

2009 Responses of Houston City Council At-Large Runoff Candidates to Quality of Life Questionnaire

By Scenic Houston, Quality of Life Coalition, Houston Parks Board, Bayou Preservation Association & Trees for Houston

Explanation of Questionnaire process and responses:

- (1) One QoL Questionnaire, with five QoL issue sections, was created by the Coalition, HPB, TFH, BPA, SH as a collaborative effort for all CoH CM Candidates
- (2) The QoL Questionnaire was sent to all 51 CM Candidates by email as listed with the CoH City Secretary.
- (3) The At-Large Run-off candidates listed below responded to the QoL Questionnaire.
- (4) The attached responses are exactly as received from the candidates and are completely unedited and un-weighted.

Parks & Trails

- (1) In 2001, Houston voters approved a \$70 million parks bond issue, and in 2007, voters approved a bond issue for \$55 million. All of the City's capital funds for parks will be depleted by 2013. There are, however, still significant needs for new parkland and new amenities in parks as well as a significant amount of deferred maintenance that must be addressed. The City's updated 2008 Parks Master Plan identified those needs at \$1.6 billion, with an initial parks bond of \$250 million divided between deferred maintenance and development of new parks.

Do you support one or more substantial parks bond initiatives in the next five years?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 –Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones
At Large P5 – Jack Christie

No

At Large P2 – Andrew Burks

What are your plans to expand the current City parks system (50-word max)?

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello – I support a program of public and private partnership to acquire park sites central to neighborhoods. Solicit the assistance of neighborhoods to help maintain existing and new park sites.

Karen Derr – I am a strong opponent of any tax increases in Houston. However, I believe that solutions to Houston's drainage/flood control problems and our need for recreational space should be developed in tandem.

At Large – Pos 2

Sue Lovell - As Chair of the Quality of Life Committee I am very proud of our efforts to add more park space to our city. We will be challenged in 2010 due to the economic downturn but I believe we can be more aggressive in going after ARA grant funding, infrastructure/flooding grants to build more detention ponds to help ease our flooding problem and those detention ponds can serve the dual use of park/recreational space.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie – As our city expands, we need to allow for reasonable and sufficient land use for parkland and open space to enhance the quality of life.

Jolanda Jones – As you point out, funding will be a challenge in the near term. I believe we should look at combining flood prevention and open space efforts by creating more detention ponds that double as parks or wetlands areas.

(2) Houston’s Parks & Recreation Department is one of the few accredited large city parks departments in the country, and its efficiency in maintenance and operations is much improved. Historically, however, Houston has under- funded parks maintenance, resulting in large deferred maintenance/replacement requirements and parks maintained at below par.

Do you support a significant increase in the Department’s maintenance and operations budget?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones
At Large P5 – Jack Christie

No

At Large P1 –Karen Derr

Which of these do you agree with as a means to avoid deferred or poor maintenance (check the appropriate box)?

a. Evaluate entire park system’s maintenance needs and costs on a yearly basis

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 –Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

b. Allocate sufficient resources to meet the park system’s maintenance needs in each year’s City budget

At Large P1 –Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones
At Large P5 – Jack Christie

c. Set up “City park maintenance stations” in convenient locations within the City

At Large P1 –Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

(3) A significant portion of an expanded parks system can be accomplished through the creation and expansion of the City’s trails network, along both greenways and roadways. Multi-use trails reach

neighborhoods where large tract purchases are not practical, and take advantage of land already owned by the public through Harris County Flood Control District or the City. Indeed, the City’s major bayous should be a connected park and trail system. Today, our nine major bayou arteries have well-used trails and parks dotted along them, but most of these trails are not connected. Planning for a trails network should be accomplished on a combined basis with Harris County and the City. Consolidated overall planning is critical to creating a coherent trail and park system and to accessing funding at a meaningful scale from the state and federal governments.

Do you support a large-scale interconnected multi-use trail system for Houston?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
 At Large P1 –Karen Derr
 At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
 At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
 At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones
 At Large P5 – Jack Christie

No

Do you support a comprehensive multi-use, bayou trail plan for Houston that would identify and build these critical connections?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
 At Large P1 –Karen Derr
 At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
 At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
 At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones
 At Large P5 – Jack Christie

No

Water Quality

(1) Every major bayou in Houston and Harris County is too dirty to meet federal standards, and as a result both the City and the County are under state and federal mandates to substantially improve water quality from non-point sources and reduce bacteria in the water. As Harris County Flood Control District has done in several detention areas along Brays Bayou, the City can combine flood & water quality land improvements with added park, open space and trail opportunities. Significant bond funds for creation of water quality filtering features and drainage improvement projects can also provide for many park land acquisition needs, saving the City money.

