

# Quality of Life Committee

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## **Executive Summary**

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From arts and cultural offerings to public greenspace to the enjoyment of historic areas and landmarks, a high quality of life is essential to a world-class city like 21st century Houston. This drives business development, tourism, civic engagement, and overall economic prosperity across all neighborhoods. This committee embarked on a comprehensive review of quality of life in Houston, *with expert subject matter input from over 22 key stakeholders throughout our process*, in order to make recommendations that we hope will enhance quality of life while remaining transparent, equitable, collaborative, and fiscally responsible. We focused our efforts in the following four areas:

### **Arts & Culture**

Houston has a dynamic arts & culture scene. At seemingly every opportunity, Mayor Turner has expressed his that arts and culture organizations be well-supported, accessible, and reflect the diversity of the city. Prior to his administration, the city demonstrated its own commitment to this community through the passing of the 2015 Arts and Cultural Plan. This committee will make three key recommendations to further elevate arts & culture now and in Houston's future.

### **Parks & Greenspace**

Houston is the beneficiary of both a beautiful landscape and now a robust set of Master Plans to ensure equal access to greenspace for every single Houstonian. HPARD is masterfully leading this charge. The role of public-private partnerships has been crucial and transformative in getting us to this point. We believe that the infrastructure and political will exist to have a truly exceptional parks and greenspace system, but also that the only way to fulfill this promise is to prioritize the elimination any funding, inter-departmental, inter-agency, or transportation/connectivity barriers to complete implementation of all existing Parks Master Plans.

### **Neighborhoods**

Houston has reached an age where many of its neighborhoods and landmarks have a rich, distinct past deserving of active preservation. We recommend that the Planning & Development Department emphasize the use of existing neighborhood character protection tools to promote a sense of neighborhood identity and civic pride. Meanwhile, in some areas, there is also the need for a systemic neighborhood revitalization that addresses physical redevelopment opportunities as well as enhanced and coordinated public and private services through partnership models. We recommend that the Department of Planning & Development undertake creation of a model for this. *We did not find the existing Department of Neighborhoods to have a function in this area, and generally find that the Department's need for organizational review falls out of the scope of our work.*

### **Partnerships & City Promotion**

Partnerships within and promotion of the City are a simple matter of investment. We fund key quality of life amenities through public-private partnerships and philanthropy. We should continue to leverage these models to learn best practices from the private sector and to actively present as a good steward of private resources. This means ensuring we perform exceptionally within our current partnerships, then seeking new partnership opportunities. Meanwhile, all of the components exist for Houston to promote a comprehensive tourist experience spanning arts and culture, urban greenspace, dining and entertainment, and business tourism through organizations receiving Hotel Occupancy Tax revenue. We believe that these organizations should routinely collaborate on maximizing the amount of revenue that can be reinvested back into the city from this Source to ultimately improve the quality of life for all Houstonians.

## **Recommendations**

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The Transition Committee proposes the following eight recommendations – outlined briefly below and expanded upon throughout this report – to improve upon quality of life in Houston.

We recommend that the City of Houston, under the directive of the Mayor’s Office:

### **Arts & Culture**

1. Create an arts funding task force
2. Update the Civic Art Ordinance
3. Create a City Arts and Cultural Policy

### **Parks & Greenspace**

4. Prioritize implementation of all Parks & Greenspace Master Plans

### **Neighborhoods**

5. Create a model for transformational neighborhood revitalization
6. Promote neighborhood character protection tools

### **Partnerships & City Promotion**

7. Use existing public-private partnerships as a model for transformational change
8. Require HOT-funded organizations to conduct regular stakeholder meetings

### **Additional Considerations**

## Recommendation 1: Create an arts funding task force

We recommend that the Mayor appoint a working group of stakeholders to research additional arts revenue sources and make recommendations for potential new funding opportunities to benefit all of the Houston arts.

### Answering our charge

- ❖ Do opportunities exist to expand the overall resources available to arts organizations? What obstacles to such an expansion exist?

