

# Buffalo Bayou and Beyond

**Visions** 

**Strategies** 

**Actions** 

for the 21st Century



"...the backbone of a park system for Houston will naturally be its bayou or creek valleys, which readily lend themselves to 'parking,' and cannot so advantageously be used for any other purpose. These valleys intersect the city in such a way as to furnish opportunity for parks of unusual value within a comparatively short distance of most residential areas..."

ARTHUR COLEMAN COMEY Landscape Architect Planning Report of 1913 for the Houston Park Commission

# **Buffalo Bayou's Central Role in Houston's Past and Future**

Buffalo Bayou has been a focal point in Houston's history since the Allen brothers founded the City in 1836. Houston's early success was driven by the Bayou's commerce. When coastal shipping was eclipsed by the railroads a century ago, port cities such as Galveston were bypassed. Anticipating this trend, Houston reinvented itself as one of the world's great 20th century ports of call.

Today, Houston is once again poised to reinvent itself as a great 21st century world center — with Buffalo Bayou as the focal point for its development and livability.



Houston in 1891 was a city defined and sustained by Buffalo Bayou at its center. District street patterns responded to local alignments with the Bayou edge.













Buffalo Bayou and Beyond builds upon one of Houston's greatest traditions and competitive advantages — the willingness of citizens to pull together to overcome virtually any obstacle to create great results for their city. The Plan also builds on the substantial achievements of the **Buffalo Bayou Partnership, a non-profit** organization founded in 1986 to oversee beautification and development activities for Houston's historic waterway. In the past six years alone, the Partnership has raised and leveraged over \$40 million in public and private funds for Buffalo Bayou's improvements and currently is facilitating nearly \$50 million in landscape enhancements.

Over the past 18 months, hundreds of committed citizens, business leaders and neighborhood residents have participated in major workshops, focus group meetings and design sessions to share their dreams and to build consensus for the waterway's future. *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond* is a people's plan, developed by Houstonians with a vision for Buffalo Bayou and a deep concern for the future of their city.

What many competitive cities have is a central, regional-scale amenity that helps to create a vivid impression of the place and that offers tangible opportunities for recreation, urban living, entertainment, and urbanity. Buffalo Bayou offers such promise for Houston.

# **Great Cities Have Great Waterfronts**

Successful 21st century cities will be those that attract and retain creative entrepreneurial people who drive knowledge-based industries – the new global economy. As this global economy shifts from moving goods to generating ideas, great cities are renewing themselves along their waterfronts – New York's Harbor, Chicago's Lakefront, Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Barcelona's seafront, and London's Docklands.

Because of these global shifts in the competitive value system, it is the moment to reevaluate ecological and urban goals, to rejoin land and water, and to establish an identity for Houston extolling the harmony of its built and natural environment. This 21st century outlook establishes the Buffalo Bayou Master Plan's theme — Balancing Conservation and Development.

# **An Integrated Regional Plan**

By balancing conservation and development, the Buffalo Bayou Master Plan invites Houstonians to explore, with renewed perspective, a deeper relationship between nature and the city. The Plan maintains that nature is not a decorative ornament, but an essential system. Buffalo Bayou's restoration will build value into Houston's urban economy; it will build a better quality of life to sustain and attract residents, celebrating the landscapes, wetlands and waterways beautifully integrated throughout the city.

Multiplicity and connectivity are other concepts incorporated into the Buffalo Bayou Master Plan.

Conserving unbuilt land within cities must serve multiple purposes — recreation, flood management and erosion control. Developing land must integrate diverse urban functions efficiently. With both conservation and development, the plan connects wildlife habitat and people-populated places.

The principles can be reinforced by conscientious planning for land connectivity, for urban connectivity through space networks and centers, and social connectivity through lively and interactive gathering places, both built and natural.

