

Environmental Exchange

A publication of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition

December 2003
Newsletter &
Calendar

The Houston-Galveston area's most comprehensive coverage of environmental news and events.

Beyond Rail: Mass transit may "urbanize" city

by Robert Belew
Contributing writer

Last month's passage by voters of the Metro rail plan may have marked a turning point in Houston's future growth and development. Although the election issues were primarily discussed in terms of getting people to and from work, urban planners say the real significance of rail transit will be its ability to reshape the city by allowing a more urban style of development model to take root.

In contrast to Houston's long used suburban model in which drivers use roads to compete with each other for access to common destinations, the urban model relies on mass transit to provide access to and within zones that are developed with the principles of higher living density, fewer cars, pleasant architecture and pedestrian accessibility. This could radically change the look and way of life of the city.

David Crossley of the Gulf Coast Institute which advocates "smart growth," said transit is about more than bringing suburban com-

muters to and from work.

Crossley identified several factors he said indicate the city will be forced to move to a series of urban-concept zones, all connected by rail. Traffic congestion and lack of parking are two factors that will necessitate the shift.

"The Galleria is a great example of a place that is limited by the lack of transportation options that it has. There are only a certain number of transactions that can go on in the Galleria at Christmas, because (of) that's how many cars that can get in there, it's utterly saturated," Crossley said.

He also used parking problems downtown as an example.

"People who are working downtown will tell you parking is just taking up too much space, we have to find ways to get people into Downtown without cars. The stores can handle more people, but they can't get in there."

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Public weighs in on NAFTA provision to allow Mexican trucks

by Erika McDonald
Staff Writer

A series of hearings held in Houston and across the state last month gave the public a chance to weigh in on environmental impacts of trucks traveling from Mexico through U.S. cities.

As part of the North American Free Trade Agreement, a 1982 moratorium was lifted, allowing Mexico-domiciled trucks, and the diesel they emit, across the border.

Public Citizens' Tom Smith, who testified at the Houston hearing, said his group is not opposed to opening the borders but without some environmental safeguards, the trucks could make it impossible for Houston to meet its clean-air goal by 2007.

Smith asked the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration, the agency that will draft the environmental impact statement, to require the trucks to use a low sulfur diesel and create emission-inspection stations along NAFTA corridors across Texas and the U.S.

Smith also asked the agency to consider environmental justice issues as part of its assessment. He said communities who live closest to freeways are primarily low-income, ethnic minorities.

"Children who live near freeways typically have decreased lung capacity or 'aged lungs' and adults living near freeways die earlier," he said. "The evidence is clear and compelling."

Smith said trucks from across the border would travel virtually every major highway in Houston and idle in the Port. Highway 59

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Post Midtown Square is one of few local sites with pedestrian friendly mixed-use development.

Environmental Exchange

The Environmental Exchange is published by the Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), an information clearinghouse and communications network for environmental issues in the Houston-Galveston area. The CEC mission is to improve the quality of life and health in the region through education, dialogue and collaboration. CEC serves the general public by bringing many diverse groups together to build awareness and stimulate discussion about environmental issues in the region. Programs include forums that give a balanced perspective on environmental issues, and information vehicles that enhance understanding.

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Perspectives Autumn Canoeing on Armand Bayou

by Chris MacGregor

On a fair Saturday morning in late September I ventured out into the waters of Armand Bayou, the last remaining natural habitat in Harris County, with my good friend Mark and my son Colin. It was the perfect day to take Colin out in the canoe, and he was excited to be able to assist in paddling.

The launching spot at Bay Area Park was fairly packed with ducks, swans, kayakers, dogs and other park life.

The water on Saturday was about the highest I've ever seen it. Usually, when up the bayou, the bank is about two and three feet high making it a challenge to find a spot to land. As always, the current in Armand Bayou is almost imperceptible.

Colin was ready to help paddle, although his motor skills were not. Instead he provided the challenge of maintaining balance as he moved from left to right with his 40 pounds of instability. This kept Mark and I on our toes and the occasional panic as the canoe would lurch with Colin. We didn't see any alligators (well, Colin did, along with Indians on the shore and monkeys in the trees but he is three and sees things like that all the time) although we did get very close to an osprey, which dove off a tree and flew low to the water only a few feet from the canoe. In addition to a number of ospreys, we spotted herons, egrets and cranes all in various states of feeding and flying.

