

AS WE BUILD OUR CITY,
LET US THINK THAT WE
ARE BUILDING FOREVER

Houston Downtown Development Framework

OCTOBER 2004

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The cover is a quote from John Ruskin that can be found in the rotunda at City Hall and at Main Street Square.

Houston Downtown Development Framework

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October, 2004

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A VISION FOR 2025

Houstonians always have sensed that their city is destined to make a lasting impact on the world. This is Houston's moment to define that impact – to not only grow, but to grow well and continue the transition from a large Texas city to a world-renowned metropolis defined by its Downtown and central city.

Downtown will nurture and enhance its essential assets – a density and diversity of buildings, people and economic activity – to achieve the levels of opportunity, creativity and prosperity enjoyed by the world's great cities. Global commerce will thrive in its office towers, shops will line its streets and celebrations will enliven its civic spaces.

There will be diverse neighborhoods for many residents who will choose Downtown to live, raise their families and retire.

Great design will define private development and public places. A rich mixture of economic activities will complement appealing urban open spaces. Effective public services and transportation choices will serve all Houstonians.

And if Houston's qualities of openness, entrepreneurial energy, family and friendliness permeate this transformation, then Downtown will become a place for the rest of the world to emulate. Opportunities will multiply, creativity will flourish, and Houstonians will enjoy mingling with countless fellow citizens from across the globe.

Over the next twenty years, this vision for Downtown will guide our public policies, private investments, civic improvements, and individual actions.

The end result will be an enduring model of open, dynamic and equitable urbanity that distinguishes Houston as one of the world's great cities.

DOWNTOWN PROGRESS: 1985 TO 2004

Profound changes can take place over the course of twenty years. In projecting progress through the year 2025, it is helpful to look back at changes over the prior twenty years. In 1985, Downtown was emerging from an intense period of office development that ended with a severe downturn in the local economy. National trends affected Downtown companies through mergers and acquisitions. But, Downtown benefited from new parks on Buffalo Bayou, the Wortham Theatre Center, and the opening of the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Major Projects 1985-2004

- Open Space/
Roadway Project
- Government/Non-Profit/
Cotswold Project
- Hotel/Convention/
Sports/Arts/Toyota Center
- Residential/Sidewalks
- Office Project
- Retail/Entertainment

*View of Downtown from
Northeast highlighting
projects implemented
since 1985*



“In 2004, Downtown is emerging from a decade of extensive physical and economic improvement. Attention is now turning to its social elements, fine-grained urban experiences, and everyday quality of life.”

*Susan Elmore –
Framework Steering Committee*

A period of rapid change

The most significant changes occurred after 1995, the timeframe for the initial Downtown Development Framework. Local governments, residential developers, smaller-scale entrepreneurs, theatrical companies, non-profit organizations, and a new sports authority pursued a wide range of projects that enhanced Downtown’s ability to attract new companies, residents and activities, which are drawn to the most vibrant Downtown economy in the southern and southwestern United States.

In addition, serious public investment was made in Downtown’s infrastructure as miles of streets, utilities and sidewalks were improved to serve a dynamic downtown area. This new infrastructure was enhanced by thousands of street trees and street lights plus acres of new parks.

A public-private partnership

- Committed \$873,000,000 for public infrastructure and \$1,263,000,000 for public facilities.
- Invested \$2,231,000,000 for private commercial, residential and non-profit projects.
- Invested \$480,000,000 for jointly-funded sports facilities.
- Formed the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP) in 1986.
- Created the Downtown District (HDMD) in 1992 for specialized management services and improvements.
- Created the Main Street Market Square Redevelopment Authority (MSRA)/tax increment zone in 1995.
- Created the Houston Downtown Alliance (HDA) from the Theater District Association and the Downtown Houston Association in 2003.

Residential development

- Built 1,281 rental and 430 for-sale residential units.
- Restored existing buildings, such as Rice Hotel, to accommodate 80% of new dwelling units.
- Added 287 rooms in SRO projects.

Sidewalks, retail, restaurants and entertainment

- Expanded and developed the tunnel/skywalk system into a convenience retailing environment.
- Lost traditional major retailers except Foley's.
- Formed new entertainment areas at Bayou Place and along Main Street.
- Updated Park Shops as Shops at Houston Center.
- Widened and improved sidewalks and began new cleaning and trash hauling services.
- Enacted new civility ordinances and restrictions on public drinking.
- Widened sidewalks, improved lighting and planted street trees throughout Downtown.

Attractions and community venues

- Opened Wortham Theatre Center and the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts.
- Opened new production facility at the Alley Theatre.
- Relocated Humphries School of Musical Theater.
- Opened and expanded George R. Brown Conv. Ctr.
- Added 3,000 hotel rooms from 1998 through 2003, including Hilton Americas convention hotel.
- Opened Minute Maid Park and Toyota Center.
- Adopted historic preservation ordinance and restored many historic buildings.
- Recommended new Downtown library in master plan and began renovations of Jesse Jones Building.

The office market

- Attracted several major companies to Downtown.
- Built five new office buildings.
- Converted many older buildings to other uses.
- Late 1990s merchant energy boom fueled office growth.
- Attracted/retained nine Fortune 500 headquarters.

Buffalo Bayou

- Completed Sesquicentennial Park and related trails.
- Began improvements to Allen's Landing.
- Established James Bute Park focused on the historic McKee Street Bridge.
- Completed Championship Park and trails.

- Announced new Buffalo Bayou master plan.
- Started Sabine to Bagby project.
- Began east side trails.

Parks and plazas

- Opened Fish Plaza with Wortham Theatre Center.
- Opened privately-owned Houston Center Gardens.
- Improved Root Square Memorial Park.
- Redesigned Market Square Park as art park.
- Opened JPMorgan Chase Park and Sisters of Charity Park at Christus St. Joseph Hospital.
- Restored Hermann Square and redesigned Jones Plaza.
- Opened Main Street Square.

Government, health care, education and religious campuses and services

- Opened Mickey Leland Federal Building.
- Opened city offices in 611 Walker and 1200 Travis.
- Began developing 3 new county courthouse buildings.
- Began expansion of Christus St. Joseph Hospital.
- Built 3 new facilities at UH-Downtown.
- Restored historic Willow Street Pump Station.
- Expanded South Texas College of Law.
- Improved Incarnate Word Academy's campus.
- Began joint initiatives to address homelessness.

Regional access

- Opened U.S. 59 North/I-10 interchange, Downtown ramps, and HOV lane.
- Opened the Katy-CBD Ramp.
- Repaired the Pierce Elevated and other I-45 segments.
- Expanded Park & Ride to serve 10,000s of commuters.
- Opened Main St. light rail and Downtown Transit Ctr.

Internal circulation and parking

- Have nearly completed 10+ miles of Transit Streets.
- Began very popular free rubber-tired trolley service.
- Rebuilt six historic bridges over Buffalo Bayou.
- Have nearly completed 5 miles of Cotswold streets.
- Improved sidewalks in Toyota Center area.
- Completed Avenida de las Americas.
- Built new storm sewer, water transmission and sanitary sewer trunk lines.
- Created a Parking Mgmt. Division for on-street parking.
- Added over 13,000 structured parking spaces.
- Installed wayfinding system for motorists and pedestrians.

A LIVELY, VITAL AND PROSPEROUS PLACE

Over the past twenty years, Downtown has succeeded in attracting and retaining high-level corporate and government offices; creating major new cultural and sports venues; and fostering the core of a flourishing residential, entertainment, and dining scene. These recent successes are more than exceptions to development models that have guided Downtown's growth since World War II. Profound changes in our nation and our city have created new opportunities and paradigms. People want and expect to enjoy their city center. The demand for urban living can now be our primary development phenomenon, even as Downtown enjoys a healthy and growing corporate community.

The perception of Downtown as only a place of business created the city that we have known for the last fifty years. In the new century, perceptions – and expectations – are shifting. People want a visible and vibrant human presence on Downtown's streets 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Streets must pulse with business, recreational, family, civic, and residential life apparent to all at any time. A strategy with four key components can achieve these goals and secure Downtown's place in Houston for the long term:

1. Tens of thousands of people living in (and around) Downtown in new neighborhoods, providing a new market for businesses, amenities and attractions.
2. Residents, visitors and employees strolling on active, engaging sidewalks with so much to do and see that Downtown's sidewalks define its high quality of life.
3. Visual and performing arts venues, schools, places of worship, sports, entertainment and hotels, along with small and large attractions that invigorate the Downtown experience throughout the day for Houstonians and tourists alike.
4. Thriving companies attracted to Downtown because it is a great place to do business and is the "center of the action" on a regional and even global scale.

The 2004 Houston Area Survey exposed a transforming trend – many in the suburbs now embrace the central city as a place to live.

As many other urban centers struggle to remain relevant in today's business world, Downtown Houston remains a dynamic headquarters location.

