

September 11, 2008

Councilmember-At-Large Arnie Fielkow
City Hall, 1300 Perdido St. Rm. 2W40
New Orleans, LA 70112

Dear Arnie,

Thank you for your leadership and presence throughout the Gustav evacuation and re-entry.

In order to help the city leadership prepare for the next evacuation and re-entry, I have collected feedback from local business owners on the phased re-entry plans following mandatory evacuation. I would be happy to brief the full city council in greater detail on the perspective of this very important constituency, New Orleans' small local businesses.

I queried registered business owners on staylocal.org about their experiences with the tiered re-entry system. Specifically, I asked what they knew about the phased re-entry system prior to Gustav and if they thought the tiered system would expedite their re-entry and business re-opening after future mandatory evacuations.

Business owners representing a variety of industries and geographic locations responded constructively. Most had no prior knowledge of the phased re-entry system or availability of placards. One who had heard about it prior to Gustav did not apply, assuming that her business was not eligible. Based on the description of the tiers many if not most of the approximately 1000 Orleans-based local business registered on staylocal.org would not have met the minimum 20-employee threshold to apply for Tier 3 (repopulation) status.

Below are specific comments from a cross-section of business types and locations throughout the parish. I have removed their business names, but can supply that information upon request. I am confident they would welcome the opportunity to provide additional feedback to the City to make evacuation and subsequent re-entry and return to normal delivery of services even more workable for New Orleans' local business owners.

Please let me know when and how best to request a place on the agenda to bring the concerns of New Orleans' local businesses to the full City Council. I can be reached at dana@staylocal.org or by phone at 232-7821.

Sincerely,

Dana Eness, Executive Director
The Urban Conservancy
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Phased Re-Entry Feedback from New Orleans' Local Businesses

Collected by Stay Local! September 2008

Case 1: Restaurant, Magazine Street

We had no idea there was a tiered system for reentry. And, now that I do, I'm not sure we would qualify for early readmittance as we are not a "major" employer.

That doesn't really make sense to me to put that limitation. Obviously, it is critical for us to resume business for the viability of our business. And, the city needs its small restaurants, especially after a storm when people have lost the contents of their refrigerators and are looking for places to eat. Our friends who own a deli stayed in the city and reopened right away. Their deli was a mob scene for days as it was the only place open. We would have come back Tuesday, but were waiting for the go ahead from the Mayor.

I think there is a clear need for small businesses to be included in the early part of allowing people back into the city.

Case 2: Business-to-Business Provider, Mid-City

As for the re-entry deal. I remember receiving something months ago talking about a meeting to get the credentials. At the time it sounded a bit time consuming and confusing so I didn't pay it much attention.

As I watched the check points shown on the news from my hotel in Jackson Ms. my initial thoughts were that New Orleans is missing the point once again. The surrounding parishes were letting all residents back in and New Orleans was creating a traffic jam checking papers to get back into the city. We are falling behind in the friendly competition with our parish neighbors. They appeared to move quicker and more efficiently than N.O. on every front. Thanks again.

Case 3: Wireless Internet Service Provider, CBD

I am not sure who created the reentry plan but it is a great concept. For a small hurricane such as Gustav I really do not see a great need for it. For a hurricane that causes more damage it would be a real benefit though. It would also be nice to see more businesses invest in generators so that they could get their businesses open faster in a Katrina type scenario. I have a Tier1R which is good for all the parishes because I am also a wireless internet service provider. I have microwave antennas on top of the only data center in the cbd that did not go down for Katrina. The old enron center. 650 poydras st. I could have delivered all the internet and phone service that city hall could use but the state police would not let me through the roadblocks. It was very frustrating and then finally one of them let me through. After that I was determined to make sure they put some type of plan in place to prevent that from happening again for future hurricanes. I think Tim with homeland security got the ball rolling. I am glad to see people are talking about this now in New Orleans. Many business people in Metairie have them. New Orleans did not make it known to businesses for some reason. Not sure about the thresholds or how that works. I know they are pretty serious about the tier 1 which is good because they need to keep the roads open for out of town entergy workers and other emergency workers.

Case 4: Restaurant, Mid-City

I would love to find out and understand this mysterious "Tiered" re-entry with placards, which seem to be only for people in some secret club. Do you have any insight into these and how business owners obtain them? I actually found the link on the city website and registered for a placard. don't know if this will happen before Ike...

Case 5: Regional Lumber Supplier, New Orleans East

We are a regional supplier serving the multi parish area and if we cannot meet our customers' expectations they will go elsewhere – outside of Orleans Parish. When I was doing the commute from Baton Rouge to New

Orleans after Katrina I often rode behind out of town lumber trucks delivering product to our city while we were operating under restricted hours and without power/water. I bet those out of towners were not collecting sales tax and they are not part of the property tax base as well. We have been here for sixty-two years and wish to stay but the challenges are enormous.

Case 6: Curbside Recycling Service (Citywide)

We are really dependent on our customers putting material out, so I'd say we would be a tier 3 (lowest, right?). On the other hand, if we were able to open a center, which we would love to do, but lack the funding, we could go in as a tier 2, assuming we had building debris recycling, haz mat, and were in a position to lend a hand with cleanup - we will have garbage trucks, so can chip in. (maybe tier 1 to help clear roads?) What are the garbage haulers?

We have 13 employees and need about 3 more.

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