A VISION FOR
BUFFALO BAYOU EAST

BUFFALO BAYOU PARTNERSHIP

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This plan is an important step forward for the future of Houston’s historic bayou.

The Buffalo Bayou East Master Plan brings the community’s vision for its waterfront to life.

Like other cities such as New York, Boston and St. Louis where Frederick Law Olmstead designed park systems, Houston hired Cambridge, Massachusetts landscape architect Arthur Coleman Comey in 1912 to provide a plan that would guide the city’s growth. In his plan, *Houston: Tentative Plans for Its Development*, Comey asserted: “The backbone of a park system for Houston will naturally be its creek valleys, which readily lend themselves to ‘parking’ … All the bayous should be ‘parked’ except where utilized for commerce.”

Building upon Comey’s vision, Buffalo Bayou Partnership’s (BBP) 2002 *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond* Master Plan envisioned a network of green spaces along the Bayou stretching from Shepherd Drive to the Port of Houston Turning Basin. Today, countless Houstonians and visitors utilize the extensive parks and trails along the waterfront to the west, most notably Buffalo Bayou Park. In addition to being a central gathering place for all Houstonians to enjoy, the park has become a symbol of the city’s rejuvenation and an important impetus for other park and bayou enhancement projects throughout the city.

While most of Buffalo Bayou Partnership’s green space development has occurred west of Downtown, for more than a decade the organization has been acquiring property and building a nascent trail system along the waterway’s East Sector. The Buffalo Bayou East Master Plan brings the community’s vision for its waterfront to life. Informed by significant outreach and engagement, the plan envisions integrating new parks and trails, dynamic recreational and cultural destinations, and connections to surrounding neighborhoods.

This plan is an important step forward for the future of Houston’s historic bayou—a project that will take decades and require creative partnerships to unfold. Step by step, piece by piece, Buffalo Bayou East will pay tribute to Houston’s industrial roots, celebrate culturally rich neighborhoods, and serve as an important symbol for the city’s continuing commitment to accessible park space for all.

**This plan is an important step forward for the future of Houston’s historic bayou.**
Houston’s rich history has been shaped by Buffalo Bayou and the waterway east of Downtown has played a particularly important role in the city’s evolution. While Allen’s Landing in Downtown Houston is the site most often associated with the city’s founding in 1836, in fact it was the town of Harrisburg, located at the confluence of Brays and Buffalo bayous, where Houston’s founders, Augustus and John Kirby Allen, preferred to locate. Situated just below the Turning Basin, Harrisburg served as a port of entry and became known as the commercial and shipping center of the southwest. For a brief period, the city served as the Republic of Texas capital.

Houston’s early success was driven by Buffalo Bayou and its influence is strongly felt to this day. Continually competing with Galveston, Houston business leaders saw the need to straighten and widen the Bayou. After years of dredging and other improvements, an agreement was reached with the federal government and the Houston Ship Channel opened.

Galveston’s 1900 hurricane and discovery of oil at Spindletop near Beaumont ensured Houston’s future as a major trading and transportation center, and today, the Ship Channel is one of the world’s great international ports.

**LOOKING BACK**

As Buffalo Bayou transitioned from a lazy stream to the transportation powerhouse it is today, so too have the neighborhoods that line its banks. Early years saw a large concentration of working class Germans, Italians and Irish, then an influx of African-Americans and Mexican-Americans.

Along with their strong work ethic and devotion to family, these early residents brought rich cultural traditions and customs that remain in the East Sector today. Whether it is the colorful murals and Tex-Mex cuisine of the Greater East End or the zydeco and blues music of the Fifth Ward, Buffalo Bayou East neighborhoods are among the most culturally vibrant in Houston.

**A CULTURAL LEGACY**

**AN INDUSTRIAL LEGACY**

While industrial activity has migrated towards the Ship Channel, active nodes still serve as important East Sector employment hubs and link the area to Houston’s history as a port city. At the same time, abandoned industrial relics contribute to a fascinating interaction of natural beauty and grit. Buffalo Bayou East celebrates the area’s industrial legacy and finds opportunities for industry and open space to exist.
Four core principles guided the master planning process and serve as a roadmap for the Plan’s implementation. Building upon the area’s rich history and character, the principles inspired designs that reflect local residents’ priorities, ensure established neighborhoods stay intact, and bring people to the water, so they can enjoy Buffalo Bayou East as it continues to flourish in the coming decades.