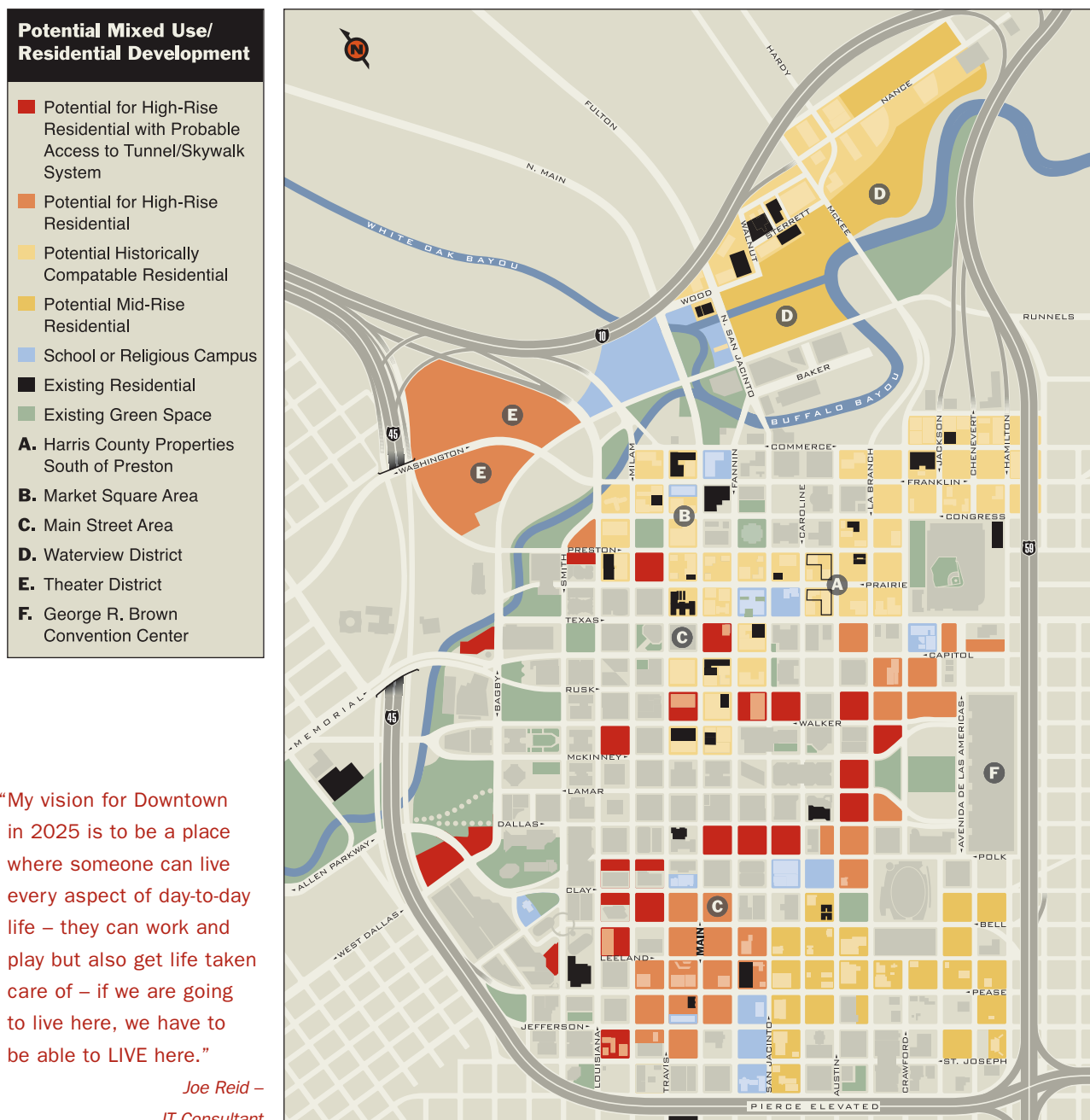
Houston is fortunate to have many other centers of urban activity. These areas should evolve into a dynamic urban whole while supporting the residential neighborhoods that surround them.





RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

The most important participants in an active street life will be the people who live there. To support this key component of its vision, Downtown should build significantly upon the stock of housing added since the mid-1990s. An expanding population will provide a reliable base of demand for goods and services and will enhance security by putting more pedestrians on the street. Well-designed residential buildings also lessen the “emptiness” of streets during non-business hours. Finally, office tenants will find Downtown more attractive if a reasonable share of their employees can have the option of living close to work. With most historic structures restored, Downtown should focus on new construction; work toward a residential population of 20,000; and offer a wide range of residential properties, from the most affordable to luxury developments.





Mixed-use, high-rise residential on Main Street

Potential residential growth areas (see map):

- Work with Harris County as it divests itself of historic properties to create a distinctive mixed-use historic residential neighborhood.
- Encourage transformation of surface parking lots and other underdeveloped sites into new medium-density residential neighborhoods.
- Guided by the *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond* master plan, work with property owners to develop a Waterview District containing medium-density urban residential developments with student and artist housing.
- Anticipate the clustering of high-rise residential towers, especially in three areas: (1) along Main Street and to the southwest; (2) around the “superblock” in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center, which also will feature a major civic park space; and (3) throughout the Theater District.
- Promote the integration of new residential and mixed-use development on key sites in the historic Market Square area.
- Anticipate high-value residential high-rises on multiple sites with potential access to the tunnel/skywalk system.



Left: Residential high-rise in Chicago



Right: Proposed Shamrock Tower on Main at Texas

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS (continued)

*New mid-rise
residential neighborhood*



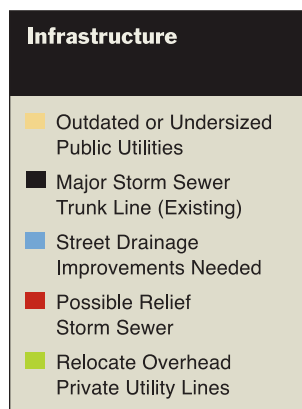
“My vision for Downtown in 2025 is to be as eclectic as the rest of Houston already is...a melting pot of classes, races and cultural diversity. Kind of like a blend of New York, Chicago and Buenos Aires all thrown in a blender.”

*Scot More –
Non-profit services*

Develop policies to encourage more residential development Downtown

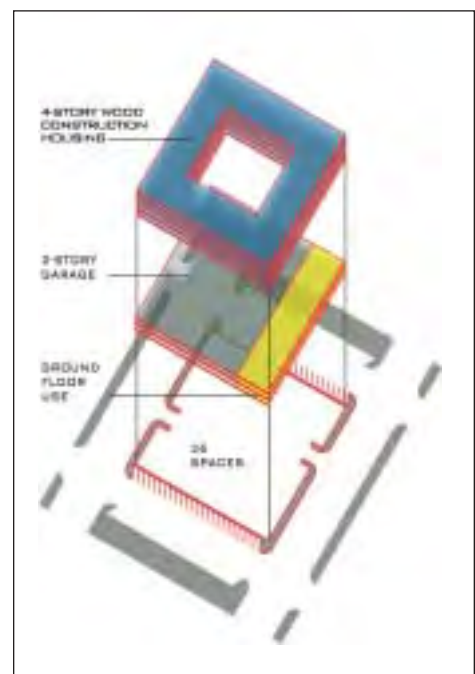
- Hasten more medium-density residential development through creative incentive programs that optimize underutilized on-street parking and parking facilities.
- Create new organizations that can partner in the residential development process.

- Work with Fannie Mae and the corporate community to promote Downtown living for their employees.
- Find ways to offer important services and recreational amenities that attract and retain residents.
- Work with HISD, private educational organizations, corporations and public agencies to develop schools and child care programs that support employees, residents, and adjacent neighborhoods.



Left: Infrastructure must be upgraded in peripheral areas to support residential development

Right: Use of on-street parking for mid-rise residential would allow for more rent-producing space at street level



DEVELOPMENT REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE A POPULATION OF 20,000

CALCULATION OF DEVELOPMENT: 2005 – 2025					NUMBER OF DWELLING UNITS				
TYPE	ESTIMATED BLOCKS	AVAILABLE ACREAGE	PERCENT DEVELOPED	DENSITY* (NET)	2005 – 2025	1985 – 2004	PRE-1985	TOTAL	CHICAGO YR 2000
Townhome	6	8.58	50%	25	107	18	0	125	–
Mid-Rise	49	70.07	50%	100	3,504	268	50	3,822	–
Loft	8	11.44	50%	100	572	604	0	1,176	–
Luxury									
High-Rise	23	32.89	25%	150	1,233	132	120	1,485	–
High-Rise/									
High-Rise Lofts	33	47.19	33%	300	4,672	402	756	5,830	–
SRO	1	1.43	75%	400	429	287	333	1,049	–
Total	120	172	41%		10,517	1,711	1,259	13,487	–
Estimated Population** (1.5 people per unit average)					15,775	2,567	1,889	20,230	42,039
Overall Population Density per sq. mile								10,995	11,240

*Excludes public streets, waterways and public parks.

**Includes student and SRO (single room occupancy) housing plus vacancies. No group quartered population included.

Source: Houston Downtown Management District

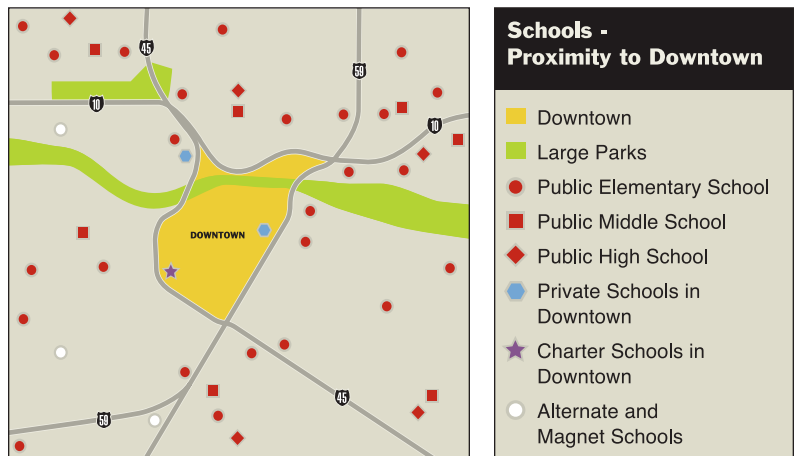
Chicago: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Promote supportive urban design and quality of life

- Implement standards that create residential streets featuring ample on-street parking, street trees, usable open spaces and appropriate sidewalk design in Downtown's new neighborhoods, possibly in conjunction with a residential incentive program.
- Encourage active ground floor uses or direct residential unit entrances to avoid "dead" streetfronts, such as those that occur where ground-floor structured parking lines the sidewalk, through design guidelines tied to incentives.

