

The Greenway on Buffalo Bayou

Project Overview

Buffalo Bayou Partnership is collaborating with the City of Houston and Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) on an exciting project along the 172-acre Shepherd to Sabine stretch of Buffalo Bayou. Using the organization's 2002 *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond* Master Plan as a guide the project's overarching goals are:

- To restore the bayou to a more natural and self-sustaining version of what exists today
- To reintroduce native park landscape
- To add amenities to enhance the safety and convenience of visitors

Buffalo Bayou and Beyond Master Plan

The current planning initiative for the Shepherd to Sabine segment builds off the 2002 *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond* Master Plan, a 20-year vision for our city's historic waterway. Focusing on a 10-square-mile bayou stretch, the plan addressed distinct problems and characteristics of three bayou segments: West Sector (Shepherd to Sabine), Downtown (Sabine to U.S. 59) and East Sector (U.S. 59 to the Port of Houston Turning Basin). Plan recommendations in the west sector include:

- Upgrading the existing bayou environment
- Improving habitat
- Expanding the waterway for boating and other recreational activity
- Improving access

Since releasing the plan eight years ago, significant progress has been made in implementing the master plan's recommendations in the downtown and east sector, including:

- Assemblage of approximately 45 acres of property for future creation of parkland
- Construction of four miles of hike and bike trails in the East End
- Phase I and II of Allen's Landing Park, including restored wharf, promenade, sloping grass lawn, terrace and public art
- Development of Sabine Promenade – Since its opening in 2008, the waterfront park has been recognized with 11 local and national awards. The project was a joint effort of Buffalo Bayou Partnership, City of Houston, Harris County Flood Control District and Texas Department of Transportation
- Creation of a comprehensive program to clear the bayou of trash and debris. Partners include: Harris County Flood Control District, Port of Houston Authority and Shell Oil Company.

Current Shepherd to Sabine Projects

In addition to the significant progress made in the bayou's downtown and east sector segments, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership has worked diligently to implement improvements in the Shepherd to Sabine area (West Sector). Currently, more than \$10 million worth of projects are under construction and planned for the near future, including:

- Pedestrian bridge, providing improved connectivity to neighborhoods to the north and to Allen Parkway on the south
- Hike and bike trails connecting to existing trails, street-level sidewalks, and to the following adjacent neighborhoods: Montrose, Sixth ward, Heights and Rice Military. (by TRZ 5)
- Tapley Tributary renovation that will restore the natural area's turtle pond, install a pedestrian and extend the site's tree canopy.
- Stream restoration pilot project to increase flood water conveyance by removing silt buildup and restoring native vegetation. Harris County Flood Control District is leading this exciting project that ultimately may be implemented west to Shepherd Drive
- Realignment and widening of the existing hike and bike trail along Allen Parkway and Memorial Drive by City of Houston and TX DOT. Scheduled to start mid 2011

Need for a Shepherd to Sabine Planning Process

With significant progress being made with current West Sector projects combined with other initiatives along the waterway, there is a great deal of momentum and interest to transform the Shepherd to Sabine bayou segment into one of Houston's premier green spaces. In addition to the growing interest in restoration of this bayou area, there is an urgent need to address natural processes (erosion, silt buildup) that if not addressed, will cause long-term ecological harm.

Shepherd to Sabine Master Plan

With the financial support of a private Houston foundation, Buffalo Bayou Partnership has joined with the City of Houston and Harris County Flood Control District to study whether Houstonians are ready to fulfill the potential of the Shepherd to Sabine area, an amazing natural and recreational resource and one of our city's most iconic landscapes.

The six-month study, which will be completed by the end of 2010, will result in a comprehensive plan for the area and a preliminary design concept for the waterway.

Harris County Flood Control District Preliminary Design Study

At Buffalo Bayou Partnership's invitation and with the support of the City of Houston, HCFCD, through a preliminary study, is investigating how the agency might restore the channel. Committed to an environmentally sensitive approach, the HCFCD team includes archaeologists, biologists and a fluvial geomorphologist who will apply lessons from natural stream systems to repair damage done to Buffalo Bayou when it was channelized. Key goals of the HCFCD study include:

- Restore and enhance the channel's storm water capacity
- Enhance the ability of the natural systems to maintain themselves naturally and affordably
- Remove silt that has built up over the past 50 years
- Preserve existing high quality trees
- Reintroduce native trees and vegetation

Buffalo Bayou Partnership Parkland Master Plan

Buffalo Bayou Partnership's Master Plan work focuses on the site's parkland from the bayou's banks to Memorial Drive and Allen Parkway. In addition to integrating the current trails and bridge project under construction, the plan's key goals include:

- Restoration of natural landscapes, including trees, native grasses and understory, including reduced mowed grass in areas not used for recreation
- Provision of areas to walk and hike away from speeding bicycles, opportunities to enjoy nature and places for canoes and kayaks to "land."
- Safer passages over the bayou away from dangerous roadway bridges.
- Improved comfort – additional benches, shade, places to picnic and drinking fountains, generally "up high" while still preserving this area as a place people can go to get away from the city, "down low."
- Improved safety – lighting to enhance the greenway "up high" while avoiding lighting in more natural areas "down low."
- Restoration of historic ravines, outfalls and other secondary water features.
- Improved access from surrounding neighborhoods.

Other (Important Goals):

- The plan will be designed with both the current population and projected population in mind.
- The plan will be designed to be maintainable over the long term to protect private and public investment.

Other Ideas

Although not part of the current master plan goals, the following ideas brought to the Buffalo Bayou Partnership in the past could become part of the final plan:

- More parking
- Pedestrian connections over/under Shepherd and Memorial drives and Allen Parkway
- Special gardens, especially those using native species
- Official dog park
- Sculpture garden
- Restrooms
- Canoe/kayak and bicycle rental operations
- Restaurant or café
- Vendor carts

- Bandstand or amphitheater
- Better planned area for recurring civic festivals such as the Freedom Fest

Community Meetings

In late June, Houstonians were invited to attend two community meetings to share their ideas and to recommend future Shepherd to Sabine enhancements. Close to 200 people attended the meetings.

See website for summary of the community meetings.