My mother is an avid birder and would love the waters of Armand Bayou, if only she had faith in canoes. Only while canoeing on the Armand Bayou do I understand my mother's interest in birding. The majesty of the birds that live around the water is stunning to behold as they take to flight and scoop fish from the water with poetic grace.

Our paddling went very well and one hour after leaving the park we were further than I have ever been up the bayou. We rounded a bend and thought we might be close to the bridge on Red Bluff Boulevard, but instead we found an amazing bridge that looked older than any of us on the boat.

At first we thought it might be a railroad bridge, but instead it looked to be an old road bridge, probably built by one of the gas companies in the 1950s.

Getting onto the bridge was not a problem, although there would have been no chance that I would have driven across it in my car. Dodging ant piles and sticker bushes, we walked up the trail about 50 yards to the cattle feeder and spotted an immense spider about four inches from back leg to front. Colin was a little nervous about the spider, but thought that the web it had crafted was "booteeful." The further up the trail we went the worse the mosquitoes got, so soon we were high-tailing it back to the boat.

The return trip was pretty easy the slightest current making it a bit faster than the upstream portion of the trek. We snacked on stale goldfish and enjoyed the unspoiled banks of the Armand Bayou. I spotted a few squirrels and a turtle on the way back, but no alligators.

Next summer when the water is low again I will go under the bridge and see what lies further up the headwaters of the Bayou.

Canoeing on the bayou offers me the chance to commune with nature. Where else in the county can you escape the sounds of cars as you glide across the water's glassy surface?

Unlike other parks in Harris County, the Armand Bayou Nature Center displays what our county looked like for hundreds of years before the hustle and bustle of the city and the pollution of refineries.

In addition to canoeing or kayaking the waters of the Armand Bayou, the Nature Center also offers miles of trails and board walks through mixed hardwood forests, the coastal prairie, and the coastal salt marshes on the east side of the bayou.

With its more than 370 species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, the Armand Bayou Nature Center is a mostly undiscovered gem in Houston, and for me it is the best place to canoe in our state.



A kayaker enjoys Armand Bayou

Report finds regulatory eye overlooks dangerous chemicals

by Renee Feltz

A new report by the Galveston Houston Association for Smog Prevention reveals chemicals that contribute significantly to Houston's air pollution problems are rarely, if ever, monitored in the region.

Two chemicals named in GHASP's report, acrolein an acrylic byproduct and acrylonitrile, a byproduct of several industrial processes also found in diesel exhaust, are both known carcinogens and irritants.

According to GHASP director and author of the report, John Wilson, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality routinely monitors four chemicals that combine to form ozone because it is under a federal deadline to reduce ozone levels by 2007.

"The state's environmental agency is not pro-active in terms of seeking out other air pollution concerns," Wilson said. "They basically wait for the federal government to tell them they have to do something before they'll do anything."

Wilson argues this orientation means some air toxins go unmonitored even though they are linked to major health concerns. Samples taken by citizen volunteers and tested by EPA sanctioned laboratories frequently revealed high levels of the chemicals.

"It's a good alert system that these chemicals are out there, but it's not a good technique for coming up with an accurate esti-

mate of long-term average pollution exposures," he said.

Uncertainty over the public health impact has led some researchers to call for a new focus from TCEQ.

Winnie Hamilton is the Director of Baylor College of Medicine's Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Research Center. She wants broader standards for determining which of the thousands of chemicals emitted into Houston air to monitor.

"We definitely need to have a more comprehensive approach to reducing pollution in general to improve public health and I think being less focused on meeting standards and more focused on improving health would be a valuable goal," Hamilton said.

But that is not an easy job according to Dave Sullivan who manages the data collected by TCEQ.

"With Houston, we have a very difficult problem: 60 percent of the petrochemical industry in America is in one community and thousands of chemical species being used everyday," he said.

He added that standardizing efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency may improve monitoring of one of the chemicals not currently measured in the Houston area. As part of a new EPA program, National Air Toxics Trend, acrolein is on the list of chemicals to be monitored. A \$100,000 EPA grant will soon fund acrolein monitoring at a site south of the Houston Ship Channel and northeast of the Texas City industrial complex.

Wilson said he welcomes this development but remains skeptical of further progress.