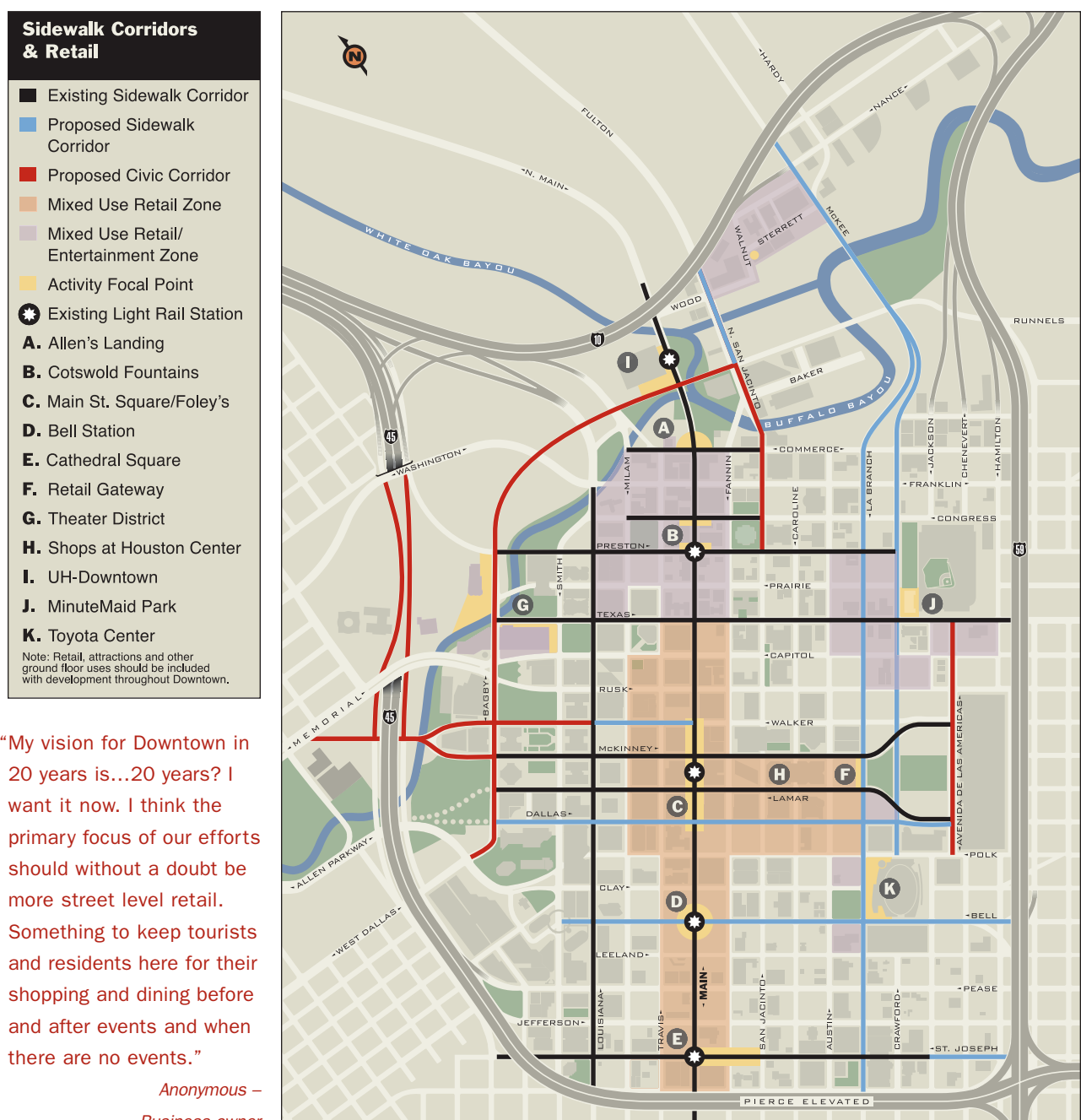
- Reduce conflicts between nightclubs and residents through fair enforcement of existing laws and strategies that discourage uncomfortable residential/entertainment adjacencies.
- Better accommodate all age groups, families and pets with schools, playgrounds, other recreational amenities and dog parks.

Left: New urban neighborhood in Dallas



ACTIVE SIDEWALKS AND RETAIL

An inviting, bustling street life is the most compelling feature of a great downtown. People walking to destinations or strolling for pleasure, storefronts luring shoppers, services conveniently located and restaurants providing atmosphere with scents and sounds all combine to create memorable experiences and increase the desire to return. Downtown must take steps to develop such an environment on its streets, particularly along key corridors such as Main Street. Fortunately, major investments have significantly improved Downtown's sidewalks. These widened sidewalks with street trees, landscaping, directional signage, fountains, public art and improved street lighting have set the stage for a true revival of Downtown's day and night street scenes. Supporting the physical improvements, new ordinances and management strategies have improved other sidewalk conditions as well.



RETAIL SPACE IN 2004*

TYPE	RETAIL/SERVICES	AVAILABLE	TOTAL
Main Street (retail)	634,543	418,169	1,052,712
Main Street (entertainment)	326,177	121,296	447,473
Ballpark Area/North of Buffalo Bayou	61,162	31,435	92,597
Tunnel/Skywalk	301,732	46,292	348,024
Other Areas	397,333	229,143	626,476
Total (sq. feet)	1,720,947	846,335	2,567,282

*Includes retail, restaurants, clubs, banks and services.

Source: Houston Downtown Management District

Encourage street-level retail and entertainment

- Develop an economic incentive program to jump-start landlord and tenant interest in key retail zones (see map).
- Encourage the presence of ground-floor retail spaces with windows, awnings, and street entrances, especially in key corridors.
- Focus on parcels and buildings near Foley's and the Shops at Houston Center to create a critical mass of retail.
- Create regularly scheduled ethnic and farmers' markets that appeal to a broad cross section of Houstonians.
- Develop a street vendor and performer program.
- Improve visitor parking (see p.33)

Manage sidewalks as a core asset

- Develop a sidewalk master plan with standards for physical characteristics, changes, improvements and uses.
- Require improvements to vacant and derelict properties.

- Improve remaining sidewalks (see p.32)
- Emphasize ongoing maintenance and programming for sidewalk areas, with the goal of creating a high quality of place throughout Downtown.
- Ensure resources, manpower and coordination for the relevant public safety organizations to maintain a comfortable outdoor atmosphere.
- Provide automated toilets along key pedestrian corridors, such as Main Street.

Sensitively manage expansion of the tunnel and skywalk system (see map p. 18)

- Recognize that tunnels and skywalks are key amenities for the office market.
- Use incentives and other policies to balance emphasis on new tunnels and skywalks with active sidewalks.
- Install a street-level sign program and encourage more public access.
- Identify and promote links between street level and the tunnel-skywalk system.



Foley's Department Store



Denver Pavilions



New urban-styled retail in The Woodlands



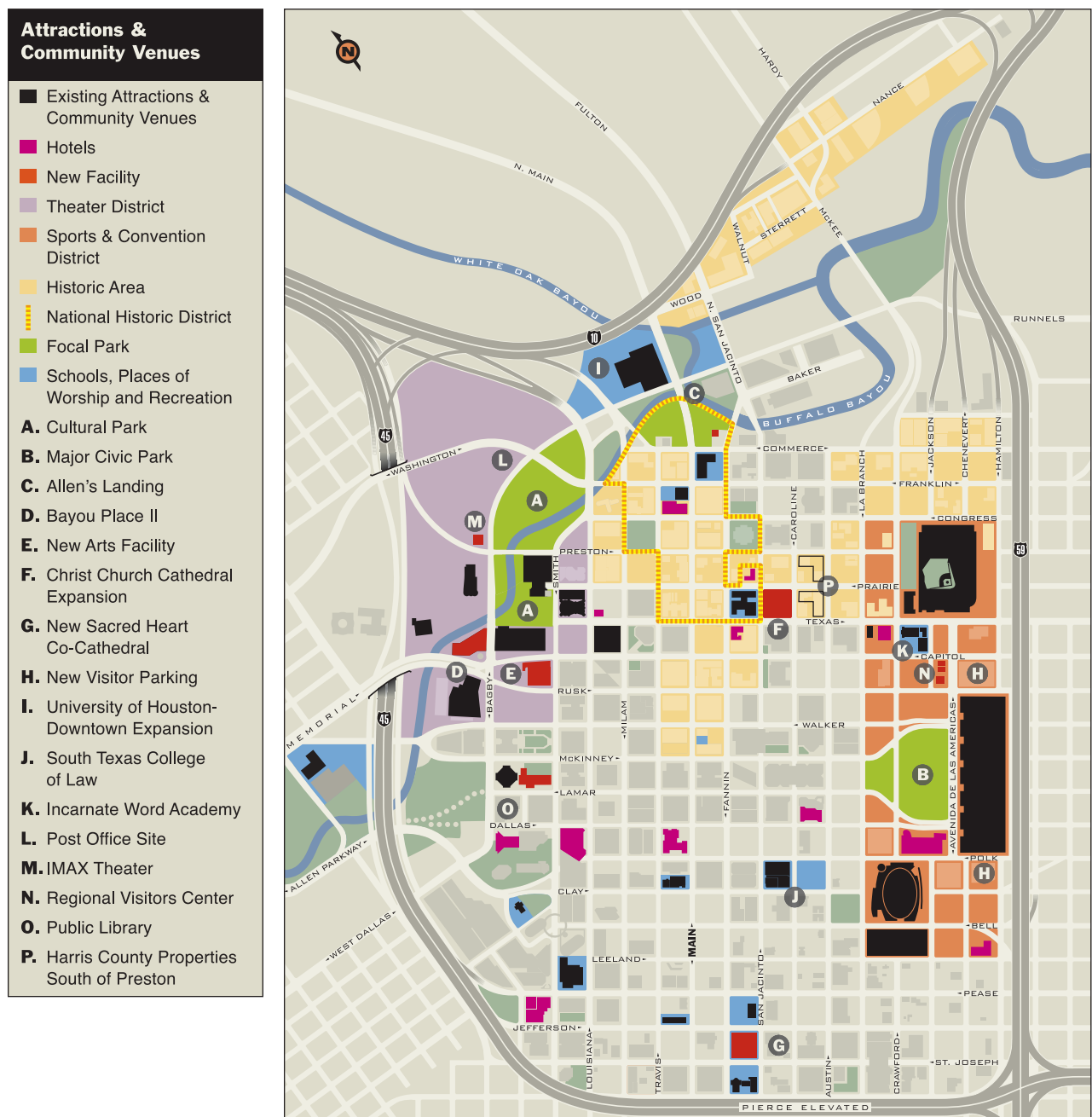
New street-level retail at The Shops at Houston Center