What are your plans to meet the state and federal water quality mandates in the City (50-word max)?

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello -- I support continued development of sub-regional /regional detention facilities. Water quality improvements are more effective

and economical developed on a regional basis. Larger basins afford more opportunities to integrate park amenities.

Karen Derr -- Meeting these mandates should be a public health priority, especially as Houston's waterways become key features in our recreational facilities. I would look for Federal funds and private funds to impact this problem.

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – I would propose more Inter Local Agreements with Harris County on this issue. Houston is in Harris County and the taxpayer pays for both to provide. Why not do things together and save money for both governmental bodies and the taxpayers.

Sue Lovell - I have long advocated for the use of detention ponds as a way of increasing parks and open space. One of my highest priorities in my last term is the creation of an enterprise fund for infrastructure that would ensure the money could be spent for no other purpose.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie – Listen to experts and read previous studies to make appropriate decision to improve water quality

Jolanda Jones – As I stated above, I support creating more opportunities for parks, open space and trails through the use of detention ponds. I will work to find ways to partner with the Flood Control District and other agencies to meet these needs.

Which of these do you agree with as a means to use storm water management to create open space and multi-use facilities for paddle, bicycle and pedestrian trails?

- a. Refit existing detention basins along the City's bayou arteries with natural wetland filtering features

<p>At Large P1 – Stephen Costello</p> <p>At Large P1 –Karen Derr</p> <p>At Large P2 – Sue Lovell</p> <p>At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones</p>

Where possible, allocate funds to plant wetland grasses along the sides of all the City's bayous

<p>At Large P1 –Karen Derr</p> <p>At Large P2 – Sue Lovell</p> <p>At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones</p>

- c. Allocate funds for hike and bike trails, canoe launch locations and wildlife viewing platforms along natural wetland features near the City's bayou systems

<p>At Large P1 –Karen Derr</p> <p>At Large P2 – Andrew Burks</p> <p>At Large P2 – Sue Lovell</p> <p>At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones</p> <p>At Large P5 – Jack Christie</p>
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- (2) Currently, the City has a Drinking Water Operations (DWO) Branch that is responsible for the supply, operations and maintenance of three water purification plants and 92 ground water pumping stations. However, there is no Watershed Management Division at the City that works to reduce flood risks for

Houston citizens and to improve water quality.

Do you support creation of such a division?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 –Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones
At Large P5 – Jack Christie

No

If yes, would you support creation of a dedicated funding source for a Watershed Management division in the City of Houston?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 –Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

No

(3) The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) currently rates the City of Houston drinking water system as a “Superior Water Supply System.” Seventy-one percent of the City’s water supply flows from the Trinity River into Lake Livingston, and from the San Jacinto River into Lake Conroe and Lake Houston. Population growth and development is projected to add several million more people to our region by 2012.

How can the City of Houston improve the water supply for drinking water and lower its treatment costs (50-word max)?

At Large P1

Stephen Costello -- I actively support conversion of existing water systems to surface water supply. I want Houston to continue to be the primary provider of surface water to area regional water authorities seeking to continue to convert to surface water.

Karen Derr -- We need to significantly reduce our water usage as this problem becomes more imminent. We need to drastically reduce landscape watering in Houston. The CoH must encourage rain catch systems for various uses.

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – I don’t have a good answer for this question at this time however I am open to hear good suggestions and ideas addressing this question.

Sue Lovell - We need to update old equipment and implement a better maintenance plan. As chair of Council’s TIA Committee, I met with the Mayor and PWE Director after Hurricane Ike; we instituted a comprehensive study of our plants and equipment to determine how to update current equipment and save money.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie – N/A

Visual Blight

(1) Houston's airport-to-downtown corridors are ugly and do nothing to visually support the fact that Houston is a world-class city. When the Houston 2012 Olympic Committee hosted international IOC visitors to Houston, great pains were taken to devise routes that kept them off our visually blighted freeways. When hosting visitors and clients, many area business leaders also use detours to avoid the signage blight along our airport corridors.

