

Captain Ethan Frizzell
Area Commander
The Salvation Army
4526 South Claiborne Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70125

Dear Captain Frizzell:

I am the Director of the New Orleans Recovery Initiative (a.k.a. The Broadmoor Project) at the Harvard Kennedy School, and I am a co-founder of the Acting in Time Disaster Recovery Project at Harvard's program on Emergency Preparedness, Crisis Management, and Disaster Recovery. My area of expertise is post-disaster recovery and reconstruction issues, and I study the dynamics of recovery from disasters in communities all over the United States and around the world.

I would like to endorse your Envirenew plan and urge The Salvation Army to fully fund and implement the project. I would further recommend that you build a significant number of the Envirenew homes in the Broadmoor neighborhood of New Orleans.

I believe that the Envirenew plan is a unique idea that conforms to, and exceeds, national best practices for disaster recovery. I believe that the project can have substantial impact on New Orleans recovery, and therefore can serve as a model for other New Orleans recovery projects, and as a model for the field of recovery for other communities facing a disaster.

One problem that we see in even the best intentioned of recovery projects is a desire to spread the rebuilding over a large geographical area. Unfortunately this approach has proven to be ineffective in achieving recovery results. Research has shown that by concentrating projects in one or two geographic areas, you can leverage the project to "tip" a block or a neighborhood. The best practice is to concentrate the rebuilding in an area where your project becomes a catalyst that propels a neighborhood to the point where other forces (usually market forces) kick-in to complete the neighborhood's recovery.

We have seen from decades of research that recovery is a tipping phenomenon. Neighborhoods either reach this tipping point and go on to see full recovery, or they fail to reach this threshold in which case they tend to slide backward into blight and decay. We recommend that the best strategic approach for recovery projects is to select a neighborhood that is close to the tipping point and use the rebuilding effort to cause them to "tip."

I would recommend Broadmoor as such a neighborhood. The Harvard Kennedy School and Bard College have been conducting a longitudinal study of recovery in Broadmoor. We began the research study in July of 2006, and every six months, a field research team conducts a door-to-door survey of the recovery status of every property in Broadmoor. The study is independent and is a peer-reviewed research project conducted according to strict scientific methodology. We have been interested in tracking the recovery of a community in fine enough time intervals (time slices) to be able to measure the phases and patterns of recovery.

The results of the longitudinal study reveal that Broadmoor is very near its tipping point. 79.1% of the properties are either completely rebuilt (55.6%) or are under active reconstruction (23.5%). This recovery progress is extraordinary, but post-disaster recovery research also shows that in general, the last 20-30% of recovery is always the hardest – these are the cases that require the most intervention. At 79.1%, Broadmoor stands right at the edge where it could easily “tip” toward full recovery, or could slip backward. With a little push in the number of homes rebuilt, Broadmoor will easily cross the threshold and fully recover.

It is my expert opinion that if Broadmoor crosses an 81-82% threshold, the neighborhood will fully recover (my conclusion is based on years of experience in measuring recovery rates, repopulation & demography, and studying adoption curves and models of completeness theory). I wholeheartedly recommend that The Salvation Army fund and implement the Envirenew project and locate a significant number of the homes in the Broadmoor neighborhood. This, along with some other housing rebuilding efforts that are being undertaken by Broadmoor, will move Broadmoor across the 81-82% threshold point and will “tip” the neighborhood to full recovery.

I believe that this strategy will produce the desired outcomes in Broadmoor, and will also serve as a model for how to achieve successful recovery results in other New Orleans neighborhoods. I further believe that this Envirenew strategy can become a model for other communities recovering from disasters in the future.

Best Regards,



Douglas Ahlers
Senior Fellow & Project Director

attachments

