

A Vision for the Houston Region

A Future Houston Region

Our 21st-Century community has become a smart system reaching for the future without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs and desires. Our technologies are efficient, self-regulating, and benign. We live harmoniously, working toward fairness in education, opportunity, and wealth.

We possess knowledge, human capital, economic goods, and natural resources. We use these to sustain us through many generations in our journey to the future. Our most valuable assets are our new generations - who are the future - and our elderly, who possess our wisdom and are our champions and pioneers.

Houston is a crossroads of culture and commerce for the Americas, the gateway to space for all people.

Our air and water are clean, we are healthier than we have ever been, and we have improved the health of our rich ecosystem.

Our Living Conditions

We live in a rich, vibrant environment with many convenient green spaces, some of which are relatively wild.

Our air and water are cleaner than the minimums required by government regulations. Our air and water goals are health-based.

Our many waterways have been returned to a natural state and support many forms of recreation and wildlife. Streams and ponds link all parts of the area, cooling and cleaning the air, providing places to hold flood waters.

The eight-county region is a web of thousands of livable urban and suburban village centers with diverse housing and employment opportunities.

We have many pockets of self-sufficient communities where people can walk or bike to work and to the grocery store and local restaurants. Most of us work, shop, and go to school near our homes.

Our central city is the primary entertainment

and cultural center for the region, and the Central Business District has many dense and active residential areas as well.

We have learned the incredible complexity of our unique ecosystem, and we have protected and improved the prairies, forests, waterways, marshlands, and particularly the spectacular Galveston Bay system. We no longer allow loss of wetlands.

“The world will not evolve past its current state of crisis by using the same thinking that created the situation.”

— Albert Einstein

We have learned to use our resources for commerce, recreation, and spiritual regeneration in ways that will sustain them for future generations.

We no longer discharge waste into these areas or use them as dumping sites.

We value our trees for all their health effects, cooling, and esthetic contributions. Destroying healthy trees requires community approval.

We have developed a significant local agriculture including thousands of community gardens using benign techniques to grow food, flowers, and other vegetation.

We have fierce pride in the appearance of our communities. Trash is rarely seen on roads or in parks, and public bins allow recycling of paper, plastic, steel, glass, and aluminum.

Transportation systems have become clean and safe. The area is increasingly less dominated by parking lots, roads, and other amenities for automobiles.

Building codes require attention to energy use and albedo (reflectivity), which has significantly reduced temperatures and air pollution.

Attention to scale has made things much more human, comfortable, and manageable. All wires have been placed underground.

Our Community

We are one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse regions on the planet, and as a result our lives are rich and creative.

We are a magnet. People want to live here because it is comfortable (not concrete hot), the region is green, clean, and friendly, and there are challenging employment opportunities with diverse and interesting places to live.

Sustainability, efficiency, sufficiency, justice, equity, and community are high social values.

The majority of the people in our extended community understand that air, water, land, animals, and plants are part of our survival and must be considered in all decisions.

We know our neighbors and together we take care of our neighborhoods.

Our public officials are smart and caring, and try to lead us toward a community that enables all of us to live safely and to find fulfillment in the work we do. These officials are honest, respectful, and more interested in doing their jobs than in keeping their jobs.

Note: This document was developed by a Vision Working Group of the Foresight Project's Air Quality Task Force. The statement has its own life, independent of the Foresight Project, but has been submitted as a draft for consideration. It is not necessarily a reflection of the direction or work of the Foresight Project

After looking at plans and ideas in use in other cities, it became clear that the discussion of clean air needs to take place in the context of a vision of what we, as a community, want the Houston area to be. The encompassing “vision”, and the more loosely collected list of specific ways in which members of the group could envision Houston in the future, are meant to energize discussions about the region.

Although the members of the group had differing perspectives on some of the specifics, all agreed that continuing to do what the area has been doing is not going to get us where we want to go. Comments and expansions are welcome at issues@gulfcoastideas.org or by mail at Gulf Coast Institute, 2001 Kirby Suite 515, Houston TX 77019. Vers. 2 2/14/00

Everybody has access to good education and the option of college or specialized training.

The focus of public health has shifted to prevention. Everyone has access to good basic medical care without regard to ability to pay. There are no homeless people in our region.

Transportation

World-class, high-speed, zero-emission rail systems connect us with Austin, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Galveston, and San Antonio. These vehicles have laptop hookups, business services, dining facilities, reclining chairs, reading lights, playrooms.

Our regional activity centers are linked by modern, comfortable rapid transit systems with some of the same amenities as the inter-city transport.

Increasingly, we move around by means of fast, quiet public transportation that is free of pollution. We have generally stopped the building and widening of roads.

