

**The City of Houston will:**

1. Spend money wisely.
2. Grow responsibly.
3. Foster safe, affordable neighborhoods.
4. Connect people and places.
5. Enable a strong economy.
6. Build partnerships.
7. Support learning.
8. Think globally.
9. Celebrate what's uniquely Houston.
10. Protect and conserve our resources.
11. Communicate clearly and with transparency.
12. Nurture healthy communities.
13. Sustain quality infrastructure.

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## **Policy Directive 1: Spend money wisely.**

### Assessment:

Houston has long enjoyed a thriving economy and ongoing population and economic growth, including a similarly expanding tax base. Yet, as the city grows, it must continue to respond to the needs of its current population, as well as service new areas and implement new programs to serve its expanding community and geography. As a large city facing multiple priorities, the City of Houston is limited in the amount of projects it can fund and support within a given period and long range fiscal challenges lie ahead..

In 2014, the City Council adopted new policies to ensure fiscal sustainability, emphasizing strengthened financial reserves, increased transparency, and an expanded focus on long-term planning. The policies encourage frequent and transparent updates to the City's operating budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and City Council approval of any modifications or movement of fees.

While government accountability and transparency are important for ensuring long-term financial health, it is necessary to understand that the financial condition of the City is directly related to its growth and development policies. As the city continues to grow, it also is responsible for servicing new areas, including the building of community facilities, utilities and roads to serve the residents and business community of those areas. This puts great financial strain on the City, which must continue to uphold quality of life standards for existing areas as it builds new. The private sector's participation is essential for initial costs, but ultimately the City is responsible for long-term service and maintenance.

### Commitments:

- Maintain a long range fiscal plan for the City that is coordinated across departments.
- Support increased development, redevelopment, and neighborhood protection activities by seeking dedicated funding for priority long-term planning and capital projects and related future maintenance costs.
- Determine the impact long-term growth will have on the City's fiscal sustainability and return on investment.
- Ensure funding streams are equitable and do not place any one constituency at a disadvantage for receipt of funds.
- Institutionalize a method of communication and coordination between departments and agencies that encourages being fiscally prudent with available finite resources.
- Continue to follow protocols of the City of Houston's Financial Policies (2014) to align the City's operating budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) annually.

### Related goals:

- ✓ Fiscally responsible, accountable, and responsive public services and investments.
- ✓ Ample, efficient and well- maintained infrastructure.
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders and residents
- ✓ Equitable access to opportunity and prosperity.

## Policy Directive 2: Grow responsibly.

### Assessment:

The City of Houston is one of the fastest growing urban regions in the United States and shows no sign of slowing down. While growth is positive for the economy and regional competitiveness, the continual expansion of the city puts stresses on infrastructure, exacerbates traffic by placing more cars on the road, and consumes valuable green space. To grow responsibly into the future—following logical patterns that allow municipal services to be provided efficiently, fiscal health to be improved and sustained, and a high quality of life to be offered to all residents—the City of Houston must adopt new protocols for development.

Houstonians are in favor of encouraging more compact, sustainable development patterns that improve their quality of life, reduce traffic, and place jobs closer to home. The desire to see “activity centers” created throughout Houston is stated in numerous existing citywide and neighborhood plans. According to these plans and input received throughout the Plan Houston process, optimal development patterns for Houstonians are those that provide opportunities for community interaction, celebrate identity, support compact, denser development with transit, bicycle and pedestrian connections, and feature a diversity of land uses. While activity centers already exist in Houston, including Downtown and other centers of commerce and culture throughout the city, no formal policy exists to proactively plan for new centers or enhance the economic vitality of those that exist.

One important factor in supporting responsible development for Houston’s future is to determine an equitable approach to upgrading existing infrastructure to better serve higher density development that appropriately balances public and private investments. Additionally, infrastructure that is financed upfront by the private sector ultimately calls to the City to maintain, adding significant operation and maintenance costs. The protocols for developer contributions need to be revised so the City of Houston is able to continue to provide equitable services for all of its citizens at a consistent standard to maintain quality of life.