"I think the state has historically been told by the elected officials not to do anything more than what's required by the federal government," he said. "It's as if this is not being done because there's any public health concern but because it's a federal requirement being imposed on the state and, that's an unfortunate and hazardous attitude."

In the meantime, as Houston struggles to comply with federal ozone standards, citizen air monitors remain the only ones keeping an eye on acrylonitrile and other toxic chemicals pumped into the air. ☉

CEC Notes

Volunteer now for Earth Day events

Earth Day is only six months away, and the CEC is gearing up to plan the next Houston Earth Day event, to be held on April 10th, 2004. There are many exciting new projects in the works and the Earth Day Committee is looking for enthusiastic people to help with the planning of this wonderful event.

If you believe that Houston deserves a large-scale, environmentally sustainable Earth Day celebration, come help CEC make it a reality. Contact Alesha Herrera, Houston Earth Day chair, at (713) 524-4232 or send an email to <events@cec-houston.org> to help make this year's Earth Day the best ever.

Coalition Notes

GHASP releases first exhaustive smog report for region

It is widely assumed that Houston's air has a toxic tinge but a short summary of Houston's air pollution problem is hard to come by. Last month, the Galveston/Houston Association for Smog Prevention released, a new report, "Where Does Houston's Smog Come From?"

The four-page report compiles virtually all available air pollution-exposure data collected in the Houston region. Using health references and air-pollution monitoring data from state and federal environmental agencies, GHASP examined cancer risk, chronic health hazards and the acute effects of toxic exposure. "Where Does Houston's Smog Come From?" is the first attempt by any organization to measure the potential health effects based on the entire six-year database of air monitoring data from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

The report is available online at <<http://www.ghasp.org/publications/smog-sources/HoustonSmogSources.pdf>>.

A more detailed technical report, also online at <<http://www.ghasp.org>>, explains how GHASP analyzed the data and presented its findings.

Guide to Civic Involvement

Ever wonder how you can make a difference when it comes to regulating polluters? The Sierra Club, Environmental Defense and the Texas Center for Policy Studies have compiled the Citizen Guide for Participating in Government Decisions on Pollution Sources with a special focus on the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The guide is available online at <www.allianceforacleantexas.org>. Check it out and start getting organized!

Nature Discovery Ctr. kicks off monthly adult lecture series

In November, the Nature Discover Center kicked off a new monthly adult lecture series with a lecture on "Fortune Telling Frogs". Maura Maple, a staff naturalist at the Center, addressed the worldwide decline in amphibian populations widespread incidence in amphibian deformity. The lecture was the first in what will be a monthly series titled, "For the Inquisitive Naturalist." Upcoming lectures will be held on the first Wednesday of every month at 7 pm in Russ Pitman Park, 7112 Newcastle. Light refreshments are available. For more information contact Jenni Malone at (713) 667-6550 or email Jeni Howell at <jhowell@naturediscoverycenter.org>.

Gulf Coast Institute seeking unique photos of Houston for exhibit

In March, the Gulf Coast Institute will present an exhibition for Fotofest in the Joan Wich Gallery in downtown Houston. The name of exhibition will be "Our Town: Houston Past, Present, and Future." GCI's goal is to include photos of little-known places in Houston that will surprise people who think they've seen everything there is to see in the region. If you have pictures that meet that description, GCI may use them in the exhibition. To submit your photo, contact David Crossley at (713) 523-5757 or email him at <crossley@gulfcoastideas.org>.

K.E.E.P in need of underwriters for educational conference

Kids' Environmental Education Project will present a series of conferences throughout the state during 2004. The Environment in Education Conferences are designed to help teachers, administrators and parents by providing the materials, knowledge and community partnerships necessary to promote students' stewardship of the environment. In order to keep

the conference fees affordable, K.E.E.P. needs financial support in the form of underwriters. The cost of underwriting the conference is \$5,000. In addition to underwriting, other opportunities for support include benefactors at \$2,000, donors at \$1,000, gold sponsors at \$500, silver sponsors at \$250 and contributors at \$100. So far, K.E.E.P. has made it possible for more than 30,000 students in Texas to explore the environment through day trips and environmental education venues near their schools. For more information on how to support this important venture, contact K.E.E.P. founder Duncan Ragsdale at (281) 759-8313.

