

MASTER PLAN for BUFFALO BAYOU and BEYOND

AUGUST 2002



PREPARED FOR:

BUFFALO BAYOU PARTNERSHIP
CITY OF HOUSTON
HARRIS COUNTY
HARRIS COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT

BY

THOMPSON DESIGN GROUP INC. / EcoPLAN



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August 20, 2002

Anne Olson, President
Buffalo Bayou Partnership
1113 Vine Street, Suite 200
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Dear Ms. Olson:

Buffalo Bayou has played a vital role in our city since its founding in 1836. Today, the Bayou can once again serve as a catalyst for new economic and cultural growth. The Buffalo Bayou Master Plan offers a compelling vision and solid framework for converting abandoned and underutilized waterfront property into a vibrant waterfront - alive with new residential neighborhoods, cultural destinations, commercial development and outdoor recreation. As a result, our city will experience increased tourism, employment and economic prosperity. Most importantly, the Buffalo Bayou waterfront will unite residents and visitors alike in discovering all that Houston has to offer.

As with past Buffalo Bayou development efforts, the city of Houston, Harris County and Buffalo Bayou Partnership will form a strong public-private partnership to implement the master plan's recommendations. Together, with significant collaboration with the business, civic organizations and the philanthropic community, we can transform Buffalo Bayou from marginal use and neglect into a position of public activity and private investment.

Sincerely,

Lee P. Brown
Mayor

Council Members: Bruce Tatro, Carol M. Galloway, Mark Goldberg, Ada Edwards, Addie Waisman, Mark A. Ellis, Bert Riefer, Gabriel Vasquez, Carol Alvarado, Annise D. Parker, Gordon Guan, Shelley Sekula-Rodriguez, M.D., Michael Berry, Carol G. Robinson, Controller: Sylvia R. Garcia



ROBERT ECKELS
COUNTY JUDGE

August 27, 2002

Harris County is proud to play a role in the development of Buffalo Bayou. The County has been a long-time partner and supporter of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership's effort to plan, coordinate, and complete amenities along Buffalo Bayou, creating an outstanding asset for our community. The Buffalo Bayou Master Plan, developed by Thompson Design Group/ EcoPLAN, incorporates already completed elements into a comprehensive long-range plan that will create an active and vibrant destination for Harris County residents and visitors.

In addition to trails, parks, and recreational and commercial opportunities from Downtown through the East End, an important element of the Master Plan is flood management. Harris County anticipates working with the City of Houston and Buffalo Bayou Partnership to implement the recommendations in the plan that will help to reduce the potential for flooding in Downtown and in the upstream communities bordering on Buffalo and White Oak bayous.

As Harris County Judge, I am pleased to offer my support for the Buffalo Bayou Master Plan and to provide my assistance in bringing it to fruition.

Robert Eckels
County Judge, Harris County, Texas



August 21, 2002

Buffalo Bayou is Houston's oldest feature and greatest natural resource. It is a reflection of our city's history and its rich diversity, a place where all residents can find a common meeting ground. Houston was founded on Buffalo Bayou's banks in the 19th century, was reinvented by the dredging of the Bayou for an inland port in the 20th century, and now in the 21st century, Houston once again can be transformed by making Buffalo Bayou a central element in the life of the city.

It is not surprising that official photos of Houston often depict our dramatic skyline with Buffalo Bayou in the foreground. The juxtaposition suggests a balance of nature with commerce. And, indeed, balancing environmental stewardship, economic development, and community integrity is the hallmark of the *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond* Master Plan. Houston will have a lively waterfront, a 10-mile linear park to anchor the city and to create an iconic sense of place. Within this pedestrian-oriented corridor the plan proposes 850 acres of new parkland, an expanded cultural and residential district rich in entertainment and retail opportunities, and major floodwater conveyance improvements. Prime mixed-use development sites are identified, neighborhoods are linked to the Bayou by greenways, and the Bayou is in turn linked to the larger ecosystem of our region. It is a vision that evolved out of community workshops. Participants recognized that bold solutions were needed to address quality of life concerns, to preserve natural resources for future generations, and for Houston to remain competitive in the 21st century.

Buffalo Bayou and Beyond has been co-sponsored by the City of Houston, Harris County, and Harris County Flood Control District. Our thanks go to the enlightened leadership of our co-sponsors, to our funding partners, and to the many individuals, civic groups, and governmental representatives who came together to share their thoughts and visions for the Bayou. The consultant team has listened, assimilated, tested and given cohesive form to those ideas. The result is an ambitious and visionary conceptual plan to guide us over the next two decades. It will require a continuing partnership of civic and political leadership to refine and implement the concepts. By working together to realize the vision, we can make "the Bayou City" a sobriquet that invokes pride for all Houstonians.