### Commitments:

- Follow *Urban Houston Framework* recommendations to create new activity centers throughout Houston.
- Conduct a nexus study to determine appropriate developer contributions for new development.
- Continue to invest in public transit and implement recommendations for Reimagine METRO study.
- Coordinate thoroughfare planning to include Complete Streets, context sensitive design, accessibility standards to support connectivity, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Consider adopting adequate public infrastructure ordinances (APFOs) to plan effectively for growth.
- Update transportation and infrastructure plans on a defined periodic basis to ensure that standards respond to the changing needs of Houston’s dynamic growth.
- Work directly with neighborhoods to identify civic investments needed to maintain quality of life in existing neighborhoods as infill development occurs.
- Assess long term impacts of regional growth patterns on issues such as mobility, drainage and financial sustainability and adopt policies to mitigate impacts.

### Related goals:

- ✓ Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ Vibrant and connected activity centers
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ An affordable, multi-modal transportation network providing convenient access and mobility throughout the region for people and goods
- ✓ Ample, efficient, and well-maintained infrastructure

### **Policy Directive 3: Foster safe, affordable neighborhoods.**

#### Assessment:

Overall, equity is a chief concern among Houstonians and transcends multiple themes, ranging from affordable housing, access to transportation choices, safe sidewalks, parks and open space, education, economic mobility, and health care. Despite being one of the largest and most prosperous cities in the nation, not all Houstonians experience success equally. The city includes severely distressed neighborhoods, tremendous challenges in health care and education, and rising concerns about the ability to equitably serve new residents. Nearly one third of Houstonians are without health insurance and adequate access to health care, and half of Houstonians have no degree past high school. The city's segregation by income is among the starkest in the nation, yet the city lacks tools to adequately address affordable housing, or link underserved areas with economic reinvestment tools or adequate public transportation. Numerous indicator reports document the dire need to address Houston's equity issues, including lack of health care, food deserts, inadequate air and water quality, and lack of job skills, and their implications for community health (e.g., obesity, asthma) and economic productivity and prosperity. Addressing equity comprehensively will take consistent commitment at the highest level of city leadership, and should include a suite of programs to address the many subjects that it touches.

Complete communities incorporate elements that contribute to the quality and character of places where people can live affordably and safely, work productively, move efficiently and thrive, both economically and socially. In Houston, a lack of affordable housing has been and continues to be a challenge that is further exacerbated as the population continues to grow annually. The provision of affordable housing has been left to the free market. However, builders tend to focus on the higher end of the market, which results in a much lower amount of affordable units, developed at slower rates than the demand requires, and often disconnected from services and amenities. Non-profit organizations and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Avenue CDC have been instrumental in helping to finance housing and establish a dialogue around housing needs, but more sweeping, coordinated action is necessary. Federal housing dollars such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) are also deployed in the development of affordable housing, but projects tend to be pushed to suburban areas, which detract from the goals of compact development, transit accessibility, walkability and access to healthy food. The development of affordable housing must be tied to overall goals for building complete communities and encouraging growth in activity centers around jobs, amenities, and linked with multi-modal transportation options.

#### Commitments:

- Develop a citywide approach to affordable housing to ensure that all Houstonians have equitable access to safe, quality, and well-maintained housing. Ensure that a continuum of housing needs is met, to include affordable and middle-income units.
- Identify strategic areas in the City to develop affordable housing, focusing on sites that are close to transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, parks, schools and other community facilities, as well as to healthy food options. Site affordable housing developments according to overarching goals for creating complete neighborhoods and encouraging balanced growth, and the provision of services and infrastructure to support these patterns.
- Create options to encourage development of affordable housing more attractive to developers.
- Establish monitoring system to track affordable housing that is removed through redevelopment to ensure that lost affordable units are replaced with quality units. Consider requiring developers building new housing to replace affordable units lost through redevelopment within the same neighborhood.
- Continue to leverage federal funds (CDBG, HOME) and incentives (LIHTC) to build affordable housing, but strive to site developments within urban areas nearby to existing facilities and infrastructure.

