Citizens' Institute On Rural Design™

ISLE DE JEAN CHARLES

WORKSHOP: JANUARY 26-28, 2017
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

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Aerial Images of the Isle de Jean Charles from 1963 and 2008

BACKGROUND

On January 27th and 28th, 2017, the Isle de Jean Charles Band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe (IDJC Tribe) hosted a workshop with support from the Citizen's Institute on Rural DesignTM (CIRD). The workshop brought together Tribal members, a diverse resource team, and state, federal and local government representatives to support the Tribe through the visioning, planning, and design process in anticipation of resettlement at their new location. Workshop participants addressed various aspects of the resettlement, with a particular focus on the proposed Tribal Center, which will be the social anchor on site.

The possibility of resettlement had been considered by the IDJC Tribe for several years, resulting in multiple efforts to secure funding to support the effort. The Tribe worked with the Louisiana Office of Community Development (OCD) to produce an application in response to the National Disaster Resilience Competition. The initiative was and continues to be consistently supported by the Louisiana-based nonprofit, the Lowlander Center, as well as a team of experts in relevant fields, similar to those that comprised the CIRD Resource Team. In 2016, several years after the IDJC Tribe had expressed their commitment to pursue a new location, the grant to the State of Louisiana was approved, allocating approximately $48 million toward the resettlement of the IDJC Tribe.

The Isle de Jean Charles and its surroundings – sovereign Tribal lands – have largely been lost to the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Many Tribal members have already relocated further inland over the course of time, while others have remained on the island. This fractured community life is one example of how land-use decisions combined with climate-induced displacement have threatened the Tribe's unity and sovereignty. Furthermore, as place is the foundation of Tribal life ways, the loss of land has led to depletion of traditional practice and cultural assets: "When you lose your land – your grocery store, your powwow field, your herbs and medicinal plants – you lose your culture and your traditions."

> "The Isle de Jean Charles Tribal Community has been battered by natural and man-made disasters, climate change, and erosion for over 60 years. The tribal community has endured the torture and survived until now. In order to ensure the future survival some drastic decisions have been made to move the tribal community from their ancestral lands to a safe, resilient tribal community inland.
>
> The Tribal center is poised to be the heart and hub of our new community."
>
> **– Chief Albert Naquin**

Selection of this project for a CIRD award was based on recognition of this well-established groundwork and vision. The award positions the Tribe to build upon their work, and carries them to the next step in unifying the Tribal community, both physically and culturally.

The partnership between the CIRD team and the IDJC Tribe provides an unprecedented opportunity to apply the principles of rural design and placemaking to a process of climate-induced resettlement, while synchronously applying the Tribal principles of land settlement to a contemporary planning process. It is anticipated that this process will act as a replicable pilot to be adopted by other communities, along the Gulf Coast and elsewhere, who share similar experiences and are striving for recovery and resilience in the face of natural disasters. Accordingly, the CIRD team recognizes that the IDJC award meets the larger CIRD program goals, as follows:

- Raise awareness about the role of design in enhancing the quality of life and economic vitality of rural communities and to spur innovative design solutions.
- Empower citizens to play a role in guiding and determining appropriate development for their communities, including best use of available federal and state funding.
- Equip participants with the tools and techniques to identify, value, protect, and enhance the unique aspects of their towns and landscapes.
- Strengthen the work and the partnerships of individuals and organizations who are already providing assistance to rural areas on design and community development issues.
- Provide a forum for rural technical assistance providers to share their professional skills, learn new techniques that would aid them in their work with rural communities, and exchange ideas and experiences with rural communities and other providers.
- Provide participants with access to best practice approaches to place-based architecture, landscape architecture, heritage tourism, cultural development, arts-based civic engagement, historic preservation, and land management.
- Contribute to the creation of a community of practice for rural design.

Throughout the workshop, IDJC Tribal members brought to light a deep longing to rejuvenate communal Tribal life, education, and cultural activities and traditions through the resettlement process. Discussions pointed to the crucial need to incorporate the Tribal approach to land settlement into the State-funded design and planning process, immediately following land acquisition and throughout the design and building of the Tribal center. Participants also addressed a variety of time-sensitive issues that need to be resolved in advance of the Tribe's relocation and in order to successfully navigate the resettlement process.

Most importantly, the workshop lended to the solid foundation upon which the Tribe will build "a hope for survival, a plan for preservation, and a bridge to the past".

