

The full set of audience questions from the Q&A session Land Use in Houston: Two Different Approaches

Sponsored by The Gulf Coast Institute, Houstonians for Responsible Growth, Blueprint Houston, Greater Houston Partnership, & Urban Land Institute - Houston

George R. Brown Convention Center
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Joshua Sanders and Kendall Miller – both with Houstonians for Responsible Growth – and Jay Blazek Crossley – with the Gulf Coast Institute – collected the questions that audience members wrote on index cards to give to the speakers. Jay picked three questions and Josh and Kendall picked three questions, but Bob Eury did not have time to present them all to the panel. We have attempted to leave all of these questions as they were on the cards without correcting grammar or spelling and leaving in the punctuation found on the card, except that things in all caps were not preserved as all caps.

Questions chosen by the Gulf Coast Institute:

"Given that we will have 3.5 million new Houstonians by 2030, don't we need both higher density close to town and more effective planning?"

"Since it has been demonstrated that housing prices in Dallas & Atlanta are similar to Houston, can we assume that you all agree that planning at their levels is desirable?"

The following question was not asked:

"What is the big worry about NOT having a plan? What (gasp! Heaven Forbid!) would happen without a Plan?"

Questions chosen by Houstonians for Responsible Growth:

"Why do some think planners are smarter than the market? Should we require types of development that the market does not support?"

"Everything Dr. Nelson explained appears to be possible and can take place simply as market need arise without form-based growth plans or city incentives, so what is the benefit for Houstonians of form-based growth plans especially since such growth plans may incorrectly project future market needs?"

The following question was not asked:

"Comment: Where are the politicians? Are they in the audience? Question: If David Crossley in 1960 had zoned Houston with his form based zoning, we would not have the Galleria, Greenway

Plaza, Uptown, Midtown, (They would still be single family residential. Can Crossley and pro zoning Councilman Peter Brown really predict the future?"

The person who was serving as the runner inadvertently picked up this question from an audience member and handed it directly to Bob, who asked it of the entire panel. We were very relieved it didn't happen to be a crazy question.

"How can we improve the quality of air and water and the cleanliness of Houston, preserve parks, and green spaces?"

The rest of the questions and comments that were collected:

"According to HGAC's 2025 RTP, Houston growth will be due to a large and sustained growth in the mining industry (oil and gas). That growth is being driven by an increase in demand for cheap energy. Over the long haul our dependence upon oil is not sustainable. Wendell Cox's pointing out that all of the rest of the world is moving to the suburbs is scary. Where will the energy come from for suburbs in India or China?"

"Based upon the multiple views that our panelists shared, it sounds like multi-use developments are the one thing we can all agree would be good for our future here in Houston. What will it take to get our community activists on the same side as developers and the business community on such projects?"

"Former Mayor Lanier is a developer who lives in a high-rise and made his money by knowing a priori where development will occur. Of course he wants to sustain developer friendly government. He has not had the pleasure of having his property values decimated by a poorly placed development. If a family invests in a 30 year mortgage why can't they expect that the city will protect their investment? Their quality of life?"

"Could you please compare levels of poverty in Portland Oregon and Houston. How would you compare levels of poverty between Los Angeles and Houston? Relate this to the assertion that planning increases/impacts poverty."

"Mayor Bob—Where do you get the idea that tolls are not taxes?"

"With a desire by both sides for higher density, walkable neighborhoods, and more transit use, why can't our politicians and planners take the heat when such projects are proposed?"

"Great examples of 'Smart Growth' are being developed all over our suburbs in master-planned communities without the regs."

"What are HFRG's thoughts on Floodway Ordinance Ch. 19.43?"

"Katy house—Where would one work? Environmental cost?
San Diego—Climate—land cost; no, reg. does not impact it!
Houston has(can't read) to address problems--?...zoning."

“There is a lack of transportation in Houston. TXDOT is out of funds and there is no mass transit on the horizon. How will this effect the growth of Houston? Will there be more business centers created in Houston due to this? If yes, where do you anticipate these to be?”

“Is housing affordability defined as a % of person’s (family’s) disposable/after tax/ gross/adj gross income”

“The biggest issue facing Houston is air quality. How should/could effective planning address air quality? We are currently non-compliant with federal Clean Air Act for 8-hour ozone—with no prospects for compliance.”

“Is any land use regulation acceptable and desired? Examples used by Speaker 2 showing 11x multiples were primarily Cal. Cities—and we all know Cal. Is overregulated at all levels by environmentalists, liberals & no growth proponents. Contrast another Texas city, San Antonio, which has zoning, historical preservation districts, etc., yet a 3x multiple. Would like thoughts on both sides.”

“Mr. Crossley,

Has written that perhaps the only way to attract to Houston the ‘creative class’ is to cram them on top of each other in dense developments (that means up)

Please challenge Mr. Crossley with this”

“Question to second speaker: (not Windel)

You seem to be promoting high-rise conotoctions for housing. You compared early in your presentation to Paris suburb development. However, France is currently discussing tearing down its high rise in poorer aera as it created dangerous neighborhood/atmosphere. How do you think those high rise building could respond to lower average household needs?”

“How do we educate Houstonians to embrace this transformation—and bring them to downtown?—and ride the metros—so we too enjoy the values (example: Manhattan, Chicago, Atlanta)? Outdoor living, tourism!”

“‘You can’t duck growth.’ Yet reckless, unchecked, never-ending growth is not a good thing. There are too many humans on the planet right now. Where is the research on what would motivate Houstonians to produce fewer humans?”

“Although Houston’s housing prices are some of the lowest in the nation, our transportation costs are the highest. Many households spend more on transportation than on housing. How do we balance this discrepancy?”

“To: Wendell Cox

You assume that Smart Growth strategies require land use controls and are not compatible with sub-urban development. If mixed-use, clustered development would be accomplished through infrastructure planning and without land use control, would you still be opposed to

Smart Growth strategies? What if Smart Growth strategies could improve air quality and water quality sufficiently to meet existing environmental regulations?"

"In a Blueprint Houston flyer from several years ago, the NYC island of Manhattan was shown superimposed over the Main Street light rail corridor. Is the vision of Blueprint Houston to change Houston into another Manhattan?"

"Why isn't the cost of infrastructure i.e. roads, utilities, police, fire, etc. included in the cost of what appear to be very low cost suburban homes?"

"Mr. Nelson

The redevelopment of strip centers is very difficult economically because of long term retail leases such as supermarkets, discount stores"

"Your figures for 'price' growth have not taken into consideration that, indeed, most of the increases in housing and other prices denominated in dollars, has been directly attributable to the rampant devaluation of the U.S. dollar via Federal Reserve Inflation. 1950 \$1 is now worth about 8 cents."

"National Planning

Free Market wins

Every step in the wrong direction is a step in the wrong direction

One more step may be too many

If you stop we are all safe.

Government leads they miss

Market Leads things turn out

Government can follow"

"Life in the big city"