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- Develop policy to strategically invest state and local bond and development incentives (380 agreements and TIRZ) to develop affordable housing throughout the city, using a balanced and transparent process that distributes funding in the areas of greatest need and to encourage mixed income communities.
- Continue to work with police department to address community policing in underserved or crime-affected areas and maintain community safety throughout Houston.
- Develop a City of Houston Equity Plan including a clear definition of equity, addressing differences in access, income and quality of life, and including policies to improve and maintain equity for all citizens.
- Update and implement the Parks Master Plan to ensure that all neighborhoods have safe, accessible and well-connected access to parks within a half mile or ten minute walk, available to all members of the population.
- Improve the availability of and access to social services to populations in need, and increase support for these services among the community at large by better communicating the need for these services. Improve coordination and streamline work between foundations, nonprofits, and city departments providing services.

### Related goals:

- ✓ Equitable access to opportunity and prosperity
- ✓ A safe, secure community
- ✓ Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ Sufficient quality, affordable housing options throughout the community

## Policy Directive 4: Connect People and Places

### Assessment:

Mobility and transportation is a chief priority among all Houstonians. From concerns over traffic and commuting patterns, to creating more walkable and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, to encouraging transit use, mobility affects Houstonians' quality of life, and is inextricably linked to the growth patterns of the city and region. Traditionally, transportation planning has considered the automobile as its primary mode of transportation, and until recently the City has focused its transportation efforts on increasing roadway capacity. The City has recently refocused on considerations such as walkability, bicycle and trail connectivity, and transit use, yet solving the transportation crisis in the city involves multiple tools and coordination across many themes for continued implementation, measured improvements to quality of life, and sustainable growth.

The City's thoroughfare planning tools, including the Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan (MFTP), including the Street Hierarchy System, has been incrementally modified over decades. Currently, they do not entirely align with other goals, including the Complete Streets Executive Order, and may not be effective in developing the type of roadway network to serve Houston's current needs. The Complete Streets Executive Order provides improved guidance on roadway planning but does not have the force of law and is subject to changes with new leadership. Meanwhile, the city is experiencing increased density, yet transportation planning is not coordinated with land use decisions and areas of density are not linked with multi-modal options, so are putting stress on roadway infrastructure. Due to parking standards and location of employment, many Houstonians still rely on automobiles for access to jobs and services. Better policy is needed to enable development and redevelopment around planned activity centers, allowing for increased density to be linked with multi-modal networks, and access to jobs and services without straining existing infrastructure. Implementation of such development patterns will allow multi-modal options, such as walking and biking to be feasible options for day to day life of Houstonians. Additionally, ensuring that traffic impacts are considered in new development will help alleviate further strain on infrastructure.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, METRO, provides bus service throughout the city and county as well as light rail in the downtown area. Currently METRO is undergoing the *Transit Reimagining Plan*, focused on the most effective utilization of current METRO resources. While this is an important step, more robust tools for improved long-range transit planning and coordination with land use goals are needed, such as mechanisms for involving METRO as a partner in attracting transit-oriented development (TOD). One existing tool is the Transit Corridor Ordinance (TCO), which seeks to improve the urban design quality of development along light rail corridors. The TCO presents a great precedent for improving the public realm around transit and for encouraging transit-oriented development. However, it needs to be revisited and amended to include up-to-date considerations including integration of the City's bus network, parking requirements and reductions, parking locations relative to the public realm, incorporation of low-impact development (LID) stormwater infrastructure, and pedestrian and bicycle amenities such as bike parking, public art, and open space. Developer incentives and economic tools to encourage economic revitalization or stimulation should also be included.

Houston's continued economic growth is dependent on a functional and efficient transportation system that is successful at connecting people and places within existing neighborhoods, across the city, and throughout the region. Processes for transportation planning including updated and forward-thinking goals need to be addressed at the neighborhood level, from the City, and coordinated regionally to achieve broad, long-range balance. To this end, goals for transportation planning need to be integrated into neighborhood planning, at the Super Neighborhood Level, in updates to all City of Houston transportation guidelines, and coordinated regionally with H-GAC to ensure regional streamlined growth.