EcoNotes

MTBE debate stalls federal energy bill

Making national headlines is debate over a locally produced fuel additive that has stalled a vote on the controversial energy bill before congress.

House Democrats balked last month at an amendment backed by majority leader Tom DeLay, of Sugarland that would protect MTBE manufacturers from environmental lawsuits.

MTBE, or methyl-tertiary butyl ether is added to gasoline to make it burn cleaner. But if ingested at high levels the chemical can cause cancer.

With 90 percent of MTBE production occurring along the Texas Gulf Coast, local environmentalists say manufacturers should take responsibility if MTBE contaminates the drinking water supply. MTBE molecules are lighter and thinner than gasoline making it expensive and almost impossible to cleanup.

Republicans like DeLay argue the chemical is a necessary tool in helping improve Houston air quality by reducing tailpipe emissions.

Environmentalists in Houston and across the country have argued that if congress is worried about air quality, they should raise commercial auto efficiency standards instead of relying on a potentially harmful, chemical additive.

The controversy threatened to derail the Republican-led effort to complete the most comprehensive rehaul of US energy policy within the last decade.

Court upholds state's blueprint to reduce Houston ozone levels

A federal appeals court last month upheld a Texas plan to reduce ozone levels in the Houston/Galveston area.

Environmentalists and business leaders had asked the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to review a state pollution plan to bring the Houston-Galveston region into compliance with national ozone standards by 2007 as required by the federal Clean Air Act.

The court ruled last month that the Environmental Protection Agency, in charge of enforcing the act, followed the law when it signed off on the plan in late 2001.

The petitioners argued that the plan, as it was submitted, fell 56 tons per day short of the nitrogen oxide reductions needed to meet the federal requirements by 2007. Since the plan was passed, the state - under pressure from industry - has opted to reduce the amount of nitrogen oxides industrial plants must slash.

John Wilson, executive director of the Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention, one of the groups involved in the suit, said he was disappointed with the court's decision.

"This legal ruling is bad for the health of the people of Houston. They are the real losers," Wilson said. "I think what the court is saying here is that the EPA has the authority to make wrong and bad decisions."

But local, state and federal officials insisted the plan will be updated and adjusted in the future.

The court's decision may be found at <<http://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/opinions/pub/02/02-60017-cv0.wpd.pdf>>. More information about Houston's ozone plan is available at <<http://www.tnrcc.state.tx.us/oprd/sips/siphga.html>>.

Houston plant among worst contributors to global warming

Legislation currently under debate in Congress could benefit Texans, who are among those who suffer most from power plants that fail to meet modern emissions standards, according to a report released

by Texas Public Interest Research Group. The Edwards-Lieberman amendment of a Senate appropriations bill would have allowed states to ignore recent changes to the EPA's New Source Review program. Under the Bush administration, NSR was revised to let old power plants modify their facilities without installing the latest pollution control technology. The amendment failed, but TXPIRG continues to lobby against regulatory rollbacks they say will increase national levels of soot and smog by 10 million tons.

A study, released by the group to coincide with the Senate vote, found most of the pollution comes from the South, including Texas where more than 90 percent of emissions come from the state's grandfathered plants. At a press conference in downtown Houston, TXPIRG organizer Stephanie Gros singled out one local company, Centerpoint Energy as one of the worst polluters in the nation and one of the top five contributors to global warming. The company owns Parish, a coal-burning power plant in Fort Bend County that ranks third in the nation for carbon dioxides, commonly blamed for global warming, and 40th in the nation for sulfur dioxide emissions.

Leticia Lowe, a spokesperson for Centerpoint's Houston office, downplayed the Parish plant's contribution to global warming. She said carbon dioxide, though linked to climate change, was not considered a pollutant by the Environmental Protection Agency. Environmentalists have argued global warming is of particular concern in Houston where sprawling communities and expanding freeways abound. Congressional efforts to regulate carbon dioxide emissions have stalled under the Bush administration. Lowe said the company's Parish plant shows high emissions, when compared to other plants around the country, because it produces more electricity, generating 14,000 megawatts for the state. She denied the high levels could be blamed on out-of-date technology.

