Home Grants Are Doubled

Coalition Talks Produce Results

Over the past two months, in a series of working meetings with the Governor’s Office, the Steps Coalition housing committee presented specific recommendations on how to get Phase II building funds into the hands of more homeowners in critical need, particularly low-income families, the elderly and disabled. The recommendations came from concerns raised by community members and local leaders during the public comment period for the Phase I of Homeowner grants in March 2006. Many of the Coalition’s recommendations were included in the Governor’s revised plan approved by HUD Secretary Jackson at a press conference on December 20, 2006 in Gulfport.

Homeowners will be eligible for up to $100,000 to repair or rebuild their home, up from $50,000. In addition, an elevation grant of up to $30,000 will be made available. For more information see page 5.

Message from Bishop James Black, Board President, Steps Coalition:

“This expansion of the grant program will be welcome news for homeowners who suffered flood surge damage and did not qualify for Phase I assistance. These families will get hope for Christmas. As we celebrate, we must also remember the thousands of other families, including renters and those whose homes were severely damaged only by wind, whose holiday season will remain filled with uncertainty. In the new year, we in the Steps Coalition will be looking to work with the Governor’s Office to quickly finalize plans to get them back into safe and affordable homes.”

Wetlands Rule Draws Fire

Steps Allies Oppose Relaxation of Wetlands Protection

A proposal for a ten-fold increase in the amount of wetlands that developers may destroy without public notice has encountered heavy opposition from an army of environmental groups, including key environmental allies of the Steps Coalition. Under a proposed “regional general permit,” a developer could fill as much as 5 acres without public notice, up from the current one-half acre limit, based on the developer’s self-certification that the wetlands are “low-quality.”

More than 7,500 comments were sent into the Mobile District office of the US Army Corps of Engineers, with opposition running at over 95%. As a result, the Corps is scaling back the proposal, in particular the acreage size.
Steps Coalition Allies

Here are profiles of some of the community groups that were founding members of the Steps Coalition.

Coastal Women for Change grew out of informal support talks among minority Biloxi women after Hurricane Katrina. CWC evolved quickly into a potent civic organization, hosting a community forum in which 200 Biloxians faced the mayor and other city officials for explanations on the recovery process. CWC won seats on the Mayor’s planning commission. It co-hosted a Women of Color forum in June 2006, and conducted a needs assessment for Moore Community House’s child care facility.

Sharon Hanshaw (above, with Danny Glover) is executive director. Before the storm, she was a cosmetologist. Now she is a frequent spokeswoman for the needs of renters.

North Gulfport Community Land Trust was founded by Rose Johnson in 2004 following her successful advocacy to block harmful wetlands development upstream from her community. Its mission to secure land and develop affordable housing in African American communities took on new urgency after Hurricane Katrina. This community development non-profit has partnered with Unity Homes to bring energy-efficient modular homes to disadvantaged communities. Crucial funding support enabled this land trust to buy land and place the first prototype on site in recent weeks. Rose was presented with the prestigious Frank Parker client award at a New York City awards reception by the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights.

AMOS Network has chapters in African American churches across the Mississippi coast. It works from proven Industrial Affairs Foundation principles to bring forth grassroots agendas for change. On the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, AMOS Network coordinated a demonstration and march in front of the Beau Rivage in Biloxi. AMOS representatives participated in behind-the-scenes discussions with state executive and legislative leaders to advocate for an equitable recovery for low-income storm victims. Gerald Taylor and Rev. Anthony Thompson are pictured on page 1 of this newsletter at the Phase II grant press conference.

NAVASA partnered with Coastal Women for Change to bring together the first collaboration between Vietnamese American and African American grassroots groups on the Mississippi Coast. Truc Nguyen raised funds for 4 wireless transmitters and 50 receiver sets. Uyen Le and James Bui conducted community education and outreach programs in East Biloxi to raise concerns about developer encroachment in Vietnamese American areas. Boat People SOS will co-sponsor a Vietnamese language legal workshop on January 19, 2007. Call Boat People SOS at 436-9999 or MCJ at 435-7284 for details.

Looking Back on 2006

To measure the pace of our progress, let’s recall some key moments in our history.

May 28 - Invitations to community groups sent out to take part in retreat.

June 16-18 - Retreat in New Orleans.

July 27 - Press Conference in Soria City to launch Steps Coalition.

August 10 - Board of Directors nominated.

August 15 - Steps speaks for tenants in 3 public housing projects scheduled to be closed; gets promise of no displacements.

August 26 - Steps is featured at NAACP-Oxfam Town Hall in Gulfport; coordinates walk-throughs in Gulfport and Biloxi.

August 29 - Steps hosts sunrise Service at Gulfside Assembly, Waveland; participates in demonstration in Biloxi.

September 6 - 1st Board of Directors meeting.

September 15 - Group dinner with Funders.

