







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.







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



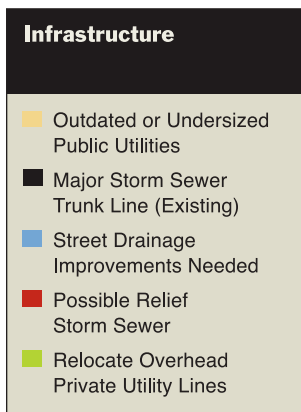
“My vision for Downtown in 2025 is to be as eclectic as the rest of Houston already is...a melting pot of classes, races and cultural diversity. Kind of like a blend of New York, Chicago and Buenos Aires all thrown in a blender.”

Scot More – Non-profit services

Develop policies to encourage more residential development Downtown

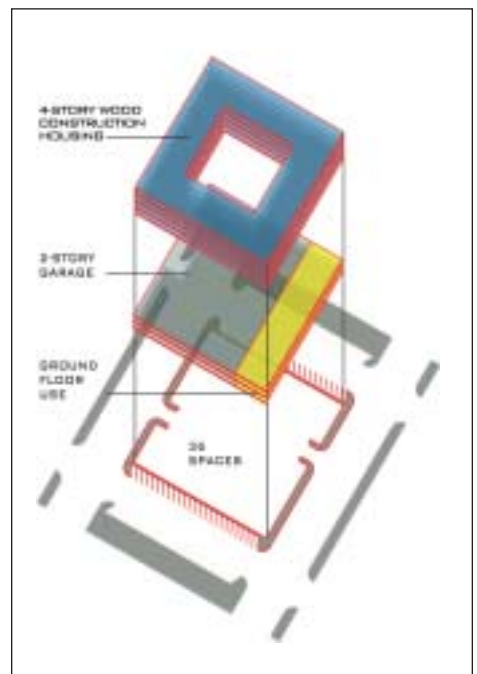
- Hasten more medium-density residential development through creative incentive programs that optimize underutilized on-street parking and parking facilities.
- Create new organizations that can partner in the residential development process.

- 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

TYPE	CALCULATION OF DEVELOPMENT: 2005 – 2025				NUMBER OF DWELLING UNITS				
	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.

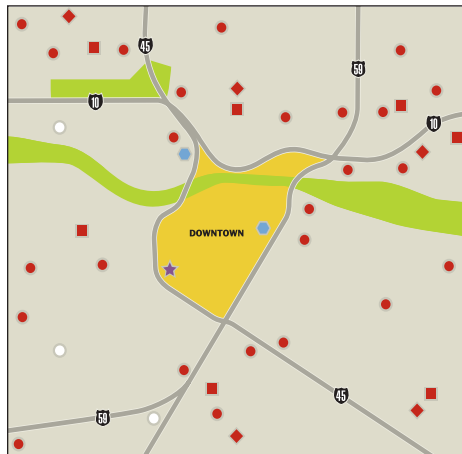
Source: Houston Downtown Management District
Chicago: U.S. Bureau of the Census

