

## **Background on CEER and HOME:**

The Coalition for Environment, Equity and Resilience (CEER) is a collaboration raising awareness of the connection between pollution, place, and the public's health. CEER brings together advocacy, social justice and education groups from three main constituencies: environmental justice, affordable housing, and conservation. Together, these main constituencies developed an 8-point plan to guide recovery efforts and infrastructure spending after Hurricane Harvey.

HOME is a diverse coalition of community-based organizations in Texas. Our shared mission is to make Houston stronger, more resilient, and more equitable in the long road to recovery from Hurricane Harvey. HOME believes that storms like Harvey hit hardest for people of color, immigrants, low-income families, and low-wage workers. These communities have an important and powerful voice in how the government makes choices about its future. HOME's focus is on long-term recovery and making sure that federal, state, and philanthropic funds serve communities in the Greater Houston area most affected by natural disasters.

**All answers should be limited to 50 words or less. We appreciate you participating and informing community members about your positions on these topics.**

### **Environmental Equity and Resiliency:**

Environmental Equity addresses the built and natural environment. It is not limited to parkland, or the preservation of natural resources like bayous or prairies, but whether a community has access to the same safe drinking water, the same walkability to schools, the same clean air, and the same open or natural park spaces as other communities. As a city, Houston has a long history of segregation by race and class, along with numerous superfund sites, on-going pollution issues with its own infrastructure, and a lack of resources to adequately protect resources like air, water, and land.

1. What is your top environmental concern for the City and as mayor, what can your office do to address it? (Air pollution, water pollution, trash, flooding, etc.)

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Flooding is Houston's #1 environmental concern. The current mayor has said we are no

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better prepared for the next flood than we were when Harvey hit. That is inexcusable.

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My seven-point flood plan provides workable solutions. It begins with stopping the diversion of drainage fees to non-drainage projects.

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2. What tools would you utilize as a mayor to ensure environmental clean-up of degraded land sites as well as reverse the documented pattern of siting landfills, recycling centers, and industrial facilities in low-income and minority neighborhoods?

Using the mayor's bully pulpit and access to available permitting and regulatory remedies,

I will work to stop that type of unequal treatment.

3. As mayor, what are the first three steps you will take to implement the proposed Houston Climate Action Plan?

1.  Increase the city's fleet of electric vehicles

2.  Increase tree planting

3.  Increase permanent green space and detention around flood prone areas

4. Do you think it appropriate to increase the City's budget line item for environmental enforcement? Do you think that enforcement should be housed in the legal department or in public health?

While I believe we need stronger environmental enforcement, I will be utilizing zero-based budgeting and requiring justification for every expense. Until that process is complete, I am not willing to assign an incremental increase to any line item. The legal and health departments need to coordinate and collaborate on enforcement.

5. Within CEER's 8-point plan, which priority is most meaningful to you and why?

#4 speaks to me most immediately because we have to do something about flooding, or it will damage our ability to continue to attract new businesses and residents.

### **Flooding and Transportation Infrastructure:**

We know that Houston will never stop flooding. We also know that federal funding for flood mitigation is often required to be spent in the areas that have the highest

property values, creating a reverse incentive to spend additional capital dollars in areas that have already received investment in the past. The two watersheds which, according to the SSPEED center, had the most residential flooding were Greens watershed and Brays watershed and there are no United States Army Corps of Engineers projects slated for those watersheds. Continuing development will likely create additional flooding problems in those watersheds.

1. How do you propose to protect and expand the riparian corridors and the existing natural flood control ability of the land within City limits?

I want to use more of the Harvey housing dollars to buy out flood prone structures and permanently dedicate them as green space and detention. I want to do the same with drainage fee monies.

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2. What are some of the tools you believe the mayor of Houston could use to address flooding in the Greens and Brays watershed outside of simply coordinating with Harris County Flood Control District? In other words, what will you do with the City budget to address these on-going watershed issues within city limits?

I will stop the diversion of drainage fees to non-drainage projects. In addition, we will prioritize improving conveyance and detention, ramp up purchases of vacant land for green space, increase funding for buyouts and build higher while being smart about it.

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Read more about my flood plan at [billkingblog.com](http://billkingblog.com).

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3. How will you ensure that the City's Resiliency and Climate Actions plans are fully incorporated into transportation planning for projects like the I-45 expansion, the Vision Zero Initiative, and METRONext?

I sat on the state transportation policy council for ten years. The city has limited control over their actions, but I am uniquely qualified to advocate for the best plans and will do so as mayor.

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I will control METRO board appointees and will ensure they represent the city's needs.

