

002

HOUSTON
magazine



plus THE GREATER HOUSTON AREA

vol 7



free



www.002mag.com

april 2005

art
maps

business
movies

entertainment
real estate

events
restaurants

health
sports

GALLERIA
Chambre of Commerce

STATE of PLACE

Created by Jeff Kaplan
Written by Jeff Kaplan, Mariela Alfonzo, Ph.D.,
and Carla Valencia
Photography by Brad Sechler

This project is called "State of Place" but it is truly about creating competition. The premise of this project is that neighborhoods, like cities, should compete against each other, **BECAUSE COMPETITION WILL MAKE EACH OF OUR NEIGHBORHOODS A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE.**

This is a comparison among some of the most well-known neighborhoods and communities in Houston with respect to their sense of place. To add empirical data to the evaluation of each neighborhood studied, *002+* flew in Mariela Alfonzo, a Ph.D. student in urban planning from UC Irvine, who also has a master's degree in urban and regional planning. She adapted a tool she helped create that was designed to collect objective urban design data and created an inventory of key design characteristics related to livability and sense of place. But, this issue will undoubtedly raise eyebrows, because, **while the study was done in a very objective manner, the importance of each item was based on the collective judgments of what our committee values most in a neighborhood – SENSE OF PLACE.**

WHILE THE NOTION OF "SENSE OF PLACE" MAY SEEM SUBJECTIVE, IT IS ACTUALLY ROOTED IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF URBANISM – AUTHENTIC ARCHITECTURE, PUBLIC SPACES, GATHERING SPACES AND PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY DESIGN. "SENSE OF PLACE" IS SOMETHING THAT IS ONLY FOUND IN HUMAN-SCALED ENVIRONMENTS – PLACES THAT ARE REAL, HAVE CHARACTER AND ARE FULL OF HUMAN ENERGY.

Across the country, there is an entire generation of people yearning for real places with good urban design. This generation has grown up among the canned environments found in strip malls and gated communities and now seeks authentic environments that foster a sense of place. We hope this study encourages residents to insist on better urban design for their neighborhoods that, in the end, not only help to establish a sense of place, but also help to foster a sense of community.

In other great American cities, neighborhoods place a higher value on sense of place than do most neighborhoods in Houston. This project is a grassroots effort to change the way people, particularly real estate purchasers, value neighborhoods. We believe that there is more long-term economic and social value to be gained by purchasing real estate in human-scaled areas where there is higher livability and sense of place. At the same time, developers should be encouraged by new market opportunities to build responsibly by thinking about the needs of PEOPLE and not cars.

The hope is that this project will encourage all the neighborhoods, especially those that ranked poorly to better themselves by creating *places*. There are many examples in the region where this is already occurring. Both Sugar Land and The Woodlands have done a fantastic job creating a heart within their communities with their new town centers.

Urban energy – created by people places – is contagious. We hope that people will catch this energy and be moved to spread it – whether through more "placemaking" in the suburbs, relocating to an urban village location, opening a unique retail business, or becoming engaged in public policy issues affecting Houston neighborhoods. We just want Houston to "get urban."

METHODOLOGY

The following neighborhoods are ranked from highest to lowest in terms of sense of place and livability with respect to urban design, using the following methodology:

Objective data was collected in twelve neighborhoods in the Houston area using a pared-down version of an existing 168-item urban design inventory developed at the University of California. The shortened version used for this study included 50 urban design features thought to influence sense of place and livability, with a total of 32 positive and 18 negative features. The inventory was conducted while driving around each neighborhood for approximately 30-60 minutes, depending on the size of the neighborhood.

Each of the 50 items in the inventory was ranked on a scale from 1 to 4, in terms of their importance to sense of place and livability, by each of the committee members. These rankings were then averaged to arrive at a numeric "weight" for each of the items in the urban design inventory. In other words, some urban design features weighed heavier than others in terms of contributing to sense of place and livability.

For each urban design feature that was present, the neighborhood received a point. For some items, a neighborhood received 1 point if that feature was present and points if it was not. For other items, each neighborhood received 2 points if "a lot" or "many" of a feature was present, 1 point if "few" or "some" of an item was present, and 0 points if "none" or "little" of an item was present. Points were assigned based on an overall assessment of the urban design characteristics of the entire neighborhood. They were meant to be representative of the neighborhood as a whole, in general.