# Planning Strategies

- Rehabilitate the Bayou as an Ecologically Functional System
- Increase Floodwater Conveyance Capacity
- **Promote Low-impact Development**
- **Improve Visibility of the Bayou**
- **Ensure Equity of Access**
- Increase Residential Opportunities Downtown
- Maintain Affordability
- **Create New Jobs and Revenue**
- Promote Joint Public-Private Development

### Proposed Financial Strategy

The Buffalo Bayou Master Plan anticipates \$5.6 billion of private investment in the Buffalo Bayou District over the next 20 years. Public investment is estimated at \$800 million (hard costs only) over this period. A five-pronged approach is recommended to finance Buffalo Bayou's revitalization:

- Use general obligation bonds backed by incremental new fiscal revenue associated with the investment anticipated within the corridor.
- Seek funding from the Harris County Flood Control District through a special Congressional appropriation for those major improvements related to flood management.
- Mount a campaign to generate intergovernmental funds from an array of federal and state sources, including both existing and special appropriations.
- Create a new public improvement district and/or expand the responsibilities of existing management districts, funded by a special assessment on real property in the corridor to fund ongoing management, supplemental services, and maintenance.
- Employ a regional assessment earmarked for bayou-related infrastructure, park improvements and land acquisition. This longterm strategy also would include broad-based funding for other bayous and parks throughout Houston, and would be coordinated with other civic groups.

### The Plan's Benefits

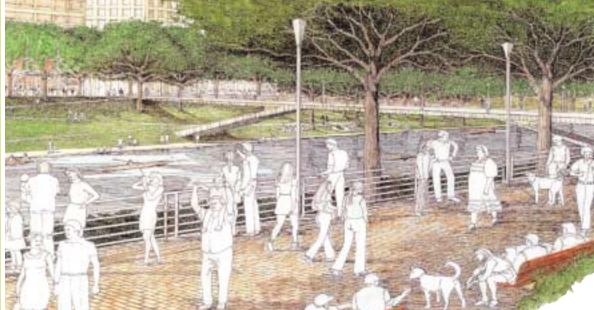
- Greater Regional Competitiveness
- Enhanced Property Values
- Reduced Future Flood Impacts
- Increased Support for Public Transit
- Increased Tourism and Visitation
- Enhanced Quality of Life for Residents and an Attractive Focus for New Jobs and Housing



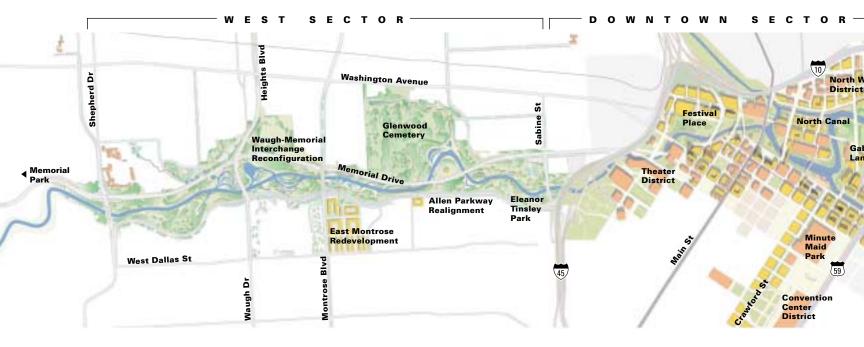
As with many of the world's great urban waterways, the North Canal will be designed to accommodate cafes, places for watching new water-based events, and other pedestrian activities.



Envisioned as a new mixed-use community, the East End's Richardson Place provides opportunities for varying densities of low-impact residential development flanking a wide, tree-lined pedestrian mall.



As a major new entertainment center and northern terminus to the Crawford Street "Super Boulevard," Gable Street Landing provides an inviting link between Buffalo Bayou's waterfront and the Convention Center District.



# A New Urban Core Focused on Buffalo Bayou

Houston's challenge is to revitalize both the Buffalo Bayou corridor and surrounding urban setting, creating a unified Buffalo Bayou District where nature is an integral part of a new urban vitality. This revitalization presents a unique opportunity to rediscover the waterway as a powerful impetus for high-quality urban development. Buffalo Bayou and Beyond proposes new destinations and development sites that will transform Houston's neglected waterfront into an active and vibrant center, enriching the lives of its residents and attracting visitors from throughout the region and beyond.

