



# *St. Bernard Parish Government*

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October 1, 2007

Mr. Donald E. Powell  
Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Re: High Priority Public Assistance Projects

Dear Mr. Powell:

Thank you for your letter of September 5, 2007 and your promise of support for our rebuilding efforts. As you know, St. Bernard Parish was dealt a devastating blow by hurricane Katrina's storm surge and has since struggled to navigate the murky and treacherous waters of the federal response. I am immensely encouraged by your willingness to hear our concerns and hope that you are successful in your endeavor to help us to achieve our goals.

As you requested, we are providing details of our five highest priority projects and the hurdles and dead ends that we are encountering in the maze that is the FEMA Public Assistance program.

## **Sewer Treatment Plant Consolidation**

In September 2003 the Wastewater Consolidation Study for St. Bernard Parish was completed. Prior to hurricane Katrina, the Parish was moving forward with the recommendation put forth in this study to consolidate all seven of its wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) to one facility. Since October of 2005, St. Bernard Parish has been working with FEMA Public Assistance (PA) to determine how to approach this project to allow funding under the PA program.

Although we are very close to resolving most issues delaying the implementation of the project, two hurdles still remain. The first is whether the consolidation should be packaged as one large improved project or seven individual projects. The Parish and the State agree that the project should be considered as one, however FEMA has indicated that the parish should request seven individual projects. The second is the time required for Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) Review. We requested expedited EHP review of one portion of the project on July 13, July 25 and August 2, 2007 but have not received a determination as yet. We have requested

EHP review of the rest of the project but are extremely concerned about the time required for these reviews.

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

For the sewer system to operate, flows must be able to reach the treatment facilities. Every sewer lift station in the Parish was damaged by the floodwaters. Likewise, the drainage pump stations were devastated. Although project worksheets (PWs) have been written for all of the stations, the cost estimates are significantly lower than the engineer's estimates and bid amounts. To ensure adequate cash flow, we need versions written for these PWs as quickly as possible.

### **Vehicle and Equipment Replacement**

The Parish lost almost all of its vehicles and equipment during Katrina. This type of loss is widespread across the region making replacement in-kind extremely difficult if not impossible. Public entities must compete with private companies and individuals which do not have the purchasing restrictions. Also, since Parish has not regained a significant portion of its population and the staffing level of the Government is a fraction of the pre-storm level, we will not require the same number of vehicles nor the same number and type of equipment (e.g. more grass cutting equipment and fewer passenger vehicles). Therefore, we want to apply for improved projects to replace what we had with what we need now. We will require assistance from FEMA to ensure that we approach these projects correctly so that they are eligible under the PA program. We understand that normally vehicles are required to be replaced one for one and in-kind but hope that an exception can be made for this unusually severe disaster.

### **Curbside Debris Removal**

Because of the extreme devastation and the fact that the residents have experienced many delays in receiving benefits both from their insurance companies and the Road Home Program, many homes have not been gutted or demolished. Demolition continues but we still need curbside debris removal for household debris. We ask that FEMA continue funding curbside debris removal at least as long as demolition is eligible.

### **Canal Cleaning**

More than two years after Katrina, there are drainage canals in St. Bernard that have yet to be cleaned of storm debris. This situation seems to be caused by the continued lack of communication between the various federal agencies that share this responsibility. We desperately need someone to coordinate the efforts of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA so that we can accomplish this very important task.

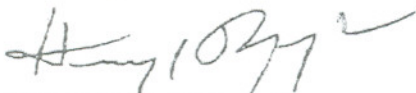
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While we understand the limitations of the Stafford Act, we hope that you will help us to utilize the provisions of the Act to their fullest to help St. Bernard Parish to recover from this terrible disaster.

Once again, thank you for your continued interest in and support of St. Bernard Parish at this difficult time. If you have any questions or require more information, please don't hesitate to contact me or the Director of Public Works, Chris Merkl at 504.278.4317.

Sincerely,



Henry J. Rodriguez, Jr.  
President

cc: The Honorable Mary Landreiu  
The Honorable David Vitter  
The Honorable Charlie Melancon  
The Honorable Kathleen Blanco  
Colonel Jeff Smith