Would you support creation of an Airport Corridor Scenic District from International to Hobby Airport to improve the visual aspect of the City's airport corridors?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 – Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

No

(2) Every time the CoH strengthens its sign code, it grandfathers every sign in existence. In other words, the improved sign code never touches what's already in existence – creating an uneven playing field for the business community. As a result, there are now more than 60,000 grandfathered on-premises signs in Houston, including 22,000 pole signs constructed years – or decades – ago. Without a mechanism that requires grandfathered signs to conform to current sign laws, those signs will stay in their current state forever. Comparative research of cities which are Houston's economic competitors show that those cities ALL have a mechanism in their sign codes to bring old signs into conformity with current regulations.

To dramatically improve existing visual blight caused by decades-old sign clutter, would you support the creation of rules (i.e. a mechanism) that require all existing, grandfathered signs in Houston to conform to current Sign Code standards?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

No

If yes, what is a reasonable time period to require existing signs to come into compliance with the current sign code standards? _____

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello – 12 months

Karen Derr – NA

At Large – Pos 2

Sue Lovell - I have not done a study to find out what a reasonable time would be at this time. Given the economic situation it would not be the right time until the economic situation improves.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie - NA

Jolanda Jones – I support this as a goal, but would need to be assured that any rules did not put an unfair economic burden on property owners or small businesses.

(3) Under our current sign code, every business in Houston can have one electronic (digital) changeable message sign that is allowed to change screens up to 288 times each day. In addition, these signs can be as high as 42.5 feet high and the electronic (digital) changeable message can be up to 100 square feet in size. Studies show that these types of signs, particularly large and tall signs along the freeways, are a safety hazard. Many cities are banning or severely limiting their use to special districts.

Do you support prohibiting the future use of electronic (digital), changeable message signs in Houston?

Yes

At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 - Jolanda Jones

No

At Large P1 – Karen Derr

If yes, do you have specific comments on how the prohibition would work? For example, would there be a citywide ban or limits only in special districts?

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello -- I would suggest a program be developed as a pilot project limited to several special purpose districts. Once implemented the effectiveness can be showcased in support of expanding the program throughout the city.

Karen Derr - NA

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – No, it would be city wide

Sue Lovell – As chair of the Quality of Life committee I supported the changes that were made this year with a promise that I would support additional changes in the future. If I am re-elected I will keep that promise.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie - NA

Jolanda Jones – I would want to bring stakeholders to the table to work out a plan that was fair and tailored to meet the problem.

Do you support the City's current prohibition on the construction of new billboards, which has been in place since 1980?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 –Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones
At Large P5 – Jack Christie

No

[Empty box for 'No' responses]

Trees & Landscaping

(1) Over the past 10 years, trees and landscaping in Houston have grown in significance as a critical part of Houston’s urban streetspace. In it well-supported by Houstonians that trees should be increased, maintained and preserved as part of our natural environment. In that regard, the City, Harris County and TxDOT’s Houston Region have committed to planting over 1 million trees in the Houston area by 2012 – called the *Million Trees+Houston Initiative* (www.milliontreesplushouston.org).

Do you support the continuation and completion of this Million Trees+Houston Initiative? If yes, the City has budgeted \$750,000 in 2009 and 2010 for this initiative – do you support continued funding dedicated to tree planting in 2011, 2012 and beyond?

Yes

<p>At Large P1 – Stephen Costello</p> <p>At Large P1 –Karen Derr</p> <p>At Large P2 – Andrew Burks</p> <p>At Large P2 – Sue Lovell</p> <p>At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones</p> <p>At Large P5 – Jack Christie</p>
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No

Empty box for No responses

Sustaining significant tree canopies and landscaping in the City requires a commitment to tree-planting by all aspects of the community – private, public, governmental and civic.

What efforts will you make to encourage the public and private sector to continue to make investments in our green infrastructure both by planting new trees and maintaining our current canopy (50-word max)?

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello – I will continue to support and advocate for public education programs designed to highlight the social , economic and quality of life benefits of tree perseverance and sustainability

Karen Derr -- Cooperate with School Districts to utilize their grounds to increase the canopy. I would utilize the cities communication lines and Super Neighborhood program engage the public. Promote good “green” corporate citizens with awards and contests. I wuld utilize Urban Harvest’s resources to promote planting of urban foraging trees, bushes and vines.

