

Program Summary (17 April 2014)

At 6:50 p.m., President Byrnes welcomed the membership to the 665th meeting of the HPS, which was founded in 1920. Members were invited to vote for section representatives.

Section A re-elected Frank Tittel (no longer interim).

Section B re-elected Wayne Shandera.

Section C re-elected George Barnstone.

Section D re-elected Wil McCorquodale, w/ Kate Kirkland as 1st alternate.

Section E elected Ernesto Maldonado.

Section F re-elected Ann McNaughton.

At 8:10 pm, President Byrnes called the meeting to order. Don introduced Jack Agee, who helped with the introduction of guests this evening.

Don introduced Charles Bacarisse (VP of Development at HBU), who introduced our speaker, Bob Eury. **Bob Eury** is President of Central Houston, Inc., which is a non-profit corporation leading the planning and implementation of redevelopment of Houston's downtown. Bob also serves as executive director for a special assessment district and a redevelopment authority. He holds a degree in urban design from the Rice School of Architecture.

The title of this evening's talk was **Shaping the Urban Region: A New Vision for Houston's Central City**. The membership warmly welcomed the speaker. This is the 665th meeting of the Houston Philosophical Society.

Bob promised not to spend too much time talking about where we've been, but to get to where we might go. He began with the 1836 advertisement for the city of Houston (where are those mountains? brick houses?). Even by 1940 Houston had not grown that much. Houston is definitely the young boy on the block. But today...

In the 1970's, millions of square feet of office space were built, but in an introverted manner, leaving many of the needs of downtown unmet. During the oil bust of the 1980's, the opera center and George Brown Convention center opened up. A key success was the conversion of the Rice Hotel to condominiums. Metro invested in the infrastructure of downtown, which was painful but has opened up today's opportunities. Discovery Green has been a huge success, with over a million visitors a year.

The public/private investment ratio in downtown has always been 50-50. But today there are 4 billion dollars of investment in progress (2011-2017) that is 80% private. Trying to maintain a 22% market share in the downtown area. Big projects under way. Same for hotels. Only 1,800 rooms downtown as recently in 2000. In 2016, there will be 8,000 rooms downtown. It will mean more competition for our convention business.

The Downtown Living Initiative was launched in August, 2012. Incentives for apartment and condo conversions are linked to design guidelines, which counts 3,500 units (up to 6,000 expected), to encourage pedestrian traf-



fic. Downtown living should triple in ten years. Bob says 140,000 people now reside in a three mile circle around downtown.

The new urban core: Uptown, Greenway, Texas Medical Center compete with Downtown. Each competes to try to be a work/live place. There is another four billion in private development in those areas. Interestingly, the medical center has over 25% of its employees living within one mile; downtown is at 18%. Cities such as New York, the figure is closer to 50%. Houston may never achieve that figure, but Bob would like to see a growth to avoid more traffic issues.

Bob touched a number of challenges to sustaining the attractiveness of the downtown as living space: education, open space, shopping, pets. Houston is blessed with ample space, which allows for some preservation and not complete gentrification. Bob outlined the progress in eliminating homelessness among veterans and others before the end of 2015.

Looking forward: the importance of mixed use walkable places. The Texas Medical Center is a prime opportunity. The city is moving toward coordinated planning. Perhaps a new vision for the heart of Houston.

Bob wrapped up his prepared remarks at 9:03 with an invitation to ask questions. A short Q&A session ensued. The audience warmly thanked the speaker. After another round of applause, and the meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Don invited the membership to the September meeting and we adjourned.

David W. Scott
Recording Secretary