



## **Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors 2018-2019 Public Policy Positions**

### **Flood Disaster Recovery and Resiliency**

In August 2018, the citizens of Harris County overwhelmingly approved a \$2.5 billion bond to fund Harris County Flood Control District projects to repair and strengthen our county's resiliency against the threat of future flooding. The \$2.5 billion will not be enough even when we consider that some of these funds will be utilized as matching funds to leverage federal dollars on our behalf. The State of Texas has a \$10 plus billion Rainy Day Fund and while the state of Texas must insure that we maintain a financial cushion with this fund, critical planning, project implementation and flood prevention must be initiated by the State of Texas using Rainy Day Funds. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports the use of Rainy Day Funds for long-term flood resiliency planning and prevention.

### **Education Funding and Property Tax**

Each biennium the State of Texas reduces the level of funding it provides for public education. At this time, the State funds only 36% of the cost in a plan that was intended to be closer to 50%. The balance of this funding is made up by property taxes (ad valorem taxes). The Houston Northwest Chamber is aligned with our area school districts which believe we should:

- Support increasing the state share of funding and updating the current formula using more relevant metrics.
- Support including an index for inflation in the school finance system.
- Support funding based on enrollment, student need and credit completion versus time in a seat.

Additionally, if uniform election dates are required for future school district elections, then we would support legislation that would expedite the release of the preliminary tax roll sooner to allow for a possible tax ratification election on the uniform date in May and legislation that would be an authorization for tax rate the following years.

We believe it is the Legislature's responsibility to discuss reducing property taxes only while addressing the impact reduced property taxes would have: 1) on our public school finances and ultimately on our most precious resource, our children; and 2) on our ongoing ability in our communities in unincorporated areas to build infrastructure, roads, bridges, develop and maintain parks and all of the functions of county government. Until there is an alternate way to fund county government, reducing property taxes would further cripple the unincorporated areas of Harris County.



## **Economic Development**

Each legislative session, Chambers are in a defensive position to protect the few economic development tools we have at our disposal in the state of Texas. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports the continuance of the use of tax abatements, tax increment financing, reinvestment zones and other incentives to promote economic development and job creation. Specifically, the legislature should reauthorize Chapter 312 agreements and continue to maintain Texas' commitment to Chapters 313, 380 and 381 agreements.

Additionally, the Houston Northwest Chamber supports continued funding for the Skills Development Fund Program administered by the Texas Workforce Commission in support of workforce training in partnership with local community colleges.

Chapters 501, 504 and 505 of the Local Government Code outline the characteristics of Type A and Type B Economic Development Corporations and authorize cities to adopt a sales tax to fund the acquisition of land, consulting costs, machines, construction costs, administrative and other expenses associated with various projects defined under the law. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce would support a creative solution to the lack of funding for economic development in unincorporated areas. 4A and 4B taxing entities for economic development are limited to municipalities and as a result, are not available to our region. An amendment to the code could open up opportunity in our community.

## **Municipal Utility District (MUD) Information Legislation**

The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce serves a community that is primarily in unincorporated Harris County, yet an area with a population approaching the size of Denver, Colorado. Besides county and state government, our basic form of local government is our municipal utility districts. These entities were important in establishing our water and sewage infrastructure when our subdivisions first developed and they continue to serve us by maintaining these services. Their authority and scope of responsibility has expanded over the years through legislation. Now they may contract for law enforcement services and they may issue bonds to develop park and green spaces within their district boundaries.

Most individuals in unincorporated Harris County are relatively unaware of the business dealings of their MUDs despite the fact that this is our most basic form of government. Most of us have never seen a MUD Board election announced and have never voted in an election. It is often difficult to find out who the Board members are and their consultants are often unresponsive to outreach by community members. The Chamber believes that in order for these Boards to truly represent the people they serve, their existence and their activities must be more transparent and customer-focused.

The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce recommends that all MUDs in Harris County with a voting citizen population of 250 or more, be required to post on a website, posting Board



elections, agendas and minutes on that website. Elections would be posted for a minimum of 30 days prior and meetings would be posted 72 hours prior. Board members must be listed on the website and there must be contact information for the district that will result in a response within a reasonable period of time.

With these changes, our local form of government would work more like responsive government: by the people and for the people.