

By ERIC CORMIER
AMERICAN PRESS

Hurricane Rita may have done something that time, people and good intentions never could.

"Cities move slowly, but the storm awakened people. Crisis always does," said internationally known planner Andres Duany. "And great things are possible. And with a great awakening comes the dislodging of money."

Before a packed room at the Lakefront Hotel on Monday, Duany outlined the benefits of downtown development and the actions his team of consultants will undertake in the coming days.

Duany, of Duany Plater-Zyberk Architects and Town Planners, was hired by the Louisiana Recovery Authority to work with leaders and residents in creating long-term building plans for Lake Charles, Abbeville and Arabi, areas affected by hurricanes last year.

The consultants are spending several days in Lake Charles.

"We inherited studies and plans put together prior to the hurricanes," Duany said. "Don't despair; this isn't one more process where nothing will happen."

His staff will incorporate a number of plans already made by the city.

"Everything you tell us, we will draw it," he said. "We will see if ideas are good, and the bad ideas will be made clearer."

Duany said young people want downtowns and that such areas make cities grow.

"And yours has great possibilities. There is a shore next to a body of water," he said.

"It is on a highway which provides economic energy. And the city blocks are 400 by 400 feet, which is excellent for parking and walking."

During the meeting, presentations were made about downtown development in San Diego and at the River Ranch in Lafayette.

"Central Texas, Utah and San Diego have all used plans such as these to set up for the high-stakes competition of the 21st century," Duany said.

Residents are encouraged to attend sessions anytime from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. through Saturday at the Lakefront Hotel, 505 N. Lakeshore Drive.