Toni Beauchamp
Chair, Board of Directors
Buffalo Bayou Partnership

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PREFACE

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The 2002 Master Plan, “Buffalo Bayou and Beyond,” is sponsored by Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP), and representatives of Harris County, Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) and the City of Houston. The Plan builds upon one of Houston’s great 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 since its founding in 1986 to improve Buffalo Bayou, and change the way Houstonians see and appreciate this waterway. During an 18-month planning process, hundreds of concerned citizens, business leaders, and residents of adjacent neighborhoods were heard from and listened to. In a sense, this really is a people’s plan, developed by Houstonians with a vision for the Bayou and a deep concern for the future of this city.

Mandate for a Master Plan

This Plan stands on the broad shoulders of Houston citizen groups who facilitated previous farseeing Bayou enhancement proposals. In 1986, the Buffalo Bayou Task Force issued conceptual recommendations about Bayou preservation and improvement, which were themselves a reevaluation of earlier plans by Charles Tapley Associates (1980-81). The report recommended new public amenities in conjunction with needed flood and erosion control improvements.

Both studies built on the philosophical foundation of Arthur Coleman Comey’s Planning Report of 1913 for the Houston Park Commission. Comey envisioned a linear park system along the city’s waterways, foreseeing that “its bayous or creek valleys intersect the city and surrounding country to furnish opportunity for parks of unusual value within a short distance of most residential areas, those of the future as well as the present.”

The Challenge Now

In its Request for Proposals in November 2000, seeking a new Master Plan for Buffalo Bayou, the BBP set forth specific objectives for the west sector, Downtown sector, and east sector. Each agenda was built on revitalization efforts and initiatives already underway, signaling the active and latent energies ready to be coordinated and harnessed to meet the next larger objective. That objective is defining the Buffalo Bayou's 10-mile waterway corridor as a restored park system that joins land and water to become the green heart of Houston. It is the opportunity to "put the Bayou back in Bayou City," with an important new waterfront presence to unite Houston with its past in all its diversity.

The Master Plan team, in conjunction with the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, has framed the Master Plan to combine these spheres: rehabilitation of the waterway's utilitarian functions as part of ecological systems and improved water conveyance capacity, redevelopment of scenic, leisure, and recreational resources, and economic revitalization of neighborhoods around the Bayou, to yield a humane city with nature integrated with new urban vitality.

Today's goals have been summarized as "Balancing Conservation and Development." That goal is being pursued by integrating past and current planning proposals, reviewing ideas already in circulation about Houston's future and its examination of Quality of Life issues; by coordinating the Master Plan with development projects in progress throughout the three sectors; and by integrating the recommendations defined by three major stakeholder workshops and countless focus group sessions.

From those platforms, the Master Plan Team has articulated visions to be realized in the foreseeable future, and strategies by which vision may be accomplished. Translated into specific plans, these ideas are presented in chapters addressing urban development and design, environmental quality and the eco-region, flood management, landscape, Bayou access and transportation, and water-based activities. The Report then addresses financing, implementation, and

strategic considerations guiding development of this unique 10-mile district containing 6400 acres of potential new uses and pleasures.

Buffalo Bayou Partnership and the team want to express appreciation to the project's co-sponsors, Harris County and the City of Houston; to the Steering Committee and Board of Directors of Buffalo Bayou Partnership, to the continuing collegial collaboration of Central Houston and the guiding council of the Greater Houston Partnership. The many organizations and individuals that have sustained this effort with interest and ideas are recognized in the Credits list.

The Master Plan team commends the many participants for devoted and detailed contributions to the planning process, and extends special appreciation to the sponsoring Buffalo Bayou Partnership for inviting us to participate in this visioning of the Next Houston.

Jane Thompson, AICP
for the Master Plan Team
Thompson Design Group, Inc./EcoPLAN



OVERVIEW

SHAPING THE NEXT HOUSTON

This report summarizes an 18-month process to prepare a new long-range Master Plan for Buffalo Bayou. It calls for Buffalo Bayou's transformation. In a larger sense, it also calls for Houston's transformation, by refocusing the City on the waterway that gave birth to it. This proposal is both a citywide and a regional vision.

