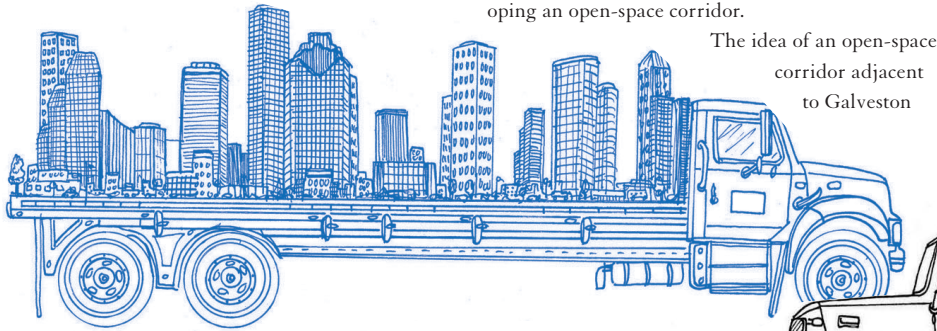


HINDCITE

WE ARE TOTALLY UNPREPARED FOR THE DESTRUCTION

and chaos accompanying a major hurricane strike, shortcomings that become more obvious as the research mounts. Our discussion of preparedness is focused on evacuation; however, evacuation is only one aspect of preparedness. What's missing is the rest of the story—the part about planning for



life after the disaster, and for the lives of the new people who will arrive in our region in the coming years.

These issues appear to be missing in our emergency planning: providing relief for evacuees who return to destroyed or damaged housing; developing a plan for rebuilding after the storm; determining the extent to which we allow/encourage future development in these hurricane high-risk zones; and providing for adequate floodplain mapping to give proper information for industrial and residential development.

The amount of damage that is projected from a Category 4 or 5 storm is incredible: Over 300,000 households are subject to inundation from a 20-plus-foot storm surge, of which 100,000 will be destroyed and 100,000 seriously damaged. It may take weeks to restore electricity to less damaged areas. Regions along the coast will not be habitable for months. In addition, there will be inland flood and wind damage. With a direct hit, we could have over 500,000 people with no place to live for an extended period of time. Where and how do we shelter and feed these people? How do

we get our basic economy up and running?

The second issue is rebuilding. Should we really redevelop an area that is so vulnerable to hurricane damage? A viable alternative concept is to set up a fund to be used in association with flood insurance payments to buy out those who live in the most vulnerable areas, preventing rebuilding and developing an open-space corridor.

The idea of an open-space corridor adjacent to Galveston

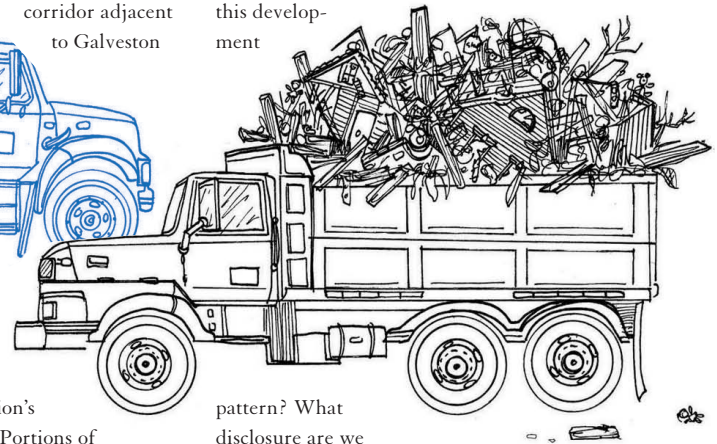
FLASH forward

Bay has much to offer our community. This buffer could provide access to the bay for the region's millions of residents. Portions of this area could be planted with wetlands and with other types of vegetation to form a biological barrier to storm surge damage. This could be done in association with strategic engineering projects to provide a long-term reconstruction concept for the area.

But we have no plan for reconstruction after a storm, and it seems that we are simply going to redevelop in the same manner that led to such destruction and chaos in the first place. Certainly the worst time to have this discussion is after the storm has come and left 500,000 folks homeless, starting at building officials, and begging for building permits. We need community discussion about a businesslike approach to rebuilding—one that makes economic and engineering sense. Any chance at being rational depends on planning before the storm, not after it.

A third issue is population growth. Our community is expected to gain three to four million persons over the next few

decades. Over 150,000 new households are projected for the coastal evacuation zone in the next 30 years. That means another 400,000 people to evacuate and another 50,000 homes likely destroyed, with substantial damage to the remainder. Based on the experience of Rita, it is reasonable to question whether the existing population of Galveston, Bolivar, and those adjacent to Galveston Bay can be safely evacuated. Is it smart to encourage this development



pattern? What disclosures are we making as a community?

The final issue is the accuracy and reliability of the FEMA floodplain maps. There is no doubt that the Category 4 and 5 storm surge predicted is significantly higher than the flood elevations shown on the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps, the official 100-year floodplain maps. These set the minimum elevation for new homes and businesses, and the levels of protection for hazardous waste storage and disposal and for sewage treatment plants and landfills. The maps are simply not sufficient at this time.

The maps currently used within the community routinely show flood elevations of 10 to 12 feet in areas that are likely to be inundated to depths greater than 20 feet. Reliable information about hurricanes, storm surge, and flooding is missing. We need to know whether our floodplains will be enlarged by 20-plus-foot tides combined with 10 to 12 inches of rain. The Harris County Flood Control District says that that interaction will not make any difference, but many engineers disagree. We need public accountability and answers to these and many more questions. Our lives and property depend upon it. ●

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