In compiling the final score of each neighborhood, the total number of points for each item was multiplied by the average "weight" that the committee had assigned the item. The presence of positive items added to a neighborhood's overall score, while the presence of negative items detracted from a neighborhood's overall score.

The complete survey results are available at www.002mag.com/state-of-place-survey.



MUSEUM DISTRICT	84.2
WEST UNIVERSITY	80.4
MONTROSE	79.2
HEIGHTS	77.4
DOWNTOWN	64.6
MIDTOWN	42
THIRD WARD	29.2
GALLERIA	9.8
TANGLEWOOD	-6.6
WOODLANDS	-14.2
SUGARLAND	-30.8
KATY	-45.4

Bio Photos by Kannon Evett



Jeff Kaplan is an urban broker with Wulfe & Company, where he works with retailers and developers on mixed-use projects. He founded and chaired the Urban Land Institute's first Young Leaders Group in 2002. Now comprised of over 2,400 members in 35 cities internationally, the ULI Young Leaders Group is introducing young real estate professionals to ULI's mission of responsible development of land at a very early stage in their careers. He is currently chairing Urban Marketplace, an educational outreach program for ULI that will promote investment opportunities in Houston's urban areas. He is also the real estate columnist for *002+ magazine* and is a Big Brother through Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.



Mariela Alfonzo, MURP, is a fourth year Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Irvine, in the Department of Planning, Policy and Design. She earned her Masters' in Urban and Regional Planning from UCI and her BA in psychology and architecture from the University of Miami. Her research focuses on the links between the built environment, walking and sense of community. She is co-author on several published academic articles, has written a solo-authored theory paper (forthcoming in the *Journal of Environment and Behavior*) on the various urban design characteristics that may motivate people to walk, and has presented her work at several academic conferences. For over two years, she worked to develop an objective, reliable urban design inventory to further test the links between the physical environment and physical activity, when she did nearly 30 site visits in neighborhoods throughout California. She is currently working on her dissertation, which will examine the conversion of former suburban shopping malls into mixed-use neighborhoods and its potential effect on residents' sense of community.



Monique Ward is a commercial real estate agent with The Guess Group, Inc., a boutique real estate firm that specializes in urban public sector real estate services. Monique's expertise in technology marketing, sales, public relations and project management provide a unique vantage point for bringing together community, commerce and culture. She volunteers with several local organizations including Blueprint Houston-Executive Community, Urban Land Institute's Urban Marketplace; Co-Chair, the Scott Street Corridor- Coalition Communications Co-Chair; Continental Societies Inc.-Corresponding Secretary; the Houston Livestock & Rodeo's Speaker's Committee Member and the Lone Star Golf Association Member. Leaving a positive imprint on her environment is her soul's touchstone.



Brian Malarkey is an Architect and Vice President at Kirksey. He co-founded the Greater Houston Area Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council and is currently on the board of The Citizen's Environmental Coalition. Brian has previously held chair positions with the AIA Committee on the Environment and The Greater Houston Area Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council. He is active with the Rice Design Alliance and continues to address groups and organizations about green building and design. Brian began his career with Kirksey in 1991 and practices both architectural and interior design. He has received local and national design awards, and has been published in *Texas Architect* and *Contract Magazine*. Most recently, Brian was awarded the Houston American Institute of Architects Young Architect of the Year. Brian currently leads Kirksey's Eco-Services Group and continues practicing design in this arena.



David Crossley is president and founder of the Gulf Coast Institute, where his focus is on urban growth issues as they relate to the economy, community and environment. The Institute has led the Livable Houston/Smart Growth Initiative in the Houston Gulf Coast region since 1998. Crossley is a founder and board member of Blueprint Houston. His involvement in community affairs has been extensive for the last twenty years. Crossley serves on many committees and panels, including the Technical Advisory Committee of the Transportation Policy Council at Houston-Galveston Area Council. He served as chair of the Urban Structure Task Force for the City of Houston Planning Department's City-Wide Committee for Clean Air.

