

FEMA Adopts Key AIA Recommendations on Katrina Housing

A year after Hurricane Katrina, there is movement at both the federal and local levels to assist displaced Gulf Coast residents. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recently announced new AIA-sponsored guidelines to address transitional housing concerns. To help residents who lost their homes entirely, FEMA plans to create an alternative housing pilot program for the Gulf Coast region based on the requirements in H.R. 4939, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act. The AIA lobbied heavily in support of the \$400-million bill, and the language mirrors several recommendations outlined in a June letter from AIA EVP/CEO Christine McEntee to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff.

Highlights of the DHS and FEMA Alternative Housing Pilot Program

The FEMA Alternative Housing Pilot Program:

- Favors context-sensitive housing that reflects consideration of transportation access and civic amenities
- Recognizes the need to consider energy efficiency and historic preservation
- Acknowledges the need to take into account the unique hazards of coastal flooding and wind as well as conformity to the local building codes
- Specifically calls for meeting the needs of persons with disabilities
- Advocates for housing of a design and style that will have a positive social impact on the community and the evolution of community social structures.

FEMA will use the \$400 million funding for projects that create transitional

modular housing for hurricane victims with improved hurricane resistance and can be constructed quickly using prefabricated panelized walls. The initial concept is based on architect-designed "Katrina cottages," which can withstand 140-mph winds, resulting in a more comfortable, and affordable alternative to a trailer.

The initial concept is based on architect-designed "Katrina cottages," which can withstand 140-mph wind.

"In the immediate aftermath of the hurricane devastation, the AIA warned of the problems associated with relying too heavily on temporary trailers to accommodate displaced residents," says Tom Wolfe, senior director, AIA Federal Affairs. "A rebuilding effort of this magnitude demands that careful attention be paid to sound, long-term planning and design elements that emphasize the highest building codes to protect against future natural disasters, not merely supplying the easiest shelter option available."

AIA 10 Principles of Livable Communities

Because temporary housing can end up lasting far longer than initially anticipated, recommendations include using certain community design elements [www.aia.org/liv_principles] to guide the rebuilding program. The AIA is working to ensure that rebuilding officials make certain that rebuilding efforts address public safety issues;

adhere to strict building codes; and provide access to public transportation, retail, recreation, and worship facilities in areas that will use transitional housing solutions.

"We are encouraged that the federal government has supplied strong funding to support this undertaking and that FEMA is receptive to: rebuilding concerns for the preservation of the historic architectural landscape, the need for environmentally conscious design principles, and local professionals being employed to create sustainable communities that pay respect to the rich heritage of the Gulf Coast," Wolfe says.

FEMA and DHS's Office of Grants and Training will administer the program. Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, and Florida will then submit applications to address the housing needs in their jurisdictions. FEMA will use a selection committee composed of government representatives and a broad cross-section of housing experts, including, they say, "private sector and not-for-profit organizations with housing policy, architectural, and construction expertise" to evaluate proposals and make recommendations to the department for awards.

AIA New Orleans hosts conference

In addition, AIA New Orleans is organizing a Housing Summit September 29 and 30 to help educate homeowners on how to rebuild and restore their homes properly, as well as advise them on ways to spend wisely the monies for which they became eligible through the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant Program.

Reference:

Read the *AIA Angle* [www.aia.org/angle] for more Government Advocacy news on hurricane rebuilding and other federal, state, and local topics that affect you and your practice.