**Authentic**
Create unique open spaces that reflect the cultural and industrial legacy of Buffalo Bayou East.

**Connected**
Rethink how parks and neighborhoods interact, activating and connecting the waterfront with surrounding communities.

**Inclusive**
Catalyze investment and inclusive neighborhood growth that does not leave current residents behind.

**Resilient**
Promote investments that mitigate flooding, stabilize the Bayou’s banks, and increase economic and social mobility.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
It was important for Buffalo Bayou Partnership to engage community members throughout the planning process. In addition to reaching out to over 50,000 community members through bilingual postcards and social media, BBP organized numerous opportunities for over 700 stakeholders to provide feedback through larger community-wide events as well as smaller group settings. Other activities, such as the self-guided public art tour **Encounter: Meeting Points on Buffalo Bayou**, allowed participants to share their ideas and opinions for future Bayou improvements.

**A NEW DIRECTION**
Buffalo Bayou East represents a new focus for Buffalo Bayou Partnership. Very different physical and geographic characteristics mean design solutions that activate the Bayou must consider the East Sector’s unique conditions. Using the set of guiding principles, the Master Plan includes several key objectives and strategies.

- Preserve Buffalo Bayou East’s culture and traditions.
- Repurpose the East Sector’s industrial relics and showcase the area’s ongoing industrial activity.
- Extend the neighborhood fabric to the Bayou and create a public waterfront edge open to all.
- Leverage Buffalo Bayou Partnership-owned and publicly-held properties for future open space development.
- Create a diverse network of parks and destinations with wide appeal.
- As early as possible, develop trails, greenways, and pedestrian-friendly neighborhood streets to connect the Bayou to the city’s bike and pedestrian networks.
- Develop an economically integrated, Bayou-facing neighborhood.
- Create a safe and resilient waterfront to support an ecologically rich habitat connected to the wider open space system.
The Master Plan is organized into four key nodes: Downtown Gateway, Central Hub, Industrial District, and Eastern Terminus.

New multi-modal connections in the form of on- and off-street trails link to public transit. New streets in key locations, developed over time, create an enhanced network between neighborhoods separated from each other and the Bayou. Small-scaled parks and open spaces tie the larger destinations together to create a cohesive system of green spaces and attractions that will reinvigorate Buffalo Bayou East.

**DOWNTOWN GATEWAY**

*A Bridge Between East and West*

New open spaces and connections near the northeastern corner of Downtown link the East Sector to destinations farther west such as Buffalo Bayou Park. Bayou improvements associated with major infrastructure projects allow the area to become the primary entrance from Downtown to Buffalo Bayou and the city’s entire bayou trail network.

**CENTRAL HUB**

*The Heart of Buffalo Bayou East*

An expanded Tony Marron Park, enhanced with new and upgraded facilities, and Japhet Creek, with its natural splendor restored, become the engaging open space core of Buffalo Bayou East. New residential development along the Bayou brings surrounding communities closer to the water and to each other.
**INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT**

*Repurposed Industrial Relics*

Abandoned industrial structures, repurposed with exciting new uses, present residents with unparalleled experiences against an inspiring backdrop only Buffalo Bayou East can provide. The destinations’ designs honor Houston’s enduring legacy as a port city and simultaneously showcase how relics from the past can be thoughtfully adapted to give them new life.