Downtown must re-establish a critical mass of retail

ATTRACTIONS AND COMMUNITY VENUES

Downtown has firmly cemented its role as the region's home of major cultural performance and event facilities. Its impressive array of regional attractions ranges from premier fine arts performance halls in the Theater District to the new sports and convention facilities on the east side. Still, Downtown must seek opportunities to become a greater part of Houstonians' lives by adding other types of attractions that will be visited during the day and on a potentially more regular basis than the existing venues. These new attractions will have the added benefit of enriching Downtown's texture for out-of-town visitors as well, making Houston a more appealing tourist destination. Finally, the activity generated by these new facilities will create synergy with Downtown's other uses, especially retail, and contribute another dimension to "street life."



Expand and refine the Theater District

- Make continuous efforts to ensure that Theater District facilities do not lag behind national counterparts in quality or capabilities.
- Add smaller-scale performance venues and support spaces that provide more spontaneity, energy and urban diversity.
- At Bayou Place Phase II, consider arts-related uses, high-rise residential development and removal of the overhead structure above Bagby so that the street can become a key civic corridor.
- If Buffalo Bayou improvements and U.S. Postal Service plans allow, redevelop the existing post office site as a mixed-use extension of the Theater District along the bayou.
- Similarly, examine the Bob Casey Federal Courthouse site as a potential location for performance venues or support spaces if a new federal courthouse is built.
- Study the potential for creating a cultural park for the Theater District by closing Texas Avenue and Prairie Street (made possible by a redesigned I-45 North) while improving access to public garages.
- Work with property owners to add entertainment, such as an IMAX theater, to the area around the Downtown Aquarium.



Promote and enhance the Convention and Sports District

Minute Maid Park

- Tie a new regional visitor center along Avenida de las Americas into Downtown's historic attractions.
- Encourage coordinated development of the "superblock" area on the west side of the George R. Brown Convention Center with a major civic green space enlivened by entertainment venues and retail, defined by high-rise residential and served by visitor-friendly parking.
- Enhance Avenida de las Americas as a key civic corridor.



Left: Alley Theater Production Center



Right: Jones Hall's dramatic lobby

ATTRACTIONS AND COMMUNITY VENUES (continued)

Further develop Downtown's library

- Work with the city's library system to plan for the expansion or relocation of the central library, with an emphasis on an engaging and exciting urban design.
- If the library is relocated, build the new facility at an existing or planned light rail station and consider converting the current location into a history center tied to Sam Houston Park.

- Work with the South Texas College of Law as it grows and develops its second block behind its main campus.
- Coordinate with Incarnate Word Academy if it seeks to expand east by closing Jackson Street south of Texas Avenue.
- Strive to preserve historic structures, create "sidewalk-friendly" campuses and integrate compelling green space into expanded campuses.

Further develop educational facilities

- Seek out educational organizations to promote Downtown sites for specialized school facilities, such as professional academies.
- Seek out opportunities to provide housing for students in Downtown.
- Coordinate expansion of the University of Houston-Downtown on property south of the bayou and to the west of its main buildings with bayou improvements, an expanded greenbelt and an extension of Runnels Street on the Union Pacific passenger main line alignment.

Further develop religious facilities

- Create new focal points around the Christ Church Cathedral expansion and new Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral, such as the proposed Cathedral Square.
- Emphasize the role of other places of worship and learning as positive additions to the urban fabric, generators of off-hour activity and amenities for residents.
- Strive to preserve historic structures, create "sidewalk-friendly" campuses and integrate compelling green space into expanded campuses.

Historic areas such as Prairie Avenue can augment our major attractions

"My vision for Downtown in 2025 is a cultural center of town for all people – rich, poor, sophisticated, home-spun, religious or sacreligious."

*Anonymous –
Piping Designer*



Create a binding fabric of smaller-scale cultural and historic attractions

- Seek opportunities to locate smaller civic and private attractions, such as the Allen Center Gallery and Heritage Hall at JPMorgan Chase Bank, on the ground floors of commercial and residential buildings.
- Emphasize cultural facilities that appeal to and are affordable for families.
- Work with Harris County and private landowners to encourage the transformation of the historic areas in the northern part of Downtown into mixed-use neighborhoods with their own museums, galleries and residential properties.
- Encourage compatible infill development to re-establish engaging building frontages along sidewalks.
- Continue improving Allen's Landing and the Sunset Coffee building.



Above: New Seattle Central Library

Left: San Diego's historic Gaslamp District

Develop hotels as the market stabilizes

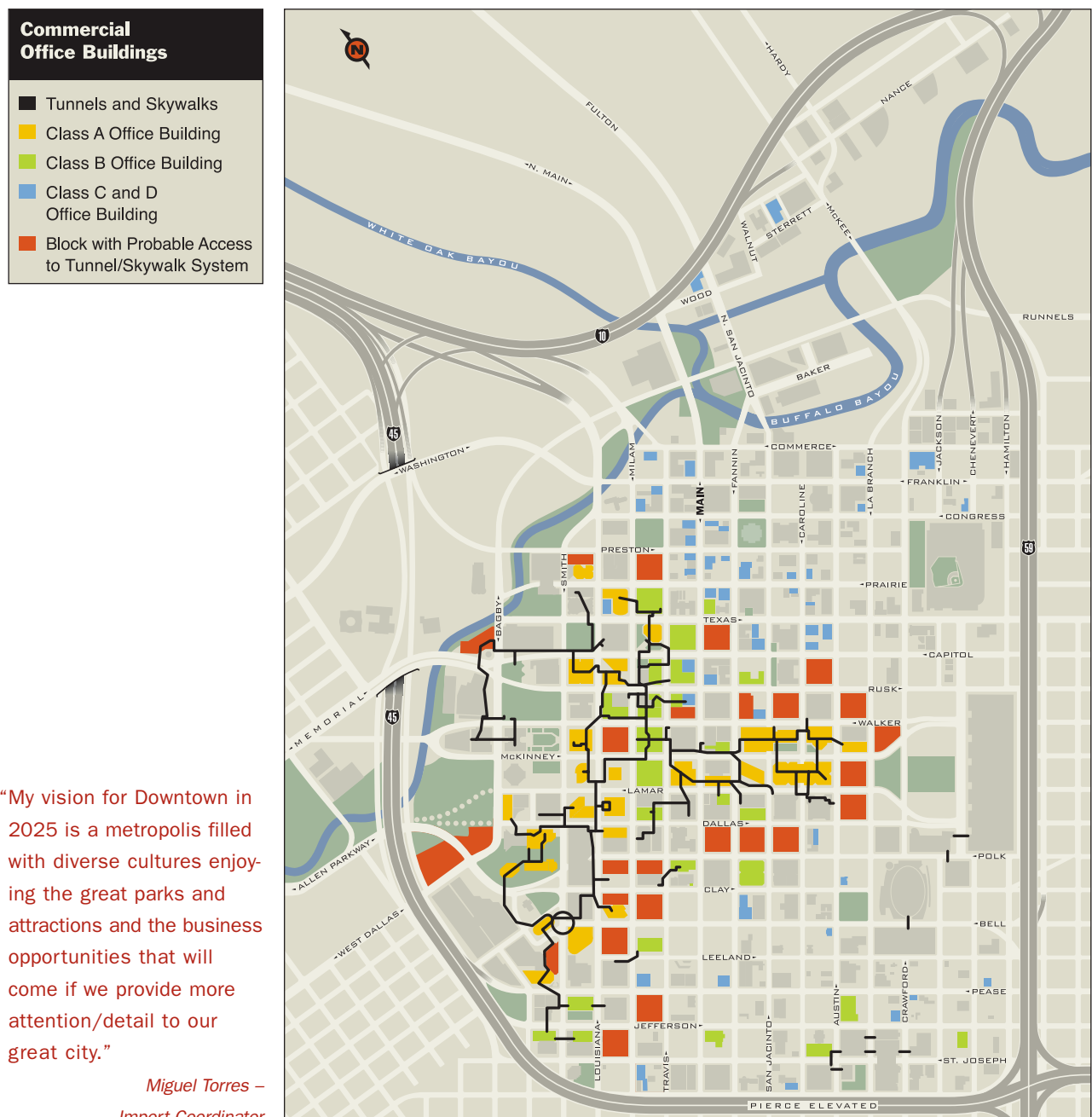
- Increase the hotel room count.
- Broaden the range of hotel products offered.
- Plan for a second major hotel near the convention center.



