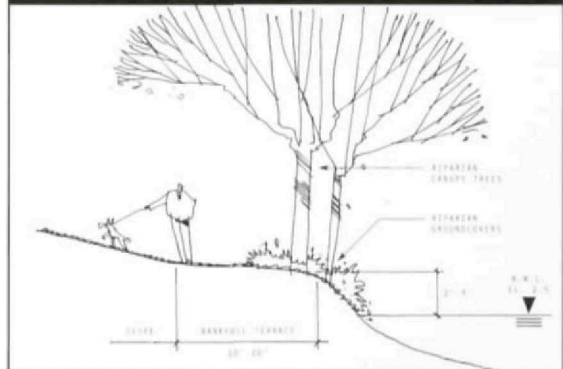
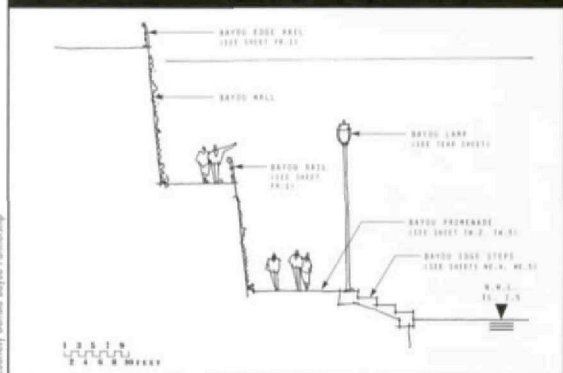


# RULES ON THE BAYOU



Pages from the booklet created to encourage consistent design standards for development next to Buffalo Bayou show, at left, proposed guidelines for a natural edge design, and, at bottom left, guidelines for a bayou edge promenade design.



WHEN SOME MEMBERS of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership saw the original plans for the new Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, they were appalled. Their concern had little to do with the look of the new auditorium but rather with *where* it looked — away from Buffalo Bayou, with little notice at all of the stream that flowed behind it.

Such architectural dismissals of the bayou have been common in Houston's history, but this one particularly stung. With the revived interest in downtown and, in particular, the success of Bayou Place, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership had assumed that the people planning the Hobby Center would pay attention to their backyard waterway. Hobby Center officials, when contacted, countered that they had assumed that if the issue were so important, someone would have approached them about it. It was a wake-up call for the Bayou Partnership, which realized that it couldn't simply assume builders would treat the bayou in a friendly manner. They'd have to be encouraged to do so.

The exchange with the Hobby Center's developers opened up the possibility of moving a parking garage away from the bayou to allow room for landscaping and a footpath, as well as a connection to the Hobby Center itself. But more than that, the exchange pushed the Buffalo Bayou Partnership to create a set of development guidelines for Buffalo Bayou's downtown sector from Shepherd Drive to McKee Street. The guidelines, which were released in January, came about following a year of meetings between local politicians, real estate brokers, people who own land along the bayou, members of the downtown development community,

and Houston-area environmental groups. Covering such topics as bayou edge treatment, setbacks, trails, planting criteria, and walkway and railing designs, the guidelines have three main purposes: to create a continuous pedestrian walkway along Buffalo Bayou's downtown waterfront; to transform the bayou's waterfront into a high-profile visitor destination and recreational amenity; and to establish the downtown waterfront as a development corridor that promotes quality urban design.

To push the idea of a uniform waterfront, says Bayou Partnership Executive Director Anne Olson, developers will be provided a 16-page booklet that details many of the guidelines; they will also be offered advice on how to implement them. One factor in favor of the guidelines, notes Bayou Partnership Chairman Mike Garver, is that some 80 percent of the land lining the bayou's banks is publicly owned, which allows the city to set a standard that private entities might then follow.

Still, for all the work put into creating the guidelines, and all the different groups that have signed on in support of them, the fact remains that they're voluntary. And as has been seen in the past, sometimes good intentions can be overwhelmed by bad economics. To put teeth into the guidelines, the Partnership is encouraging the city to enact an ordinance to back them up. That, though, could take time. And with all the work taking place downtown, time is at something of a premium. For the moment, though, bayou supporters are encouraged to at least have guidelines, hoping that will be enough until such time as the suggestions can be transformed into rules. — MJS

Copies of the Buffalo Bayou development guidelines are available from the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, 713.752.0314.

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