Buffalo Bayou Plans

Ann Olson, President of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership will be the featured speaker at the next meeting of the North Montrose Civic Association. Created in 1986, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership is a coalition of civic, environmental, governmental and business representatives whose director nominees are confirmed by the Mayor of Houston and Harris County Judge. The 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation is transforming and revitalizing Buffalo Bayou, Houston’s greatest natural resource.

For one quarter century, BBP has been actively pursuing plans and programs for a 10-mile stretch of Buffalo Bayou. Directed by the Buffalo Bayou and Beyond Master Plan, over the past 15 years alone the organization has raised and leveraged more than $80 million for Buffalo Bayou’s revitalization. The organization’s major accomplishments include: Sesquicentennial Park ($23 million), Allen’s Landing ($4 million), Sabine Promenade ($12 million), hike and bike trails ($2 million and a $2 million pledge), and land acquisition for the future creation of parks and open space ($20 million - 45 acres).

Buffalo Bayou Park Enhancements – 2011 - 2015

Through the establishment of a strong public-private partnership led by the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP), the City of Houston and Harris County Flood Control District, with catalyst funding from Houston’s Kinder Foundation, a major enhancement project is underway to improve aesthetic and recreational opportunities along the Shepherd to Sabine segment of Buffalo Bayou while simultaneously regaining the waterway’s flood conveyance capacity and environmental qualities. The comprehensive park enhancements are slated to begin in mid-2012. Harris County Flood Control District is planning to coordinate with these enhancements as it restores the bayou channel in a manner similar to its recent work upstream of the Sabine Street Bridge. The overall project is scheduled for completion in mid-2015.

STREET WATCH

♦️ Regent’s Square Project is set to make big announcement in May; rumors are that a high rise residential being planned as first building
♦️ Hanover Square Apartments at West Gray and Montrose—construction in progress
♦️ Finger Development Midrise, West Dallas—construction Spring 2012
♦️ New townhome construction: 1400 block of Crocker, 300 & 600 block of Bell. 300 Block of Pierce, 300 block of Saulner, 1400 Block of Taft, 1400 Block of Stanford, & 1200 Block of Peveto
McKinsey & Company is a leader of urban strategies world-wide. Scott Nyquist along with Associate Ms. Shannon Bouton, summarized the results of the McKinsey Global Institute’s (MGI) analysis of the 600 leading cities, which account for over 60% of the world’s GDP. Today, over half the world’s population is living and working in cities. The dynamics of the global economy is “urban,” driven by fierce competition between metropolitan regions, with strong central cities energizing productivity and innovation. MGI analyzed these cities, 2010 to 2030, in terms of population growth, productivity (GDP/capita the leading indicator), environmental quality, and increase in social capital (quality of life).

**Recommendations made for the City of Houston moving forward are:**

1. **Grow the City tax base** – the highest priority. Attracting investment in commerce and real estate should be the highest priority for the Mayor’s office and the local business community.

2. **Economic Development Strategy** – An “Economic Development Task Force,” appointed by the Mayor, is needed to make recommendations for a competitive, pro-active economic development program, leading to a professionally-staffed Houston Economic Development Corporation, with a reliable source of funding, and a high level executive board, appropriate for the nation’s 4th largest city.

3. **Develop Exciting Urban Districts – to Appeal to the “Creative Class”** – The city needs vibrant, walkable, transit-served urban districts appealing the “creative class,” a growing and diverse group of young professionals, who want to live and work in an exciting urban environment. This means more compact, well-planned, higher density, mixed-use, urban districts in key inner city locations, and diverse, revitalized traditional neighborhoods. With its culture and entertainment, strong employment base, expanding rail transit, the central city is in a unique position to attract the “creative class.”

4. **Vision, Planning and Guiding Principles** – Houston seems to lack a clear vision for the future. Build consensus for a long-term City vision and its role in the metro region. This will require a new level of urban planning, with a set of “guiding principles” to achieve economic, environmental and social sustainability. Better coordination of policies and programs between cities, counties and H-GAC is essential.

5. **Increase the City’s Share of Regional Growth** – From 2000 to 2010, the City’s share of regional population declined from 44% to 36%. Over 92% of the population growth was in the suburbs, outside the City limits. As a primary goal, increase the City’s share of regional population and job growth, reversing current trends. To compete, the City must offer a competitive environment to the suburbs in terms of jobs, economic opportunities, neighborhood and family life, security, schools and urban amenities. This will require the creative use of “Rebuild Houston” infrastructure funds.

6. **Address Poverty and Income Disparities** – The widening income gap, high poverty rates, loss of the middle class, high youth unemployment, high drop-out rates, poor community health, and a growing underclass, should be addressed with coordinated programs in education, youth activities, public health, new business incentives, job training and employment services.