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

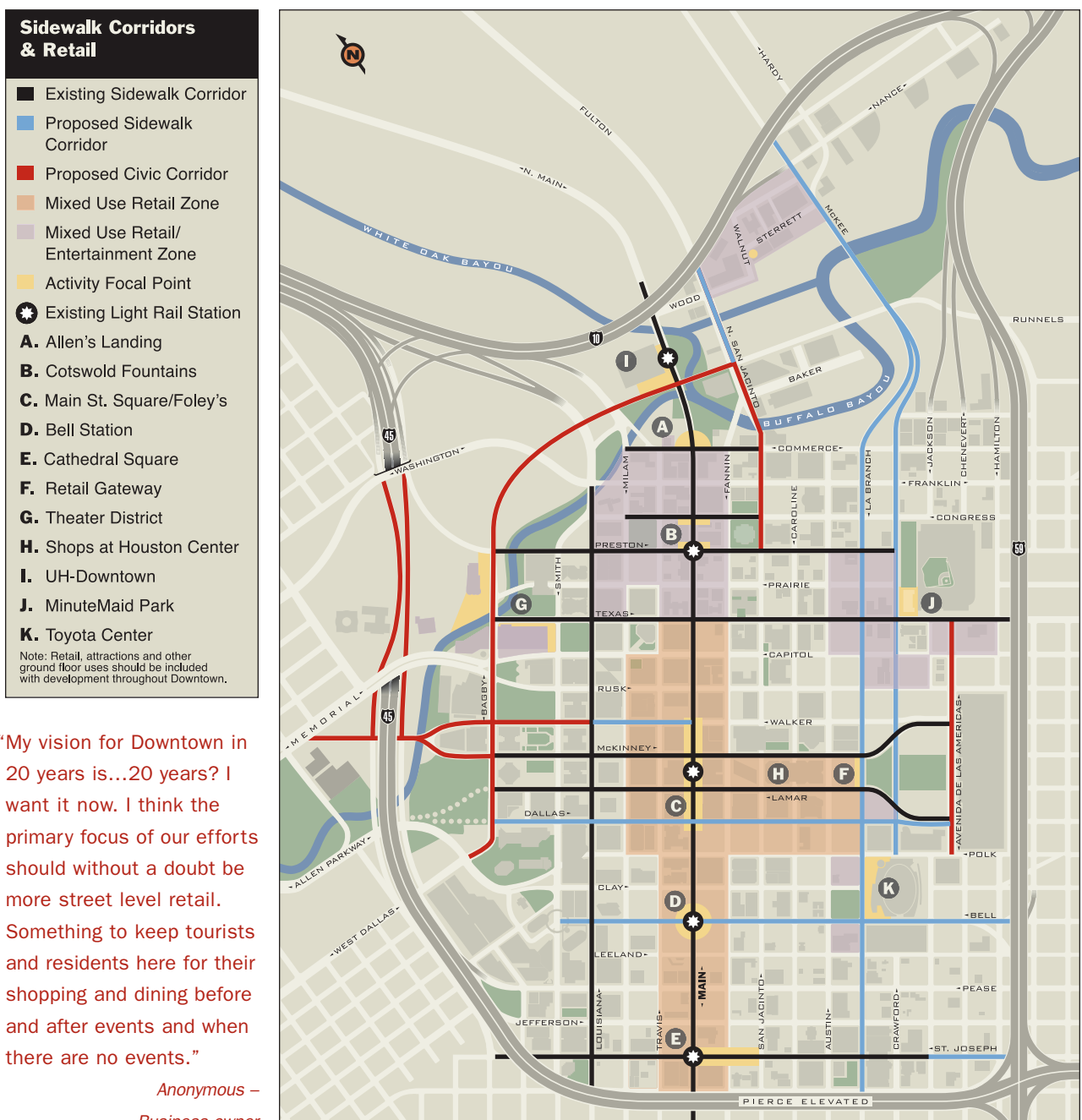


Schools - Proximity to Downtown

- Downtown
- Large Parks
- Public Elementary School
- Public Middle School
- ◆ Public High School
- Private Schools in Downtown
- ★ Charter Schools in Downtown
- Alternate and Magnet Schools

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.



“My vision for Downtown in 20 years is...20 years? I want it now. I think the primary focus of our efforts should without a doubt be more street level retail. Something to keep tourists and residents here for their shopping and dining before and after events and when there are no events.”

Anonymous – Business owner

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.



