

NATIONAL PLANNING EXPERTS HELPING ST. BERNARD OFFICIALS

Several visits planned over the next six months

Turni Bazile



PHOTO BY KAREN TURNI BAZILE: St. Bernard Parish President Craig P. Taffaro Jr., met with national planning experts last week to discuss marketing the parish and addressing real estate issues post-Katrina. From left: Taffaro, David Jon Boehlke, a community strategist nationally known for redeveloping challenged communities, Marco Cocito-Monoc, executive director of the St. Bernard Community Foundation, an offshoot of the Greater New Orleans Foundation, and Donald Poland, a national expert on planning and Smart Code zoning issues.

National experts in planning and revitalizing distressed communities are visiting with St. Bernard Parish officials to help with efforts to rebrand the community that was devastated by Hurricane Katrina's flood waters and winds. The experts are being paid for by a \$50,000 grant from the St. Bernard Community Foundation, an offshoot of the Greater New Orleans Foundation.

David Jon Boehlke, a community strategist nationally known for redeveloping challenged communities, met with St. Bernard Parish President Craig P. Taffaro Jr. last week as well as Planning Commissioners and other parish leaders as part of the kick-off visit in a six-month project to bring professional and technical planning assistance to St. Bernard at no cost to parish government.

Boehlke is focusing on devising a marketing and branding effort for the parish to reach to its own current residents, its displaced residents and potential new residents and businesses as well as helping leaders come up with a workable plan for managing the land it will acquire as a result of the Road Home and other abandoned properties.

Taffaro said he was pleased with the initial meetings.

“This is part of the focus of the remainder of the term since the first 100 days focused on getting the infrastructure of government functional,” Taffaro said. “While we maintain the momentum of the first 100 days, we can move forward to address the overarching issues of our permanent recovery.”

Boehlke said he is satisfied with the progress he made during his first contacts with parish leaders last week, and he will return regularly over the next six months.

“There are practical ways to manage the transformation” of the community, Boehlke said. The effort will include marketing, outreach and leadership development. His focus also will be to help manage space with zoning and how to rebuild area real estate values.

Using the grant from the St. Bernard Community Foundation, Boehlke is bringing in other experts during his upcoming visits. This time he was joined by Donald Poland, who is expert on codes and the legal and administrative issues regarding SmartCodes, and Betty Weiss, who is known for her work to create sustainable neighborhoods and who has helped other communities harmed by Hurricane Katrina.