September 21 - Steps Coalition comments on Phase II grants.

September 24 - Steps allies guide Environmental Justice For All Tour Bus across MS Coast.

October 14 - 1st hearing of National Environmental Justice Commission in Gulfport, co-sponsored by Steps Coalition.

October 23-24 - Affordable Housing Summit.

November 8 - Steps housing group meets with Governor’s office on Phase II.

December 20 - HUD Secretary approves doubling Phase II grant cap, other changes sought by Steps housing group.
Steps are in place to help people.

This coalition of organizations is a powerful tool to restore the beautiful but injured Gulf Coast Region. We see the connections between issues that shape the quality of life of individuals, families, and communities. Help make Steps the successful effort that so many deserve.
This photograph depicts the Mississippi Sound at the Steps Coalition Sunrise Service at Gulfside Assembly on August 29, 2006, a short distance from where the eye of Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Mississippi one year earlier, taking the lives of 1,689 men, women, and children along the Gulf Coast.

The Earth Island Institute at Columbia University has compiled a list of Hurricane Katrina Deceased and Victims.

To see the list, visit this link. http://www.katrina lista.t.columbia.edu/results.php
Q & A on Phase II Home Grant Program - (continued from page 1)

Up to $100,000 for cost of repair plus up to $30,000 for cost of elevation/compliance.

Q. Who qualifies for the grant?
A. A homeowner who
- suffered hurricane flood surge damage- small percentage still qualifies for full grant
- to their primary residence (not second homes or rentals)
- located inside or outside the federal 100 year flood zone
- with or without property insurance on the residence

Q. What is the income limit?
A. A 2006 household income at or below:

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Q. What must I agree to do?
A. You must sign a covenant to
- rebuild to IBC Code standards
- rebuild to current FEMA elevation requirements
- buy and keep homeowner’s and flood insurance
- pay off any SBA loan from grant

Q. Do I have to stay put for 3 years?
A. No. You can move.

Q. Is my grant cut by 30% if I have no insurance?
A. Not if you are 65 or more, or disabled, or your 2006 household income is at or below:

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If you were uninsured and you earn more than this, and you are under 65, and not disabled, then your grant will be reduced by 30%.

Reminders
Save the Date: Feb. 27, 2007, General Meeting-Election of Board of Directors.
Be sure to send in Your Group’s Memorandum of Understanding before then - For details, contact Melinda.

Sign up for a Steps Pillar Initiative - contact Melinda
Shelter (Housing)
Community (Historical Preservation)
Prosperity (Financial & Personal Health)
Balance (Environmental Justice)
Fairness (Civil & Human Rights)

Thanks to our Funders
Twenty-First Century Foundation
Oxfam America
Unitarian Universalist Church Fund
Special Thanks to Bill Tyler Designs for Steps Logo

Board of Directors
Andy Guerra, Bishop James Black, Joe Williams, Buck Lawrence, Thao Vu, Marva Tanner, Martha Milner, Natalie Presley

Bishop James Black — President
Marva Tanner — Vice President
Buck Lawrence — Treasurer
Thao Vu — Secretary

Executive Director
Melinda Harthcock
228-832-8806
info@stepsouthms.org

Steps Coalition
PO Box 2361
Gulfport MS 39505
www.stepsouthms.org
Join the Steps Coalition.

Steps Allies - a growing list

AMOS Network 228-326-3185  MS Immigrant Rights Alliance 601-354-9355
Back Bay Mission 228-432-0301  NAACP, Mississippi Conference 601-353-6906
Boat People SOS 228-436-9999  NAACP, Biloxi Chapter 228-326-7143
Center for Environmental & Economic Justice 228-374-3010  NAVASA 504-344-7804
Coastal Community Watch 228-467-6202  North Gulfport Community Land Conservancy 337-321-2427
Coastal Women for Change 228-297-4849  Oxfam America 617-728-2446
East Biloxi Coordination & Relief Center 228-438-9188  Sierra Club, Mississippi Chapter 601-352-1026
Enterprise Corp. of the Delta 228-374-1554  Southern Echo 601-982-6400
HOPE Community Credit Union 228-374-1554  Soria City Civic Organization 228-437-3348
Gulf Coast Fair Housing Center 228-396-4008  Turkey Creek Community Initiatives 228-326-4004
Gulf Coast Latin American Assn. 228-697-7322  William Winter Institute, Univ. of MS 662-915-6734
Gulf Restoration Network 504-525-1528  Help Update Our List. Contact Melinda with Your Information.
HandsOn Network 228-257-9064
Interfaith Disaster Task Force 228-868-0961
International Relief & Development 228-864-6677
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law 202-662-8600
Mercy Housing & Human Development 228-896-1347
Mississippi Center for Justice 228-435-7284
Mississippi Center for Workers Rights 662-334-1122
Mississippi Coalition for the Disabled 601-969-0601