

## HOUSTON CHRONICLE

### EDITORIALS

# TMO at 30

The Metropolitan Organization's successes have changed the lives of many people.

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November 13, 2014 Updated: November 14, 2014 10:51am



Photo: Michael Paulsen, Staff

Mayoral candidate Annise Parker talks to members of The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) during an open dialogue between the group and the two mayoral candidates, Annise Parker and Gene Locke, at the Trinity United Methodist Church Monday, Nov. 30, 2009, in Houston. ( Michael Paulsen / Chronicle )

There are two Houstons. In one, inhabitants fret over whether to eat sushi for dinner or to grill outdoors. In the other, citizens worry about their lack of access to health care. One set

of Houstonians may struggle with traffic on Loop 610, but the other set lives below the freeways as well as below the poverty line. Our city may be technically solving "the homeless problem," but low-wage workers chase affordable month-to-month housing in the other Houston. In stark contrast to the Houston where shoppers prefer organic dog food, these Houstonians live in fear of stray dogs that rule their streets. Headlines that celebrate a drop in crime ring hollow in this other Houston; crime is as evident in these neighborhoods as the used condoms that litter the sidewalks.

In affluent Houston, people know how to get their City Council members to return phone calls. Although they may not win their civic campaigns, its citizens can afford to post "Stop Ashby Highrise" signs in their manicured front yards. In the other Houston, people don't expect basic services from a deaf city government. They are voiceless.

The Metropolitan Organization, which celebrated the 30th anniversary of its charter this October, works with the voiceless to help transmute their anger into leadership. In a meeting with the Chronicle editorial board, TMO representatives said that the nonprofit, which organizes church congregations and other institutions across the region, encourages residents to say: "This is the city I want," and then to hold government accountable. Under TMO's stewardship, neighborhoods find their voices, and city government acquires a hearing aid.

TMO's past successes have changed real people's lives in large and small ways. The organization secured the reversal of a \$40 million rate increase by Houston Lighting & Power Company during the Whitmire administration, obtained sidewalks for Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard after the death of a child pedestrian in the 1990s and organized evacuees during Hurricane Katrina to secure a playground and areas for the elderly. TMO currently is spearheading an effort to train hundreds of community college students for living-wage careers and is continuing its effort to build a strong citizenry.

Thirty years from now, we hope TMO will have brought both Houstons to the table. Because the truth is that there aren't two Houstons. There is only one.