She said Parish emissions remained within federal limits assessed in 1990 and, since 1999, the plant had reduced its nitrogen oxide emissions, a major component of ozone. But Gros said plants in and around the Houston region, like Parish reduced nitrogen oxide emissions, in order to meet a 2007 deadline to com-

ply with federal ozone standards. She said Texas used a "piecemeal" approach to regulation. She recommended regulators consider all four chemicals released by smokestacks (nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and mercury) to achieve similar reductions. The TXPIRG study, "Lethal Legacy" found that more than half of all plant emissions, both in Texas and nationally, could be eliminated if the old NSR rule were strictly enforced.

A spokesperson for the EPA's regional office was unable to comment on the NSR rule change.

City set to implement plan for blighted land

More than four years after it was first approved, city officials are poised to begin an ambitious program intended to transform blighted, tax-delinquent property into affordable housing and other new development.

The City Council last month approved a new agreement with other local taxing jurisdictions to launch the Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority, which would sell abandoned property to developers at below-market prices to promote construction of housing that Houston's low- and moderate-income families can afford. "It's an experiment, and as it works, we would be open to bringing other neighborhoods in," said Steve Tinnermon, Mayor Lee Brown's chief of staff, who has been instrumental in working out details of the program in recent months.

City officials and some community activists say the program could improve conditions in deteriorating neighborhoods, relieve the city of the burden of maintaining abandoned property, shore up the tax base and increase the stock of badly needed affordable housing.

"We have lots of low-income families that live in the Fifth Ward, and lots of them would like to own homes," said Sarah Williams, a Fifth Ward resident and president of the Houston chapter of Acorn, a grass-roots housing advocacy organization.

The Fifth Ward, northeast of downtown, and the Third Ward on the southeast side will be the first areas to benefit from the program. City officials have identified 217 lots in those areas that qualify for foreclosure and redevelopment.

Inside Loop 610 alone, city officials say, more than 8,000 tracts of land meet the criteria for the program.

Among other standards, the property must have at least a six-year tax delinquency, along with tax judgments that exceed its market value.

The concept of turning such property into affordable housing has had broad support since it surfaced in the late 1990s. Jurisdictional turf battles and other problems, however, have delayed the program.

The new agreement among the taxing jurisdictions includes changes that reflect concerns expressed by Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee, who held up county approval of the plan almost three years ago.

After receiving City Council approval, the agreement must be approved by the boards of the Houston Community College System, the Harris County Department of Education and the Port of Houston Authority. City officials said the college board is expected to approve the agreement Thursday, and approval by the other two boards is expected on Nov. 17.

The county commissioners court, the Houston Independent School District and other taxing jurisdictions already have approved it.

Among those waiting anxiously for the program to begin are Houston's nonprofit community development corporations, or CDCs, which would have the first option to buy properties that the redevelopment authority acquires through foreclosure.

"CDCs throughout the city are very interested in the pilot program being a success so that it can be expanded citywide," said Mary Lawler, president of Avenue CDC and Houston's CDC Association.

Acorn, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, released a statement timed to coincide with the vote urging Houston's new mayor to make the land assemblage program a priority.

The group said the program could help to prevent gentrification that would push low-income people out of inner-city neighborhoods.

The plan has received approval from Harris County Commissioners Court, the Houston school district and other taxing jurisdictions, but still must be approved by the boards of the Houston Community College System, the county Education Department and the Port of Houston Authority.

Sensitive land around Big Thicket preserve could be protected

New federal funding may mean lands around Big Thicket National Preserve in East Texas could be placed back in public hands. As part of a Department of Interior spending bill, which passed the Interior appropriations conference committee last week, \$3.5 million dollars was earmarked for the purchase of lands around the preserve.

The National Parks Conservation Association estimates another \$16 million is needed to adequately protect Big Thicket.

More than 1.5 million acres surrounding the preserve are owned by timber companies. Houston conservation groups raised concerns recently, because they say clear-cutting by the companies and irresponsible land use bordering Big Thicket could impact the entire preserve.

The southeast Texas preserve was created in 1974 to protect flora and fauna indigenous to the region. Big Thicket spans seven counties. ●

Urban growth

Continued from page 1

That same dynamic applies to other centers of commerce, such as Greenway Plaza, Westchase and Greenspoint. Crossley said the next stage of growth should connect these high-density, high-commerce areas.

A major obstacle to such a vision is Houston's tradition of no zoning, and limited or no land use controls. Although rail will unify the various urban zones and make them more accessible, without a coherent system of planning and controlling the land use there is no assurance that any of the urban zones will be a desirable destination.