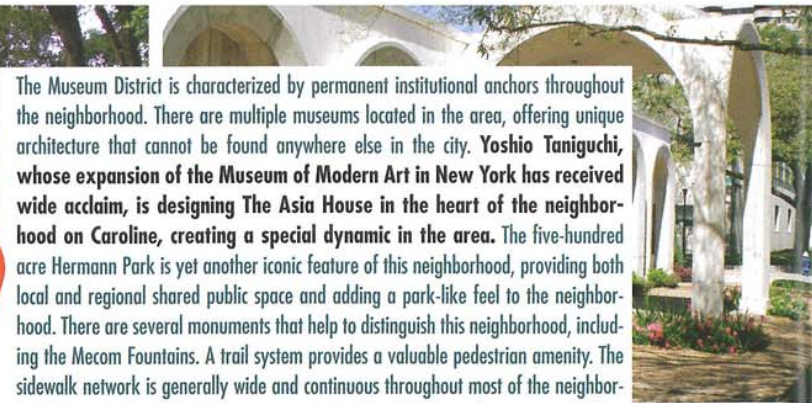


An architect from Mexico City, **Andrés Cueto** moved to Houston after graduating from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. After working in the Houston and Austin offices of PageSoutherlandPage, he accepted a position as a project designer for Zeigler Cooper Architects, where he has been instrumental in such high-profile projects as the Montebello condominiums and the new Catholic Co-Cathedral that recently broke ground in Downtown Houston. Andrés is an active member of the Urban Land Institute's Young Leaders and the Contemporary Art Museum's The Studio, a fundraising group of young art enthusiasts he helped launch in 2003. Andrés lives in Midtown with his wife Marion.



Special thanks to Alfonso Watts, for assisting us on this project. Alfonso Watts's background consists of a BBA from Sam Houston State University and thirteen years in the banking industry, of which, five of those years were spent in commercial real estate. He is a licensed real estate agent and is a second-year graduate student in urban planning at Texas Southern University. He recently completed a one-year tenure with the City of Houston's Planning and Development Department in the Long Range Planning division, where he published a report entitled "How We Compare," giving a detailed explanation on how Houston compares to the ten largest cities in the country. The document will be available on-line in the near future.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS



MUSEUM DISTRICT

The Museum District is characterized by permanent institutional anchors throughout the neighborhood. There are multiple museums located in the area, offering unique architecture that cannot be found anywhere else in the city. **Yoshio Taniguchi, whose expansion of the Museum of Modern Art in New York has received wide acclaim, is designing The Asia House in the heart of the neighborhood on Caroline, creating a special dynamic in the area.** The five-hundred acre Hermann Park is yet another iconic feature of this neighborhood, providing both local and regional shared public space and adding a park-like feel to the neighborhood. There are several monuments that help to distinguish this neighborhood, including the Mecom Fountains. A trail system provides a valuable pedestrian amenity. The sidewalk network is generally wide and continuous throughout most of the neighborhood and is buffered by mature street trees and landscaping. Other positive attributes include street furniture, such as street benches that provide an essential pedestrian amenity; crosswalks and pedestrian-activated signals; and a light rail stop within the neighborhood, increasing its connectivity to jobs and other neighborhoods in the area. The small number of retail destinations in this neighborhood and the overhead wiring are areas the Museum District could work on. The addition of outdoor dining and/or some service-oriented retail would infuse even more vitality into the area, making it a real challenge for any neighborhood to ever beat it.



WEST UNIVERSITY



West University is primarily a residential neighborhood "west" of Rice University, inspiring the neighborhood's name. **Developed in 1917, the neighborhood is on a grid-street pattern, comprised of single-family homes and distinctive architecture. Old oak, maple and magnolia trees line its streets.** The houses are fairly large, but lot sizes are smaller than in the Galleria and Memorial neighborhoods. Most of the neighborhood has a complete sidewalk network although there are a few areas where it is interrupted. The residential areas of this neighborhood are within comfortable walking distance of commercial districts like the Village. There are several pedestrian-activated crossing signals to make walking both safe and convenient. The retail district in this neighborhood is quite walkable, with a continuous sidewalk network, many buildings that come up to the street, and on-street parking (that acts as a buffer for pedestrians). Many retailers are locally based, giving the area character and a unique feel. The addition of street vendors, street furniture or public art would infuse this area with an even higher sense of place and vitality.



