

Energy Corridor District director: Shell Oil and ConocoPhillips moves will alter area

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In the coming months, roughly 3,400 Shell Oil Co. employees will be moving from the oil giant's downtown headquarters into its Energy Corridor campus as Shell looks to eventually house all of its Houston-based employees on the west side.

The move is indicative of an energy industry downturn in Houston that has led oil companies to slash thousands of jobs and consolidate office space to mitigate costs.

Shell will leave its One Shell Plaza headquarters, a 50-story skyscraper, after 45 years.

ConocoPhillips, another large oil company, also recently announced that it will move its employees out of its large Energy Corridor headquarters into a smaller location south of Interstate 10.

The Energy Corridor is home to thousands of workers who live in the Katy area.

As these companies prepare to move, Clark Martinson, executive director at the Energy Corridor District, talked to the Houston Chronicle about the upcoming changes to his district, as well as how they might affect the area.



Photo: Brett Coomer



About 3,400 employees from Shell Oil Co. will be leaving the company's One Shell Plaza headquarters in downtown Houston around the beginning of next year.

Houston Chronicle: Thousands of Shell employees will soon be moving into the company's Energy Corridor campus. What type of affect, if any, will that have to your district?

Martinson: It will be a fun two years ahead of us. The new campus at ConocoPhillips will be consolidated, too, so there's potential to create something really great between Shell and Conoco. It's going to make that area better in the future more than we thought before. I see someday in the future the land that will be redeveloped by Shell and Conoco could become more public. There is potential that if they do a joint venture, that a much higher quality of a place can be created alongside I-10.

HC: The Shell employees are coming from a downtown area that offers a lot of public transit option. How do you quell some concerns those employees might have about not having enough public transportation options out here?

M: If they live along the midtown-downtown area, that's their best chance to have a bus route from METRO on all of the park-and-ride busses that start at the Addicks Park & Ride and go downtown. The Energy Corridor District could create a circulatory bus route that would tie the Addicks Park & Ride and would tie the businesses around here to (energy company buildings).

Note: The district published an article with transportation information for Shell workers who will be working in the Energy Corridor. The article can be seen [here](#).

HC: Can you explain how the Energy Corridor can be a more viable option for oil companies as they look for ways to cut costs during the energy industry downturn?

M: What has happened in the last three years with the six million square feet of office space out here is that when you have that much space built out here – now it is available for people to occupy. The space is already built. You just move into it and make it your headquarters. We still also have a lot of sublease space for people who want to be out here. So there is a greater potential in the next couple of years to see new startups be near one another. And most of these energy companies are already here, so they might want to buy more space. We are located in a great area. We have Katy ISD schools nearby. It's a place for a lot of millennials and people with growing careers.

HC: How many Katy-area residents work inside the Energy Corridor?

M: About a third of the workers here come from the west. The largest share of the work force is coming from the Cinco Ranch and Katy subdivisions.

HC: How are you guys working with these oil companies as they make transitions that affect your district?

M: We have gone downtown to meet with people at One Shell that are coming out here. One of Shell's managers, Peter Elgohary, is on my board of directors. Right now, we are coordinating with him. We're coordinating an employee survey with Shell that I think is almost fully focused on (transportation) to determine if there's a market for a bus from The Woodlands to the Energy Corridor.

HC: What's the biggest advantage for companies by being in the Energy Corridor area?

M: The quality of the neighborhoods. The parks. The Shell campus having its connection to the Addicks Reservoir and Cullen Park, as well as the connection to Terry Hershey Park. We're a very park-friendly place at the Energy Corridor.

HC: How does your district plan to facilitate growth there in the next few years?

M: A lot of land needs to be developed next to Dairy Ashford Road. The MD Anderson (Cancer Center) is building a campus out here that we anticipate will work with Shell and Concoco, but there's many acres of land that will be developed. Where I see the greatest potential for growth in west Houston will be on the north side of Interstate 10. At the Energy Corridor, we have plans to make a connection route from that area to Terry Hershey Park. Interstate 10 is one heck of a highway that connects these campuses. As long as we can keep traffic moving, it's a pretty fantastic highway for connecting the west to the center of the city.



Sebastian Herrera

Reporter, Houston Chronicle