*Yes, there is a great need to increase overall resources (namely, funding) to all arts organizations on an equitable basis. Obstacles to such expansion are the variable nature of HOT funding as well as the limitations of CAP appropriation. Another obstacle is the city's budget shortfall, which effectively guarantees that additional funding for the arts will increasingly need to come from outside sources.*

- ❖ Do opportunities exist to eliminate duplicative fundraising or administrative efforts within Houston's arts and culture space? How can the City of Houston be a helpful partner in eliminating these kinds of inefficiencies?

*Yes, there is a great need to increase overall resources (funding) to arts organizations due to the variable nature of HOT funding as well as the limitations of both CAP appropriation as well as HOT revenue expenditures. The City of Houston can be a helpful partner by sanctioning and legitimizing fundraising initiatives conceived and undertaken by the arts community.*

- ❖ Can Houston learn from the successes of any other jurisdictions with respect to arts & culture? *Yes, primarily in the level of arts funding that is administered through the local government. Please see next page.*

### National Comparison: Local Government Funding Per Capita for Artists and Organizations



**When:** By Summer 2016

**Who:** Committee Members Perryn Leech and Kathryn McNeil have offered to chair this task force.

### Potential Outcome

Our goal in recommending the creation of an arts funding task force is:

- **To make recommendations on how to expand the overall resources available to arts organizations that can be implemented by:**
  - **HAA**
  - **HOT-funded arts & culture organizations**
  - **HoustonFirst**
  - **Private arts organizations, large and small**
  - **Individual artists**
  - **Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs**

## Recommendation 2: Update the Civic Art Ordinance

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We recommend that the Mayor's Office appoint a post-transition committee to update the Civic Art Ordinance last revised in 2006.

### Answering our charge

- ❖ Do opportunities exist to expand the role of the arts within the City of Houston's operations?  
*Yes, first focusing on Civic Art, since the funding mechanism for Civic Art is severely limited under the existing ordinance.*

**When:** Immediately post-transition, form the committee.

By Fall 2016, recommend specific updates to the ordinance.

**Who:** This committee recommends that Bill Baldwin, Nancy Kinder, Council Member Ellen Cohen, the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, and the Chief Development Officer be responsible for this update.

### Potential Outcome

Our goals in recommending that the Mayor's Office appoint a committee to update the Civic Art Ordinance are:

- **To investigate an increase in the Civic Art Program (CAP) appropriation from Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects from the current level of 1.75% to 2%.**
- **To investigate a modification of CAP appropriation from CIPs to include a wider definition of projects, including horizontal construction and those implemented through redevelopment authorities/TIRZs, etc.**
- **To update CAP language to include specific criteria ensuring all 11 council districts are served at the neighborhood level.**
- **To update CAP governance to ensure greater oversight of the City's resource.**

### **Recommendation 3: Create a City Arts and Cultural Policy**

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We recommend that the City form and implement an Arts & Cultural Policy, initiated through the Department of Planning & Development with input from the Mayor's Office for Cultural Affairs (MOCA).

Additionally, we recommend that the Mayor's Office reconvene the Quality of Life Transition Committee twice in 2016.

- First, at the outset of the Arts & Cultural Policy creation.
- Once more, in October 2016 to review the implementation status of the 2015 Arts & Cultural Plan at its one year mark.

#### **Answering our charge**

- ❖ The City of Houston recently adopted a comprehensive arts and cultural plan. What is the status of its implementation? Do opportunities exist to supplement or update the existing plan?  
*The status of the 2015 plan's implementation is unclear. Also, various opportunities to supplement and update the existing plan can be accomplished with the first three recommendations of this committee.*
- ❖ Do opportunities exist to improve the City of Houston's support of individual artists?  
*Yes, the City can accomplish this by outlining with greater transparency the grant-making systems for individual artists in the Arts & Cultural Policy.*

**When:** By Summer 2016

**Who:** This committee recommends that the Department of Planning & Development be primarily responsible for this effort, with input from the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs and the QoL Transition Committee.