The plan identifies ways that Buffalo Bayou can become a central feature in the life of the City and of every Houstonian. It sets forth specific proposals to:

- Create 850 acres of new park land that will transform the Bayou into a recreational and scenic focal point for Houston;
- Define key sites that will make the Bayou a focal point for greater Houston's future development;
- Reduce potential for flooding in Downtown Houston and upstream communities bordering on Buffalo and White Oak Bayous;
- Build a network of trails and public sites to promote access to the Bayou, and to reconnect communities to their waterway;
- Reclaim former industrial sites and repair damaged environmental resources to make Buffalo Bayou a national model;
- Create public access to the Bayou views and edges, from streets, trails, neighborhoods, and all areas of Downtown.

The Bayou's Central Place in Houston's Past and Future

Buffalo Bayou has been a focal point in the Bayou City's history since the Allen Brothers founded Houston as a trading center in 1836. Houston developed because of this water access and the connections it afforded with the USA and the world. The city's early success was driven by commerce made possible by the Bayou. When coastal shipping was eclipsed by the railroads a century ago, other port cities, such as Galveston, were bypassed. Anticipating this trend, in the early 20th century Houston reinvented itself as one of the great entry ports in the world, a center of petrochemical industries, when it transformed the lower reaches of the Bayou into the Houston Ship Channel.

And now, Houston is once again poised to reinvent itself by transforming Buffalo Bayou – this time into a great 21st century world center – with the waterway as focal point for its development and

livability. Through this process, Houston can secure a worldwide reputation for exemplary quality of life, and a stronger, more resilient and more diversified economy less prone to the boom and bust cycles of the mid- and late 20th century. The Bayou will play a central role in this new image and economy, as Houston's great "iconic" public space – the feature people recall when they think of the "New 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. And they, in turn, will gravitate to places that offer the best quality of life. That special quality is now associated with nature and urbanism, and urbanism in nature.

Throughout America, people are heading for cities. About 80 percent of the U.S. Population now lives in metropolitan regions, and this figure is moving towards 90 percent. Downtowns are the location of choice as they become safer and more desirable places to live. Conversely, as more people occupy and refurbish old urban areas, these naturally become safer, livelier and better served with conveniences and amenities.

Obviously, the livability of cities is the critical factor driving decisions by people and businesses to decide on relocation. That is why, all over the world, great cities are reinventing themselves around their waterfronts. Think of New York's Harbor, Chicago's lakefront, Baltimore's Inner Harbor, San Francisco's Bay, Barcelona's seafont, Paris' Seine riverfront, and London's South Bank and Docklands. As the global economy shifts from moving goods to generating ideas, great cities are rediscovering their under-productive waterfront lands, transforming them from manufacturing, warehousing, and shipping points, to focal points in their new economies: places for living, recreation and new forms of production in the knowledge-based economy. For the same reasons Buffalo Bayou's new role will depend not on its potential to move goods, but rather on its unique potential to attract people and improve Greater Houston's quality of life and leisure. This transformation will change the way Houstonians look at the city and the way the world looks at Houston.

In the next several years, Houston will renew and redefine itself for the next century. Now 'places for people' rank as high on the

economic agenda as 'accommodation of goods'. Because of these global shifts in the competitive value system, this is the moment to recalibrate ecological and urban goals, to rejoin land and water, and to establish an identity for Houston extolling the harmony of its built and natural environments. This 21st-century outlook establishes Houston's Master Plan theme that has emerged as both important and achievable: Balancing Conservation and Development.

Though it is clear that quality of life is a priority issue for Houston's next decade, the words are not yet clearly defined. The question remains: which qualities, what commitments? It implies a search for a city that balances environment, economics, and community – forces that will move it up the lists of most livable cities in the nation. This is without question the ultimate priority concern of this Master Plan.

There are countless steps and decisions along the way to the ultimate goal, which is quality of life for all. To chart that course, the Master Plan team has transformed visions into a strategic plan that foresees many scenarios for utilizing Houston's extraordinary resources, to achieve competitive advantage together with evolving greatness. The peak scenario describes cumulative impacts of multiple projects phased over 5, 15, and 20 years. The scenarios also explain why the Master Plan team has taken a multi-disciplinary approach to fashion a plan for Houston's entire landscape, waterfront and waterway.