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – I propose the city compensate the public and private sector for their efforts to maintain our green infrastructure. The private sector can perform the work at a lower cost saving the city money. This will help our under funded and understaffed Forestry Department.

Sue Lovell - I am committed to the continuation of current efforts, and hope to serve again as Chair of the QoL Committee on City Council. I will continue to work to educate the public about the importance of preserving our canopy of trees, both from the standpoint of quality of life and public health.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie - NA

Jolanda Jones – Bringing the public and private sectors together to solve problems is my preferred way of doing things. I will work to continue our efforts to invest in our green infrastructure and to educate the public about why it is important.

(2) Multiple City of Houston departments play important roles in various aspects of our urban forest. For example, the Public Works Department has purview over tree planting along street rights of way during construction; the Parks & Recreation Department has responsibility for tree planting and maintenance in parks, open spaces, esplanades and some city streets; and Public Works and Planning has purview over tree planting and removal on private property during permitting and construction processes.

Is the current structure for protecting and increasing the City’s tree canopy the optimal structure to ensure the best use of our green resources and to protect what we have?

Yes	<p>At Large P2 – Andrew Burks</p> <p>At Large P2 – Sue Lovell</p>	No	<p>At Large P1 – Stephen Costello</p> <p>At Large P1 –Karen Derr</p>
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If no, how would you change the structure of urban forestry in the City (50-word max)?

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello -- I would like to see one department (centralize function) be responsible for purview over tree planting, maintenance and removal.

Karen Derr -- I support the appointment of volunteer commission to oversee this important aspect of quality of life in Houston. Our lushness is truly one of our most important natural resources and characteristics.

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – I would first look at the overall urban forestry plan for the city and work from there. The current plan being used has numerous flaws and maintenance is horrible.

Sue Lovell - At this time I believe that it is working. I am always open to re-evaluation and ways to improve. The current economic situation has altered many plans but I am very proud of the way we have managed our city. We are in much better situation than other cities.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie - NA

Jolanda Jones – I believe we should always look for ways to do better and I will keep an open mind. At this time I am not aware of significant reasons to change our current system.

Also, do you believe that the City’s current Tree and Shrub ordinance is effective?

Yes	<p>At Large P1 – Stephen Costello</p> <p>At Large P1 –Karen Derr</p> <p>At Large P2 – Sue Lovell</p> <p>At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones</p>	No	<p>At Large P2 –Andrew Burks</p>
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Policy and Governance

(1) TIRZ and Management Districts are starting to become more active in park creation and improvement activities within their boundaries. TIRZ policy should continue to insist on investment in neighborhood and community parks as an economic development strategy, and affordable housing goals should

include parks creation in affected neighborhoods.

Do you support a policy of maximum participation by TIRZ and Management Districts in funding of parks and trails?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 – Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

No

At Large P2 – Andrew Burks

(2) The parks set aside ordinance should be reviewed and standards increased so that new residential development shares more of the burden of park creation with existing property owners. The current ordinance, while important in setting the policy of new residences contributing to new needs, simply does not require enough to have a meaningful impact.

Do you support improving the current ordinance with any of the following?

a. Increase by 50% the amount of set-aside fees paid for new developments (based on population served)

At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

b. Increase the number of acres required to be set-aside for new developments

At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

c. Increase by 70% the amount of set-aside fees paid for redevelopment in low-park areas

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 – Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

(3) Houston and Harris County operate geographically overlapping parks systems. Recently, the City and County have partnered to maintain and develop certain individual parks efficiently. Survey after survey show that citizens neither know nor care which entity operates their parks. The cost savings from running a blended system compared to running separate operations could be substantial.

There is also strong relationship between flood damage reduction objectives and those of open space, conservation, and parks and recreation. It shows good stewardship of public assets to use land for parks and recreational purposes between the occasional floods. Recent experiences around Texas have shown that bond elections that *tie together issues* related to water (lack of water, water quality issues, too much water) with *quality of life issues* (recreation, natural areas, open space, wildlife habitat) *are more likely* to encourage the electorate to come out and vote *YES* - often at levels higher than could be achieved when these connections are not made. Often, these natural areas that need protection fall within both City of Houston and Harris County boundaries.

Do you support studying a closer partnership with Harris County to see whether and how efficiencies and savings could be achieved?

Yes

At Large P1 – Stephen Costello
At Large P1 – Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

No

If yes, how would you achieve this goal (50-word max)?