7. **Attract and Retain the Middle Class** – The exodus to the suburbs leaves the City with Dr. Stephen Klineberg’s “hour-glass economy” – a few wealthy at the top, a disappearing middle class, and a growing underclass. Concentrated revitalization strategies are needed to transform older areas into attractive mixed-income neighborhoods with local businesses and jobs. This means safe streets, better inner-city schools, expanded rail transit, crime and poverty reduction, and plenty of neighborhood amenities.

8. **A Greener City** – Although progress is being made, in terms of green building and use of renewable energy, a truly sustainable City should be addressed through better planning, regulations, and transit expansion. Key measures are reduction of our high “carbon footprint,” excessive car dependence, flooding, air and water pollution, and low waste recycling rates of 15-20%.

9. **Smarter Government** – McKinsey’s experience working with cities around the world, suggests that Houston can achieve greater governmental efficiency, doing more with less, by implementing “best-practices,” deploying innovative technologies, embracing innovation, and successful private-sector management practices. The focus should be better urban planning, improved financial management, a strong talent pool, smart services delivery, and pro-active economic development. Increased densities are needed to make the delivery of municipal services more efficient. [The City has to drive a garbage truck 2.5 times further than in LA to service one household].

[Study first appeared in Better Houston.org February 2012, A Community Forum]

What’s your vision for North Montrose, the city and the greater Houston area? Go to northmontrose.com and post your comments on our “Visions” blog.
District C “CIP” Meeting

Houston officials, including Mayor Annise Parker, heard a laundry list of questions, complaints and suggestions from District C residents at the first of 11 public meetings to receive community input on how the city should prioritize its capital improvements projects.

The crowd of about 150 people voiced concerns that ranged from the long-awaited youth Center in Freedom’s Town to drainage on Richmond to sidewalk accessibility around the district.

The city uses its 3-1-1 phone system, FEMA flood claims, and a street surface assessment vehicle, which can also read any inconsistencies below street surfaces, to evaluate and find potential projects for improvement, Dale Ruddick, head of the ReBuild Houston initiative, said.

ReBuild Houston is the city’s pay-as-you go program for capital improvements. Under it, capital projects will be paid for by new drainage fees, while debt will be paid by existing sources of funding, such as ad valorem taxes.

“The purpose of the meeting is to make sure we know what your concerns are”

DISTRICT C CITY COUNCIL MEMBER ELLEN COHEN

Proposed Congressional Redistricting for Montrose Likely to Bring in “Old” New Rep

U.S. Rep. Ted Poe (R-Texas District 2) is “coming back” to represent Inner Loop Houston, as he puts it -- his district redrawn in new maps released by federal judges Tuesday to include Montrose, Rice University, the Museum District and the Texas Medical Center, and parts of the Washington Avenue-Memorial Park area, The Heights, and a sliver of River Oaks.

In doing so, Poe loses the expansive rural parts of his district in Liberty and Jefferson counties, to have his entire constituency in Harris County.

The move of District 2 to inside the Loop takes that portion out of U.S. Rep. John Culberson’s District 7. Bellaire and West University remain in Culberson’s district, but communities east of Kirby Drive will most likely will now be represented by Poe.
The Houston Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas is one of the more impressive buildings that line Allen Parkway. The distinctive building was constructed in 2006 and designed by architect Michael Graves. The Houston Branch serves as a cash depository for area banks and as a center for economic research and education. The annual report on the Houston business economy can be found by going to http://www.dallasfed.org/research/houston/2012/hb1201.pdf

The Federal Reserve System has three functions: to conduct the nation’s monetary policy, to provide and maintain effective and efficient payment system; and to supervise and regular banking operations.

In addition to these monetary duties the Houston branch also serves as an art gallery and safeguard depository for a contemporary collection of prominent Houston artists. The works of Aaron Parazette, Janaki Lennie, Leamon Green, Karin Booker, Al Souza, Ellen Francis Tuchman, Dixie Firend Gay and Billie Mercer are located in the banks public spaces.

In a 2006 article about the collection, Nicole Laurent, former Civic Arts and Design Project Manager for the Cultural Arts Council wrote that “the art primarily address three things: the mission of the Federal Reserve, the showcasing of Houston’s diversity through local and regional artists, and the honoring and acknowledgement of a wide variety of mediums.”

Tours are conducted by appointment at 10 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. To schedule a tour complete the following form http://www.dallasfed.org/fed/tours_hou.cfm

The U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials on passed thru North Montrose as do may other fund raising runs

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Visit the North Montrose Civic Association Website
www.northmontrose.com

The North Montrose Civic Association was formed over 25 years ago to promote civic affairs in the neighborhood. NMCA is a non-profit organization that depends on voluntary membership and participation. Our borders are north/south between Allen Parkway and W. Gray/Peden and east/west between Shepherd and Taft. We encourage you to become a member and help shape the future of North Montrose. Membership forms are on our website.