

NOV 14 2007

The Honorable Junior Rodriguez  
President, St. Bernard Parish  
8201 West Judge Perez Drive  
Chalmette, LA 70043



Office of the Federal Coordinator  
for Gulf Coast Rebuilding

Dear President Rodriguez:

I would like to thank you for your prompt follow-up to the request by Congressman Melancon and me for your five highest priority rebuilding projects. As we previously indicated, our goal is to elevate the dialogue between you and the Federal Government to ensure that any barriers to moving forward with these projects are fully identified and addressed as expeditiously as possible. As you know, I share your sense of urgency toward increasing the pace of rebuilding efforts.

The project information in this response is a product of detailed and thorough examination by senior Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials at the State, regional and headquarters level. I am very pleased with the degree of coordination that has occurred among you, your staff and FEMA in focusing your collective efforts to target your top-five Public Assistance (PA) infrastructure projects. I want to ensure you that your top priorities are also our top priorities and as such have received the absolute highest level of attention. The following information regarding project status was forwarded to me directly from FEMA Administrator David Paulison at my request.

#### **Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) Consolidation**

*Request: 1) FEMA funds to be used toward one large consolidation project and 2) improve the amount of time required for environmental and historic preservation review.*

I recognize that the Parish began the process of modernizing the wastewater treatment system in 2003—and given the scale and severity of damage to the system—this rebuilding effort presents a critical opportunity to implement changes for efficiency and effectiveness. I am committed to ensuring that Federal assistance can be applied to this project in such a way that helps you reach your goals for the future.

**FEMA has obligated approximately \$24 million among the seven facilities involved in the consolidation project.** This total includes the repair value for the five facilities eligible for repair and the full replacement value for the two facilities eligible for replacement. FEMA specialists have been working closely with the Parish for over a year to structure the project request in such a way that the funds from each of the damaged facilities are able to be applied toward the Parish's consolidation plan.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup> (one day after your letter to us), I understand that the Parish submitted Improved Project requests for each of the seven facilities to the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP).

**My staff has reached out to the senior staff at GOHSEP and they have informed us that the project requests have been forwarded for final review by Col. Kirkpatrick and should be received by FEMA very shortly. Upon receipt, FEMA will review the projects for approval as**

**quickly as possible. For those projects requiring approval at the headquarters level, I will work directly with FEMA headquarters to ensure their expedited review.**

In addition, I understand that the State has allocated approximately \$26 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) infrastructure dollars to St. Bernard Parish for the purpose of implementing priority projects in the Parish's Long-Term Recovery Plan. The Administration, through my office and Congress, secured funds for the State specifically for the purpose of infrastructure improvement beyond the level that FEMA is able to provide from the Disaster Relief Fund. The WWTP Consolidation Project meets the intention of this funding and the State has dedicated approximately \$1.1 billion for this purpose. I am glad that the Federal Government can fully support your efforts to consolidate these facilities.

In your letter, you also noted your August request for expedited environmental and historic preservation (EHP) review (involving the Violet treatment plant force main). **This has been completed. The State Historic Preservation Officer and FEMA have both concurred with the Environmental Protection Agency's Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) as long as the stated scope of work is not altered and the conditions of the FONSI are strictly followed.** This was communicated in a letter from FEMA to the State on October 17, 2007. If there are any other EHP reviews currently underway that you feel are significantly delaying the ability to move forward with your priority projects, please let me know as soon as possible.

Regarding other EHP reviews that are anticipated to be required for the WWTP Consolidation Project, **FEMA staff is beginning data collection in advance so that the necessary reviews can be completed as quickly as possible following the formal project approvals.**

FEMA will continue to provide a senior team of wastewater system experts to assist the parish with implementing its plans. It is our intent to see that construction on this project moves forward as quickly as possible to bring permanent solutions online and discontinue temporary solutions. In order to approve continued funding of temporary wastewater treatment activities, **FEMA needs you to submit a construction timeline indicating the dates and phases by which the discontinuation of temporary solutions is expected.**

### **Sewer and Drainage Pump Station Repairs**

*Request: Versions written for project worksheets as quickly as possible.*

I recognize the widespread scope of damage to all of your sewer pump stations. FEMA has obligated project worksheets (PWs) for each station, enabling the Parish to move forward with the necessary repair work. As you are aware, FEMA's process for aligning preliminary/estimated costs with actual costs as project work ensues is called "versioning"—and to ensure timely access to adequate cash flow, FEMA has streamlined this process as "just-in-time" versioning. As soon as the Parish submits detailed bid estimates to FEMA, FEMA will then quickly align the scopes of work between the existing PW and the bid estimate to reflect revised obligated amounts for all eligible work.

I understand that the Parish has implemented a phased process for repairing the 89 remaining pump stations by December 2008. **FEMA will promptly version any PW for all eligible and reasonable costs just as soon as they receive bid receipts from the Parish. FEMA will be working with you to coordinate its versioning process with your schedule and the rate at which you expect to receive bid receipts for each pump station. If you feel that the timeliness of the versioning process is inhibiting your ability to proceed with these repairs or access the necessary cash, please let me know as soon as possible. In addition, if you feel that your staff should need any specialized assistance to better coordinate the submission of bid documents for FEMA versioning, please also let me know.**

### **Vehicle and Equipment Replacement**

*Request: 1) Flexibility to apply for improved projects to replace what we had with what we need now and 2) assistance from FEMA to ensure that we approach these projects correctly so that they are eligible under the PA program.*

The challenge you face with regard to vehicles and equipment is a critical one—and one you share with many other severely impacted communities. This is an area where we are again committed to ensuring that Federal resources are provided in ways that are flexible enough to allow you to meet your current and future needs, rather than your pre-disaster needs.

