

GENE
LOCKE
for **MAYOR**

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GREENING HOUSTON

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It's time to take Houston "green." Our city is headed in the right direction, but we can do more. In the coming years, we must be able to comply with tighter federal standards for air quality. However, our concern for the environment is bigger than that. How we treat the world around us is not just about our health and quality of life for our children; a broader message is sent to our prospective residents and businesses who place great value in environmental quality and awareness when they choose a city in which to live or operate.

It is not only important that Houston remain the energy capital of the world, but we must also become the alternative energy capital of the world. This is an economic issue critical to the city's continued growth and success. Being the alternative energy capital means drawing the jobs and businesses of the future. It also means leading by example. By conserving energy we can reduce the city's operating costs and lighten the burden on taxpayers. By reducing the foreign substances we introduce into our air and water, we will create a city that is even more receptive and accommodating to newcomers. This is a great opportunity for Houston to further demonstrate its reputation for having an entrepreneurial spirit. By exploring green approaches to drainage and flood prevention, transportation, construction and the like, we will enable Houstonians and visitors from across the world to enjoy clean air, a quality water supply, and the lush bayous and open spaces for which southeast Texas is known.

Green infrastructure: Houston's infrastructure is the backbone of our city and can play a vital role in ensuring our sustainability for the future. By incorporating an environmental ethic into fundamental city services like drainage, traffic signalization and wastewater treatment, we can conserve energy and protect our environment while conserving energy and protecting our environment.

- Drainage and bayous: Our bayous are an untapped resource. By treating our bayous well, we can create attractive, wildlife-friendly spaces that also protect our homes and businesses from flooding. The redesign of Sims Bayou increased flood protection for more than 37,000 homes and businesses. This project allowed the bayou to follow its natural flow, took advantage of detention basins, and utilized permeable concrete banks through which grass and vegetation can now grow. The result is a bayou that looks better and works better. With improved coordination between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Harris County Flood Control District and others, we can pursue similar options across our city, incorporating research findings from work being done at the University of Houston and Rice University. We need to consider flood prevention as a way to increase green space in our neighborhoods.
- LED traffic lights: It is expected that all of Houston's intersections will be equipped with energy-saving LED traffic signal lights in the next year. LED traffic lights cut electricity use by some 90 percent while lasting about seven times longer. We need to look for other ways to use this technology, including school zone signals.
- Combined heat and power: Houston's wastewater plants perform an essential function, but they are also one of our largest consumers of electricity and natural gas. Using technology like

combined heat and power can cut our energy costs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We should use the experience of other cities across the country to successfully integrate this technology into our operations while holding our contract plant operators accountable for finding new efficiencies.

Build Green: We need to encourage all Houstonians to use alternative energy. We can do this by using innovative new programs to equip homes and businesses with new technology. We must also conserve energy. From green roofs to rainwater collection and a multitude of other design elements, there are a myriad of opportunities to incorporate energy efficiency and conservation into the buildings in which we live and work.

- Alternative energy assessment districts: The state legislature has recently given cities a new tool to encourage cost savings and help homeowners and businesses adopt alternative energy sources. We can designate existing neighborhoods as alternative energy assessment districts. With these districts, the city can offer financing for alternative energy systems and weatherization, and design the financing for these districts to track the federal energy tax credits. Furthermore, homeowners and business owners can voluntarily agree to pay assessments on their property in exchange for borrowing the costs of new alternative energy systems. These lower financing costs plus the available federal tax credits can expand the use of alternative energy systems in the city. Programs of this type already exist in cities of both Colorado and California. This voluntary program would make it easier for families to use more alternative energy.
- Public facilities: The city has committed itself to making its facilities energy-efficient through retrofits of existing buildings and green design of new ones. This should continue; it has already demonstrated its potential to reduce energy use and expense.
- Grass-roots participation: Houston's community weatherization initiatives, which assist low-to moderate-income residents in equipping their homes with energy-conserving upgrades like CFL light bulbs and weatherstripping, should be expanded wherever practical and possible. We should consider offering incentives to residents for installation of low-flow water fixtures and Green Star appliances.
- Nurture green development: From green building design to pedestrian-and-bicycle-friendly development around public transit stops and stations, our development community can be a key player in preserving and enhancing Houston's environment. Rather than mandate green construction and development through regulation of the private sector, we should identify opportunities to facilitate this approach through recognition, expedited permit review or other incentives.