Historic Main Street was chosen for Superbowl festivities

A DYNAMIC ECONOMIC CENTER

Downtown has never lost its economic importance as a prime location for corporate headquarters and major offices. Preserving and enhancing this economic base is critical for Downtown's future success. Downtown still has the greatest concentration of office employment in the region, much of which is in Class A high-rise properties. The firms occupying these buildings – with their population of workers, demand for office space and charitable largesse – create an irreplaceable economic and social foundation for the region. In addition, since Downtown is the heart of the region and the most significant projector of Houston's image around the world, its vitality is a key piece of Houston's ability to attract firms and employees in the global marketplace. As the market accommodates this vitality over time, new office development will occur again, most likely in locations adjacent to existing tunnel and skywalk connections.



OFFICE DEVELOPMENT (IN SQUARE FEET)

TYPE	PRE 1945	1945 – 1964	1965 – 1984	1985 – 2004	TOTAL
New Construction*	6,478,130	6,645,697	28,578,105	4,656,292	46,358,224
Conversion-New Use**	–	(100,000)	(500,000)	(4,415,908)	(5,015,908)
Net Gain (S.F.)	6,478,130	6,545,697	28,078,105	240,384	41,342,316
Major Upgrade	–	943,570	241,797	4,439,082	5,624,449

Since 1985, office space usage per employee has shrunk. One large oil company has cut its space usage per employee more than 50%. Law firms now house almost twice as many employees per square foot. As a result office-based economic activity continues to increase independent of new construction.

*All Class A office space has been built since 1965. Class A space totals 28,914,021 s.f.

**Pre-1985 figures are estimates.

Sources: Houston Downtown Management District and Co-Star

Proactively protect and enhance the office market

- Use incentives to systematically, predictably and cooperatively encourage firms to locate Downtown.
- Pursue “attractor” uses, such as a new federal courthouse campus or an international trade center that, in turn, attract related businesses Downtown.
- Recognize the importance of regional transportation connections, parking and streetscape management to the health of the office market.
- Effectively maintain emergency preparedness plans and procedures already in place for Downtown.



ChevronTexaco building and skybridge



Plaza in front of JPMorgan Chase Tower

Build upon Downtown’s global economic position

- Develop business and social networking programs and facilities that reinforce Houston’s open, forward-thinking entrepreneurial culture and emphasize Downtown as a place to find new ideas.
- Support Houston’s established and emerging “economic clusters,” including energy, commercialization of biomedical technology, world trade, law and finance.
- Increase synergies with area universities and the Texas Medical Center.
- As a world “crossroads” business center, promote branch offices and networking in Downtown for major global firms.
- Use telecommunications, media and public relations channels to promote Downtown’s business climate and opportunities within the region and around the world.
- Encourage the State of Texas to consider Downtown Houston as the key urban business center in the state and an important part of overall economic development efforts.

A CENTER FOR THE REGION'S PUBLIC LIFE: SPACES AND SERVICES

Downtowns that prosper through long periods of time not only generate economic activity but also nourish quality of life. Over the last twenty years, new parks have been added along Buffalo Bayou, and miles of improved sidewalks have begun to establish an open space and pedestrian system. Downtown Houston can expand upon and enhance these corridors and public places to complement its urban fabric, providing focal points for civic life. These plazas, parks, green spaces and water features also can be venues for events, opportunities for casual socializing and recreation, and stages for artistic and social endeavors. As a result, they will become treasured centerpieces for the surrounding city that can be tied together by a network of streets, sidewalks and other open spaces.

In the same manner, well-designed public services can improve our quality of life with opportunities for personal growth and assistance for all Houstonians. All aspects of service delivery, from public safety to health to social needs, should optimize their effectiveness, including maximizing partnerships among different governments and the nonprofit and private sectors. Both our public places and our public services should reflect Houston's diversity and improve each individual's quality of life.

Our Vision for Downtown Houston relies on the continued improvement of our public and civic realm. Strategic priorities include:

1. Transforming Buffalo Bayou into Downtown's greenbelt and waterfront.
2. Enhancing existing parks and plazas to create truly compelling civic places.
3. Making Downtown an urban garden by developing new parks, greener sidewalk corridors and landscaped surface parking lots.
4. Designing public services to truly serve the needs of all Houstonians.

Houston has always been diverse, but this trait now defines our population. In our schools, scores of languages can be heard. This transformation is profoundly changing our city.

Downtown must support Houston's leaders as they work with Houston's neighborhoods to improve our community.

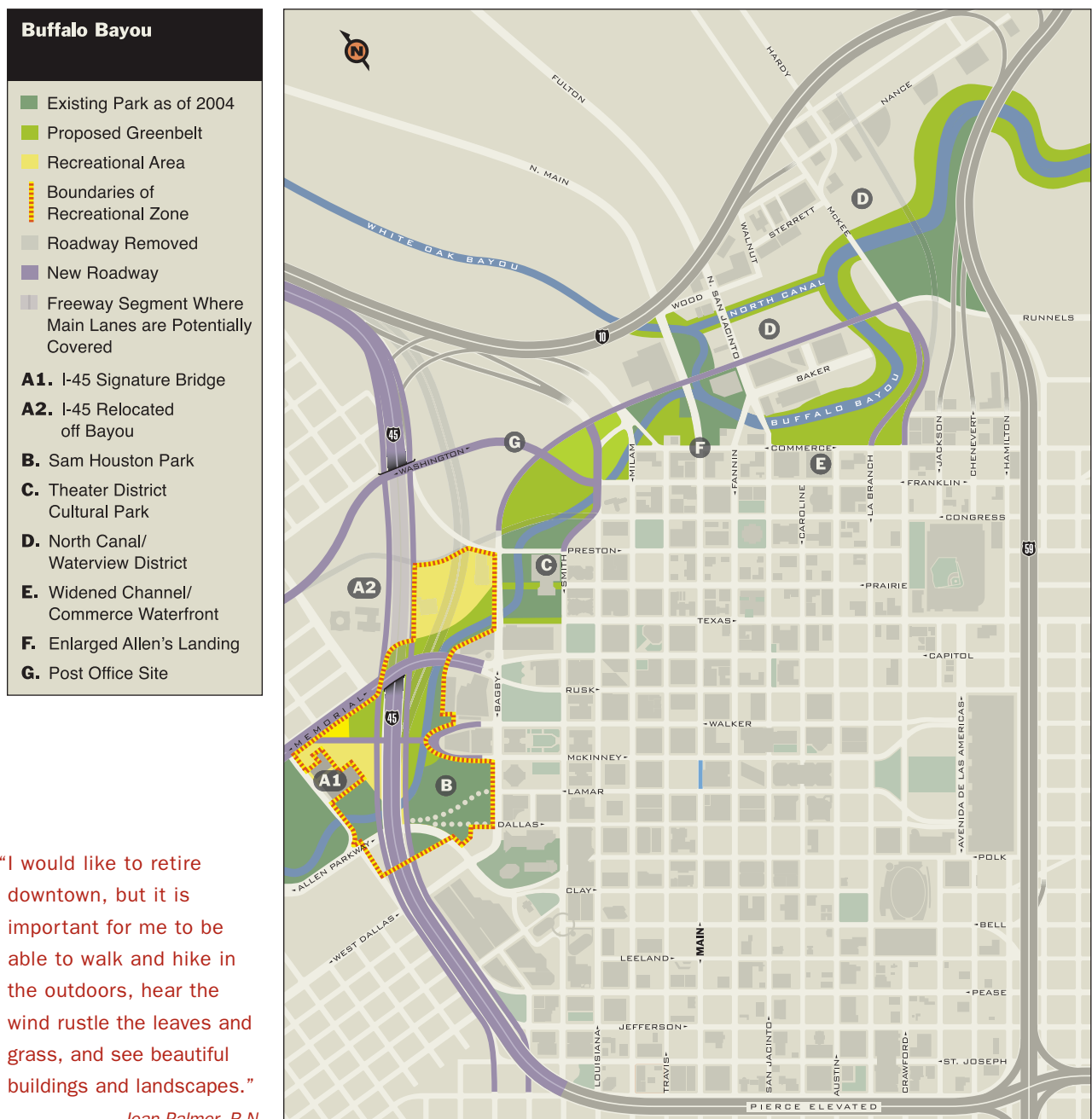
Downtown has made measurable progress toward greener streetscapes – 1,000s of new street trees and miles of widened sidewalks with landscaping and fountains accenting key areas.





BUFFALO BAYOU: A NATURAL SETTING FOR DOWNTOWN

Buffalo Bayou has great potential to serve as a significant natural setting for Downtown. Along with White Oak Bayou, Buffalo Bayou also must effectively drain floodwaters from most of western Harris County. Houston's most important and historic waterway has received increased attention in recent years with the completion of Sesquicentennial Park, improvements to Allen's Landing and stormwater drainage expansion. The Buffalo Bayou Partnership's recently developed master plan, *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond*, provides a long-term vision for the waterway. The Downtown Development Framework supports further improvements to the bayou and adjacent areas based on the precepts of this plan. The bayou should be a defining natural feature and a mixed-use recreational corridor, stretching from Memorial Park to the East End, with inspired urban development along its banks.