**EASTERN TERMINUS**

*A Gateway to the Port*

New connections between existing parks and undeveloped green space create a cohesive and attractive destination for local residents and transform an underappreciated corner of Buffalo Bayou into a location where the Port of Houston can present its face to the public.
CONNECTIONS

Vital Links for Buffalo Bayou East

A carefully considered network of trails, multi-modal connections, on-street bikeways, and neighborhood-scaled open spaces creates a cohesive transportation backbone for experiencing Buffalo Bayou East. Trails and small open spaces provide continuous linkages between destinations and surrounding communities. New routes weave between active industrial sites that are currently difficult to access. Enhanced lighting, furniture, shade structures, and landscape upgrades make existing trails feel more attractive, secure, and comfortable. Linear green spaces extend the natural beauty of the Bayou deep into surrounding communities. And most importantly, new boat landings allow residents to travel from one place to another along Houston’s most important and historic waterway.
Create a Front Door to Buffalo Bayou East from Downtown

Major infrastructure projects proposed for Downtown Houston offer a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create an exciting gateway to Buffalo Bayou East. A combination of urban promenades along the North Canal, a flood mitigation project, and the green spaces created by the required detention for the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP) rerouting Interstate 45 and US Highway 59 also provides important connections to Buffalo Bayou Park, other destinations to the west, and the city’s entire bayou network. The planned improvements demonstrate how urban infrastructure projects can go beyond their strictly functional uses to incorporate green space amenities.
Downtown Gateway improvements require close collaboration between Buffalo Bayou Partnership and a variety of public entities.

- The North Canal, a new hydrological connection required for flood mitigation between White Oak and Buffalo bayous (1) can increase the bayou-frontage of the Warehouse District (2) opposite the renewed James Bute Park (3).
- Texas Department of Transportation’s freeway reconstruction provides the opportunity for detention, creating valuable habitats (4).
- Widening the main Bayou channel to mitigate flooding and erosion allows generous recreation areas (5) and bayou lawns (6), creating an open space gateway to Buffalo Bayou Park upstream and Buffalo Bayou East downstream.
- The new highway deck park on Downtown’s eastern edge, created as part of the NHHIP project (7), connects to the Bayou through a greenway (8) and extended urban grid (9). The existing rail bridge, repurposed for pedestrians and bicycles (10), improves connectivity to the Near Northside and Fifth Ward.
Expand and Improve Parks and Neighborhoods

The Central Hub becomes the park and neighborhood centerpiece of Buffalo Bayou East. Existing parks on the south side banks expand to provide a wider range of recreational and cultural activities. Investments in soccer fields, a play area, and venues for events and festivals transform currently underutilized green areas into one of the largest neighborhood parks in Houston. Boat landings, canoe/kayak rentals, and a future boat house provide for recreational offerings on the water. In addition to creating park space, a new residential development extends the existing neighborhood south of the Bayou to the water’s edge. On the north side of the Bayou, restoration of an historic natural tributary provides an important connection from the waterway to the Fifth Ward.
Tony Marron Park becomes a gathering place for Geater East End and Fifth Ward residents and serves as the primary green space destination for Buffalo Bayou East.

- Upgrades include new entry gardens connecting to North York Street (1), enhanced sports fields (2), improved habitat areas (3), and a new playground (4).
- At the North York site, a swimming hole (5) and beach (6) become one of the most unique Bayou destinations.
- A new boat house, picnic lawn, and boat launch (7) establish North York as a major boating center.
- Existing buildings on the City-owned Drennan Street site, refurbished as picnic pavilions for a food truck court, support community events and activities in the Fiesta Plaza (8).
- Shade structures distributed throughout the park encourage families to come for birthdays, picnics, and other celebrations.
- A pedestrian bridge connects the park to Japhet Creek (9).
Transform Japhet Creek into a Natural Connection

Before the development of this part of the city, Japhet Creek, a Bayou tributary, stretched north, deep into the Fifth Ward. Now only visible south of Clinton Drive, a restored Japhet Creek can serve as a key connection to Buffalo Bayou.

- New pedestrian and bike trails from the Fifth Ward and Finnigan Park (10) arrive at a Bayou trailhead with parking, community gardens, and an outdoor classroom (11).
- Nature trails lead along the creek and cross at a new pedestrian bridge (12), linking a series of nature play and interpretive elements (13) that extend to the Bayou. These upgrades integrate with the urban farm St. Catherine’s Montessori School is developing in the area.
- In the long term, redevelopment of an existing industrial property (14) may include a publicly accessible bayou promenade (15), recreation lawns (16), and sports fields to attract neighbors from the Fifth Ward (17).
Lockwood South: A New Economically Inclusive Neighborhood

A new residential development along the south bank of Buffalo Bayou near Lockwood Drive becomes an inclusive, mixed-income neighborhood.

