

# A Vision for Houston

## A Future Houston

Our 21st-Century urban community has become a self-organizing system reaching for the future without compromising our ability to meet our needs and desires. Our technologies are efficient, self-regulating, and benign. We live harmoniously, reducing disparities 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 the globe. Our air and water are clean, we are healthier than we have ever been, and we have improved the health of our unusual 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.

Asthma and other respiratory problems are at levels found in distant rural communities.

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

The eight-county region has become a webbed metropolis, with education, commerce, and service areas spaced across the web.

The development of livable urban centers with diverse housing alternatives has stopped the spread of urban sprawl. Most of us live near our workplaces.

We have many pockets of self-sufficient communities where people walk to work and to the grocery store and local restaurants. Our central city is the primary entertainment

and cultural center for the region, and has become a residential area as well.

We have learned the incredible complexity of our unique ecosystem, and we have protected the prairies, forests, waterways, marshlands, and particularly the spectacular Galveston Bay system. We now use these areas for recreation and spiritual regeneration, rather

all of us to live safely and to find our own fulfillment in the work we do. These officials are honest, respectful, and more interested in doing their jobs than in keeping their jobs.

All residents have access to a good education and the option of college or other specialized training.

All have access to good basic medical care without regard to ability to pay.

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

— Albert Einstein

than using them for private profit or as dumping sites for our wastes.

Destroying healthy trees requires community approval. We no longer allow loss of wetlands.

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, glass, and aluminum.

The area is no longer dominated by parking lots, roads, and other amenities for automobiles.

Building codes require attention to albedo, which has significantly reduced temperatures and air pollution.

The scale of everything is much more human, comfortable, and manageable. All wires have been moved underground.

## Our Community

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

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.

Our public officials are smart and caring, and try to lead us toward a community that enables

## Transportation

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

Our regional communities are also 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 stopped the building and widening of roads.

*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 [sense@mediaplace.com](mailto:sense@mediaplace.com) or by mail at CEC, 3015 Richmond, Suite 270, Houston TX 77098. Acrobat PDF versions are available at [www.mediaplace.com/vision](http://www.mediaplace.com/vision). 10/27/98*

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

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

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

We are a magnet. People want to come 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.

### **Our Economy**

We are the bridge to the stars and the crossroads of commerce for the Americas. The dream of inhabiting other planets is being realized through NASA. Our port, road, and rail systems encourage rapid transport of goods on the continent and around the world.

The Ship Channel is a model “green” 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 famed medical center is the largest on earth and provides cutting edge research and applications in a multitude of disciplines. Because of the enormous concentration of chemical and medical expertise, we have developed a new pharmaceutical industry.

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

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 large-scale profitable systems to provide all our energy. Houston is teaching the world not to burn non-renewable fossil resources, but instead to use them efficiently to produce products.

We no longer use chemical fertilizers or pesticides, so our waterways and Gulf are clean and our fishing industry has been resurrected.

Our businesses are run by our neighbors, who

share and understand the desire to have an exciting, pleasant, and healthy community for ourselves, our children, and our parents. New commercial ideas are examined with care to determine whether they will bring harm.

Cost/benefit studies now include depletion of resources, health effects, and remedial costs.

Corporate leaders 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 the cultures of the world 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.

We live in a sustainable economy with an emphasis on sufficiency, equity, and quality of life, rather than quantity of output.

Our economy is a means, not an end, and now 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.

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

### **Our Assets**

Several natural bayou systems coursing through the region.

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

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, computers, pharmaceuticals, and other products.

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

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

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 affordable housing.

---

### **Vision Working Group:**

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