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### Times-Picayune

#### New Orleans master plan wins approval of City Planning Commission

January 26, 2010

By **Bruce Egler**

After 18 months and \$2 million of work, **New Orleans' long-awaited master plan** won final approval Tuesday from the City Planning Commission.

The commission passed the more-than-500-page "**Plan for the 21st Century: New Orleans 2030**" 7-0 with little discussion.

According to the City Charter, the document now goes to the City Council for action. The charter says the council will have 90 days to review and vote on the plan. If it wants any changes made, the document must go back to the commission for further review.

However, state law says it is the planning commission's responsibility to "make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the municipality," suggesting that the commission's vote Tuesday was the final action needed to make the plan official. To resolve the issue, the commission will ask Attorney General Buddy Caldwell for an opinion on whether the council or the commission "has ultimate authority" to adopt the plan.

Meanwhile, work will continue on a new zoning ordinance that will spell out how the principles in the master plan will apply to 250,000 individual parcels of land in the city. The old zoning law, passed in the early 1970s and amended hundreds of times, is so complex, confusing and outdated that experts have said for many years it needed replacement.

The City Charter for decades has mandated adoption of a master plan to guide the city's long-term development, but such a document was never completed. That changed after Hurricane Katrina. The city allocated \$2 million of recovery money to create a plan, and Goody Clancy, a Boston planning firm, was hired to lead the effort.

In 2008, voters **amended the City Charter** to give the yet-to-be-written plan the force of law, meaning that all zoning and land-use decisions must conform to it. The charter amendment also, for the first time, required the city to create "a system for organized and effective neighborhood participation" in decisions that affect residents' quality of life.

David Dixon of Goody Clancy said adoption of the master plan means that "for the first time New Orleans has a plan that provides a credible and legitimate basis for future public policy and decision-making regarding land use, development, zoning, city capital expenditures, transportation, and similar fundamental decisions that shape the city's future."

The plan's top priorities, he said, "include aggressive city leadership in redeveloping 60,000 vacant and blighted lots; in creating a public-private partnership with the capacity and resources to diversify the city's economy; and in advocating strategies to protect the city and the region from the impacts of rising seas and global weather change."

Dixon also said the plan's "development and urban design recommendations make clear that the persistent debate between preservation and innovation is meaningless by demonstrating that New Orleans' cultural heritage is its most potent weapon in attracting investment and talent."

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