Implement the flood-control projects recommended in *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond*

- Redesign and raise bridges above the 100-year floodplain.
- Widen the bayou channel downstream of Allen's Landing.
- Construct a "North Canal" to bypass the existing bottleneck at the Allen's Landing confluence of White Oak Bayou and Buffalo Bayou.
- To clear the way for the North Canal, relocate the Union Pacific passenger main line to the parallel rail corridor north of Downtown (see map p. 30).
- Build all improvements with strong consideration of urban design and desired urban development.
- Educate property owners about best practices to reduce flood damage risk and advocate policies that minimize upstream runoff that floods Downtown.

Uncover the bayou by relocating and redesigning Interstate 45 North

- When reconstruction is scheduled (in 10 to 20 years), work with the Texas Dept. of Transportation (TxDOT) to relocate the freeway through publicly-owned land immediately west of Downtown.
- Lower the freeway near adjacent neighborhoods.
- Design a signature freeway bridge over the bayou. (see page 31)
- Use the freeway realignment to create more park space and a recreational corridor.

Improve the bayou's environment and usage potential with other projects and development opportunities

- Make Buffalo Bayou the centerpiece of a transformed Theater District with a cultural park and development on the post office site.
- Emphasize mixed-use residential development from the Theater District to the East End.



© Thompson Design Group, Inc. rendering: Kevin Wilson

Proposed Waterview District

- Develop sites along the bayou by redesigning thoroughfares, freeway ramps and the bayou channel banks so that events can take place without traffic disruption.

Emphasize quality of place in all improvements within and adjacent to the channel

- Encourage strong connections to the bayou for both private development and public streets.
- Ensure that public areas have a strong management, maintenance and programming system for security, cleanliness, appearance, water quality and vitality.

Proposed North Canal, centerpiece of the Waterview District



© Thompson Design Group, Inc. rendering: Kevin Wilson

PARKS AND PLAZAS: A SERIES OF COMPELLING FOCAL POINTS

Downtown must have more green spaces and pedestrian areas that provide arenas for both structured and unstructured activity. Both types of places have the potential to become the jewels in Downtown's crown and much-loved memory points for locals and visitors alike. Downtown's public spaces should range from green gardens to lively plazas in order to accommodate a range of activities. The northwestern sector of Downtown already contains a number of such spaces. But, they have yet to fulfill their potential as social, recreational, and cultural focal points. In addition, parks and plazas are sparse in the other sectors of Downtown, reducing opportunities for some types of development, especially residential. It is important to address all of these issues over the next twenty years.





Above: Sesquicentennial Park

Left: New civic park on the east side of Downtown

Enhance existing parks and plazas to improve their usefulness and vitality

- Review existing spaces for design improvements to encourage human use and complementary development.
- Change operations and programming to increase appropriate activities and retail concessions (cafes, vendors and markets).
- Create design, management and programming guidelines for all parks and plazas to improve their friendliness and usage.
- Unify Theater District parks and plazas into a “Cultural Park” energized by arts activities and related uses.
- Restore Sam Houston Park to its historic configuration if it is feasible to reconfigure Allen Parkway.

Integrate green spaces into private development

- Work with owners of surface parking lots to install trees and perimeter landscaping.
- Create a “garden district” on the east side of Downtown where the landscaping of private properties and public sidewalks complements the west side parks and gardens that already enhance City Hall.



Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland

Create new parks and open space in underserved areas

- Create a major new civic open space on the “superblock” in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center that will become a new “front door” for Houston.
- Complete the new plaza at the heart of the Harris County campus.
- Create a new park that links Midtown to Cullen Center along I-45.
- Complete green space in Christ Church Cathedral expansion.
- Seek opportunities in the southern and eastern areas of Downtown to create new smaller parks and plazas next to active ground-floor uses and/or residential development.



Surface Parking Lots

Greener parking lots could transform Downtown

PUBLIC SERVICES AND AMENITIES FOR ALL

Downtown is both literally and figuratively the center of Houston. It serves as the primary home of city and county government as well as an assortment of federal-level offices. It is also an important commercial and service node for a constellation of diverse neighborhoods that surround it, as well as its own increasing residential base. Given this special situation in Houston, Downtown must seek to embrace and serve the entire city. This means that all residents of Houston, no matter what their background or economic situation, should feel that Downtown benefits them, and that they in turn have something to offer Downtown. At the most basic level, Downtown should be a welcoming town center where residents can receive high-quality public services and partake of convenient amenities.



Create attractive and convenient major government campuses

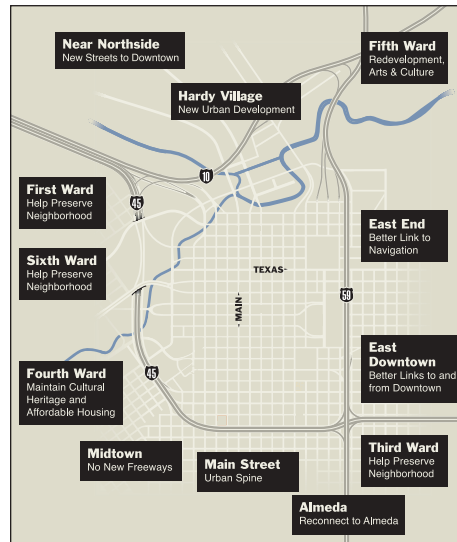
- Finish the Harris County campus expansion, restore the historic Civil Courthouse Building, and build the city-county joint booking facility.
- Build a new federal courthouse and Downtown post office while creating a federal campus centered on the historic Customs House.
- Create a new public safety campus west of I-45 for HPD and Municipal Courts while providing Trinity Church with expansion space. Determine if 61 Riesner should be replaced or renovated if I-45 is relocated (see p.31).
- Complete Fire Station Number 1.
- Integrate convenient visitor parking and transit access into all plans.

Provide affordable and useful retail, services and amenities for center-city residents

- Seek community-level establishments that meet the needs of central city residents.
- Provide child care facilities, schools and physical amenities such as playgrounds.
- Promote farmers' and ethnic markets that can create opportunities for small businesses and interesting shopping.
- As Downtown's population grows, provide neighborhood-level public services.
- Encourage ethnic cultural centers.

Continue expansion of Christus St. Joseph Hospital

- Continue the physical expansion of the hospital campus with a women's hospital, cancer center, medical office building and new patient care tower.
- Recognize the hospital's role as the trauma center for Downtown.
- Coordinate hospital expansion with potential mixed-use residential development, including investigation of jointly sponsored projects to serve hospital employees and physicians.
- Complete improvements to St. Joseph Parkway.



Some concerns heard from adjacent neighborhoods

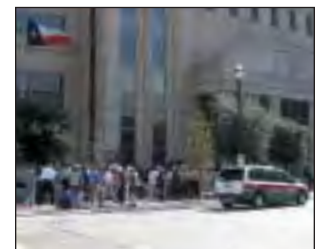
Strengthen ties to surrounding neighborhoods

- Emphasize that Downtown employers can recruit and train central city residents.
- Highlight Houston's diversity through a range of cultural and social events.
- Jointly plan projects on Downtown's perimeter with adjacent neighborhoods.
- Support existing designated historic neighborhoods and those with potential historic designations so that they can retain residents who support Downtown businesses.



Serve the homeless and economically disadvantaged

- Upon completion of the homeless population census, better integrate all services through an ombudsman; reduce random feeding; and implement new initiatives to improve service delivery, including 24-hour dispatch, expanded mobile outreach, day facilities and a renewed "wet & cold" program.
- Promote community-wide solutions for housing the formerly homeless while providing more such housing in Downtown.
- Institute a "community court" to more effectively adjudicate quality-of-life and civility infractions, reduce recidivism and truly improve the lives of offenders.



Good police services (above) and criminal justice services (lower) are fundamental

CONNECTED AND CONVENIENT

Downtown's internal street grid has functioned effectively for more than 150 years, and today there is also easy access to Downtown from any point in the region. Protection and enhancement of these assets are essential to Downtown's long-term prosperity and growth. Over the past twenty years, access to Downtown has been enhanced through improvements to freeways, the addition of high-occupancy lanes on most freeways leading to Downtown and accommodation of enhanced transit service through dedicated diamond lanes.

However, Downtown's multiple roles – regional center, urban commercial district, residential neighborhood and place to have fun – mean that it must be accessible and convenient for more than daily commuters driving to work. Houstonians need more travel options, whether they live downtown, visit or commute on a daily basis. Links to adjacent neighborhoods – severed by regional roadwork and major facilities – must be re-established. Transit and other modes must be re-integrated into Downtown, applying the same public and private ingenuity that successfully accommodated the automobile fifty years ago.

These elements are the foundation for the Framework's vision and provide the basis for the following strategic priorities:

1. Continued improvements to freeways and toll roads for regional access, with more consideration given to their impact on neighboring properties and people.
2. Improved regional transit service, including bus, rail and intermodal facilities.
3. Continued multimodal enhancements to our street and sidewalk network.
4. Improved links to and visibility of surrounding neighborhoods.
5. Improved visitor parking, especially on streets and at key destinations.

Houston cannot build its way out of its congestion. The answer lies as much in the desire to live near one's work in the central city as it does in more freeways and transit.

More than 40% of Downtown commuters use something other than a single-occupant automobile in 2004. Because of its density of commuters, investment in alternative modes serving Downtown will benefit the entire region.

With seven years of street construction ending in 2005, Downtown's system of roadways, sidewalks, transit and infrastructure (both public and private) is among the most modern in the nation.