002+ directory
realtors
Absolute Realty Group
713.522.8750
absoluterealtygroup.com

Alexan Lofts
877.305.4472
alexanlofts.com
Allison Spear Realtors
713.524.7653
allisonspear.com
Brooks Ballard
GMAC Real Estate
713.522.474

Heritage Texas Properties
713.225.5565
heritagetexas.com
Holland Moore Properties
281.685.2557
hollandmoore.com
In The Loop
713.521.RENT

intheloopproperties.com
Nautilus Real Estate
713.256.4303
nautiluslouston.com
Sandra Gunn Properties
713.224.2777
sandragunn.com
Urban Living
713.868.7226

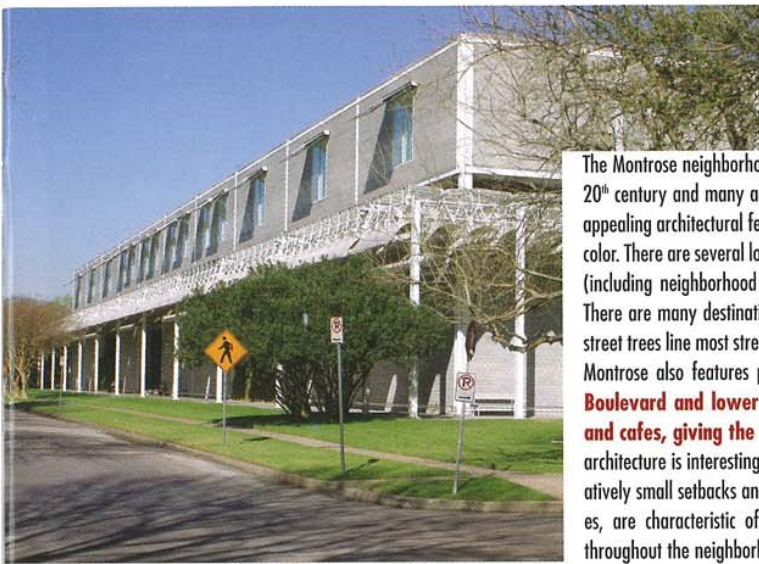
urbanliving.com
Urban Habitats
713.664.8940
urbanhabitats.com
locations
7575 Kirby
713.667.7575
7575kirby.com

Dominion Post Oak
1.888.270.0385
dominionpostoak.com
Empire
713.785.10FT
theempirehouston.com
Jackson Place
Condominiums
713.528.2661
jacksonplacecondos.com

Live Oak Lofts
713.225.5565
liveoakloftshouston.com
Parkside Homes
713.433.9595
parksidhomes.com
Post Rice Lofts &
Post Midtown
Square
713.739.POST

postproperties.com
St. Germain
713.223.LOFT
stgermain.com
The Edge
Condominiums
281.687.8429
allisonspears.com
The Esplanade at
Hermann Museum

Circle
713.807.7777
archstoneapartments.com
The Village of Oak
Forest
713.256.9388
thisnewhouse.us
Washington Lofts
713.224.2777
sandragunn.com