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preparation and Process Milestones: Site Visit and Planning Session

The process facilitated by the CIRD program began with a focused two-day site visit on August 26th and 27th, 2016. During this session, the CIRD team met and worked with members of the IDJC Tribe to build the framework for the two-day intensive workshop in January, including: definition of workshop goals, drafting the agenda, developing strategies for messaging and outreach, identifying speakers, facilitators, presenters and resources, and additional planning and logistical details.

Following this initial meeting, and in anticipation of the January event, a planning session was held on October 23, 2016, exclusively for Tribal members to offer input and ideas toward the foundation of work to be undertaken together with the CIRD resource team. The outcome was an extensive list of functions that the Tribal Center should serve, providing the necessary platform for participants in the January workshop to engage in deeper work and to delve into further detail regarding design, programming, and resources. These functions include:

- Early Childcare and Development Center
- Senior Recreation Center
- Health Center
- Worship Center
- Museum; Cultural Preservation and Activity
- Tribal Office Space
- Outdoor Recreational Facilities and Activities
- Pow Wow space
- Garden
- Market / Store

IDJC Tribal Members with Preliminary Conceptual Designs

CIRD Two-Day Workshop: January 27th-28th, 2017

The first day of the CIRD workshop in January was attended by Tribal leaders, Resource Team Members, outside experts and partners from around the state and the region, while the second day was geared for community input and ideation with the Resource Team and was attended by the broader Tribal community. The IDJC workshop brought together a larger and more diverse group of resource team members, friends, and colleagues than any other project in the history of CIRD, as follows:

Native American Team Members:
Chantel Comardelle, IDJC Member and Tribal Council Executive Secretary
Nikki Crowe, Program Coordinator, 13 Moons. Fond du Lac Reservation, MN
Sue Herne, Mohawk, Bear Clan. Akwesasne, NY
Stanley Tom, Tribal Administrator, Newtok Traditional Council. Tununak, AK

Organizational Partners:
Alessandra Jerolleman, Vice President, Louisiana Water Works and Treasurer, Lowlander Center
Kelly McHugh, Objects Conservator, National Museum of the American Indian. Washington, DC
Cynthia Nikitin, Senior Vice President, Project for Public Spaces. New York City, NY

Design, Planning, and Sustainability Professionals:
Edward (Eddie) Jon Cazayoux, FAIA, EnvironMental Design. New Orleans, LA
Joe Evans, Landscape Horticulturalist / Principal, Evans + Lighter Landscape Architecture. New Orleans, LA
Joseph Kunkel, Executive Director, Sustainable Native Communities Collaborative, Santa Fe, NM
Barney Lighter, Principal, Evans + Lighter Landscape Architecture, New Orleans, LA
Kelsey Moldenke, Senior Planner, Quinault Indian Nation, Taholah, OR
Timothy Reinhold, Senior Vice President, Research and Chief Engineer, Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS). Tampa, FL
Julie Rochman, President & CEO, IBHS. Tampa, FL

Day 1: Friday, January 27th, 2017

The workshop began with a site tour for all Resource Team members to experience the Isle de Jean Charles. Participants were driven to the island along Island Road, formerly surrounded by marshland and now affected by intense erosion. In harsh weather, the road is completely covered by the waters of the Gulf, which implies that the community does not receive emergency relief services during disasters. In fact, the state has mandated that should the road wash away, it will be not be replaced. The island itself has been largely vacated; the grocery store, which had once been the meeting place for the community, is now closed. Due to unique climate conditions, Tribal members who remain on the island are exposed to a number of health risks, including brain-eating amoebas found in the stagnant waters of the Southern bayou, which can also be found in the crustaceans which they catch and eat . While berms have been constructed around its edge, and marsh grasses planted out into the bayou, the island is still not protected from flooding; bridges that were built in order to connect the elevated housing entrances to the road are repeatedly washed away and reconstructed. All of these devastating effects illustrate the unimaginable challenges of continued living on the island, and the inefficient and unsustainable measures taken by Tribal members to maintain their ability to stay above water.

Friday Site Tour on the Isle de Jean Charles

Chantel Comardelle Presents Interim Findings

Upon arrival at the Terrebonne Parish Library, **Chantel Comardelle**, the Isle de Jean Charles Tribal Secretary and CIRD Workshop Organizer, began with a recap of previous ideas generated by community members, including the outcomes from October's session. This initial presentation provided the Resource Team and other guests with a sense of the Tribe's priorities and needs for the design of the planned Tribal Community Center, enabling participants to focus their comments and approach. Chantel noted in her presentation that the Tribal Center will serve as the heart of the community – just as the grocery store, which served as the central meeting place on the island, had done for many generations.