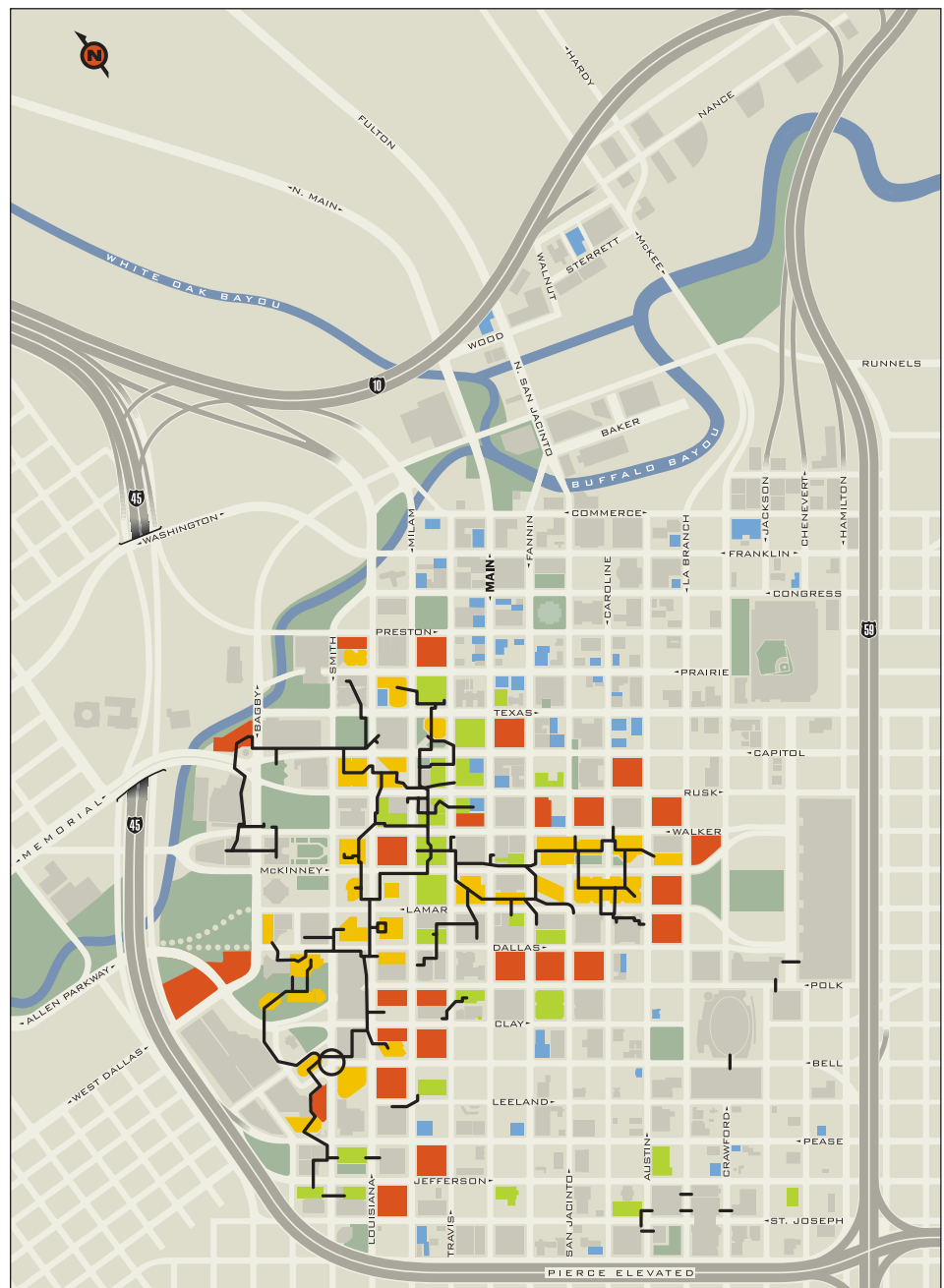
Historic Main Street was chosen for Superbowl festivities

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.

Commercial Office Buildings

- Tunnels and Skywalks
- Class A Office Building
- Class B Office Building
- Class C and D Office Building
- Block with Probable Access to Tunnel/Skywalk System



“My vision for Downtown in 2025 is a metropolis filled with diverse cultures enjoying the great parks and attractions and the business opportunities that will come if we provide more attention/detail to our great city.”

*Miguel Torres –
Import Coordinator*