

Present at the birth of a new Houston

By ED WULFE

BECAUSE of actions taken by Houston City Council last week, Houstonians can look forward to a more beautiful city. Council took two giant steps forward when they voted to designate downtown Houston as a "scenic district" and when they amended the sign ordinance to bring the city of Houston facilities within the scope of that ordinance.

The compromise ordinances approved by City Council were the product of months of hard work, intense negotiations and compromise by business and civic leaders, downtown arts and

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entertainment entities, sports venues and community and environmental leaders. Some wanted more signs to ensure the success of their downtown venues; some wanted fewer signs to ensure that Houston's emerging new and vibrant downtown would not end up looking like the Las Vegas Strip.

In the end, all gave up something they wanted, each got something they wanted and the process worked. For decades, Houston has had a business-oriented, "can-do" philosophy that has given us the reputation as the city where deals get done. That reputation for innovation and robust business successes will hold, but with a new sensitivity to quality-of-life issues playing an integral role in all that we do.

Our city is beginning a renaissance of the senses: New parks, landscaped boulevards, more trees, hike-and-bike trails, pedestrian-friendly streets and a downtown district alive with music, theater, the arts and a wonderful variety of clubs, restaurants and sports venues. These will all help to carve out a new place for Houston in the national imagination. We are seeing the beginning of a new city where quality of life and quality of place issues go hand in hand with the opportunity to succeed.

This new awareness of what Houston can be has been fueled in large part because of the remarkable partnership of what have been divergent interests. Environmental leaders have joined with elected and public officials, architects, developers and business and community leaders under the umbrella of the Quality of Life Coalition. This strong, grass-roots-driven coalition is a new public policy force united by a single vision of a cleaner, greener city where our community is sensitive to the environment and its effect on the quality of our daily lives.

What does this all mean for our city? As we reshape the city to be more beautiful, more vibrant and more inviting, new talent, new tourists and new businesses will be attracted to our urban center. That means more business, more jobs, more tourism dollars and more of the necessary revenues to make the city a greater delight for the senses.

As a city, we've focused on getting the job done from Monday to Friday. Now, as we grow, we can spend time and resources on making Saturdays, Sundays and time-off days worth staying right here at home.

Stay tuned for the new Houston: It's coming, not with a bang, but in a greatly enhanced and inviting green space filled with the sound of music, the aroma of food, a delight in the arts and a sense of well-being.