

TUESDAY, JULY 20, 2010

EDITORIAL

Better Bayous

...make a better city

How much do we love the Houston Bayou Greenway Initiative, the ambitious master plan to add 250 miles of "linear parks" along Harris County's bayous and at the same time fix many of our water-quality and flooding problems?

Let us count the ways.

1) We love the size and scope of the proposal. Ten bayous! Four thousand acres of new detention-pond park land! Hundreds of partners! A half-billion dollars! It's been too long since Houston dared to dream this big.

2) We love the way that the "linear parks" would vastly increase outdoor public space all across this park-starved city.

3) We love the bang for the buck. Flood-prone bayou land costs much less to acquire than drier acreage and can serve more than one purpose. During a flood, a baseball field can become a retention pond. A wetlands nature park can improve water quality. And shade from trailside trees would cut the amount of mowing the county flood-control district has to pay for.

4) We love the greenways as a business proposition. To compete with other cities, Houston

has to attract well-educated young workers. And they crave parks and trails.

5) We love the proposal as serious planning for the future. In the next 20 years, Harris County is expected to add a million people. As we pack more people into our city, the land grows more flood-prone — and parks become ever more precious.

6) We love what safe places to walk, jog and bike would do for our waistlines - and for our public health care costs.

7) We love the plan because it addresses, in a big way, Houston's dysfunctional relationship with nature. The bayous are our flat coastal plain's best natural feature, but in previous decades we treated them as enemies to be stomped into submission. We paved them, straightened them and dumped raw sewage in them. And we got what we deserved.

But the bayous are forgiving - as has been proven by (among others) the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Terry Hershey Park and Project Brays.

It's time to expand that good work in a big way.