The Resource Team Members responded to Chantel's presentation of the Tribe's values and visions through a series of professionally focused presentations and facilitated question and answer sessions:

- Landscape architect **Joe Evans** discussed the importance of and methods for incorporating land and water living systems into architecture, alongside possibilities for incorporation of symbolic Tribal themes into the physical design and layout of buildings and facilities;

- Community designer and educator **Joseph Kunkle** reviewed a number of ways to build for climate resilience, highlighting, for example, the need to build with elevation to provide safety from flooding, but also the need to ensure secure roofs that can withstand strong winds and hurricanes. He also touched upon human resources and economic opportunities, such as development of connections outside of the Tribal community that can contribute to the Tribe's economic resilience, as well as ensuring that employment generated within the Tribe's territory are maintained as positions for Tribal members themselves.

- **Kelly McHugh** and **Sue Herne** spoke of the National Museum of the American Indian and the Akwesasne Cultural Center, respectively, as inspirations for the IDJC Tribe's proposed cultural and community center. Through this lens, they addressed the differences between memorializing and actively living Tribal traditions and culture, and how experiences of a museum or Tribal Center can fall anywhere on the spectrum between the two. They explained how these experiences can be determined by design and programming decisions.

- **Matt Sanders**, Resilience Policy & Program Administrator at the Louisiana OCD, stated the intention that the IDJC resettlement process will act as a model for ten additional coastal communities facing similar challenges across the country. He described the immense difficulty and complexity of resettlement, and assured that the State is committed to learning how to ensure a successful process that considers community values and vision.

- **Nikki Crowe** facilitated a discussion that focused on multigenerational and multi-use spaces -- in particular, the evacuation center and the senior and child care facilities -- as well as the connections between them. Throughout the discussion, attendees were encouraged to identify resources that would be needed and/or that are already available to the community in order to support these places. Participating professional partners were asked to share examples of other similar spaces that have successfully incorporated a variety of uses and catered to broad audiences.

Following these presentations, participants broke out into learning carousels, during which three groups focused on three distinct themes: design, programming, and resources. These conversations were continued throughout the second day, together with the broader community; key findings are summarized in Section 4, Key Takeaways and Recommendations, below.

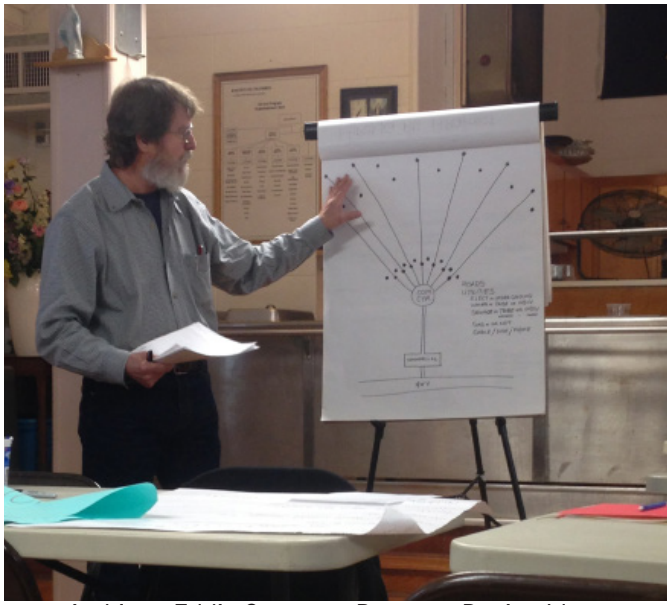
Learning Carousels

Day 2: Saturday, January 28th, 2017

The second day of the workshop foregrounded community expertise, knowledge exchange, and exploration of next steps toward the resettlement.

- Sessions provided a **platform for shared learning with representatives of other Native Tribes** from across the United States, featuring presentations from Tribal leaders, planners, and museum curators from Newtok, Alaska; Akwesasne, New York; and the Quinault Indian Nation of Taholah, Oregon. Stanley Thom, Sue Herne and Kelsey Moldenke respectively provided valuable insight into the process of climate-induced displacement faced by their own communities, as well as considerations that may influence the capacity to maintain traditional practices when planning for a cultural center or museum.