MONTROSE



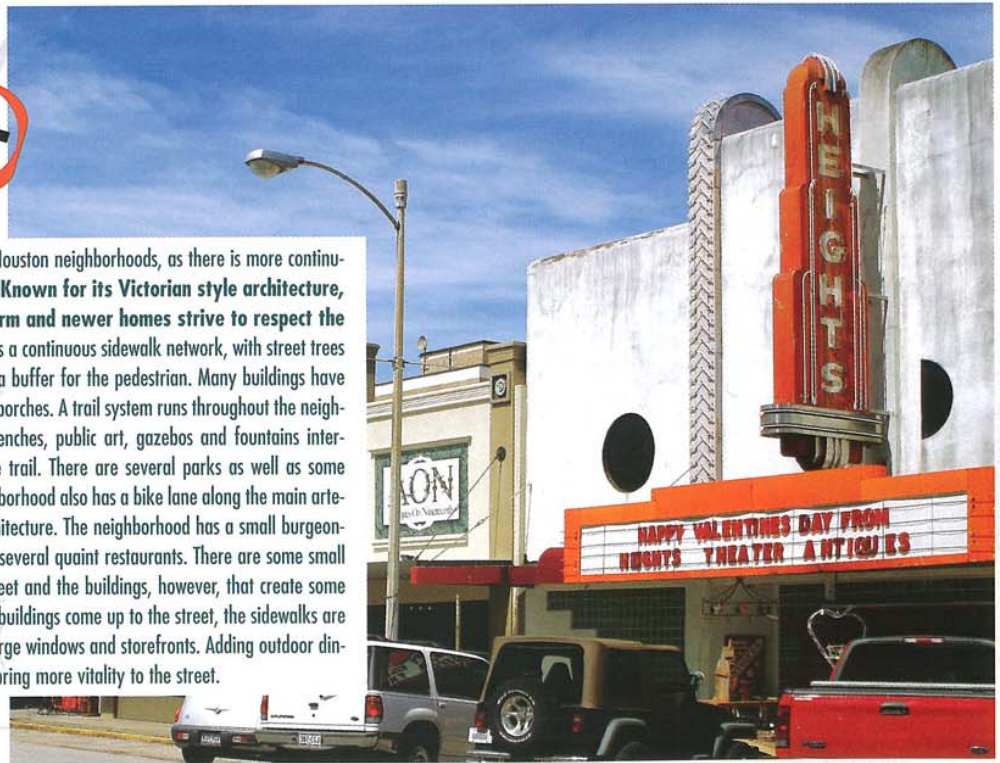
The Montrose neighborhood has a unique and distinctive feel. Homes date back to the early 20th century and many are listed in the national registry of historic places. There are many appealing architectural features throughout the neighborhood, including the extensive use of color. There are several local boutique type stores, bars, restaurants and service-oriented uses (including neighborhood grocery stores). The area has some vertical mixed-uses as well. There are many destinations within walking distance of residences. Buffered sidewalks and street trees line most streets. Many streets also have crosswalks to accommodate pedestrians. Montrose also features public art, street furniture, monuments and markers. **Montrose Boulevard and lower Westheimer are lined with interesting local restaurants and cafes, giving the neighborhood charm and the feeling of a café society.** The architecture is interesting and attractive. Single-family homes in this neighborhood have relatively small setbacks and most are modest in size. Brick-bungalows, some with front porches, are characteristic of this neighborhood. There are some small surface parking lots throughout the neighborhood that interrupt the continuity of the streetscape, however.



The Heights neighborhood is visually set apart from most other Houston neighborhoods, as there is more continuity in the land uses, streetscapes and urban design characteristics. **Known for its Victorian style architecture, many homes are being renovated to their old-world charm and newer homes strive to respect the integrity of the existing architecture.** This neighborhood has a continuous sidewalk network, with street trees and crosswalks. Several streets have on-street parking, creating a buffer for the pedestrian. Many buildings have balconies and/or front porches. A trail system runs throughout the neighborhood, with street benches, public art, gazebos and fountains interspersed throughout the trail. There are several parks as well as some playgrounds. The neighborhood also has a bike lane along the main arterial.

HEIGHTS

The residential area has varied but compatible styles of architecture. The neighborhood has a small burgeoning main street, 19th Street, with eclectic local retailers, including several quaint restaurants. There are some small strip-retail areas with small surface parking lots between the street and the buildings, however, that create some disruption in the continuity of the streetscape. For the most part, buildings come up to the street, the sidewalks are fairly large and walkable, and the streetscapes are varied with large windows and storefronts. Adding outdoor dining to the area would enliven the neighborhood even more and bring more vitality to the street.