However, there is a movement in some quarters to allow development zones to enforce standards that serve the purpose of the zone.

Dan Barnum of the Midtown Management District said that the vision for redeveloping Houston's Midtown was clear – renounce Houston's traditional Suburban style. Barnum said a major obstacle to "urbanizing" Houston is a lack of understanding on the part of developers.

"They don't understand urban development, and those entities that do understand it... will say 'we are very reluctant to go into an area

December Calendar

For the most complete and current listing of environmental happenings in the Houston-Galveston region, visit CEC's web site at www.cechouston.org and click on Calendar.

Mon, Dec 1

Ornithology Group December Meeting Christmas Bird Counts

Where: Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet
When: 7 pm
Contact: Kathy Farr at (713) 939-9375
Fee: Free

Wed, Dec 3

Nature Photography Nature

Where: Discovery Center, 7112 Newcastle
When: 7 pm
Contact: (713) 667-6550
Fee: Free

Fri, Dec 5

Houston Zoo Program Swimmer Dinner

Where: Houston Zoo
When: 6-8 pm
Contact: (713) 533-6550
Fee: \$25 for member, \$30 for non-member

Sat, Dec 6

Growing And Eating Citrus Fruit

Where: Urban Harvest
When: 9:30 a.m.-12:00 pm.,
Contact: (713)-880-5540, \$20
Fee: \$20 non-members, \$10 members.

Houston Zoo Wild Art Class -

Painting at the Zoo (ages 6-12) Observe animals painting & paint animals yourself.
Where: Houston Zoo
When: 8-10 am
Contact: (713) 533-6550
Fee: \$45 for member, \$55 for non-member

Sat, Dec 6-Sun, Dec 7

Houston Zoo Overnight Family Program -

The Truth About Cats and Dogs (ages 7+)
Where: Houston Zoo
When: 6 pm

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$45 for member, \$55 for non-member

Sun, Dec 7

Woodland Holiday

Where: Nature Discovery Ctr, 7112 Newcastle
When: 12 noon-4 pm
Contact: (713) 667-6550
Fee: Free; bring money for crafts/food

Sun, Dec 7

Houston Audubon Society Field Trip - West Waller and Harris Counties

Where: Wilson Elementary School, Windsong Trails and Keith Harrow Street
When: 7:30 am
Contact: (713) 932-1639
Fee: Free

Tue, Dec 9

Birds of Texas

Where: Houston Arboretum
When: 7-9 pm
Contact: (713) 681-8433
Fee: \$15 for member, \$20 for non-member

Wed, Dec 10

Houston Audubon Society Meeting

Winter Bird Population Changes in Texas

Where: Cullen Hall, University of St. Thomas
When: 7:30 pm
Contact: (713) 932-1639
Fee: Free

Texas Trust for Public Land Workshop- Funding for Parks and Land Conservation

Where: League City Recreation Center, 450 W. Walker, League City
When: 9 am-4 pm
Contact: Linda Shead (713) 226-7200
Fee: Free

Sat, Dec 13 & Sun, Dec 14

Holiday Craft Workshops (ages 6+)

Where: Nature Discovery Ctr, 7112 Newcastle
When: 1-4 pm Saturday - Christmas crafts, Sunday - Hanukah crafts
Contact: (713) 667-6550
Fee: \$30 for member, \$45 for non-member

Sat, Dec 13

Piney Woods Wildlife Society -

Jesse Jones Annual Winter Bird Count

Where: Contact for details
When: Contact for details
Contact: Kathy Coward at (281) 893-1816
Fee: \$5

Tue, Dec 16

Piney Woods Wildlife Society Meeting

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: Kathy Coward at (281) 893-1816

Fee: Free

Fri, Dec 19 or Sat, Dec 20 or Mon, Dec 22

Nature's Tricks: Ungrateful Partners (ages 3-5)

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: Varies; Call for times

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: \$6 for member, \$12 for non-member

Fri, Dec 19 or Mon, Dec 29 or Tue, Dec 30

Holiday Day Camps

Call for details on ages, topics, days.