Main Street Square

Southbound Red Line

ion - llegada de tren

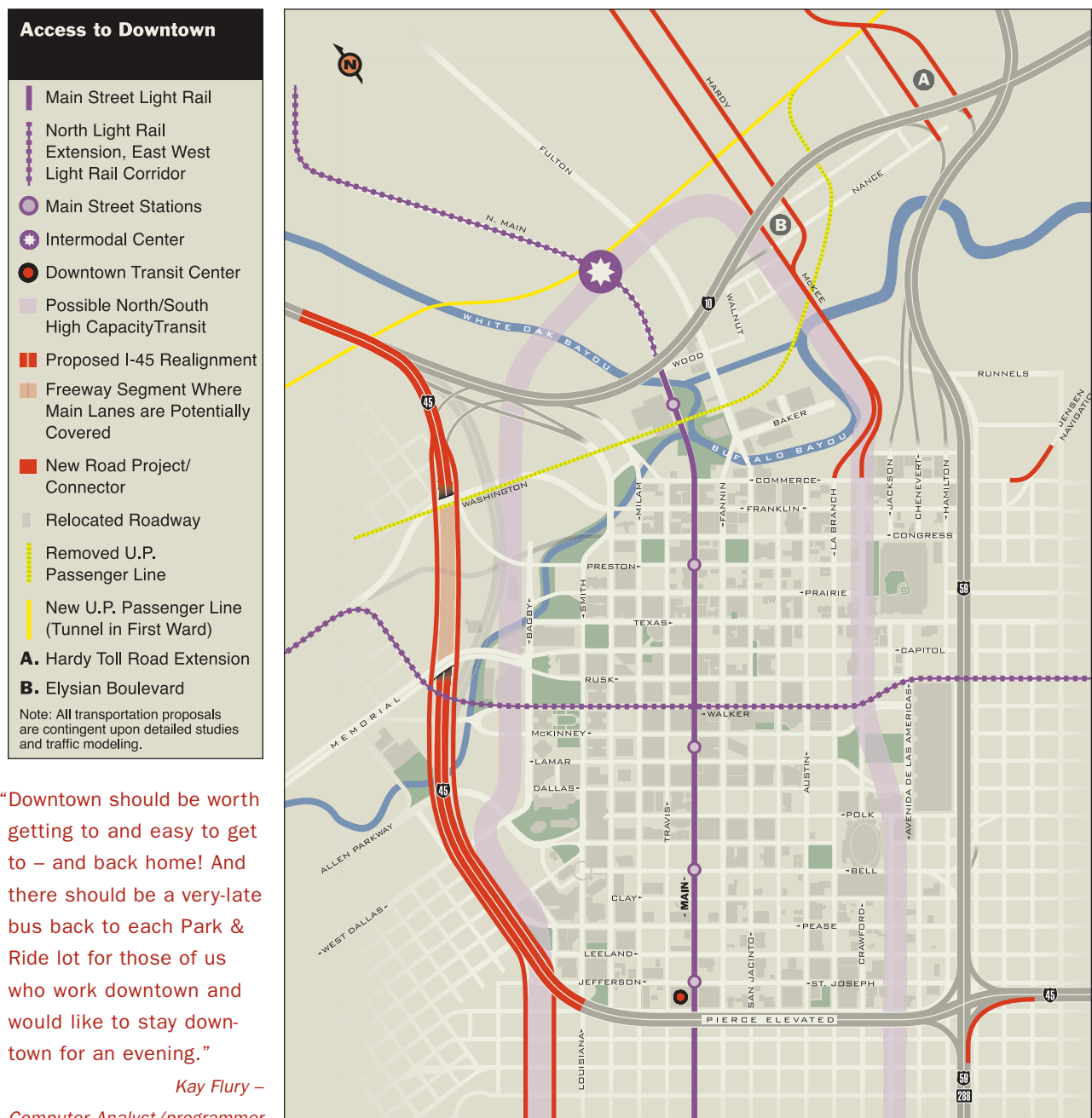
Main Street Square

TICKETS



HIGHWAY AND MAJOR TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS

Downtown continues to enjoy improved regional access. Over the past twenty years, U.S. 59 North and South have been improved. In addition, high occupancy vehicle lanes now exist on these freeways and I-45 while the Katy-CBD Ramp has improved transit access from the Katy Freeway. More recently, light rail service began along Main Street from Downtown to the Texas Medical Center and Reliant Park. As Downtown continues to be a major commuting destination while increasing its attractiveness for nonwork activities, the capacity and convenience of links to the region will need to improve without harming the urban environment. In addition, access will need to include a variety of travel modes so that traveling Downtown does not automatically mean dealing with traffic congestion, but instead offers an increased number and quality of non-congested options.



Improve highway connections into Downtown

- When I-45 is scheduled for reconstruction (in 10 to 20 years), relocate the freeway west to public property and replace interchange ramps with landscaped access roads. Study right-of-way width, placement of parkway roads and related impacts on adjacent properties.
- Do not expand the Pierce Elevated or build freeways in Midtown. To relieve pressure on this freeway, improve and beautify Bagby and Brazos streets between I-45 and U.S. 59 in Midtown and redesign the S.H. 288 – I-45 ramps.
- Extend the Hardy Toll Road to the I-10/ U.S. 59 interchange in Downtown and provide convenient secondary access via a reconfigured, at-grade Elysian Boulevard.
- Seek to eliminate elevated freeways by rebuilding them below-grade without compromising access across freeways; where this is not possible, landscape, light and secure areas under freeways.

Offer new and improved transit service

- Extend the Main Street light rail line north, in conjunction with improved Park & Ride facilities along I-45.
- Reduce transit trip time between Downtown and in-city neighborhoods.
- Develop a regional intermodal center

north of Downtown that serves the Main Street line, future light rail lines, commuter rail, Amtrak (with possible high speed inter-city rail), regional and local bus service. Coordinate with relocation of the Union Pacific passenger main line (see p. 23).

- With the planned east-west light rail line, serve the sports facilities/convention center, Main Street Square, City Hall/Theater District and the public safety campus. To avoid disruption to traffic flow and adjacent major buildings, place it in a subway (shown on Walker). Tie its schedule to METRO's capacity to fund a subway (see p. 32).
- In the future, plan north-south light rail lines linking the intermodal center with the Wheeler Transit Center in the south end of Midtown, thereby serving the heavily developed west and east sides of Downtown and Midtown with an "urban center loop".
- Expand Park & Ride bus service and, where appropriate, add commuter rail service in principal corridors serving Downtown.
- Reinstitute trolley service to adjacent areas where appropriate, using funding partnerships to cover operating costs.



Enhanced Chicago freeway passage



A signature bridge could become an icon for Houston



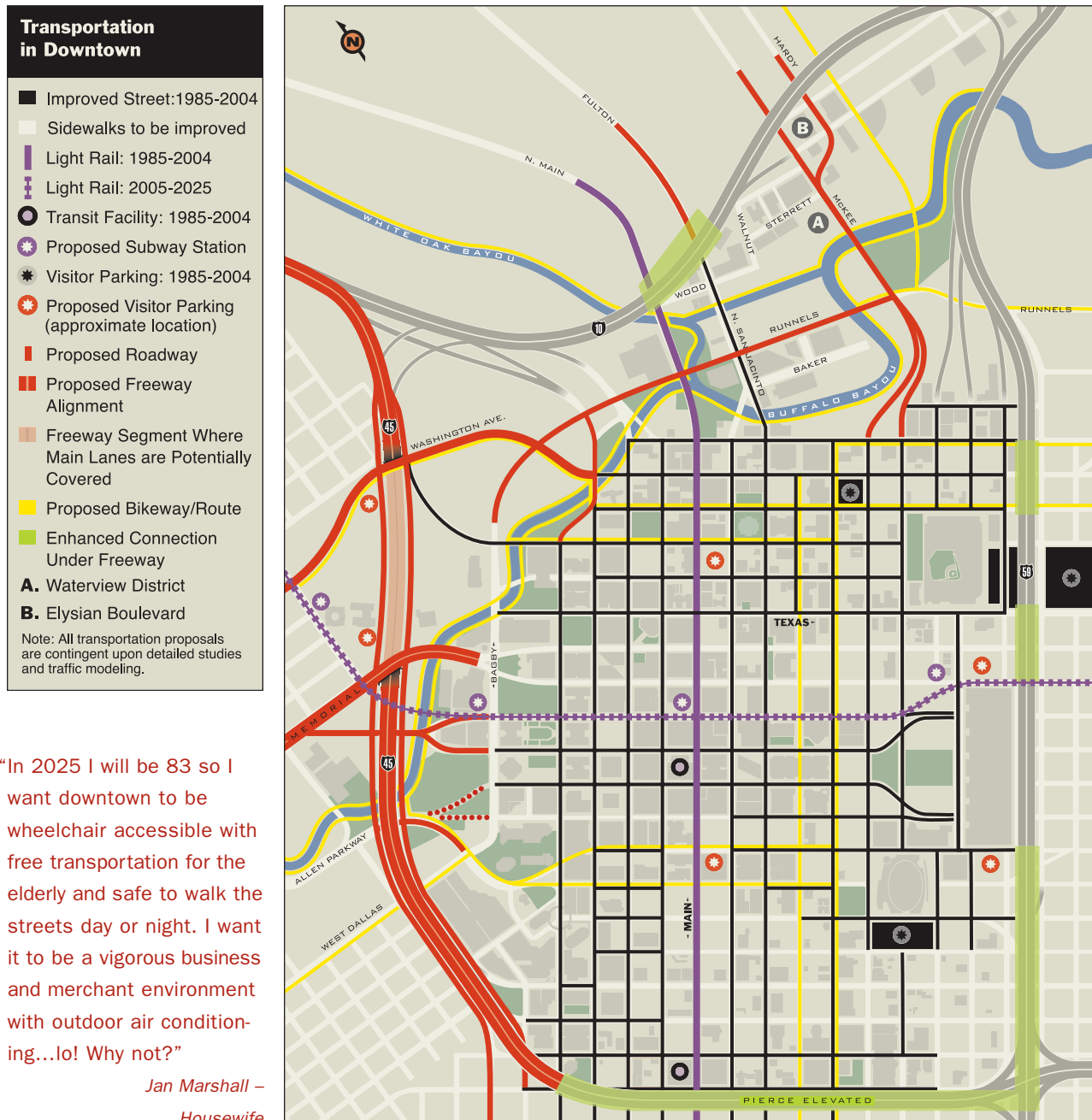
The existing interchange cuts Downtown off from the bayou parkway to the west

A redesigned I-45 will improve access and allow the bayou parkway to extend into Downtown



INTERNAL CIRCULATION, PARKING AND LINKS TO ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS

Downtown's most notable transportation feature is its street grid, which is remarkably effective at distributing traffic, creating pedestrian connections and accommodating transit. It also provides the basis for additional improvements that enhance the convenience and appeal of getting around within the area and accessing surrounding neighborhoods. Because Downtown will broaden its range of functions and attractions, these short trips will become more popular as people will wish to visit more than one location while running errands, spending leisure time, or both. In addition, because the Downtown experience is superior and often more practical when not in an automobile, the community should place special attention on alternative means of travel such as trolleys, walking and bicycles. Fortunately, major improvements to streets, sidewalks and transit facilities over the past decade make these alternatives far easier to achieve.