DOWNTOWN

The core of Downtown Houston is characterized mainly by mid- to high-rise buildings that come up to the street. Various architectural styles are present, including historic styles, as well as 1950's to 1970's Modern and Postmodern. **Main Street forms the heart of Downtown, and the addition of the light rail system makes this area visually appealing, with large sidewalks featuring distinctive paving treatments, human-scaled lighting features and street furniture.** The pedestrian-friendly Main Street provides hardscaped public space — a valuable amenity for this neighborhood as well as for the entire region. There are several public spaces throughout the neighborhood, including parks, plazas and the new Main Street Square. Downtown also offers public art, fountains, street trees, street furniture, historic buildings, on-street parking, bus stops and crosswalks. Downtown's leaders have made great public investments over the last several years, and the stage is set for urban village development to follow. The extensive underground tunnel system, containing many restaurants catering to the 9 to 5 work population, funnels a large part of pedestrian traffic, however and is one of the biggest challenges to retail resurgence on the street. Downtown Houston generally accommodates pedestrians quite well, although there are many surface parking lots that interrupt the connectivity of the streetscape. Fifty years ago, Downtown was the retail center for the city and it appears ripe for retail revitalization today. Foley's Department Store remains a major retail anchor at the 1100 block of Main Street. Across the street, the former Sakowitz Department Store is currently being redeveloped to its original retail use. On the adjacent block, Entertainment Development Group is planning a large-scale, three-block, mixed-use project with hip merchants and several hundred residential units. This mixed-use project will create a vital pedestrian link between the Convention Center and Main Street, helping to solve Downtown's connectivity problem. Further north on Main Street, some mixed-use developments have already occurred where there is a good integration of uses (e.g., the Rice Lofts). The area of Downtown that feels most like an urban village today is the northern end, where burgeoning loft growth has helped bring residents back to the central city. With more new residents moving back downtown, though, the lack of local services (e.g., a grocery store) catering to residents needs to be addressed. Furthermore, there is an essential need for additional housing, including affordable and workforce housing projects, in order for a critical mass of residents to occur.



MIDTOWN

Midtown has a tremendous opportunity to become a true urban village as a result of the revitalized Main Street Corridor. The Midtown neighborhood is an urban planner's dream, not because it is a model approach to planning, but because it is still such a blank slate. Located between Downtown and the Texas Medical Center, this area is nestled between the two largest job magnets in the city, and could not be more suited for urban village development. Even though there has not been much mixed-use development on Main Street itself, there has been a resurgence of new development and new residents coming into the neighborhood over the last several years. Much of the new development in the area has been multi-family residential units, mostly townhomes. There are several historic buildings and a fairly continuous buffered sidewalk network with street trees. Midtown has several public spaces, including Baldwin Park, which is currently undergoing a major redevelopment. Some areas have on-street parking. On a negative note, there are some blank streetscapes and undeveloped land, as well as some rundown buildings and warehouses. There are several medium-sized surface parking lots along with some drive-thrus and small strip malls. Wide four-lane, one-way streets are present, which can present a barrier to pedestrians, although many of the large arterials have crosswalks. There is one vertical mixed-use development in the neighborhood, Post Midtown, that has balconies overlooking the street, street furniture and gathering places, and is a model urban village project. However, the city's lack of zoning and controls seems to be having an impact. Across the street from Post and a neighborhood park, CVS Pharmacy recently opened a new, suburban style store, despite neighborhood opposition. **With all of the parking in the front, the store's layout does not interface with the street, practically eliminating the opportunity for further urban village development adjacent to this great project and park.** Local leaders are hoping to pass a neighborhood plan that would control how future growth occurs along the Main Street Corridor, to ensure that Main Street is developed in a responsible, pedestrian-friendly way.





B- THIRD WARD

The Third Ward is typical of many first tier, pre-WWII neighborhoods. There is a ton of potential within this neighborhood, as most of the infrastructure and urban form characteristics necessary to increase the livability of this neighborhood are already in place. The neighborhood is built on a grid street pattern, which makes it much easier to create walkable districts. Modest-sized houses with small setbacks and front porches characterize most of the tree-lined streets. A continuous buffered sidewalk network exists throughout most of the neighborhood and there are several public spaces, including the 10-acre Emancipation Park. **The Third Ward is as complex as it is unique. From the historic "Shot Gun Row" houses on Holman to the mansions along South MacGregor, there is much discussion about the exact perimeters of Third Ward.** There is, however, consensus that this predominantly African American part of Houston has its own character of entrepreneurship, generational home ownership and cultural resonance. The impact of no zoning, on a positive note, has allowed for several mom-and-pop stores to be integrated throughout the neighborhood. On the negative side, the lack of zoning has made it easy for certain illicit businesses to set up shop with little fear of reprisal or regard for the negative effect on property values. While certain isolated areas show signs of a lack of government infrastructure support, many area residents still pride themselves on maintaining their property. Nevertheless, gentrification is certainly having an impact on the neighborhood – rapidly increasing property values and subsequent tax increases continue to drive many multigenerational African-American homeowners out of their homes. Most buildings have high architectural integrity, although many structures, both residential and commercial, are abandoned or severely rundown. Positive attributes include few strip center developments, the presence of the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, and pedestrian-friendly sidewalks. A widespread grass roots movement is underway to seek comparable funding for the Third Ward. Area residents are seeking municipal, county and federal funding for infrastructure improvements, enhanced public transportation, i.e., METRO rail, and a coordinated master plan for urban redevelopment. In order to balance the need for growth with the historic fabric of the neighborhood, the city would be wise to support the development of mixed-use, as well as mixed income communities in the neighborhood.