#### **Potential Outcome**

Our goals in recommending the creation of an official Arts & Culture Policy are:

- **To issue a statement of the importance of arts & culture accompanying the policy.**
- **To create an institutionalized response to calls for transparency and equity from the Arts & Cultural Plan (2015)**
- **To address underserved areas in arts and culture that are resultant of the current funding structure.**
- **To ensure fairness in all grantmaking systems for smaller arts organizations and individual artists.**
- **To provide visible City leadership & engagement in the area of arts & culture.**
- **To actively seek the creation of new Cultural Districts.**

## Recommendation 4: Prioritize implementation of all Parks & Greenspace Master Plans

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We recommend that the City better support the mission of an active, diverse urban greenspace sector by streamlining all inter-departmental and inter-agency aspects of parks and greenspace planning, implementation, and partnership according to all existing parks & greenspace master plans.

### Answering our charge

- ❖ Do opportunities exist to improve or expand park space within the City of Houston, including through the expansion of pocket parks and other neighborhood parks? What obstacles, including funding, exist?

*Yes, the city still seeks to achieve its goal of a park within .5 mile/10 minute walk of every Houstonian via the HPARD Parks Master Plan. Funding, land acquisition challenges, and an inefficient permitting process are the main obstacles.*

- ❖ What opportunities exist to expand the availability of greenspace in the city? Can the cost and benefits of such expansion be qualified? How can the city ensure that any such benefits are equitable?

*The HPARD Parks Master Plan and Master Plans of other parks entities, including Bayou Greenways 2020, constitute a clear path to equal access of greenspace for Houstonians. Therefore, every attempt should be made to continue implementation of these plans through future bond elections, continued TIRZ funding (where applicable), and by using the Mayor's Office to streamline the inter-departmental and inter-agency aspects of parks planning.*

- ❖ What is the current status of implementation of existing plans such as Bayou Greenways 2020 and the Houston Bike Plan?

*Implementation is well under way for Bayou Greenways 2020 with a relatively clear path to completion. Meanwhile, the Houston Bike Plan is in need of guaranteed short-term implementation funding.*

- ❖ Do opportunities exist to improve the implementation of the Complete Streets concept in Houston? How can the city ensure that a Complete Streets program operates equitably?

*The existing Complete Streets Executive Order is lacking a mechanism to ensure that infrastructure projects are viewed holistically so that parks and alternate transportation (including sidewalks) are considered from the start. This is due to a lack of neighborhood-level planning, which is ultimately the way to ensure a Complete Streets program operates equitably.*

**When:** By the end of 2016

**Who:** This committee recommends that the Mayor's Office proactively engage HPARD, the Department of Planning & Development, and all parks entities to ensure implementation remains fully underway.

**Potential Outcome**

Our goals in recommending the prioritization of implementing all parks & greenspace master plans are:

- **To ensure the continued and complete implementation of the HPARD Parks Master Plan and other parks Master Plans already approved by City Council, including Bayou Greenways 2020, Buffalo Bayou Park, Hermann Park, Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, Memorial Park, and others.**
- **To steward future bond elections that will fund further implementation of Parks Master Plans.**
- **To initiate a redraft of the Complete Streets Executive Order through the Planning & Development to include input from quality of life stakeholders.**
- **To ensure that infrastructure projects are viewed holistically so that pocket parks and alternate transportation from (from improved sidewalks to bikeways) are considered and funded from the start.**
- **To eliminate specific inter-departmental obstacles to implementing any park master plans, including but not limited to a protracted/inefficient permitting process (including exceptions and rendition of final plans once approved), undue application of stormwater management requirements, and issues regarding parks and trees that fall outside of Chapter 42 and cross into the purview of Planning & Development.**
- **To augment existing inter-agency coordination efforts of HPARD and the Mayor’s Office, specifically with TxDOT, Harris County, and Harris County Flood Control District.**
- **To maintain strong inter-departmental relationships so that long-term parks concerns are not only addressed head-on but also according to the best interest of parks entities (e.g. any discussion of metered parking at the city’s signature parks should ensure that proceeds are directed back to the park).**
- **To steward other public and private initiatives to finance new parks, including signature, neighborhood, and SPARK parks. This includes ensuring that public funding previously committed to parks through CIPs and/or contractually committed, such as through TIRZ funding, remain committed to those parks projects, since it is critical for leveraging private investment.**

## Recommendation 5: Create a model for transformational neighborhood revitalization

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We recommend that the City charge the Department of Planning & Development to create a model for innovative inner-city redevelopment that places a priority on neighborhood revitalization coupled with efforts that support affordability and locally-driven stability.