"In 2025 I will be 83 so I want downtown to be wheelchair accessible with free transportation for the elderly and safe to walk the streets day or night. I want it to be a vigorous business and merchant environment with outdoor air conditioning...lo! Why not?"

Jan Marshall –
Housewife

Preserve and enhance Downtown's street grid

- Do not grant additional permanent street closures without careful review of their impacts on street grid function.
- Optimize arterial street connections to the grid as freeways and peripheral sites are redeveloped.
- Extend Runnels St. as a new thoroughfare in the Union Pacific passenger main line alignment across the north end of Downtown (see also map p. 30).
- Improve streetscapes and storm sewers along east-west streets crossing Main St. south of Texas Ave.
- As new residential development occurs in the Waterview District, improve connections to adjacent areas and add streets to improve the grid where it is lacking.

Improve connections to surrounding neighborhoods (also see map p. 30)

- If I-45 over Buffalo Bayou is relocated to the west, reconfigure thoroughfares such as Washington, Memorial, Allen Parkway and West Dallas to provide more convenient and attractive connections to the new public safety campus and areas west of Downtown.
- Extend North San Jacinto Street across I-10 and the current Hardy rail yards to the Near Northside.
- Create an at-grade thoroughfare in place of the Elysian Viaduct that connects to the Hardy Tollroad Extension and accesses the new Waterview District, Near Northside and Fifth Ward.
- Directly connect Commerce Street east to Navigation Boulevard and Jensen Drive via a new tunnel under the railroad tracks.
- Through roadway and streetscape design, improve the connectivity to neighborhoods to the east and southeast that was diminished by street grid interruptions for major east-side public facilities.



Improve the convenience and design of visitor parking

- Develop new visitor parking facilities on Main Street to support retail.
- Create new visitor parking on the east side of Downtown in the vicinity of the proposed major civic park.
- Improve the appearance and user experience of surface parking lots.
- Encourage the “wrapping” of ground floor active uses, such as retail, in above-ground parking structures with strong attention to the aesthetic appearance of parking structures overall.
- Rationalize and improve on-street parking patterns and management to better serve the visitor.
- Improve directional signage to freeways.

New cultural park modeled on Chicago's Millennium Park if studies show Texas and Prairie can be closed and garage access improved (see p. 15)



Eastside bayou hike and bike path

Accommodate all forms of mobility

- Provide well-designed and appropriately located pathways for pedestrians that connect Downtown to surrounding areas.
- Complete planned bayou bikeways and on-street bike lanes. Add bicycle storage facilities throughout Downtown.
- Investigate the provision of water taxi service along Buffalo Bayou as development increases along its banks.
- Provide trolleys, pedicabs and other options to serve longer trips within Downtown.



Cotswold improvements with improved parking and transit

IMPLEMENTATION

Just as Houstonians have come together to create the vision that drives this update of the Houston Downtown Development Framework, they will have to collaborate and cooperate to implement the Framework's recommendations. This will require the steadfast attention and commitment of private property owners, businesses, citizens, nonprofit organizations, special districts, government and public agencies. Some tasks will need to begin immediately, while others will wait in the wings. Because this report represents a consensus vision for Downtown, ongoing research, coordination with public policy, sub-area planing and urban design will require continuing attention. Houstonians have proven themselves time and again to epitomize creativity, industriousness, determination and generosity – all qualities that the Framework will require for its realization.

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A framework for ongoing progress

This update to the Framework establishes a common starting point and guide for decision-making through collaboration and partnership. In order to ensure that this collaboration can occur effectively, a Framework Steering Group will be established. Its members will include representatives from the groups who will implement the Framework. Government and public agencies, including the City of Houston, Harris County, TxDOT and METRO must be involved along with private investors and other partners. Key Downtown organizations include:

Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP): Primary non-government partner for improvements to Buffalo Bayou planned for the next twenty years.

Central Houston, Inc. (CHI): Focus for Downtown-based economic development, major civic projects, access/mobility, long-range planning initiatives and advocacy for Downtown.

Downtown District (HDMD): Specialized services not offered by traditional government, research, planning and general improvements of prime importance to Downtown's future.

Houston Downtown Alliance (HDA): Human side of Downtown through its family of organizations, including events, attractions, promotions and ways to involve workers, visitors and residents.

Main Street Market Square Redevelopment Authority (MSRA): Public improvements to retail, residential, bayou and theater environments on Main Street and within its tax increment zone boundaries.

An entrepreneurial city

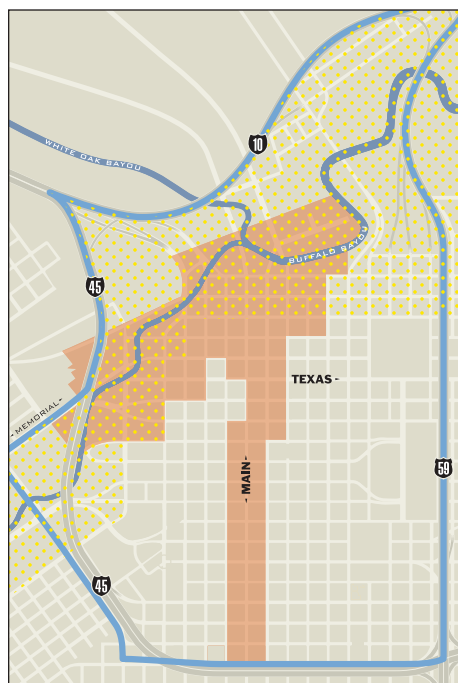
Any process must acknowledge the role of the entrepreneur in Downtown's future. Many creative ideas and opportunities will emerge from the private sector, and Houston should seek interested investors and welcome their contributions, however unexpected. More investors are seeking community support and assistance. When

such support and assistance are sought, the Downtown community should consider whether the proposal in question will help achieve the vision for Downtown Houston in 2025. Such proposals should generate positive answers ("yes") to the questions listed on this page.

Better coordination of public policy with private investment

In urban areas of Houston, better coordination of private investment with public policy and improvements is required. The Framework recommends that the City of Houston adopt procedures that will allow appropriate aspects of the Framework to be implemented as public policy, including the following:

- Modifications to development regulations that are already in place.
- Protection of investments made in roads, landscaping and sidewalks.
- Consideration of adherence to voluntary design guidelines when offering assistance to developers.
- Ongoing consideration of the Downtown community's overall goals as public improvements and services are planned.



Considering New Projects & Proposals

Questions that should be asked about any project or proposal being considered for support by the Downtown community and public sector.

Does the proposal enhance:

1. Residential opportunities?
2. Continuous, active, attractive sidewalks and public spaces?
3. Downtown's range of attractions and community venues?
4. Downtown as a global business center?
5. The Buffalo Bayou greenbelt and waterfront?
6. Compelling and green public spaces?
7. Government or health care services and facilities?
8. Multimodal access without undue negative impacts on properties or people?
9. Conditions for adjacent neighborhoods?
10. "Visitability" for Downtown tourists and conventioners?
11. Historic buildings and areas?

Special District Boundaries

- MSRA/TIRZ Zone
- HDMD Service Area
- Approximate Area of BBP Master Plan

SPONSORS AND PARTICIPANTS

Sponsoring Organizations

Central Houston, Inc.
Downtown District
Houston Downtown Alliance
Main Street Market Square Redevelopment Authority

Volunteer Committees

For one year, the Steering Committee, comprised of stakeholders from in and around Downtown, oversaw the process, established strategic priorities and guided production of this document. Task forces focused on important issues and advised the Steering Committee. In addition, several dozen focus group meetings were held with users and stakeholders in and outside Downtown.

Contributors

While the Framework is the product of volunteers, others made important contributions:

Research Consultants

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SWA Group
Parsons Transportation Group
Economics Research Associates
Gensler/Rey de la Reza Architects
Lucy Buck/Dexter Street Studio

Plan Production Consultants

Spillette Consulting
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Other Contributions

The *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond* master plan, produced by the Buffalo Bayou Partnership and its consultant, Thompson Design Group, underlies most proposals for Buffalo Bayou.

Task Forces

In addition to Steering Committee members, the following volunteers served on six task forces:

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Dave Robinson
Carroll Shaddock
Scott Slaney
Paul Weathers
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Additional Reports Available

Task Force Reports

Research:

- Residential and Retail Incentives
- Office Market Review
- Entertainment Districts
- I-45 Redesign