

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.)

There are many. Harvey recovery and flood mitigation are pressing. We are working hard given the lack of funding, though after two years, federal funds are finally coming online. In the long term, the related issue of climate change is paramount. I am excited about our upcoming Climate Action Plan.

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?

Enforcement of local health and safety laws is key, as well as documenting and publicizing the dangers to help local communities organize. At the city our powers are severely and unfairly constrained by hostile federal and state governments and now local and statewide revenue caps.

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

Adopting the plan is a huge first step for Houston, which remains the world's oil and gas capital. Transitioning to electric vehicles – We lost much of our municipal electric fleet to Harvey. Reducing vehicle miles traveled – pass the METRO Proposition this November. Get started quickly on optimization strategies.

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?

We absolutely need more funding for environmental enforcement. But I won't make promises I cannot keep, given that our city is operating under its onerous voter-imposed revenue cap and now faces an additional state revenue cap. I am open to a discussion about the best department to manage this.

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

Many of the plan's priorities are meaningful to me. As mayor, I would have to say embracing resiliency is the most foundational, because many of the other priorities cannot be realized in its absence.

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?

We are implementing new standards for development in floodplains and expanding the regulated area from the 100-year floodplain to the 50-year floodplain. Our out-of-date floodplain maps are in the process of being updated. In many cases, bridges that have impeded the natural flow of water are being upgraded.

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?

To the extent possible, we are removing barriers to progress. For example, the city has taken out a \$43 million loan from the Texas Water Development Board, which it will advance to the Harris County Flood Control District for widening Brays Bayou and replacing bridges.

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?

With very limited tools to control land use, it takes leadership: working with Democrats and Republicans at all levels of government and engaging stakeholders to create public pressure. We are moving as funds are available. One example: Our Safe Streets initiative that is identifying and repairing Houston's most dangerous intersections.

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?

We are prioritizing the use of Harvey Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery funds to support the expanded availability of affordable housing in Houston for low- and moderate-income Houstonians. Apart from Harvey, our Complete Communities program includes affordable housing construction coupled with actions to discourage gentrification.

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?

As I mentioned above, our Complete Communities initiative is moving forward with affordable housing expansion, particularly along transit corridors. We are moving to hold TIRZs more accountable to meet affordable housing funding mandates, and locking in long-term affordable housing stock through an innovative land trust program.

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?

We need to do both. Early in my first term, I engaged in a spirited debate with HUD over moving low-income families into “opportunity neighborhoods.” I support these efforts but they must be coupled with investment in long under-served neighborhoods. That was the impetus for creating our Complete Communities initiative.

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?

Increasing affordable housing near transit is one of the priorities in our Complete Communities initiative. For example, Avenue CDC has constructed several affordable housing communities near transit in the Near Northside.

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

The city has an emergency management plan in place and we’ve been making improvements based on the lessons we learned from Harvey. The Mayor’s Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security is working in coordination with the Police Department, Fire Department, Office of Emergency Management, Information Technology, and Health Department.

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?

After Harvey walloped our city budget, we are moving to address the structural budget imbalance with a zero-based budgeting model – requiring every expense to be justified. We have also revamped our Build Houston Forward infrastructure program website with more information for the public and more changes are on the way.

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.* 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.

* <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/economy/article/Slowing-population-growth-another-challengeot-14021444.php>

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 are working in partnership with tech giants like Microsoft and our educational institutions to increase STEM education, digital coursework and job skills for young Houstonians. I am also extremely proud that our Hire Houston Youth program has grown from 450 summer jobs to more than 11,000 this year.

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

Local hire is an important part of workforce development. It must be combined with job training and, for those who have been chronically unemployed or underemployed, support services that help workers keep and succeed in their jobs once they have been hired.

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.

I was instrumental in the adoption of these standards and know them well. Part of the reason we could achieve these standards is that they came with a funding source. I support continuing and expanding this program in principle, but we must be realistic about our current budget constraints.

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.

We are in discussions with the Labor community about adopting an ordinance of this type.