Commitments:

- Coordinate land use and transportation planning to encourage neighborhood reinvestment and economic development, while minimizing mobility impacts. Utilize a neighborhood activity center approach that enables more compact, self-sufficient neighborhood activity centers and connects these centers with strong multi-modal transportation links.
- Coordinate with METRO to encourage transit-oriented development (TOD) around transit corridors, including working to attract the type of development that makes transit feasible.
- Expand the Transit Corridor Ordinance to include both rail and rapid bus corridors, and refine regulations and financial incentives to encourage transit-oriented development along such corridors, encourage more improvements to the public realm, and appropriate maintenance of sidewalks.
- Comprehensively revisit the City's thoroughfare and street network planning tools. Align the Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan (MTFP), *ReBuild Houston*, and the Complete Streets Executive Order, including context sensitive design, and attention to the public realm. Encourage preservation of the street, access management, incentives for multimodal connectivity, and an adequate network of supporting collectors.
- Include bicycle and pedestrian mobility options, including on-street facilities and separated facilities through parks and open spaces, as integral to multi-modal transportation framework and achieving healthy communities.
- Create an overarching parking strategy, with recommendations for both on- street and off-street parking, and reduce parking requirements near transit-oriented development (TOD) and in activity centers.
- Improve the image of transit to more effectively promote its use and develop incentives for public transit use among Houstonians of all income levels.
- Continue and expand coordination with H-GAC for funding for neighborhood and mobility planning, coordinated regional planning protocols, and guidance regarding commuter and high speed rail.

Related Goals:

- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ Vibrant and connected activity centers
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ An affordable, multi-modal transportation network providing convenient access and mobility throughout the region for people and goods
- ✓ Ample, efficient, and well-maintained infrastructure
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders, and residents

## **Policy Directive 5: Enable a strong economy.**

### Assessment:

Houston has long enjoyed a robust economy, which is nationally and internationally recognized, with a welcoming culture of ingenuity, entrepreneurialism, and self-reliance. As Houston welcomes new residents, and continues to grow and progress, aspirations are aimed at achieving a balanced, diversified economy and ensuring that the economic primacy of Houston is resilient against economic fluctuations. In addition to strengthening Houston's economy on a citywide scale, nurturing the economic vitality of districts and neighborhoods throughout Houston is necessary as well.

While the City has in place a number of economic development tools, a coordinated, layered approach to economic development has not been defined, and therefore an overarching program including goals and strategies to accomplish those goals is needed. Existing tools available to implement economic development in the city include TIRZ, 380 agreements, and tax abatements. Since the City has no program for targeting proactively identified economic development areas, implementation of the City's economic development tools is oftentimes reactive, with decisions made on a case-by-case basis as requests for assistance are made.

Houston's strong industry clusters for economic growth include the port, the medical center, the universities, and the oil and natural gas industry. While Houston is making progress in efforts to diversify its job base, economic strength remains significantly influenced by the energy sector. Greater diversity in Houston's industry base and continuous innovation is needed to fully ensure Houston's economic durability. Innovation is encouraged in several citywide plans, especially those concentrated on economic development within the private sector. Innovation in the public sector, health and social services is equally important.

Encouraging small businesses as well as large economic hubs is an important ingredient in maintaining a strong, diverse, and resilient economy. Generally, Houston presents a low barrier of entry and offers a good support system for starting small businesses. Expanding the city's competitive edge and encouraging further business development (both large and small) is a priority in terms of citywide economic development, as is encouraging strong and robust neighborhood commercial areas, revitalization, and encouraging business reflective of local culture.

The City of Houston has a strong MWDBE (Minority, Women, and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) program to encourage the foundation and success of underrepresented communities. However, more robust tools are needed to encourage all levels of the economy, including small, local, and minority-owned businesses, with increased promotion of existing, available tools. Additional incentives and dissemination of information are necessary to fully equip current and future business owners with the financial and management skills to achieve long-term success.

### Commitments:

- Develop a coordinated economic development and redevelopment strategy that identifies areas of or priority to be targeted and includes a range of tools to intervene in struggling markets to induce regeneration. Develop economic development strategies at the neighborhood level, coordinated with neighborhood planning, to identify distinct needs and tools to respond to local challenges.
- Promote better coordination between appropriate City departments, outside agencies, and non-profits to uphold economic development as a key City policy.