**FEMA has obligated more than \$7.1 million for the repair and replacement of vehicles and equipment in St. Bernard Parish. By structuring your request as an Improved PW, this will allow you to combine your obligated funds, and purchase the quantities and types of equipment you need now.** FEMA has discussed with your staff the criteria for making this type of funding request and provided specific guidance as to how the Parish may structure its request to best meet its needs. As you know, FEMA cannot provide complete funding for a brand-new fleet; however, they will do everything they can to enable you to use your funds with the maximum amount of flexibility.

I understand that this can be a complicated process. If your staff continues to experience difficulty in appropriately structuring your improved project request, please let me know immediately. There are many best practices as to how other communities are effectively addressing similar challenges and FEMA is dedicated to doing all it can to help you navigate this process. **If you feel that a dedicated team is needed to help your staff address this issue, please notify me in addition to your FEMA contact and I will see that the Parish receives the specialized assistance necessary to get this accomplished.**

### **Curbside Debris Removal**

*Request: Continued funding for curbside debris removal at least as long as demolition is eligible.*

Among the entire Gulf Coast, no other jurisdiction has more demolitions that remain to be completed (nearly 8,800) or cubic yards of storm-related debris to be removed (approximately 2.7 million) than St. Bernard Parish. I understand that this is the result of a great many factors; however, it demonstrates the degree to which the demolition and debris removal needs of St. Bernard Parish differ from many

other jurisdictions. In response, **FEMA has extended the eligibility period for curbside removal of all storm-related debris through February 29, 2008.**

As you know, a primary challenge with debris removal at this stage in the rebuilding process is that it is becoming very difficult to distinguish and manage storm-related vs. construction-related debris. To that end, I need and appreciate your continued vigilance to ensure that contractors dispose of their new construction-related debris in the appropriate manner. This greatly helps FEMA to be able to discern the ongoing need for curbside removal of storm-related debris.

### **Canal Cleaning**

*Request: Coordination among the efforts of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA so that we can accomplish this very important task.*

The cleaning of canals is an important issue that affects not only progress in rebuilding but the ongoing ability to safely and effectively manage interior water drainage. It is also an area where a number of Federal resources are able to provide assistance—and you have accurately pointed out the need for effective coordination among these Federal agency resources together with your staff and local resources.

FEMA has coordinated its debris removal efforts with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and obtained a determination of eligibility from them for work they will perform. **FEMA and NRCS agreed that 27 canals and/or segments of canals are eligible under NRCS authority within St. Bernard Parish and the Lake Borgne Basin Levee District.**

**NRCS has further identified 14 ditches and three canals that will not be eligible under its authority. FEMA, through an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), has completed the removal of all eligible debris from these 17 areas that were ineligible for NRCS funding. Please let me know if there are any remaining issues associated with these 17 ditch and canal areas.**

**In October 2006, FEMA obligated \$332,741 for removal of debris from all remaining canals and ditches that are the responsibility of St. Bernard Parish.** I understand the Parish did not let a contract for the work due to challenges dealing with a broad scope of work for the associated PWs. In order to help the Parish proceed with work, FEMA has assisted your staff in developing appropriately definitive scopes of work that are needed to let contracts.

Additionally, **FEMA will write versions to the existing PWs for all eligible work remaining in the canals and ditches not covered by USACE or NRCS** (eligible debris is that which FEMA determines to pose an immediate threat to public health and safety). If you continue to experience difficulties or delays with being able to move forward with canal cleaning (on behalf of the Parish or NRCS), please let me know immediately.

### **Federal Follow-Up**

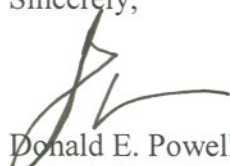
Congressman Melancon and I are proud of FEMA's accomplishments and continued support for recovery and rebuilding efforts in St. Bernard Parish. The strong working relationships between FEMA and our Federal, State and local partners are what drive the successful rebuilding of Louisiana's Gulf Coast.

As you know, we share your sense of urgency and frustration about accelerating the pace of rebuilding. You are also well aware that the local applicant and State are full partners in these efforts with each of us maintaining responsibilities to move forward and complete this work. To that end, the resolution of outstanding Public Assistance issues is my top priority and I will continue to work with FEMA and other Federal agencies to drive your priority issues to resolution in the most expeditious manner possible.

Congressman Melancon and I will be tracking each of your priority projects to completion and will continue to request the most detailed information possible to allow us to focus our future efforts. I recognize that you may feel there are still unresolved issues based on the responses above. If so, I encourage you to bring those issues to my attention immediately and with as much specificity as possible. I will be reaching out to your office very shortly to schedule a meeting with Federal, State and local decision makers for an update on the progress of these issues.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to St. Bernard Parish and to a better future for Louisiana and the Gulf Coast.

Sincerely,



Donald E. Powell  
Federal Coordinator Gulf Coast Rebuilding

cc: The Honorable Mary Landreiu, U.S. Senator  
The Honorable David Vitter, U.S. Senator  
The Honorable Charlie Melancon, U.S. Congressman  
The Honorable Kathleen Blanco, Governor of Louisiana  
The Honorable Bobby Jindal, Governor-elect of Louisiana  
Colonel Jeff Smith, Acting Director, Governor's Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness  
Colonel Thomas Kirkpatrick, State Coordinating Officer, Louisiana  
Michael Chertoff, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Gil Jamieson, Associate Deputy Administrator, Gulf Coast Recovery, DHS FEMA  
Jim Stark, Director, Louisiana Transitional Recovery Office, DHS FEMA  
Carlos Castillo, Associate Administrator, Disaster Assistance Division, DHS FEMA  
William Peterson, Regional Administrator, DHS FEMA Region 6