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## **Affordable Housing:**

There are many options to expand affordable housing: developer incentives that require that a proportion of units are affordable, better leveraging of federal housing funds to get more units per dollar in partnership with others, use of state and local bond and development incentives (e.g., 380 agreements), Limited Equity Corporations, or land banking to name a few.

1. In your own words, describe the role the City plays in affordable housing specifically for families earning below average median income, and how you as mayor of the third largest city in the nation would engage in that role?

Single-family residential homes are the basic building blocks of any community and our affordable housing efforts should emphasize access to multi-family and SFRs. I have long advocated that the city's substantial inventory of abandoned properties be invested in a homestead program to provide equity for families to acquire homes.

2. Understanding Hurricane Harvey funds have already been allocated, and many Houstonians are still not properly housed, what is your plan for leveraging other funding sources and economic incentives (i.e. 380 agreements, tax abatements, TIRZ, etc.) to increase quality affordable housing stock throughout the City?

Before we seek out new sources of funding, we must first make sure the dollars already awarded are being spent effectively and efficiently. That is not happening right now. In addition, more of the money already awarded needs to be spent on buyouts.

3. Today, a household earning the median (and below) income in Houston cannot afford the median housing costs in Houston. What is your plan to reduce displacement in gentrifying areas while also expanding affordable housing choices in well-resourced areas?

I am concerned about the amount of affordable housing money that currently goes to developers, consultants, design professionals and financiers, many of whom are also major contributors to city election campaigns. My focus would be toward assuring more of the available federal dollars end up building homes and not paying fees.

4. What policies or initiatives will you implement to ensure more development of affordable housing along or in close proximity to frequent public transportation lines?

We can increase affordable housing options with better management of the considerable amount of dollars we already receive for this. We need to be careful about making investments around traditional public transportation because of the incredible technological disruption on the horizon.

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5. Should the City have an emergency management plan in place, and available beds identified for longer term rental, for future storms?

Among my first actions will be to assemble a commission to determine what went right and wrong during Harvey. This should have already happened. It hasn't. Under my watch, we will have a definitive response and recovery plan that will be available to the public on the City's website.

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**Transparency:**

1. If you are elected, please describe three actions you will take to ensure transparency in the City's budget process and its priorities in spending beyond the annual CIP meetings held throughout the districts?

1.  I will restore to the budget document more than 200 pages of information deleted by Turner.

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2.  Every contract will be posted on the city website.

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3.  The Monthly Financial Report will list contracts from the previous month that fell below

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the \$50,000 threshold requiring council approval.

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**Job Creation and Workforce Development:**

The Houston Chronicle recently reported that "net migration" to Harris County (and the City of Houston) has been negative for the last three years, meaning more people are leaving than coming.<sup>1</sup> This creates a labor shortage and slows economic development, but also provides an opportunity to reinvest and "in-fill" the city to provide a more attractive quality of life. To do this, however, skilled labor will be required and continued opportunity to encourage advancement and training within city limits may be necessary.

1. Please describe in your own words key elements that are needed to construct a city-wide workforce development program and key partnerships you think would be necessary to ensure young Houstonians can find jobs locally within 10 years.

We need to work with high schools, community colleges/universities to create curriculum and programs to train workers in the skill sets needed today and tomorrow. In addition, we must make sure we have the infrastructure in place to be attractive to startups. This should include a robust angel investor network.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/economy/article/Slowing-population-growth-another-challenge-ot-14021444.php>

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2. Do you see local hire as a priority for workforce development? Why or why not?

It is always better to hire locally because it provides jobs for residents and the income earned  
by those workers stays in the community, helping to fuel the economy.

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**Worker Protections:**

The HOME Coalition fully supports the Better Builder Program created by one of our member organizations. The Better Builder Program creates good jobs in the construction industry by establishing minimum standards on construction sites. These standards include a living wage for all construction workers, OSHA 10-hour safety training for all workers, workers compensation coverage, local hiring goals to place workers in approved skills training programs, and independent on-site monitoring to ensure these standards are met.

1. Would you support incorporating these standards as minimum requirements in the City? Please explain why or why not.

In general, I support the Better Building standards, however, the scope of this question extends to numerous different legal situations.  
Whether I would support the standards in any particular case in the future would be subject to a definition of those standards and the applicable situation.

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2. Many government entities have passed fair contracting (often referred to as responsible bidder ordinances) or best value contracting to level the playing field between construction entities. Explain how you would work towards better transparency in all city bids.

Contracts will be awarded based on the lowest responsive bid. It is more cost-effective and eliminates subjectivity that allows rewarding of campaign contributors. Once a contract is awarded, all documents related to the award, except those which cannot be released by law, will be posted on the city website.

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