A Strategic Plan

This plan is strategic in envisioning specific changes and additions, coordinated in implementable steps to achieve the city's potential for vitality, with the Bayou as its central organizing force. It estimates costs and probable returns at many levels to assess the value and viability of changes. Finally, it lays out key issues in implementing projects in cooperation with a variety of departments and institutions, including principal sponsors of the plan: Harris County, Harris County Flood Control Department, The City of Houston, and Buffalo Bayou Partnership. One might call it a pragmatic plan, as it views ideas and achievement as a continuum, assuring that different steps for different purposes have a reality check – an initial review of feasibility.

Conceptually, this plan recommends creating two major new elements for Houston: 1) A linear park, one mile wide and ten miles long,

containing a usable waterway, with at least half of its 6,400 acres being water-fronting land; 2) A world-class waterfront in a renewed downtown, center of this park. The apex of the plan is the confluence of the Bayou and Main Street/CBD; the park invades the city, and they merge. This city can be a park! Successfully uniting the forces of Houston's dual nature - the natural and the urban – will create a city that the urbanist William H. Whyte termed "The Humane Metropolis."

Environmental and Landscape Features

Rehabilitation of the Bayou – along major stretches of the waterway both west and east, and of the compact urban center and downtown waterfront has been a multi-pronged task. The Master Plan team has worked with a large and varied toolbox. No single stencil applies to downtown revitalization issues and to ecosystem conservation issues, except the shared drive to rebuild and repair. Each of these zones has its own imperative, and these have been observed, without "either/or" choices or weighted judgments. Both exist for their contributions to life, both merit sensitive improvement, and they must coexist harmoniously.

As envisioned, the 10-mile linear park is a system of linked parks, new and existing, along the Bayou from Memorial Park to the Turning Basin. The power of traditional downtown parks is recognized as a prototype of Houston's enhanced greenbelt winding through the entire Bayou corridor. Individual open spaces in all neighborhoods can be linked to larger parks, in a grid of easy connections between linear trails and cross-paths to schools, parks, and neighborhoods.

Enrichment of wildlife habitat will be achieved by widening the flood plain within the Bayou corridor, increasing the surface water area, creating large marshes, connecting habitats to enable species to migrate, and taking a full watershed approach to managing flood volumes and water quality.

It is apparent that filtering of storm water before discharge will improve Bayou water quality, but efforts must expand into a broad-based sanitation campaign, in which citizens both demand and assist in achieving a higher antipollution standard. Bayou embankment stabilization and recreated wetlands, acting as natural filters for runoff throughout the watershed, will restore Buffalo Bayou waters

to a state more acceptable for wildlife. Environmental improvement will also come if car usage is reduced by public transportation integrated with pedestrian links to residential zones. This issue is addressed by proposed transit extensions into development areas.

Achieving a Downtown WaterView District

The Plan envisions a world-class WaterView district stretching from the Post Office site on the west to York Street on the east, flanking both sides of the Bayou. From the Post Office to El Mercado landing, the WaterView district restores the quality of the historic town area, reminding us that Allen's Landing was the first front door to the city. And it can now relive that role as front door, a welcoming center of street-facing shops, galleries, and sidewalk cafes, a place of historic scale, a magnet for city destination seekers. It remains perfectly positioned in its geography (junction of bayous), and its access (head of Main Street Metro Rail) and public activity (Theater District, Arts District, Civic Center). Many of the new potentials along Commerce Street and throughout WaterView will spring from renewed activity around Allen's Landing, a place conveying the same central significance in the city plan that the Allens recognized in choosing their first town site. It is still in the right place!

As envisioned, WaterView describes an area of key relationship to the waterfront. It sets a new downtown mood and scale with its transformation of Commerce Street as a promenade opened along the water edge, with new bank treatments, pedestrian-oriented bridges, and outdoor amphitheaters at both ends – at Gable Street Landing, and at Festival Place (Post Office site). The new focus on an accessible waterfront will pull a regional audience to diverse attractions: cultural events, sporting events, water and street festivities. With the anticipated increase in attendance at Convention Center events, WaterView will become a target destination for national tourist audiences.

Realizing this revival of the old downtown waterfront depends on rationalizing the transportation network, to uncover the Bayou and to make it visible from sidewalks and moving vehicles. Visibility of banks, contours and water flow can be accomplished by road consolidations and some bridge removals that also improve floodwater conveyance. Specific review of I-45 improvements, now under study

by the Texas Department of Transportation, can consider public recommendations to liberate the west edge of Sam Houston Park from the invasive highway structure, whose removal would reveal the original park in its full glory.