- Architect Eddie Cazayoux provided **extensive guidance regarding hiring and working with architects and designers**. The dialogue that ensued brought to light a number of critical issues that Tribal members will need to discuss and agree upon in order to successfully navigate the resettlement process vis-a-vis the State of Louisiana and the hired design team.



Architect Eddie Cazayoux Presents Design Ideas

- Landscape architect Joe Evans provided examples of **Best Practices for environmentally sustainable design**, unique to Louisiana's climate and physical attributes. He presented a number of initial sketches, created in collaboration with Tribal members, that portrayed potential applications of these design practices **in combination with symbolic Tribal elements**.

- The culminating discussion, during which participants summarized the two-day workshop and shared any thoughts or concerns left unspoken, was led by Joseph Kunkel from the Sustainable Native Communities Collaborative and IDJC Deputy Chief Boyo Billiot. The focus of this session was the development of a **phased approach** to implementation of the programs, design, and building of the Tribal Center, the **physical space and infrastructure required** for each function, and **possibilities for cross-fertilization and clustering of uses** in order to best maximize space and reduce redundancy.

IDJC Youth Present their Vision

- Throughout the day, Dr. Jack Martin facilitated a working group with the youth from the Isle de Jean Charles. Before the workshop's conclusion, the children and teenagers shared their **illustrated history of the Island and hopes for the future** in the Tribe's new home. Some of the older participants shared their skills and ideas, such as permaculture and fishing, that they intend to contribute to the new location. The drawings and words shared highlighted a deep desire and hope among the next generation for a strengthened sense of identity and community.

HIGHLIGHTS AND THEMES

Building a Nationwide Network

The IDJC workshop brought together a number of representatives from Tribal Nations from across the United States as well as an unprecedented number of CIRD Resource Team Members. Tribal Secretary Chantel Comardelle successfully curated an interdisciplinary network of experts and professionals in Native American lifeways, design, architecture, museum studies, and climate-sensitive planning. The national network established through this workshop has the potential to become a recognized advisory team for Tribal communities facing climate-induced resettlement across the country. The group is also anticipated to advocate for increased inter-agency cooperation in order to provide a simplified, "one-stop" resource of information and support for communities coping with the complexity and challenges of resettlement.

Developing a Model for Climate-Induced Resettlement

As mentioned above, several other coastal Tribal communities will be facing resettlement in the near future. The model developed for the IDJC Tribe will serve as a national model that will guide government agencies and communities through the resettlement process. This model, as noted below, will be founded upon sensitivity and respect toward Tribal lifeways and culture.

Respecting the Tribal Approach to Land Settlement

Deep relationship with the land is sacred to Tribal lifeways. The workshop was a critical step in building the Tribe's relationship with their new home by firmly establishing a community-driven, place-oriented approach to planning and design. Indeed, the Tribal approach to land settlement is significantly different from the common contemporary approach to land use planning; before any decisions can be made, it is crucial for the Tribe to have the opportunity to spend time on their new land, to engage with the land through traditional practices, and to explore and study it in order to understand the ways in which they can interact with it. This process will position the Tribe as the client, the beneficiary, the owner and caretaker of the land; members of the Tribe alone have the true understanding of their needs, the needs of the land, and how they regeneratively support and nurture one another.

Implementing with Incremental Development

While many ideas had previously been generated and goals articulated for the Tribal Center facilities, the workshop exercises were geared specifically to challenge Tribal members to prioritize their needs by outlining phasing, feasibility, design parameters, and opportunities for leveraging existing human, financial, and technical resources. The finances allocated to the resettlement constitute approximately half of the necessary funds for full realization of the Tribe's vision; therefore, the design and planning process must allow for incremental development of the new site. This way, immediate needs will be met with currently available funds, while further resources will need to be leveraged in order to enable long-term implementation.

Becoming the Best Possible Client and Project Steward

Tribal members recognize the importance of being able to develop, articulate, present, promote, and steward a cogent vision for their community throughout the entire State-facilitated design and build process. To this end, the Tribe must work to answer a number of key questions, which will impact and shape the design process. In doing so, Tribal leaders will improve their capacity to engage and interact effectively and successfully with the selected architects and designers. Furthermore, in solidifying and clarifying their needs and preferences, Tribal members will enhance their ability to assess prospective design teams, and will be positioned to play and active role in selecting the professionals

charged with designing their new home.