The model should:

- Utilize distinctly robust public engagement mechanism to support the interests of the community.
- Build upon existing public/private partnership interest.
- Address physical redevelopment opportunities.
- Enhance and coordinate public and private services.
- Employ initiatives to increase livability and access, including measures such as increased transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements that connect residents to jobs, schools, parks, greenways, and community facilities.
- Promote local culture and history, including long-term resident retention through affordable/workforce housing via public/private partnerships.

The effort should initially focus on a single neighborhood on a pilot project basis, with potential for expansion to prioritized targeted areas based on success of the initial project.

For a clear outline of the steps to create and implement this model, please refer to the next page.

### Answering our charge

- ❖ Do opportunities exist to improve the City of Houston's interactions with local neighborhoods?  
*Yes, but to maximize the impact of those interactions, it is the recommendation of this committee that the City focus on transformational, structural models rather than the service-based model that prevails in the existing Department of Neighborhoods. We feel that this is a direct response to the Mayor's call for transition efforts to **be bold**.*
- ❖ Do opportunities exist for the city to improve neighborhood amenities such as libraries and community centers, including through improving technological accessibility at these sites? How should the city prioritize such improvements?  
*Yes, these opportunities do exist but are best catalyzed by the existence of a transformational model rather than a one-off approach. The city should prioritize those improvements through socioeconomic and demographic indicators available through the Market Value Analysis and other metrics.*

**When:** By June 2016

**Who:** This committee recommends that the Department of Planning & Development lead this charge with input from all City departments, quality of life stakeholders, the NGO/non-profit sector, and neighborhood-level stakeholders.

### **Potential Outcome**

Our goals in recommending the creation of a model for transformational neighborhood revitalization are:

- **To recognize and work collaboratively with neighborhoods as strategic building blocks of a world-class city.**
- **To positively impact the quality of life for Houstonians of all income levels on the neighborhood scale.**
- **To attract, coordinate, and leverage resources to be invested directly into neighborhoods of need from local public-private investment to federal and state funding.**
- **To provide an accessible process for the City to engage and collaborate with stakeholders embedded within a given neighborhood.**

### **Steps to Creating a Transformational Neighborhood Revitalization Model**

This committee recommends that the Mayor's Office issue a directive to the Department of Planning & Development that, by June 2016, it fully develop the framework for a transformational neighborhood revitalization program that follows these steps:

- 1. Identify the location for an initial neighborhood revitalization planning effort.**
- 2. Through a community engagement process including key stakeholders, identify the assets and goals of the community.**
- 3. Develop a coordinated plan of action and schedule to achieve community goals using public and private resources.**
- 4. Create an implementation plan and schedule to bring about change within the recommended period of time.**
- 5. Actively pursue implementation of the plan immediately upon completion.**
- 6. Immediately consider the potential for a future prioritization process for other targeted areas after the pilot project is complete.**
- 7. Identify the internal and external resources necessary to achieve the above steps.**

## Recommendation 6: Promote neighborhood character protection tools

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We recommend that the City expand its reputation and infrastructure as a preservation-minded city, highlighting the economic and neighborhood-improvement benefits of neighborhood character protection tools, through several key directives to the Department of Planning & Development.

1. That the Historic Preservation Office of the Planning & Development Department, using the Historic Preservation Fund, complete an inventory of:
  - a. potential new historic districts (neighborhoods intact for >50 years), and
  - b. City-owned properties eligible for Protected Landmark status.
2. That this inventory also include areas where neighborhood character protection tools such as Minimum Lot Size, Minimum Building Line, and reinstatement or creation of deed restrictions can be upheld permanently.

Additionally, we recommend that the Mayor's Office:

3. Announce initial support of the application to designate Freedmen's Town a UNESCO World Heritage Site, working with the Historic Preservation Office to determine feasibility and impact as a tourist destination and historic landmark.
4. Sign the application for the city's establishment as a Certified Local Government by the Texas Historic Commission, which affords grant funding and training for staff and commissioners and grants for design guidelines, education, rehabilitation, and restoration.