Where: Nature Discovery Ctr., 7112 Newcastle

When: 9:30 am-3:30 pm

Contact: (713) 667-6550

Fee: \$30 for member, \$40 for non-member

Sat, Dec 20

Scatology - The Scoop on Poop (ages 5-12)

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 9 am-12 noon

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: \$9 for member, \$15 for non-member

Sun, Dec 28

Recycle That Holiday Tree

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 2 pm

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: Free

Regular Meetings

Meetings are monthly unless otherwise indicated. Call to verify before attending a meeting. To list meetings, call 713-524-4CEC or fax 713-524-3311.

American Institute of Architects Environmental Committee 2nd Tues at noon. AIA office 3000 Richmond, Ste 500. 713-520-0155.

American Institute of Chemical Engineers 1st Thurs, Sheraton Astrodome, 610 Loop S. & Kirby Matthew Kolodney, 713-767-3752.

American Planning Assoc. 1st Tues, 11:45 am, The Court at St. James Place. Bret Keast 713-785-0080.

Bayou Preservation Assoc. 2nd Monday of Jan, March, May, Sept & Nov, at the Houston Arboretum, 713-529-6443. PLEASE RSVP.

BikeHouston last Tues, 6:30 pm, 3015 Richmond 713-652-2555.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition Board meeting 1st Tues, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond. 713-524-4CEC.

Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition 3rd Weds, 7:30 pm, Lakewood Forest Residents Club, 15006 Lakewood Forest Drive

Electric Auto Association, Houston Chapter. 3rd Thurs, 6:30 pm, HEC 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. Ben Chamberlin, 713-975-7744.

Environmental Educator's Exchange 1st Wed of Feb, May, Aug, Nov, 5 pm. Sites vary. Kelly Drinnen, 409-683-4233.

Friends of Texas Wildlife, 2nd Sat, 10 am, Samuel Matthew Park, 1728 E. Hufsmith Road, Tomball, 281-255-8885 or Lynda Guertin, cell 713-825-4095.

Galveston Bay Estuary Program Quarterly. Call for specific dates: 281-332-9937.

Galveston-Houston Assoc. For Smog Prevention (GHASP) 3rd Thurs, 7:30 pm, 3126 Fairhope. Ron Parry, 713-669-1195.

Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, Monthly walking tours, 4th Sun, 2 pm. Historic Neighborhoods Council Meeting, last Sat. Call 713-216-5000 or visit www.gpha.org for times and locations.

Green Party 3rd Mon, Montrose Public Library 4100 Montrose. 713-866-6285 or 713-880-3219.

Gulf Coast Institute: Houston/Gulf Coast Smart Growth Initiative 4th Wed, monthly at 11:30 am, H-GAC, 3555 Timmons, 2nd floor. 713-523-5757.

Harris County Soil & Water Conservation District 1st Wed, 9 am. Bennie Billington, 713-855-8716.

HART - the Houston Animal Rights Team 1st and 3rd Thurs, 7pm, University of St. Thomas 2nd floor, Crooker Center (the student cafeteria) 713-527-9144 .

Historic Neighborhoods Council 1st Sun, 10:30 am, Heights Branch Library. Ramona Davis 713-216-5000.

Houston Arboretum & Nature Center 3rd Wed, 5:45 pm, Houston Arboretum. 713-681-8433.

Houston Archeological Society 2nd Fri, 7:30 pm, M.D. Anderson Hall, Univ. of St. Thomas. Tommy Nuckols, 713-664-8369.

Houston Audubon Society 2nd Wed, Sept-May. 7 pm, University of St. Thomas, Cullen Hall. 713-932-1639.

Houston Bicycle Club, Inc 2nd Tues, except May. 7 pm, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Drive. 713-935-2810.

Houston Canoe Club Gen Mtg 2nd Wed, 7 pm, Red Cross Building, 2700 Southwest Frwy. Social Mtg 4th Wed, 7 pm Jax Grill, 1613 Shepherd. 713-467-8857.

Houston Homeowners Assoc 4th Mon (except November, Aug, and Dec), 5:30 pm, First Presbyterian, 5300 S. Main. Michael O'Brian, 281-496-0752.

Houston Renewable Energy Group Last Sunday of Jan, April, July, Oct., 2-4 pm, TSU School of Technology, Room 225. 713-524-2492.

Katy Prairie Conservancy 2nd Tues, 5:30 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-523-6135.

Keep Houston Beautiful Quarterly meetings at 2700 Post Oak Blvd., Ste. 1728. 713-621-7020.

Legacy Land Trust 3rd Wed, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-524-2100.