# Landscape Plan

The Landscape Plan looks to the remarkable rewards of reclaiming Buffalo Bayou as a recreational resource. By providing continuous public access, integrating landscape amenities with flood management infrastructure, and encouraging boating and other public uses, the Landscape Plan will transform the Bayou's image — from polluted industrial channel to vibrant community destination.

# Landscape Plan Project Initiatives

- Add 850 acres of new park land to create a linked park system connecting Memorial Park to the Turning Basin.
- Create continuous publicly-accessible Bayou bank edges.
- Integrate landscape amenities and urban design elements with flood management infrastructure.
- Integrate neighborhoods in the park system through "Green Streets."
- Connect to metropolitan and regional greenway networks.
- Build 14 new and expanded boat landings.
- Offer excursion boat services.

# **Access and Transportation Plan**

Houston is a city that relies primarily on automobile transportation. As the Buffalo Bayou District grows and evolves over the next 20 years, it will be important to evaluate current transportation priorities against changing demographics and land use imperatives. Enhanced public transit will be important to ensure convenient access to work, residential and recreational destinations for Buffalo Bayou District residents and all Houstonians.

### Access and Transportation Plan Project Initiatives

- Remove/reconstruct bridges that negatively impede floodwater flow.
- Upgrade East End boulevards and improve modes of transit along these corridors.
- Reclaim underutilized roadways to create new urban park space.
- Improve access to Bayou landings, coordinated with parking provisions.
- Extend hike and bike trails along both sides of the Bayou.



Richardson Place offers residential and other mixed-use development opportunities.

# Environmental Quality and the Eco Region Plan

Buffalo Bayou is a significant resource for Houston, but one seriously impacted by environmental problems. Very little native wildlife has survived, water quality is poor, Bayou banks suffer from severe erosion, and brownfields are extensive throughout the corridor. The Environmental Plan will create environmentally rich ecosystems that are integrated into a regional system of open space improvements. Minimizing flood impacts, improving water quality, and increasing wildlife habitat will be key efforts in attracting people to Buffalo Bayou.

## Environmental Plan Project Initiatives

- Create "Green Fingers" to detain, filter and cleanse stormwater.
- Reduce erosion by stabilizing bayou embankments.
- Coordinate trash cleanup program.
- Convert brownfields to parks.
- Promote the use of low-impact development techniques.
- Expand and create wildlife habitat areas.
- Initiate demonstration projects to test long-term impacts of Bayou-related improvements.
- Develop a regional Eco-Park to expand rehabilitation efforts beyond Buffalo Bayou.

(guidelines-based) encompasses the entire 10-square-mile project area. Development within the overall district will be regulated not by zoning or land use regulations, but by district-specific guidelines. These guidelines are intended to promote the intentions of the Master Plan through low-impact development responsive to and focused on the Bayou.

### WaterView District

(project-based) includes nearly 500 acres and is the mixed-use center of the Buffalo Bayou District, opening the bayou edge to the city. A set of key project sites has been identified for joint public-private development. Local area plans or Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) will be required to create these neighborhoods.

# Flood Management Plan

Frequent flooding of the bayous in Houston's urban core often results in substantial property damage and sometimes loss of life. The impacts of Tropical Storm Allison in 2001 have brought a sense of urgency to the long-felt need to address problems that have contributed to flood damage.

## Flood Management Project Initiatives

- Improve downtown floodwater flow carried by Buffalo and White Oak bayous by creating supplementary canals.
- Consolidate bridge crossings to reduce impedance to the flow of floodwater.
- Increase Buffalo Bayou conveyance capacity along critical reaches, particularly from Allen's Landing to McKee Street.

# Balancing Conservation and Development



## A Steering Committee, comprised of representatives from constituent communities and funders of the plan, guided the Buffalo Bayou master planning process.

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