**When:** Within 30 days post-transition

**Who:** This committee recommends that the Historic Preservation Office of the Department of Planning & Development lead all of these efforts with authorization to use the Historic Preservation Fund to expand its capacity.

### Potential Outcome

Our goals in recommending the promotion of neighborhood character protection tools through the Department of Planning & Development are:

- **To emphasize the significance of Protected Landmark status for certain city-owned properties.**
- **To encourage the development of certain city-owned historic structures as revenue-generating facilities or facilitating the sale of these landmarked structures to neighborhood associations or other private groups, with 25% of proceeds going back into the Historic Preservation Fund, where legally allowed.**
- **To leverage this renewed City investment in preservation of city-owned property to publicly issue a challenge to the private preservation and philanthropic groups to propose a plan to preserve privately-owned property eligible for protection, along with requests for City resources where appropriate.**

## Recommendation 7: Use existing public-private partnerships as a model for transformational change

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We recommend that the Mayor’s Office directly manage City involvement and performance in existing public-private partnerships and use them as a model to design, attract, and promote future partnerships.

### Answering our charge

- ❖ What opportunities exist for the City of Houston to partner more effectively with outside organizations?  
*A sticking point for many organizations throughout our committee process, especially the public-private partnerships, was the City’s ability to nimbly respond to the needs of these organizations, even in cases where there is a clear administrative channel.*
  
- ❖ Do particular issues lend themselves more readily to outside partnerships? By what standard should the city judge the success of existing partnerships?  
*Yes, quality of life areas in particular are more amenable to partnerships, but this committee recommends that models for transformational neighborhood redevelopment also be considered an area of public-private collaboration, including with the non-profit sector (e.g. Avenue CDC). The city should ultimately judge the success of existing partnerships through a survey of our partners and through the sustainability and clear implementation of partnership goals.*

**When:** By Summer 2016

**Who:** This committee recommends that the Mayor’s Office establish the City’s performance standards for transparency, equity, and collaboration within this model with input from Bill Baldwin and Nancy Kinder.

### Potential Outcome

Our goals in recommending a role to manage public-private partnerships are:

- **To leverage and improve upon the proven public-private partnership model in Houston with a call for more transparency (from within the city) and equity (for all involved), including public availability of all agreements on the City of Houston website with a clear delineation of the City’s role.**
- **To provide the City with a clear area of ownership in this model as a way of showing engagement and good stewardship of our private sector partners, to ultimately attract more partnerships.**
- **To survey the leadership of various local public-private partnerships on how to improve the City’s involvement in this model and work within the city to address any findings.**
- **To work with organizations like the Greater Houston Partnership to effectively market the City’s strong relationship with the private sector.**
- **To most effectively honor existing public commitments to public-private partnership projects through CIP, TIRZ and other funding, which is critical for leveraging private investment.**
- **To apply the same standards of transparency, equity, and collaboration to existing models such as TIRZs and Redevelopment Authorities, by which at least the meeting minutes, agendas, and recording of these entities must be made available to the public.**

## **Recommendation 8: Require HOT-funded organizations to conduct regular stakeholder meetings**

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We recommend the Mayor's Office initiate at least quarterly meetings for all HOT-funded organizations, Visit Houston, and additional stakeholders to set a unified plan for increasing HOT and sales tax revenue through cultural attractions, tourism and other city promotions with an end toward maximizing the impact of dollars raised. The organizations required to participate will be:

1. Houston Arts Alliance
2. Theatre District Improvement, Inc.
3. Museum District Association
4. Miller Outdoor Theater Advisory Board
5. Houston First Corporation
6. Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs

This coalition of organizations should constantly seek to engage additional outside organizations to join this effort.

**When:** Within the 2nd quarter of 2016

**Who:** This committee recommends that the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs and the Mayor's Office of Special Events be considered to lead this charge.

