS SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER THAN THAT OF THE STATE**. The average household income in the City is approximately \$35,000 as opposed to the average household income in the State which is approximately \$53,000. Participants discussed how it is hard to revitalize the economy without the amenities that generally come from a higher-paid workforce.
- Support services, such as childcare options, need to return to the City for residents to effectively return to work.
- Participants discussed how students are being encouraged to study STEM fields. However, there is a lack of STEM jobs in Panama City. STEM jobs need to be brought to Panama City in order for the youth to be attracted to stay.
- City leadership is impressed with the community's overall recovery progress thus far. While **THERE IS A LOT OF WORK TO DO**, they noted that the City should be proud of where they are today.
- City leadership also noted that **THE FOUR LINES OF EFFORT (SAFETY/SECURITY, INFRASTRUCTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND QUALITY OF LIFE) ARE OF EQUAL PRIORITY**; they are strands in a rope that intertwine and overlap to promote strength.