

## New Urbanist-Style Architect Sets His Sights on New Orleans

By THADDEUS HERRICK  
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NEW ORLEANS -- Architect Andres Duany, perhaps best known for the Florida resort community of Seaside, is seeking to establish a post-Hurricane Katrina beachhead in New Orleans.

"New Orleans is the planning Super Bowl," Mr. Duany told several hundred residents who gathered at a local church last Thursday evening to discuss the rebuilding of the city's Gentilly neighborhood, an area largely devoid of people since the storm.

The Miami-based planning and architecture firm Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. has been among the most aggressive in the push to rebuild after Katrina, holding meetings with officials along the Gulf Coast as early as last October.

Yesterday Mr. Duany, 56 years old, concluded a week of workshops in Gentilly, which he said offers a microcosm of New Orleans. Mr. Duany came to New Orleans at the invitation of a neighborhood group and at his firm's expense, along with dozens of other planners and architects who adhere to the New Urbanist vision of more traditional, pedestrian-friendly cities.

Mr. Duany wants the lead role. He proposes rebuilding Gentilly in a way that will incorporate a mix of residential, retail and commercial uses. Among potential projects that sparked interest: the conversion of a strip mall into a town center, a system of public squares and the transformation of a business park into a high-density workplace.

But some local architects say a New Urbanist New Orleans would undermine the history and the character of the city. Ultimately, Mr. Duany's plans may rest on his ability to generate a cohesive post-Katrina vision for New Orleans -- an imposing task considering the city's size. Even then, his proposals may cost considerably more than locals have -- or care to -- spend.

Mr. Duany is undeterred. "The question," he told residents last week, "is whether you want to go back to Aug. 28 [before Katrina struck] or into the 21st century?"

In parts of hurricane-ravaged Mississippi, some officials have embraced New Urbanist concepts, among them regional rail and the transformation of the main coastal road into a beachfront boulevard. Mr. Duany has won some support in earlier brainstorming sessions in Louisiana.

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