### **Potential Outcome**

Our goals in recommending required regular stakeholder meetings for HOT-funded organizations are:

- **To have routine collaboration on marketing campaigns and major events that will drive revenue not only from widespread tourism, but also from increased patronage of city amenities from residents of other cities within the region.**
- **To ensure ample opportunities for knowledge sharing and training so that all stakeholders can participate in developing and marketing a comprehensive tourist experience spanning the arts, urban greenspace, and unique local points of interest, including historic districts.**
- **To present to the Mayor's Office, City Council, and the state legislature a unified legislative agenda to in address needs affecting tourism or event revenue outcomes.**

**Additional**

**Considerations**

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1. Assess the current effectiveness of situating the Deed Restriction Enforcement Team within the Legal Department.
    - a. Presently there is no real system for deed restriction enforcement in Houston. Deed restriction violation is treated as a civil issue rather than a function of planning or public order. Considering the role of deed restrictions in preserving neighborhood character, this committee recommends that the entire process be examined by the Mayor's Office, possibly through the Citizen's Assistance Office.

## **Presentations**

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*Presentation of Houston Arts and Cultural Plan highlights to Quality of Life Transition Committee, by Deborah McNulty, Director, Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, City of Houston, January 20, 2016*

*Presentation of Neighborhoods, by Katherine Tipton, Director, Department of Neighborhoods, January 27, 2016*

*Houston Parks and Recreation Department and Parks Master Plan Overview, by Joe Turner, Parks and Recreation Department, February 3, 2016*

*Buffalo Bayou: Houston's greatest natural resource, by Anne Olson, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, February 3, 2016*

*Parks by You: Bayou Greenways 2020, by Mike Nichols, Tom Bacon, Houston Parks Board, Barron Wallace, Bayou Greenways 2020, February 10, 2016*

*Memorial Park is Growing: Executing Memorial Park's Long Range Master Plan, by Shelly Arnold, CEO, Memorial Park Conservancy, February 10, 2016*

*Hermann Park Conservancy, by Doreen Stoller, Executive Director, Hermann Park Conservancy, February 10, 2016*

*Discovery Green: Reinvigorating a Downtown with a Great Urban Park, by Barry Mandel, President, Discovery Green Conservancy, February 10, 2016*

*Where the Wild Things Grow, by Deborah Markey, Executive Director, Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, February 10, 2016*

*Houston Bike Plan, by Michael Payne, Mary Blitzer, BikeHouston, February 17, 2016*

*Quality of Life in Houston Texas, by David Crossley, Jay Crossley, Houston Tomorrow, February 17, 2016*

*My Houston, by Mike Waterman, Executive VP Houston First, Jorge Franz, Sr. VP of Tourism, Visit Houston, February 17, 2016*

*Your Local Arts Agency, by Jonathon Glus, President and CEO, Houston Art Alliance, February 24, 2016*

*Museum District Association, by Gary Tinterow, Museum District Association, February 24, 2016*

*What is Theater District Houston, by Kathryn McNeil, Theater District Improvement, Inc., February 24, 2016*

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*Civic Art Program, City of Houston, Texas, Ordinance No. 2006-731 (n.d.): n. pag. Web.*

"Arts and Cultural Plan." *Arts and Cultural Plan*. N.p., Oct. 2015. Web. 07 Mar. 2016.

*Market Value Analysis, The Reinvestment Fund, October, 2015*

*Historic Preservation in Houston, Houston Planning Department, City of Houston, January 26, 2016*

*UNESCO World Heritage: Jobs and Prestige (n.d.): n. pag. UNESCO World Heritage: Jobs and Prestige. Web.*

*Why Unesco, Lawal, Eileen, Citizen, February 3, 2016*

## **Meetings & Additional Input**

BikeHouston, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Department of Neighborhoods, Department of Planning & Development, Discovery Green Conservancy, Heritage Society, Hermann Park Conservancy, Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, Houston Arts Alliance, Houston Needs a Swimming Hole, Houston Tomorrow, HoustonFirst, Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, Memorial Park Conservancy, Miller Advisory Board, Museum District Association, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Parks & Recreation Department, Scenic Houston, SPARK, Theatre District Improvement, Inc., Visit Houston