- New single and multi-family dwellings (1, 2), including workforce housing, generates activity and density to build a critical mass of regular park users.

- The neighborhood plan thoroughly integrates housing with surrounding green spaces (3) and adjacent housing (4) to stitch historically disconnected communities to the waterfront.

- Lockwood South incorporates Low Impact Design (LID) features such as permeable pavement and over four acres of stormwater detention (5).

- Strong development guidelines promote a well-designed housing and public realm.

- Creative financing measures may provide revenue for park capital investment and operations.
While industrial activity has migrated toward the Ship Channel in recent decades, active nodes still serve as important East Sector employment hubs and link the area to Houston’s history as a port city. Meanwhile, Buffalo Bayou East’s intriguing industrial relics serve as a unique backdrop for creating new public spaces unlike anywhere in Houston. With the underground Cistern in Buffalo Bayou Park, Buffalo Bayou Partnership has already seen the benefits of repurposing these types of remnants. The abandoned former City water reservoir has been toured by tens of thousands and is one of the most popular sites for visitors to Houston. Gas Works Park in Seattle, Concrete Plant Park in the Bronx, and numerous sites in Germany’s Ruhr Valley also demonstrate how industrial relics in Buffalo Bayou East can be renovated into popular parks and cultural attractions.
A former industrial site owned by Buffalo Bayou Partnership becomes an adventure and extreme sports park that includes activities attracting users from nearby neighborhoods and the region.

- A park weaves adventure and extreme sports into the naturalized landscape.
- The park includes a series of training hills (1) inspired by the mounds of sand and gravel found in nearby industrial sites, as well as obstacle and ropes courses (2).
- Though most of the industrial structures no longer exist, two remaining concrete buildings become a ticket office and picnic pavilion (3, 4).

An Adventure Park in a Natural Environment
The former Lockwood Water Treatment Works are converted into water gardens.

- Repurposed industrial artifacts of the Water Treatment Works site host botanical displays, water gardens, and experimental stormwater cleansing basins (5, 6, 7).
- Main buildings along Armour Drive house a small visitor center, event space, and café (8).
- A boat dock for water access links these sites to others on the Bayou (9) and connects destinations and trails to the Greater East End and Fifth Ward neighborhoods.
A Neighborhood Arts and Event Center

A Buffalo Bayou Partnership-owned site along Navigation Boulevard at a stretch of the Bayou called Turkey Bend transforms abandoned structures into a center of activity.

- A renovated warehouse includes community art and event facilities, possible incubator space for nurturing neighborhood businesses, and food service (1).
- Along the water, the wharf serves as event and gathering space (2) as well as a boating center and canoe/kayak launch (3). A protected oxbow off of Buffalo Bayou’s main channel allows boaters to explore the water in a safe environment (4).
- Transformation of Navigation Boulevard into a linear greenway (5) improves pedestrian and bicycle connections and allows for outdoor events and activities in the plaza (6) in front of the warehouse building.
Create an Open Space Anchor in the East

Many cities in the US and across the world have active ports that are centered in the heart of urban areas. Far removed from Downtown, the Houston Ship Channel is barely known and underappreciated as an economic engine for the Houston region. By expanding existing parks and adding new green space, the area near the Port of Houston Turning Basin can become a welcoming gateway to the Ship Channel, an attractive location for boarding Port Houston’s tour boat, the M/V Sam Houston, and an anchor for Buffalo Bayou East. A pedestrian bridge and trails offer important linkages into the surrounding neighborhoods and potential to tie in with an existing trail network along Brays Bayou.
New and Existing Parks and Open Spaces

Green spaces allow areas adjacent to the Turning Basin to act as the Eastern Terminus. Trails continue east to provide connections along the waterfront and between these areas.