Throughout the workshop, resource team members identified specific issues from their respective professional perspectives, and charged the tribal members and elders with formulating answers and resolving these issues as soon as possible, including, for example:

- What are the needs of Tribal members and families that must be accommodated in housing units? For example, how can the housing design accommodate attic storage while ensuring resistance of roofs to extreme weather conditions? Additionally, what needs to be included in the housing design in order to address accessibility challenges that imposed by elevated entrances?

- Will the Tribal Center facilities serve the Tribe solely, or will it be open to the public? How does the Tribe envision the balance between building its core community strength vis-a-vis sharing its wealth of culture and knowledge with others? One consideration in addressing this issue is if and how the facilities can become a source of economic revenue for the Tribe.

Embracing the Positive

The process of accessing and utilizing federal funds is a lengthy one, and can be confusing and alien for communities. The timeline for the identification of the Tribe's new land and purchase of the property has been significantly delayed, and is thus taking longer than the Tribe had initially anticipated. While some Tribal members see this as a source of frustration and disappointment, and a threat to the cohesion of the Tribe, others expressed their appreciation that these delays do in fact afford them the valuable time and opportunity necessary to co-create a unified and comprehensive plan for their community. Resource Team Members encouraged the Tribe to take full advantage of this lag time to learn deeply about the design process, to engage with a core ensemble of colleagues, to continue to build a platform for partnerships, and to solidify a support system for ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Culminating Discussion with Joseph Kunkel

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Design

Design conversations focused on three general themes: identification of infrastructural needs, layout of uses throughout space, and incorporation of cultural principles through symbolic physical attributes. The design considerations identified during these conversations are as follows:

Infrastructure

- Sustainable infrastructure priorities include: LEED building standards; permeability for natural light; sustainable stormwater management; adequate storage space; flexibility of space; and elevated base heights in order to ensure resilience in extreme weather conditions. This elevation would have the added value of providing space beneath buildings for outdoor social and educational gatherings and programs.
- The entrances to the Powwow area and community center should face east.
- Buildings should be designed to encourage indoor-outdoor connections, both visually and spatially. For example, the Cultural Center should include a porch area for indoor activities to spill out, or to be held outdoors in appropriate weather.
- Social seating should be provided throughout the community, to encourage spontaneous gathering and learning opportunities.

Uses and Layout

- The layout would need to ensure easy access to key facilities, such as the health clinic and outdoor green spaces. This would require assessment of building locations as well as mobility networks.
- All facilities must be in harmony with the natural landscape, and feature strong indoor-outdoor connections as noted above.
- Commercially zoned spaces would would tie traditional and cultural practices to economic revenue, leveraging assets in order to generate economic sustainability of the Tribal Center and for the community at large. There is a strong preference to have commercial spaces face outward, in order to be accessible to the general population, which would in turn contribute to the economic viability of Tribal businesses.
- The community center should be the most visibly prominent element upon entering the settlement.
- All elements should be designed for flexibility of use, and uses should be clustered rather than segregated; for example, develop the powwow space in the center of a field that could be used for sports and recreation, combine the worship center and the museum, and incorporate programs for Elders and youth together.

Cultural Symbols

- Physical manifestation of cultural principles serve to re-engage and grow the Tribal community and to sustain cultural heritage, especially considering the diaspora of many members of the community brought about by rising waters.
- Ideas included an organized seafood market and a community kitchen, where the Tribe could serve farm- and bayou-to-table style food.
- Materials from the Island -- plants, trees, and elements from existing structures -- could be utilized in construction of the Tribal Center, in order to instill a direct connection to the island at first glance. The museum, too, will be inspired by the island, so that from floor to ceiling it will be an immersive experience that instills a feeling of the island. This may include an illustration or physical representation of the journey toward resettlement.

Programming

Programming on site must include both cultural and economic elements. First and foremost, the following points must be developed further, and agreed upon internally among Tribal members:

- Identify economic opportunities that are both sustainable and culturally appropriate, building on the expertise and traditional ecological knowledge of the Tribe;
- Identify Tribal traditions that need to be maintained and sustained, and develop programs to strengthen those elements;
- Consider different ways by which the Tribal Center might serve the neighbors of the resettlement site, and how interaction with neighbors may contribute to the success and sustainability of the Tribal community. Evaluate the need to strengthen and protect the core of the Tribal community vis-a-vis the value in sharing Tribal knowledge with non-Tribal members.

