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HOUSTON DOWNTOWN MANAGEMENT DISTRICT’S PUBLIC/PRIVATE PROJECTS TRANSFORM DOWNTOWN HOUSTON

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On August 26, 1836, brothers Augustus C. and John K. Allen purchased 6,642 acres of land along Buffalo Bayou for $5,000 and named their new town Houston in honor of Sam Houston. On August 30, 1836, they officially opened their new town and sold it to the public for $1 per acre. One year later, 1837, with 1,200 residents, the city of Houston was incorporated. Fast forward to the 2010 census, the fourth most populous and fastest growing city in the United States, Houston, is home to almost 2.1 million people within 599 square miles, and according to <https://en.wikipedia.org/siki/Houston>, Houston’s estimated population for 2016 is 2.2 million.

In 1837, a multi-passenger horse-drawn stagecoach line connected Houston and Harrisburg, a distance of five miles. Today, Houstonians are privy to an abundance of public and private modes of transportation, including an airport system comprised of George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), William P. Hobby Airport (HOU), and Ellington Airport (EFD).

Compared to crude downtown structures that early businesses occupied, today, Houston boasts numerous beautifully architecturally designed buildings that outshine comparable cities. Real estate developer Gerald D. Hines, along with a host of renowned architects, takes credit for many. On March 30, 1967, ground was broken on Hines’ 50-story downtown Houston One Shell Plaza, which was to be Houston’s tallest building. Architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson’s designs were a major move into the future. Today, Houston has over 360 completed high-rises, the majority of which are in the downtown area. In 1982, the tallest building in downtown Houston, the 75-story JP Morgan Chase Tower (formerly Texas Commerce Tower) was completed and rises 1,002 feet (305 miles). It is also the tallest building in Texas and the 12th-tallest in the United States. It was developed by Gerald D. Hines, and designed by architects I.M. Pei & Partners.

Downtown Houston has always been significant for a lot of different reasons, and obviously, improvement has always been paramount for the leaders of Houston. Since 1996, we can thank the Houston Downtown Management District (Downtown District), formed by the Texas Legislature in 1995 and spearheaded by a 30-member board of directors, for the marvels of present day/future downtown Houston.

Today, more than $1.39 billion in new downtown construction projects are underway and another $2.58 billion in pre-development/design, nearly one-third being residential developments. Houston continues to welcome floods of new businesses relocating offices to its central business district, thus, urban professionals will see an additional 2.86 million square feet of office space being constructed. Adding to Houston’s skyline, will be eight new, modern and luxurious hotel high-rises. Our beloved urban parks, Discovery Green and Market Square Park, have spurred growth in the eastern and northern ends of downtown Houston, respectively. Because Houston offers a strong economy, a growing urban population, and the status of being one of the nation’s top culinary and entertainment centers, it is widely known as a global city. Over the last decade, Downtown District has accelerated renewal of Houston’s urban core by setting several important goals with quality of life being the underlying theme. It has/is succeeding in building a lasting community for downtown by recruiting investors and retailers/tenants, while retaining existing ones and making sure that downtown is clean, safe, and attractive.

Presently, six main goals exist and they are:

Goal 1: Downtown feels comfortable and safe at all times.

* Expand collaboration to maintain low crime rate and make downtown feel safe.
* Reduce presence in the public realm of homeless and street persons.
* Downtown’s sidewalks are comfortably lighted.
* Increase standard of care for downtown’s cleanliness and well-kept appearance.
* Conditions of disorder are removed.
* Prepare for and respond to emergencies.

Goal 2: Public realm is beautiful and celebrates the life of the city.

* Make key pedestrian streets inviting.
* Managed, programmed, and delightful public spaces.

Goal 3: Accessible to the entire region all the time and easy to navigate.

* Effective transit access from more places, more hours of the day.
* Convenient, multiple means of circulation without personal vehicle.
* Easy to find way around.
* Connected, walkable neighborhoods and districts inside and outside of downtown.
* Convenient, understandable and managed parking.

Goal 4: Vibrant, sustainable mixed-use place.

* Best place to work in region.
* Exciting neighborhoods in which to live.
* Competitive shopping place.
* A remarkable destination for visitors.

Goal 5: Downtown’s vision and offerings are understood by all.

* Market downtown to region.
* Promote the ease of using downtown’s offerings.
* Vision plan/development framework for future understood by all.
* Tools to assist continued redevelopment.
* Information source to support continued development, investment, and marketing of downtown.

Goal 6: District governance and service known for excellence.

* Board and administration: Engage stakeholders in decisions regarding downtown.
* Communicate to owners, tenants, and others about the District.
* Preservation of assets: Build appropriate capital replacement reserves.

Presently, the downtown district, bounded largely by the freeway ring around Houston’s central business core, which includes Interstate 10, State Highway 59, and Interstate 45, is operated under the 30-member board of directors and focuses on leveraging public funds with private resources to improve facilities/services, as well as accelerating area improvements with widespread benefits above and beyond present local government or voluntary effort levels.

The Downtown District’s vision is that downtown Houston will be a vibrant, livable, and accessible center of the most thriving urban region in America. Its mission is to collaboratively plan, manage, maintain, and develop downtown to make it a productive, inviting, safe, accessible, walkable, livable, interesting, and always active urban place.