- A trailhead with parking, improved habitat, and a picnic grove beneath the Wayside Drive Bridge (1) provides a new waterfront open space in the Magnolia Park neighborhood.
- Between Yolanda Black Navarro Buffalo Bend Nature Park and Hidalgo Park (2), an enhanced trail creates a much larger green space destination that directly links to surrounding neighborhoods.
- A new sloped lawn at Hidalgo Park opens up views to the Bayou and supports an accessible path down to a new boat dock (3).
- Adjacent to the existing rail trestle bridge, a new pedestrian bridge (4) further expands the green space to a new nature park (5) with its own trailhead (6) and nature pavilion (7) on the Port of Houston Harbor Street site as well as to the Sam Houston boat tour embarkation point (8).
- Trails to Wayside Drive and a pedestrian bridge (9) towards the Port of Houston Dredged Material Placement Areas (DAMP) site improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity in an industrial area that is currently challenging for non-vehicular movement.

Sports Park of Regional Significance

Transform the DAMP site into a regional sports destination.

- The elevated site’s large size and level top host a regional-scale sports park.
- Ample parking and convenient connections to Interstate 10 to the north make the site easily accessible to athletes from across Houston.
- An emphasis on soccer, softball, and baseball offers a valuable attraction to the surrounding neighborhoods (10).
- A viewpoint at the southeast corner (11) affords panoramic views of the Port of Houston Turning Basin.
Communities of the Greater East End and Fifth Ward have long been separated from their Bayou, and one another. Large active and abandoned industrial sites create obstacles between the waterway and the upland neighborhoods, while street linkages and visual connections remain broken. The Bayou has been the East Sector’s back door and a barrier. No longer.

Buffalo Bayou East reunites neighborhoods and creates a common meeting ground to gather and experience a part of Houston like no other. A comprehensive network of trails, on-street bikeways, green fingers, promenades and multi-modal connections provides vital linkages.

Historically, Buffalo Bayou has been used for transportation. Recently, BBP has made boating a central part of the waterway’s revitalization. Buffalo Bayou East offers more boating activities and gives people an opportunity to see Houston from a unique perspective.
BAYOU TRAILS

A continuous, 15-foot wide multi-use trail follows the north and south banks of the Bayou where possible. Benches with nearby trash cans at regular intervals along the trail provide places to rest. Wayfinding and interpretive signage mark key points.

TRAILHEADS

Trailheads identify gateways to the Bayou from surrounding neighborhoods. At Clinton Drive and Schweikhardt Street, Fifth Ward residents enter Buffalo Bayou East’s open space network half a mile from the waterway. An on-street bikeway, with well-marked crosswalks, turns into a multi-use path.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

Trail and bikeway networks link Buffalo Bayou to surrounding communities and each other. Off-street trails accommodate both pedestrians and bicycles, while protected, on-street bikeways allow cyclists to safely traverse Buffalo Bayou East.

WATER CONNECTIONS

New landings, expanded canoe/kayak concessions, and possible water taxis in the future provide community residents stronger connections to the water.
NAVIGATION GREEN FINGER

A generous green space links the Bayou to commercial establishments along the Navigation Esplanade and to Second Ward neighborhoods. Remnants of the site’s former rail yard remind users of Buffalo Bayou East’s industrial legacy. Shade trees and lush lawns provide an inviting refuge for area residents to relax and enjoy a break from hectic city life.

NAVIGATION GREENWAY

Along Navigation Boulevard, the former westbound lanes become an on-street greenway, wide enough to be a transportation path and a linear park. At the Turkey Bend site, this space can be used for neighborhood festivals and events. The former eastbound lanes now handle traffic in both directions. With active industrial sites still lining Buffalo Bayou’s eastern stretches, the Navigation Greenway provides an alternative route for accessing destinations towards the Port of Houston Turning Basin.
BUFFALO BAYOU EAST MASTER PLAN FUNDERs

- Houston Endowment Inc.
- The Garver Foundation
- The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
- The Carruth Foundation, Inc.
- Fifth Ward Redevelopment Authority (TIRZ #18)
- Harrisburg Redevelopment Authority (TIRZ #23)
- Midway
- The Winston Charitable Foundation
- Anne Whitlock and Michael Skelly

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