At Large – Pos 1

Stephen Costello -- I would actively encourage the next park director to meet with each county commissioner for the purpose of establishing and solidifying a partnership to explore multipurpose uses and future maintenance cost savings benefits.

Karen Derr -- Create an overall survey of all city and county (including Harris County Flood Control) holdings to assess connectivity and opportunities for cooperation.

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – Through more Inter Local Agreements

Sue Lovell - I will work with our next mayor and controller to achieve this goal. The first step should be a joint task force to lay out possible parameters. The controller’s office should have particular input on quantifying possible efficiencies.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie - NA

Jolanda Jones – We should always look for ways to partner with the county and other agencies to achieve efficiencies and savings. I would support a joint study group or task force to make recommendations to both jurisdictions on next steps.

Capital Improvements Funding

(1) The City funds its major capital improvements for parks, libraries, new police and fire stations as well as streets and drainage projects from the general fund. The general fund is also used to pay for the City’s general operating expenses for such services as public safety, (i.e. Police and Fire), health department, garbage collection, etc. Revenues collected for the general fund are derived from property taxes, sales taxes, and other fees. The City issues bonds to pay for capital improvements and then pays off the bonds from a small portion of the general fund.

Competition for these limited dollars for projects is fierce, and there are always more projects than there are funds. Many times, when the City is faced with additional demands for services or programs needing general revenue funds, it has delayed or slowed down their capital improvement projects so that the money that would be used to pay for the projects can be diverted to other programs or services.

Approximately 25 percent of the City’s infrastructure was developed before World War II and is now 70 years or older, well beyond the useful life of 30 to 45 years for streets (asphalt and concrete) and 50 years for storm sewers. The total value of the City’s streets and drainage systems (according to the City’s GASB 34 data) are over \$10 billion dollars (which is less than the replacement costs of these systems

when you take into consideration the built environment conditions in which any reconstruction must occur).

Do you support a change in the way City funding is provided for streets and drainage?

Yes

At Large P1 –Stephen Costello
At Large P1 – Karen Derr
At Large P2 – Andrew Burks
At Large P2 – Sue Lovell
At Large P5 – Jolanda Jones

No

What change would you support (50 word max)?

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello -- Establish a dedicated enterprise fund similar to the current water and sewer fund. Identify areas where the funds will be directed and what year based on a "needs only" criterion such that the general public will understand how and where the dollars are being spent.

Karen Derr -- Needs more study.

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – The city’s way of doing business addressing these issues has never been good. I would suggest we revisit and reevaluate all infrastructure needs set and plan and stick to it.

Sue Lovell - As I said above, one of my highest priorities in my last term will be the creation of an enterprise fund for infrastructure that would prevent funds from being raided for other purposes. A stable funding source will enhance long-term planning and allow for a more efficient use of resources.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie - NA

Jolanda Jones – I support efforts to do a watershed-by-watershed analysis of our drainage issues and setting aside funding to tackle the most serious problems first. We have to look at changing the CIP process to accommodate issues like drainage that do not conform to council district boundaries.

General

What are other Quality of Life Goals that you would like to see achieved, if elected (50 word max)?

At Large - Pos 1

Stephen Costello -- As an existing member of the Memorial Park Conservancy board for the last 13 years, I believe that parkland has a significant impact in neighborhood quality of life. I would like the city to actively pursue park space acquisition for neighborhoods lacking green space.

Karen Derr -- Parks better utilized by utilizing the city’s Super. Many park facilities open later. More green space for apartment communities. More private/public partnerships for park equipment. Concession opportunities at urban parks to enhance

At Large - Pos 2

Andrew Burks – I would address the flooding problems, expedite the delivery of city services, work to reduce crime, change the way the city addresses affordable housing, provide an economic balance for the entire city, work to reduce property taxes and strengthen our health departments ability to meet new challenges.

Sue Lovell - My goal is to continue to be a part of improving the quality of life for all Houstonians. It has been a pleasure to serve as the chair of the

Quality of Life committee and to work with people that have a passion for our city and the courage to introduce new ideas.

At Large - Pos 5

Jack Christie - NA

Jolanda Jones – I will continue to advocate for improving air quality. My son has asthma and therefore I understand personally the toll that dirty air takes on our quality of life. I also fought to shut down CES, a company which emitted noxious air to its residential neighbors and killed a worker.