The Galleria neighborhood can be characterized as Houston's second downtown, hence the moniker Uptown – with its own signature skyline. There are several mid- to high-rise office towers that line the major arterials of the neighborhood. It is difficult to traverse this area as a pedestrian, as the major arterials in this neighborhood are 6 to 8 lanes wide, the sidewalks are relatively narrow, the sidewalk network is incomplete, and there are few crosswalks or other pedestrian-crossing measures. The streetscapes are not pedestrian-friendly, as there are a number of big-box retailers with blank facades and deep setbacks with large surface parking lots between the street and the building. The Galleria Mall remains a permanent regional landmark in the neighborhood, giving the area its own cachet. Several monuments and markers throughout the area, such as the silver arches and silver rings over street intersections, also help to distinguish this neighborhood from others within Houston. The residential area is characterized by large houses, with large setbacks. The houses have varied architectural styles that are attractive and interesting. Large street trees line most of the residential areas, although sidewalks are often absent. **The area is initiating plans to create a promenade to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Additionally, developers are planning to re-vamp some of the older strip centers by making them multi-use and moving the parking lots behind the buildings.** Local developer Ed Wulfe is planning a major urban, mixed-use project at the corner of Post Oak and San Felipe, which will create a pedestrian district and help bring a vibrant sense of place to the area.

GALLERIA UPTOWN AREA





MEMORIAL TANGLEWOOD



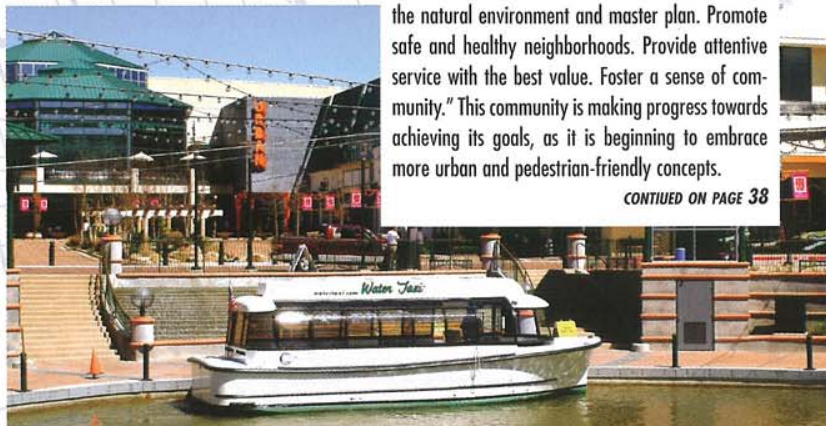
The houses in this neighborhood have interesting and stylish architecture. Street trees are present on most residential streets. Most neighborhoods branch off Memorial Drive, which was an old Indian trail. 1960s ranch-style homes are typical to this area, which is made up of six villages but incorporated as a city in 1955. Most large roads are lined with strip-retail developments with medium to large surface parking lots. Narrow sidewalks line the large arterials and few crosswalks are available. Many arterials are lined with blank street walls and residential areas lack sidewalks. These conditions make it both unpleasant and unsafe for pedestrians. Although the neighborhood is composed mostly of single-family homes, there are also several multi-family structures throughout the neighborhood. In general, this area is lacking connectivity and accessibility, critical elements for creating sense of place. The neighborhood follows a hierarchical street pattern (with wider streets as the arterials and smaller streets within the residential areas). A mixed-street pattern characterizes the neighborhood (linear street grid pattern with some cul de sacs). **Although the area is generally pleasing aesthetically with gathering spaces, local retailers and outdoor dining, it lacks pedestrian amenities and human-scaled design, which would make the area more walkable and foster a sense of place.**



