

History provides a guide for how Houston can rebuild after the devastation of Harvey. In the wake of destructive floods in the early twentieth century, both Los Angeles and San Antonio undertook significant flood control projects to mitigate future flood risk.

However, the forms those projects took differed drastically. In Los Angeles, the Army Corps of Engineers channelized the L.A. River with concrete and created an urban eyesore that has lasted for nearly a century. In San Antonio, the local community strongly advocated a flood control project that not only provided protection, but also served as an amenity for the city. An architect, Robert H. Hugman, developed a plan that would ultimately become the Riverwalk, drawing tourists from across the globe with an estimated \$13 billion annual impact. Meanwhile, nearly a century later, Los Angeles has realized the potential of the L.A. River as an amenity rather than a blight and has engaged a design team led by architect Frank Gehry to reimagine it.

In anticipation of the federal and state moneys that will start flowing into the Houston region in the wake of Harvey's devastation, local officials are already identifying major infrastructure projects that help protect the area from future disasters. The public and private sectors should work together to make sure that, in addition to providing the critical protection that our city needs, these projects enhance the quality of life for adjacent communities and the region as a whole.

These two historical examples illustrate how considering design as an integral part of a project solution has the potential of creating public spaces that can transform the city and help drive the local economy in addition to providing protection. Houston, too, has taken some major steps in this direction since



Rendering of The Big U. Image from rebuildbydesign.org.

the 1970s with detention basins and bayous that double as parks. Austin's flood mitigation plans for Waller Creek are enabling investments in parks, trails, luxury housing, and workforce housing. As much as Texans don't like getting lectured by Northerners, when it comes to the scale of rebuilding we need after Harvey, we should also look to the Northeast.

After Superstorm Sandy, states in the Northeast were in the same position that Houston is now. Faced with destruction across the region, local officials also had to develop projects to help protect their communities from future threats. As will likely happen with Houston, billions of dollars began flowing into the region for rebuilding. While a majority of those funds were designated for specific projects and programs, officials also understood the potential for design to play a significant role as they rebuilt. They created the Rebuild by Design Competition, which evolved into a broader initiative for rebuilding cities to be more resilient, to bring the top design teams from around the world to imagine projects, funded through Housing and Urban Development (HUD) block grants, for their communities. Teams led by acclaimed firms and institutions such as Bjarke Ingels, OMA, and MIT developed solutions that would not

just provide protection from future storms but also create public spaces that would revitalize communities across the region.

Such an undertaking would be just a slice of the work done to help the city, county, and region recover. And our region would need to discuss what form such an effort could take for the Houston area. How much funding should we devote to it? What geography should it include? Which entities should be invited to submit ideas? How would we structure such an initiative?

Most of Houston's challenges will require interventions different than Manhattan's. The fact that we live in a flat plain might mean the best solutions are more dispersed across the region, and not readily visible to the untrained eye. At the same time, some grand and iconic gestures may be worth the investment too in order to regain the ability to attract major corporations who may be leery of relocating their employees to Houston now. Houston needs to demonstrate to the world that we are serious about addressing flooding issues. Houston's version of Rebuild by Design could help frame long term priorities even as we continue to address affected people's immediate needs. Our version could focus investment on traditionally underserved areas during the recovery

process by encouraging project proposals to build from meaningful community input. The conversation to determine the scope and goals of a Harvey effort could be one that all Houstonians could participate in. While the type of impact that the Northeast experienced after Sandy was very different than what Houston experienced, an effort tailored to address the specific needs of our region could identify the most innovative and impactful solutions for rebuilding a better Houston.

Many individuals and groups across the region are in intense discussions for how we should be rebuilding after Harvey. Jim Blackburn and Rice University's Baker Institute have issued recommendations. Judge Ed Emmett has released a fifteen-point plan and major foundations have put together a research consortium to guide decision-makers. Multifunctional design should be one more topic that is added to those conversations.

As Houston contemplates how it will rebuild after Harvey, local, state, and federal officials should recognize that flood management projects should not mitigate flood risk at the expense of the region's vitality, character, and quality of life. The histories of San Antonio and Los Angeles provide strong arguments for why design should play an essential role in developing new infrastructure and a cautionary tale for what happens when it is ignored. Rebuild by Design provides a blueprint for how Houston can attract leading thinkers to develop solutions that will not only protect us during future floods, but let people enjoy living here for all the times in between. For a city that was daring enough to build the world's first indoor stadium and send a man to the moon, Houston has the opportunity and experience to reshape itself as it rebuilds after Harvey. Let's be daring enough that when we do rebuild Houston, we make it great. **H**

José Solís is the founder of Big and Bright Strategies, which specializes in sustainability, risk mitigation, and project management for architectural and planning projects.

JOSE SOLIS OCT. 30, 2017 2:24 PM

A Call to Rebuild Houston by Design: Mitigation Alone is not Enough