Green transportation: Although driving is a fact of life in Houston, we need to enable others to pursue every opportunity to reduce tailpipe emissions. My "C.H.O.I.C.E.S. for Transportation" plan highlighted several methods of doing this, including a quality public transportation system, encouraging flexible work schedules, and providing incentives for carpooling and bicycle commuting. Each of these methods will cut back on emissions while reducing congestion. But there is more we can do to make sure Houstonians can travel "green."

- Low-emission vehicles: With plug-in hybrid vehicles rapidly nearing the consumer marketplace, the city should look for ways to incorporate these vehicles into its fleet while also encouraging their broader availability to consumers. The city can foster the installation of charging stations in homes by making sure our building codes are receptive to this new amenity. The city can be a catalyst in drawing together public and private sector partners to add charging stations at key activity points. This could be done by offering tax abatements for the cost of installing automotive plug-in systems in private parking garages and key activity points, including downtown destinations, malls, airports and park-and-ride lots. Finally, we will request proposals from companies interested in developing on-street automobile plug-in service.
- Regional leadership: While the city continues to grow its own green fleet, it should recognize that smaller cities may not be able to purchase on a scale that lets them participate in federal and state grant programs. The answer is to partner with the Houston-Galveston Area Council on regional grant proposals that allow smaller cities to incorporate “green” technology into their own fleets.
- Encourage bicycling and walking: Houston claims nearly 350 miles of trails and bikeways, but these are not always well-connected and do not necessarily offer bicyclists their own space on the road, an important step toward safety for all road users. The city should ensure that all road construction and rebuilding addresses the needs of bicycle and pedestrian traffic through enhanced design and dedicated lanes wherever feasible. We should continue the trend toward development of new trails where possible so that pedestrians and bicyclists can navigate our city while experiencing minimal interaction with vehicular traffic. The city should also offer the private sector an incentive to provide the necessary facilities to make bicycle commuting more feasible. One way to do this is to offer tax abatements to developers to offset the cost of workplace showers and storage facilities for cyclists who commute to work.

Green thinking in action: Many of the ideas cited above pertain to reducing emissions and energy consumption, but there is a menu of other ways that Houston can strengthen its growing reputation as an environmental leader.

- Expand curbside recycling: Despite all of our progress in recent years, Houston still lacks a recycling program that is convenient for residents. As mayor, I will pursue the creation of a citywide curbside recycling pickup program. Not only will this program make participation easy for those who want to help preserve the environment and reduce the city’s dumping costs, but it will also keep reusable items out of our landfills.
- Improve air quality: While we are taking steps to reduce the amount of pollution we put into the air, it is important to recognize that others also play a critical role in this effort. The city can take a lead in holding all of our partners accountable, including state regulators and major polluters.
- Green energy: Houston is a leader among U.S. cities in our use of alternative and renewable energy sources. Building on the city’s strong move toward clean energy, we can continue to purchase more solar and wind power (and produce our own). This will create a model for others to follow, reduce emissions from conventional electricity sources, and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

- Protect our water supply: Keeping our water clean and making sure that we have a sufficient water supply are equally important. One good way of doing that is using less water. By fostering the development of water-conserving buildings and using low-flow fixtures and water-thrifty appliances, we can take steps now to make sure Houston's water supply is adequate to accommodate our continued growth. In addition, we can look for ways of reducing the pollutants and trash entering our waterways through fertilizer runoff and the like.
- Increase native plantings and urban gardens: Plants and trees help combat the "urban heating" effect that occurs when concrete and conventional building roofs replace natural ground in reflecting the sun's heat. They also make our city more attractive. By encouraging "WaterSmart" landscaping that uses mostly native plants accepting of our region's feast-or-famine precipitation patterns, we can reduce water demand while increasing Houston's aesthetic appeal. Following the lead of organizations like Last Organic Outpost and Urban Harvest, we can use vacant public property to introduce our communities and children to organic gardening. We must also encourage healthy eating and lifestyles, create greater environmental awareness and support the bird and butterfly populations that are a critical part of our ecosystem.