WOODLANDS



The Woodlands is a large master planned suburban development with several neighborhoods divided into "villages." This area is visually distinctive. The trees that line the streets throughout the various neighborhoods and major arterials are different from those typical to the rest of the Houston area (which has primarily oak trees). **These trees are a huge factor in distinguishing this area from other neighborhoods throughout Houston.** They act as a street wall throughout most of The Woodlands, giving the area somewhat of a rural character, and acting as a natural buffer from the heat. The area has a lot of public space and nature features as well as various golf courses. An extensive trail system runs throughout most of the neighborhoods. The commercial development is typical of suburban areas where big-box and national retailers are set back from the street with large surface parking lots between the street and the buildings. There are several office parks in the area, also with large setbacks and surface parking areas. Most main arterials lack sidewalks, and where present, sidewalks are narrow and lack a buffer. Long blocks characterize this area. The residential areas consist of large single-family homes, a curvilinear street pattern and gated communities. Several of the villages have houses with prominent garage fronts that line the street. These characteristics – long blocks, few sidewalks and blank streetscapes – detract from the sense of place and make walking to commercial areas both uninteresting and hazardous. To address these challenges, **The Woodlands has begun to take great steps in the right direction, as the new Woodlands Town Center incorporates several pedestrian amenities.** New brownstones come up to the street and engage the pedestrian, creating an interesting streetscape. These residential developments, as well as new lofts, are within walking distance of the movie theater and the retail district within the new Woodlands Town Center. Adjacent to the mall is a new retail area lining a "river-like" waterway, making it visually appealing and distinctive. The Woodlands Association states as its values: "Preserve the natural environment and master plan. Promote safe and healthy neighborhoods. Provide attentive service with the best value. Foster a sense of community." This community is making progress towards achieving its goals, as it is beginning to embrace more urban and pedestrian-friendly concepts.



CONTIUED ON PAGE 38

SUGARLAND



Originally home to Texas' oldest company, Imperial Sugar, Sugar Land is a planned community. The neighborhood is largely characterized by strip centers and shopping malls that line the arterials, as well as low-density, tract home developments. Many of the older residential neighborhoods within Sugar Land have houses that vary little architecturally and whose garage fronts dominate the residential streetscape. Many arterials are lined with blank walls that create visually unappealing streetscapes. Most neighborhoods have cul de sacs, which can sometimes act as barriers to pedestrians. Some nature features are present, including a lake and the bayou. Some large arterials have a sidewalk network that is buffered, but contain large setbacks between the buildings and the street, making walking visually unappealing. The new Town Square introduces a new typology of urban design for this area, however. **As a result of a public-private partnership, this mixed-use development incorporates the City Hall as well as residential and retail uses into a new urban village.** Large sidewalks line this development, with street furniture, on-street parking, human scaled lighting and crosswalks. This development is a step in the right direction, helping to add a sense of place within Sugar Land.



KATY

Katy's roots are as a rice farming community... then suburban sprawl crept in. The area is characterized by low-density development, strip-commercial lined arterials and large surface parking lots. The Katy Mills Mall, a suburban regional outlet mall with huge surface parking lots, is an iconic landmark of the area. This area includes some industrial uses as well as large areas of undeveloped land. Single-family homes with prominent garage fronts are typical of Katy. Most arterials have blank street facades, as the commercial buildings are set back far from the street. There are few if any sidewalks along the arterial roads and no crosswalks, making walking from the residential areas (which typically have sidewalks) to commercial areas extremely difficult, if not impossible. Despite this, one can clearly see where there are pedestrians attempting to walk this area, as there are footpaths worn into the grass along the major arterials. Besides the inconvenience and hazardous walking conditions found in this area, walking would be visually unappealing as there is virtually no streetscape throughout the commercial arterials. This neighborhood is clearly auto-oriented, although walking can be accommodated within the residential areas. The street pattern is mostly linear and follows a grid, although there are cul de sacs throughout the area. There are some street trees within the residential areas, but not nearly as many as some other Houston neighborhoods. **There are a few areas in Katy, e.g., Lakes on Buckingham and Cinco Ranch, that stand out for sensible planning and livability, and act as a respite from the rest of Katy.** But, in sum this area is in need of a heart.