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- Establish a centralized location for economic development planning, while providing decentralized assistance at the neighborhood level.
- Develop a policy structure around the use of special districts for economic development to ensure consensus on goals, consistent decision-making, and allocation of resources. Provide support for local businesses to promote local economic development and ensure that small and minority business owners have the tools for upward mobility, and sustained success.
- Ensure Houston's long-term economic durability by maintaining a diversity of industries that support Houston's economic strength and provide jobs for skills of all levels.
- Strengthen efforts to identify and encourage emerging industries to ensure that Houston's economy is diversified and resilient to economic fluctuations.
- Encourage the establishment of a diverse selection of small business and innovation incubators. Work with successful local businesses to provide entrepreneurs encouragement and support for initiating innovation.
- Explore ways to expand access to start-up capital for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

### Related Goals:

- ✓ A skilled and talented and versatile workforce
- ✓ A thriving, resilient, and diverse economy
- ✓ An exemplary climate for all businesses, with an entrepreneurial spirit and world-wide competitive-ness
- ✓ Job opportunities that support a good standard of living and financial stability
- ✓ A culture that encourages innovation

## **Policy Directive 6: Build partnerships.**

### Assessment:

Partnerships refer to both organizations and individuals working together towards a common goal, including public private partnership, which refer to the public (City) and private sectors (businesses, nonprofits, foundations) sharing financing responsibilities to bring about a common investment. Without partnerships, many projects that promise substantial public and private benefits can end up being delayed or never started at all because neither side can justify the full investment needed to complete them. Cooperation makes these projects feasible.

To a significant extent, Houston is the thriving metropolis that it is today because of the strong leadership of its business and nonprofit communities, and a longstanding tradition of partnerships between the city, county, organizations and agencies willing to invest in one another and help to bring ideas to fruition. In the era of constrained public resources, continued reliance on and support of public private partnerships is essential to provide efficient service and to match new and expanded programs to respond to Houston's needs today and in the future.

A multitude of programs and organizations currently exist in the greater houston region to meet the needs of its population and address a variety of functions, including education, combating homelessness, financial advisement, health care, arts and culture, and job skills training. Many of these have been created through the work of partnerships. Public private partnerships have been instrumental in economic development, building infrastructure, and increasing the amount of green space in the city, as illustrated by the Buffalo Bayou Greenways initiative. The City's Municipal Management District program (MMD) is also an example of public private partnerships that have resulted in economic regeneration of many areas of the city—including Downtown—resulting in significant economic generation.

Though much work has been done at the partnership level to bring about positive change in Houston, more is needed. More robust programs are essential to respond to Houston's dire need for education and health care reform, ensuring equitable access to parks and open space, arts and culture facilities, social services, job training, and upgraded community facilities. Where some such programs exist, strengthened ties are necessary to improve resource-sharing, expand programs, and bring services closer to communities in need. Better procedures for aggregating public and private dollars are also needed to upgrade existing infrastructure

### Commitments:

- Continue to coordinate with adjacent counties to ensure policy alignment.
- Continue to coordinate the work of city departments to encourage efficiency and to become more involved with service providers.
- Expand the use of joint agreements between City of Houston departments, the business community, libraries, schools and parks, and outside organizations to foster collaborative programs for education with the proper facilities. Document policies for joint use agreements in updates to relevant citywide plans.
- Consider expanding opportunities for local non-profits to provide services at city-owned facilities.
- Continue public private partnerships that generate funding for parks, and seek out ways to increase the equity of funding for park improvements. Continue to support the Houston Parks Board's implementation of Bayou Greenways.
- Foster Houston's relationship with the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) and position the City to exert better coordination and greater leadership on funding decisions, development patterns and other issues that impact Houston's interests.
- Encourage shared use of City-owned facilities and school resources to provide opportunities for community interaction, and places and events that foster community pride and identity.