Expanding residential capacity in Downtown is key in this revitalization plan. It is supported by a national trend of Americans moving by choice from suburbs back into cities. Houston's residential demand, already ahead of supply, will be a force in future economic development. The growing market for urbane residential choices is already propelling residential activity in and near Downtown.

East and west of Downtown, many undervalued sites will be in demand when the Bayou is perceived as an asset-rich location. This Plan predicts that the north bank of the Greater East End will invite a new wave of economic diversification, offering ample opportunity for high tech facilities, clean technologies and knowledge industries, coming into modern industrial parks planned with nearby housing communities. Extending Metro Rail connections eastward, on both banks, will open up extensive areas of now marginal land. Precedents of major industrial reclamation in the Germany's Ruhr Valley among other places indicate that large-scale land-use recycling brings strong financial returns to both the City and private sector.

Overall, the plan predicts dramatic environmental upgrades with consequent commercial and community benefits and returns. The Bayou corridor has potential to become a national environmental landmark represented both by the restored land and water areas and extension of the larger eco-region as an ecological preserve reaching as far as Galveston Bay.

Addressing the Flood Factor

Immediately following Tropical Storm Allison in June 2001, Harris County Flood Control began a collaborative study with the Master Plan team, to determine the flood management potentials of floodwater conveyance improvements, planned in conjunction with revitalization of the downtown waterway and adjacent areas.

Eight months of testing quantified cumulative benefits from various measures proposed to ease flood water movement, including a canal

diverting White Oak Bayou storm water just above its junction with Buffalo Bayou, and another diverting flow from its east corner at Commerce and Crawford streets to a Jensen Drive outfall, and main channel improvements to Buffalo Bayou from Main Street to the Turning Basin. A reduction of as much as 8.5-feet in flood water levels for a 100-year storm event could be seen at Main Street as a result of these measures. The Plan proposes to create new development spines using these proposed flood control investments to provide benefits measurable by reduced flood damage, and by enhanced City revenues. The tax revenue base will increase from new private investment drawn to land near these amenities.

Implementation

The Plan anticipates expansion of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership's functions and authority to manage intergovernmental funding, to coordinate open space and public improvements, and to package redevelopment opportunities within the proposed Buffalo Bayou and WaterView districts. Design coordination would be applied to building heights, setbacks, street layouts and landscapes within the District, to achieve a strong natural character and identity. Development would still rely primarily on the private sector to respond to investment opportunities created by a series of dramatic public improvements – tapping into that increment of new value added to sustain continued growth, maintenance, and management of the Bayou corridor.

With a Buffalo Bayou District defined and recognized in this plan, integration of proposed improvements in keeping with its vision can be implemented over time. The Partnership's efforts can be directed to coordinating restoration upstream and downstream and helping create Downtown of human scale, with buildings, public places, and dynamic physical environments that are conducive to recreation, socializing, shopping, walking, talking, and people-watching. All in all, the scenario foresees Houston's opportunity to transform the Bayou waterfront into that of a world class eco-city over the next 20 years.

These are the visions and strategies illustrated in the Master Plan for Buffalo Bayou.

BUFFALO BAYOU PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

At the outset of the Master Plan process, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership identified a number of objectives for the project scope area. These were organized by geographic sector and include:

Buffalo Bayou West Sector (West End)
Shepherd Drive to Sabine Street

- Conduct site specific planning to upgrade the greenway – providing for improved landscaping and placement of amenities such as park benches, trash receptacles, public art and decorative lighting.
- Evaluate and assess the bayou's natural setting in relationship to the growing trend of hosting special events and festivals along the bayou's banks.
- Link bayou to adjacent neighborhoods that are experiencing growth.
- Improve access to bayou's banks.

Buffalo Bayou Downtown Sector (Downtown)
Sabine Street to McKee Street

- Establish Buffalo Bayou as one of the unifying urban design element for downtown development projects.
- Identify areas for commercial development
- Secure consensus on whether the bayou should be controlled, as is the San Antonio River.
- Improve access to the downtown waterfront.
- Identify open space and recreational improvements, including bikeways, boating facilities, outdoor performance spaces, and other activities such as a farmer's market.
- Identify specific features that can serve as focal points and signature elements for Buffalo Bayou in downtown.

Buffalo Bayou East Sector (East End)
McKee Street to Port of Houston Turning Basin

The vision outlined in the 1993 Buffalo Bayou East Sector Redevelopment Plan is now becoming a reality. The Plan needs to build on this evolving revitalization along Buffalo Bayou's eastern sector.

