



## Office of Mayor Annise D. Parker



# City of Houston Media Release

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## American Planning Association Designates Buffalo Bayou A Top 10 Great Public Space For 2012

### Bayou Noted For Design, Community Support, Natural/Man-Made Features

The American Planning Association (APA) today announced the designation of Buffalo Bayou as one of 10 Great Public Spaces for 2012 under the organization's Great Places in America program. APA Great Places exemplify exceptional character and highlight the role planners and planning play in creating communities of lasting value.

APA singled out a nine-mile stretch of Buffalo Bayou, between Shepherd Drive and Turning Basin Overlook Park, for its distinctive design, amenities, and public art; high level of public and private support; and ecological restoration and protection efforts.

"Buffalo Bayou is our Central Park," said Mayor Annise Parker. "From the time the Allen Brothers laid the city's street grid along the bayou's course to today as it undergoes a rebirth, Buffalo Bayou has been central to our history and development. Yesterday it was used for commerce and trade. Today it provides recreation for increasing numbers of bikers, hikers, joggers, skateboarders, dog walkers and art lovers. Tomorrow, it will serve as the spine for a continuous system of public parks and trails, or greenways, linking every major bayou segment of the city."

Through Great Places in America, APA recognizes streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces whose unique and authentic characteristics have evolved over time, not by happenstance but by the thoughtful and deliberate efforts of residents in partnership with planners. APA Great Places illustrate the effectiveness of planners in gauging the ways that today's actions will influence tomorrow's communities. The 2012 Great Places offer better choices for where and how people work and live and are defined by many of the qualities Americans say they want planners to focus on: employment opportunities, safety, schools, neighborhood vitality, and water quality. Since APA began Great Places in America in 2007, 60 neighborhoods, 60 streets and 50 public spaces have been designated in 50 states and the District of Columbia. Today's announcement is the second recognition for Houston. Montrose was selected as a Great Neighborhood in 2009.

"The result of effective citizen involvement and public-private partnerships, Buffalo Bayou is a mosaic of residents' ideas and labors that, due to their planning efforts, has become more colorful and diverse with time," said APA Chief Executive Officer Paul Farmer, FAICP. "Residents involved with planning – something 75 percent of Americans agree is essential to improving people's lives – has been critical to Buffalo Bayou's success ever since a 100-person citizens' committee met in 1921 to develop planning guidelines for the area," he added. Buffalo Bayou, whose 20 miles of trails meander through suburban and downtown Houston, remains a work in progress. A \$30 million gift from the Kinder Foundation launched a \$55 million renovation of the Bayou's Downtown Sector, to be completed in 2015. Plans – which capture the intent of early 19th-century visionaries who viewed the bayou as a source of beauty, recreation, and civic pride – call for private funding, with the exception of \$5 million from the Harris County Flood Control District.

Featuring stunning scenery and skyline views of Houston, Buffalo Bayou is home to one of the city's iconic fountains and one of the nation's top skate parks and serves as a destination for tens of thousands of Houstonians who gather to watch fireworks on July 4th. Dusk finds people gathering on a viewing deck to watch more than 200,000 bats emerge from their home beneath the Waugh Drive Bridge.

Public art abounds in the area. In addition to Buffalo Bayou Artpark, where public art is displayed temporarily, there is "Tolerance," a septuplet of sculpted kneeling human figures representing Houston's dynamic diversity. "Seven Wonders," rises dramatically, recounting Houston's history thematically through children's drawings etched in stainless steel plate. The promenade and terrace at Allen's Landing emulate a 19th-century port and text-based artwork provides historical context.

The bayou became a bustling corridor of commerce not long after two land speculators purchased 6,000 acres in 1836 and laid out the city in a grid pattern oriented to the bayou so that ships could load and unload from the docks at Allen's Landing. As the City Beautiful movement swept the country, the idea of a parkway system emerged in Houston. In 1906, the city purchased land on the banks of the bayou. After a 1909 report urged the acquisition of more land for parks before it became too expensive, a three-member Board of Park Commissioners was formed to advise the mayor.

By 1916, landscape architect George Kessler had envisioned a channelized bayou devoid of oxbow bends with a landscaped mall, golf course, pavilions, and a pedestrian promenade. After Kessler's death in 1923, the Kansas City design firm of Hare & Hare finalized a bayou plan. Over time, the city acquired additional land and developed some parks but freeway construction in the mid-1950s ate up large stretches of the bayou. A 1960s U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood mitigation project for a nearby bayou, which eliminated riparian vegetation and lined the channels with concrete, was the impetus for creation of the Bayou Preservation Association. The group, in partnership with then-U.S. Representative George H.W. Bush, thwarted the city's flood control plan, saving Buffalo Bayou from a similar fate.

The Buffalo Bayou Partnership, formed in 1986, is leading efforts to restore and enhance the waterway and lands that surround it. Its 20-year, \$5.6 billion strategic plan is the work of countless volunteers and reflects residents' passion for preserving the bayou for future generations.

For more information about APA's nine other 2012 Great Public Spaces, as well as the top 10 Great Streets, top 10 Great Neighborhoods, and designations between 2007 and 2011, visit [www.planning.org/greatplaces](http://www.planning.org/greatplaces). This year's Great Places in America are being celebrated as part of APA's National Community Planning Month during October; for more about the special month, visit [www.planning.org/ncpm](http://www.planning.org/ncpm).

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