**Related goals:**

- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
- ✓ High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents
- ✓ Unique and internationally-recognized cultural and entertainment opportunities
- ✓ A thriving local arts and creative community
- ✓ Schools and communities that invest in each other
- ✓ A skilled and talented and versatile workforce
- ✓ An exemplary climate for all businesses, with an entrepreneurial spirit and world-wide competitive-ness
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders, and residents

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## **Policy Directive 7: Support learning.**

### Assessment:

Quality education for all Houstonians at every age is a recurring theme throughout citywide and neighborhood planning. Although many outstanding efforts are being made by public schools, one in four adults in Houston lacks a high school diploma, according to the U.S. Census. More needs to be done across all levels of education, from early childhood education to job skills training, to ensure that every child has a strong start and is gaining the skills needed for success and creating an able workforce.

Currently, the City needs more defined and deliberate policies on the best ways to support and partner with education organizations to make meaningful strides in education reform. Coordination is needed to involve the multiple partners involved in providing education services, including public schools, private schools, community colleges, universities, nonprofits and foundations, and City departments providing education related services in community facilities such as parks and libraries.

Supporting schools is also essential to create thriving neighborhoods, as schools and their surrounding communities depend on each other for their success. Closer coordination between schools and communities is needed to ensure that families are involved in supporting education at home, and are giving back to schools in terms of volunteerism, and making sure that schools are respected and well-maintained. Services provided at other neighborhood facilities, such as parks and libraries, can be leveraged to ensure that neighborhoods have the availability of comprehensive services and neighborhoods are sharing resources for maximum efficiency and convenience.

Education aimed at achieving a skilled workforce is a priority throughout Houston both at the citywide and neighborhood scale. In recent decades, the community focused on the importance of a four-year degree, and high skills jobs will continue to be critical to serve the growing professional and business, financial, education, health, and government services sectors, among others. However, there is also an increasing need for workers with middle skills who are qualified to fill the rising number of technical jobs in the community. Stronger policy is necessary in order to institutionalize the teaching of innovation as both a value and a skill to young people in the region, and to ensure that jobs skills training incorporates up-to-date technology.

Houston benefits from a large number of private entities throughout the city and region that have focused on job skills training and workforce development. Greater coordination with educational institutions and the City are needed to ensure that workforce development needs are met and matched with current and emerging industries.

### Commitments:

- Improve coordination between the City and educational agencies to identify gaps and create new partnerships for efficiencies in providing education services.
- Create a working group of all major school districts, charter schools, private schools, community colleges and universities, and non-profit partners to create a clear path for education reform.
- Continue to create partnerships between education providers and social service providers to improve wrap-around services such as counseling, behavioral health education, and health care at schools.
- Further develop afterschool programs and resources for early childhood education in elementary schools, parks, and libraries. Promote lifelong learning with all age groups by providing educational resources at community facilities and working with nonprofits and foundations.
- Strive to provide support for single-parent families and for grandparents rearing children.
- Adopt policies encouraging city departments to support education.

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- Continue to implement and support programs and partnerships to provide job training at all skill levels and develop a skilled workforce. Improve coordination between job training program providers, and increase awareness and coordination of all existing programs to connect job seekers with potential employers. Support mentorship and internship opportunities to learn applied skills.
- Continue to partner with education institutions to develop and implement programs to infuse and teach innovation through the learning enterprise.
- Support research and development efforts at University of Houston and other institutions to foster new ideas, entrepreneurship, and growth in technology-related businesses.

### Related goals:

- ✓ Equitable access to opportunity and prosperity
- ✓ Engaged and informed residents
- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
- ✓ Quality learning opportunities from early childhood onward
- ✓ Schools and communities that invest in each other
- ✓ A skilled and talented and versatile workforce
- ✓ Job opportunities that support a good standard of living and financial stability

## **Policy Directive 8: Think globally.**

### Assessment:

The City of Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, on par with New York and Los Angeles in prevalence of international populations. Due to its location and its ethnic diversity, as well as economic opportunity and relatively low cost of living, the city remains a primary point of entry for new immigrants. In 2013, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, more than one in five Houstonians was foreign-born, versus one in eight nationwide. This population provides a competitive advantage for the city to continue to welcome new citizens from all over the globe, to support its thriving and dynamic economy.