League of Women Voters of Houston 2nd Thurs or Fri. 713-784-2923.

Mothers for Clean Air Quarterly. Call Jane Laping 713-526-0110.

Nature Discovery Center of Friends of Bellaire Parks 3rd Mon, 7 pm, Nature Discovery Center, 7112 Newcastle. 713-667-6550.

Native Plant Society of Texas 3rd Thurs (except Dec, Jan), 7pm, Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway, 713-431-6346.

Outdoor Nature Club 2nd Thurs, Sept-May.

7:30 pm (social begins at 7), Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet. 281-358-5407.

Piney Woods Wildlife Society 3rd Tues, 7:30 pm, Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. 713-955-6667.

Sierra Club 1st Thur, 7:30 pm, Central Presbyterian, 3788 Richmond @ Timmons. 713-895-9309.

Texas Association of Environmental Professionals 3rd Thurs, 11:30 am, Brady's Landing, 8505 Cypress; Reservations: www.taep.org, reservation@taep.org, or 713-629-9119.

Urban Harvest Community Gardens Quarterly Meeting 4th Tuesday in January, April, July, 6-8 pm; Organic Gardening Classes weekly; workshops for outdoor classroom teachers annually summers. 1900 Kane. 713-880-5540.

Vegetarian Society of Houston 4th Wed, dinner mtg. at various local restaurants. 713-880-1055; Outreach volunteers call 713-880-1055.

White Oak Bayou Assoc 2nd Wed, 7:30 pm, Heights Fire House, 12th & Yale. For agenda, Fred Lazare, President, 713-864-9416 or Teresa Matlock, Treasurer, 713-864-3008.

Wildlife Rehab & Education Central/West: Carol at 713-661-5038 date and times. South/East: 2nd Wed 7 pm Sharon, 281-332-8319.

The Woodlands GREEN Quarterly at WCSC, 8203 Millennium Forest Drive. Christina West, 281-291-5876.

Urban Growth

Continued from page 6

like midtown because we don't know what is going to happen across the street," he said.

The rift in development styles was evident most recently when the management district balked at plans for the opening of a CVS pharmacy in midtown that included plans for a 66-space parking lot with four curb cuts.

"It was the standard suburban site plan and we sent back some notes with some sketches of different ideas they could do," Barnum said. "We got nowhere."

Bob Litke, Director of planning and development with the city defended Houston policies.

"Not having zoning laws doesn't mean developers can come in and build whatever they want," he argued. "We still have rules and regulations they must follow."

In 1999, the city made its first step in differentiating innerloop development from suburban areas by lowering the minimum lot size for urban areas.

Litke said, since 1999 there has been a conscious effort within the planning department to encourage dense growth, like the style seen in midtown. He agreed that this trend would

likely continue as rail corridors develop.

Crossley called midtown the most promising growth opportunity in the entire Houston region.

"There has been a marketing study that found a latent demand for 110,000 households in midtown, which now has seven or eight thousand, so you are talking, transformational, fast growing economic gains," he said.

Whether or not the midtown style of development spreads along Main Street following the opening of the light rail line may serve as the indicator for regional growth around the forthcoming Metro Solutions plan.

Crossley said he is confident that once the rail lines are up and running, and the major job sectors in the city are connected, development will follow suit.

"These places aren't all that spread out, they are all do-able by rail," he said. "If you can connect, as we have this Main Street line, which connects two of our major employment centers, the Medical Center and Downtown, and start to connect that to the Galleria Westchase, Greenway Plaza, now you have an urban place, accessible by rail by everyone, including visitors."

The big picture, according to Crossley, is a radical shift in development and a major transition in the look and feel of the city. ●

Trucks

Continued from page 1

is slated to become a major interstate highway from Brownsville and the Katy Freeway and I-45 will carry cargo from Mexico to Dallas and other destinations to the west.

A study by Public Citizen indicates the trucks could raise diesel emissions for Houston by 17 percent. Trucks from across the border are older, (10-16 years) than American trucks and use fuel that does not meet EPA standards for emissions.

Also testifying at the hearing was David Coffee, a representative with International Trucks of Houston, a trade association that helped convert one Houston commercial truck fleet to a low-sulfur diesel. He said his industry was working to help meet the city's clean-air deadline, and worried that the Mexican-domiciled trucks would impede its efforts. ●

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

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