Small, more personal rapid transit systems provide easy movement within and near activity centers.

All public transit is fast, safe, reliable, and convenient.

All personal vehicles and local delivery vehicles are pollution free. Benign or renewable energy sources are abundant and widespread.

Bikeways and pathways link centers as well as waterways, parks, and historical areas.

Freeways and industrial areas are surrounded by greenbelts, without billboards.

Our Economy

We are the crossroads of commerce for the Americas, and through NASA we are the bridge to the stars.

We are the world center for energy development and marketing and lead the world in developing non-polluting or low-polluting sources of energy.

Our companies have developed renewable energy sources into profitable systems to provide all our energy. Houston is teaching the world to use non-renewable fossil resources efficiently to produce products and to stop burning those resources.

Our famed medical center is the largest on earth and provides cutting edge research and applications in a multitude of disciplines.

Because of our enormous concentration of chemical and medical expertise, we have developed a new pharmaceutical industry.

The dream of traveling to other planets is being realized through NASA.

Our port, rail, and road systems allow rapid transport of goods on the continent and around the world.

The Ship Channel is a model port lined with greenbelts, where tugs and other vessels are non-polluting and use renewable sources of energy and safe, triple-hulled ships ply the waters. There are many cruise ships.

Our colleges and universities now produce adequate numbers of highly educated citizens and we have stopped the long brain drain from the area.

Our fishing industry has been resurrected.

New commerce is examined with care to determine whether it will bring harm.

Our businesses are run by our neighbors, who share and understand a desire to have an exciting, pleasant, and healthy community for ourselves, our children, and our parents. Cost/benefit studies now include depletion of resources, health effects, and remedial costs.

Corporate leaders who seek smart, capable employees are in the forefront of efforts to improve education and health.

Construction is now based on design principles that work within our particular climate and geophysical characteristics, not those of Boston or New York.

Our media reflect the world's diversity and at the same time bind together our cultures with relevant, accurate, timely, unbiased, and intelligent information, set into its historic and whole-system context.

Our political, corporate, and social leadership all understand and practice the application of a sustainable economy and the region is a model of eco-effectiveness.

There is emphasis on sufficiency, equity, and

quality of life, rather than quantity of output. Our economy is a means, not an end, and serves the welfare of the community and the environment, rather than demanding that the community and environment serve it.

Our work is among our passions, not something we have to do against our will just to survive. We all do something that benefits one community or another without harming any.

Our work dignifies us, rather than demeans us. Our lives have meaning. Reasons for living and for thinking well of oneself do not require the accumulation of material things.

Industrial Processes

Our industries have embraced the concept that waste is profit lost. By utilizing waste products and food products for other industrial processes, we are approaching zero waste and a truly viable industrial ecology.

Our industries are now sited to enhance by-product synergy.

Because our industries have learned to design their processes in a way that produces no emissions - and thus no regulation - they are able to compete successfully with unregulated foreign companies. Regulations are now understood as symptoms of design failure.

All companies and all facilities operate under the same set of rules; there are no "grandfathered" facilities exempted from rules.

We no longer bury "technical nutrients", but bury only biological nutrients that will biodegrade as food for natural processes. Technical nutrients like chemicals and plastics are reused within industrial processes.

Growth now supports itself and does not require public subsidies.

We are approaching zero refuse in all areas, including trash, toxics, excess heat, and other emissions.

Vision Working Group:

David Crossley, Winnie Hamilton, Miriam Heller, Doug Lipka, Deborah Martin, Mary Jane Naquin, Janet Redeker. First published October 27, 1998.

Our Assets in the Year 2000

The Gulf of Mexico.

Galveston Bay and all the economic and recreational opportunities that it holds.

Many natural rivers, bayou, creeks, and streams coursing through the region.

The confluence of a complex ecosystem with prairies, forests, marshes, and coastal plain.

A lush, semitropical environment with green growth, trees, flowers, and the attendant wildlife.

A location within the major migratory routes for birds and butterflies as they fly between Canada and South America.

A warm, generous, and energetic population.

A wealth of diversity in skin color, language, religion, and a general appreciation that this diversity is one of our greatest strengths.

A strong industrial base with phenomenal expertise and capital in energy, health, computers, pharmaceuticals, and other fields.

The brainpower of NASA, our petrochemical complex, our medical complex, our transportation complex.

Our universities, including the University of Houston, Rice, TSU, HCC (largest community college in the nation), UT Health Science Center, Baylor College of Medicine, and more.

A vibrant, gifted, and unpredictable community of artists.

World-class symphony, opera, ballet, theater, and other formal art forms, including our many museums.

A wide range of diverse and affordable housing. [Is this a current asset, or a vision?