- Identify increased opportunities for residential development along the bayou.
- Conduct site specific planning to improve underutilized and undeveloped parks along this bayou segment.
- Link bayou to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Develop ideas for the reuse of historic industrial properties.
- Create signature features and focal points highlighting the unique history of this bayou segment.

PROCESS

CITIZEN INVESTMENT IN CONSENSUS-BASED PLANNING

The Master Plan for Buffalo Bayou has evolved from an intense and multi-staged, yearlong participatory process. Three large consensus-building public workshops were held in March, July, and October 2001. Workshop participants representing neighborhoods, schools, organizations, agencies, and constituencies interested in conservation, recreation, and Houston's development, worked together in groups to identify problems and opportunities for the area and region. Each working-group formulated goals and objectives for the planning area, outlined and sketched plans, and developed and summarized visions for the Bayou and its banks (See Appendix for a list of participants).

Numerous focus group meetings were held with community leaders and implementers throughout the February 2001 to February 2002 planning period. Some issues were raised time and again: long-term and regional concerns, such as Houston's image and quality of life; and short-term and local desires, such as the need for immediate improvements currently missing in downtown life. As stakeholder goals and desires were formulated, simultaneous inputs were solicited from implementation agencies, and issues of long-term coordination between City, County, and private interests were addressed.

STAKEHOLDER GOALS

The consensus envisions a Buffalo Bayou functioning again as a healthy system, restored to its place at the core of Houston's identity and quality of life.

Stakeholders concluded that this larger vision can be achieved by:

- Revitalizing the waterway, Downtown, and all Bayou neighborhoods
- Providing a continuous and safe public amenity, with access for all
- Protecting life and property by managing flood impacts
- Increasing the effective synergy of government and businesses through a lasting public-private partnership

The natural outcome from the achievement of these goals will include:

- Growth in the city's economy with increased job opportunities
- An improved quality of life for Houston's residents
- New businesses and residents attracted to the city
- A new image for Houston as a destination for cultural and ecological tourism



A pre-workshop bus tour visited all areas of the Bayou corridor.



Stakeholders reviewed quality of life issues along the Bayou.



Participants recorded ideas and plans in break-out sessions.



A VIEW FROM THE BAYOU

Scramble down 20 or 30 feet of embankment to reach the water edge, climb into a canoe or flat bottom skimmer, push off, and you enter another world, a nether world of transforming possibilities.

If you launch at mid-Bayou, at Sesquicentennial Park or at Allen's Landing, heading upstream through the West End, you move through caverns framed by highway pylons, on water that soon becomes a shallower winding stream. It is framed by soft banks, alternately green and brown, draped in shaggy brush and weedy grasses beneath toppling tree trunks. You move in a calm silent tunnel, feeling deliciously detached, up the stream that draws ever more intimately around you with clawlike overhanging branches and steep-rising banks, thick with random green. The jungled stream-bed finally narrows and sometimes fades to a thin trickling brook.

Beached, glancing up, you are alone with nature, like an explorer probing the headwaters of the Amazon. But – wait. High in the haze overhead, the outline of a tower breaks through, misty and remote. It must be a false vision – how can a city be so near? You have reached world's end determined to relish this escape from civilized pressures. There in a deep private ravine, who is to say otherwise?

Unkempt and unwelcoming to the eye, Buffalo Bayou becomes a magical waterway carved into the earth over time. It invites you in – deeply in – to touch the stones, sand and soil of the ages, disturbed but not yet destroyed by centuries of urban habitation. It is a river of many moods and abundant memories, and some of its stories are still revealed in soil atop its banks and beneath its waters.

There are almost as many views from the Bayou as there are viewers, each one capturing some of the half-hidden dimensions. If you finally choose to reverse course and to flow eastward, through the city onto the broadening passage to the Gulf, you will discover other secrets. The Bayou remains a force within the City, neglected and misused as a drainage ditch, asserting itself in periodic floods in rebuke for overpaving of flood-prone plains. Yet people are again recognizing this as a uniquely undervalued asset that the city cannot spare. As they begin to see the Bayou anew, they want it revealed, revered, used and enjoyed by generations to come.

The Bayou invites a new try at cohabitation – city with open space, urbanity within nature. Together they are far greater than the sum of their parts. Balancing Conservation and Development expresses aspirations toward a green environment as a model of 21st Century thinking – the Eco-City, both urban and natural.