Economic revenue, cultural reinvigoration, and community life were identified as key goals of programming; cultural exchange may also become one, depending on the Tribe's decisions regarding Item 3 above. Programs to meet these goals include:

- Educational programs that teach the Tribal approach to land and place, and of cultural ways of knowing;
- Reinstating regular Powwows;
- Recreational activities, such as sports;
- Agriculture, permaculture, gardening, and phenology;
- Crabbing and fishing;
- Community media initiatives;
- Inclusive uses of the health clinic, beyond health care, such as programs that promote active living, health education, and community support groups;
- Job trainings for Tribal members;
- The market as an economic driver and place to sell traditional Tribal products and foodstuffs;
- Facility rental for outside programs;
- Live-work programs to engage with outside volunteers, especially students, who may be interested in helping with maintenance of facilities and programs.

Resources

Conversations regarding resources resulted in a number of recommendations for key partnerships, opportunities, and approaches, including:

- Acquisition of funding for design, construction, and maintenance of facilities beyond the existing available funds;
- To this end, map out resourcing plans and potential funding sources by component; for example, target the USDA for agricultural funding, or various placemaking grants for multiuse outdoor spaces;
- Development of income-generating programming, as described above, by leveraging activities, facilities, cultural products, foodstuffs, etc.;
- Pursuit of key partnerships with private donors, foundations, and grant organizations, as well as universities and other organizations that may augment financial resources with human capital;
- Create and manage an inventory of the assets, knowledge, skills, talents and expertise of Tribal members, including the areas of construction, plumbing and electrical, gardening, landscaping, etc.;
- Strengthening and pursuit of further collaborations with other Tribes as sources of knowledge, information, and experience.

NEXT STEPS

1. Advocate for a Comprehensive Community-Driven Process

The Highlights and Themes above point to the need for a unique, contextual, and culturally sensitive planning process. In particular, the Tribe is requesting that a number of criteria be incorporated into the design and planning RFP disseminated by the State of Louisiana. The RFP must significantly relate to traditional Tribal values of place and approach to land settlement, including the opportunity for the Tribe to experience the site before solidifying design or planning approaches, followed by an incremental, phased implementation. The RFP should require the selected design team to be highly flexible, and in continuous collaboration and contact with Tribal representatives. This incorporation of Traditional Tribal Knowledge into the State-facilitated planning and design process is crucial in supporting the Tribe's self-reliance, in respecting their knowledge of their own needs, and in establishing their ownership of their own resources.

2. Data Compilation

Organize the data collected and presented thus far regarding each element of the Tribal center. This data will be used to communicate internally with Tribal members, as well as to navigate the State RFP process and guide the design team hired to develop the resettlement plan. Accordingly, the data must be clearly and concisely summarized using language that is accessible to a broad audience.

3. Data Evaluation and Enhancement

Evaluate existing data and identify any missing information, including, for example, the actual demand for each use, more specific functions needed for each space, and any other key factors that will affect design and programming decisions, as noted in Section 3 above. Identify which of these missing items can be addressed by the Tribe, and which will require assistance from partners and outside resources.

4. Establishment of Focused Task Forces

Organize focus groups assigned to refine each element as noted in Item 1. Each group will include IDJC Tribal members and respective outside experts. For example, focus groups may hone in on cultural elements, health and access to food, education, or sustainable design. Each group will include interested Tribal representatives as well as identified partners who have experience in the development of Tribal museums and cultural centers.

5. Process Development for Incremental Implementation

Information produced by Tasks Forces in accordance with Item 4 should be synthesized, together with the findings presented in this document, in order to best prioritize the phases of design and programming development and implementation. By establishing such a concrete, prioritized work plan, the Tribe will be best positioned to specify which physical elements will be addressed by the State RFP, and to subsequently tackle each phase of the resettlement process when funding opportunities become available.

In addition, existing initiatives, from which the Tribe can learn about incremental development processes and project management,should be identified. Contact would then be pursued with respective agents, including:
New Orleans City Park Officials who developed a system, post-Katrina, for prioritization and implementation of smaller projects that fit into a broader redevelopment strategy. Upon receiving available funds, the bulk of the planning work had been completed, such that implementation could be initiated immediately.
Representatives from the Coushatta Tribe, who have have established their own Digital Archive.
The State Archive Department may be able to provide guidance for designing a documentation method.

6. Nurture the Network

Continue to build and maintain an interdisciplinary advisory network of Tribal members, academics, design professionals, foundations, nonprofits, and governmental agencies. Compile a database to actively track skills and assets of all network associations in order to best navigate and allocate human resources.

APPENDIX

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Chief Albert Naquin, IDJC
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Dominic Naquin, IDJC
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