Houston is a hub for a multitude of industries, including energy, health care, nanotechnology, aerospace, and information technology. The city is also known for a favorable business climate and dynamic development approach. Several programs exist to promote Houston for business attraction and retention and to encourage a skilled and talented workforce to relocate to Houston. Despite these efforts, Houston still trails behind its peer cities in quality of life perceptions and Houston's image on the national stage has not kept pace with recent quality of life improvements undertaken by the City. As Houston looks to the future, it must position itself to be recognized as a desirable place both to do business, and to live, offering all of the quality of life amenities such as an eclectic culture, parks and recreational resources, a range of mobility and housing options, and high quality education and community services.

In order to raise its profile on the global scale, Houston must continue to market and promote its welcoming culture and economy and create tools to attract further investment in the community. This includes financial tools to attract businesses and encourage investment throughout the city, supporting and celebrating Houston's diverse community members and cultural offerings, incentives to encourage innovation and technology, and continued investment in measures to improve quality of life. To compete globally and nationally, the City must recognize the importance of providing desired lifestyle amenities found in peer communities, such as a diversity of housing, accessible recreational and open space resources, cultural and entertainment offerings, efficient and well-connected mobility options, clean air and water, and quality education systems. Such amenities must be open and available to Houstonians from all cultures to remain an attractive place for the global community to live, work, and play.

### Commitments:

- Leverage the competitive strength of Houston's international diversity to attract international businesses and investors.
- Expand business attraction strategies for marketing Houston outside of Texas and the United States.
- Continue to support and develop Office of International Communities (OIC) and Global Houston programs, and other initiatives that welcome and help newcomers integrate into and succeed in the community.
- Work with the Greater Houston Visitors and Convention Center and Houston First as partners to expand marketing and promotion nationally and internationally.
- Develop marketing efforts that are geared toward reinforcing the connection between diversity and culture in City branding and identity.
- Continue to expand programs to attract a skilled and talented workforce to Houston.
- Consider becoming involved in the Welcoming America Cities and Counties Program.
- Prioritize projects, programs and initiatives that improve quality of life and connect to the city's ability to attract and retain a creative workforce.

*Related goals:*

- ✓ An integrated community that reflects our cultural diversity and heritage
- ✓ Unique and internationally-recognized cultural and entertainment opportunities
- ✓ A thriving, resilient, and diverse economy
- ✓ An exemplary climate for all businesses, with an entrepreneurial spirit and world-wide competitive-ness
- ✓ Job opportunities that support a good standard of living and financial stability
- ✓ A culture that encourages innovation

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## **Policy Directive 9: Celebrate what's uniquely Houston.**

### Assessment:

There are numerous attributes of Houston that makes the city unique, from its incredible diversity, to its historic buildings dating back to its foundation in the early nineteenth century, to its inviting natural setting, to its large collection of cultural institutions and events. As the fourth largest city in the United States, Houston is home to over 2 million people in the City and over 6 million people in the Greater Houston region. Every ethnicity and about 90 nationalities are represented in the region, while more than a hundred languages are spoken in residents' homes. This amounts to a city and region with many pockets of identity in distinctive neighborhoods, a variety of traditions, and wide-ranging resident needs.

Highlighting Houston's unique community and identity is important to consider when planning for the future. This includes respecting and celebrating the many elements of Houston's character, including its people, its history, its cultural institutions and providing programs for further cultural expression and public art.

While Houston enjoys some of the most impressive cultural institutions in the world, today not all Houstonians have equal access to their programs, and not all cultural organizations receive adequate funding to highlight the cultures of diverse groups through events, performances, and public arts.

As the city grows, it is important to reinforce and highlight the elements of the city that make it unique, maintaining areas of character and identity, which in turn help enhance quality of life. This includes the protection of historic resources. The City of Houston currently has a historic district program and local and state landmarks; however no formal protection is in place to maintain community character outside of historic districts, or plan appropriately for development that might adversely affect historic areas. The development of a survey of historic properties is an important first step in realizing Houston's wealth of resources.

### Commitments:

- Continue to forge partnerships with cultural institutions and local arts groups to explore grants and funding opportunities for smaller, local art groups and to support small-scale, neighborhood-oriented or ethnically specific festivals.
- Promote access to arts and culture in underserved areas, schools, and neighborhoods and ensure that all Houstonians have access to Houston's cultural attractions.
- Continue to market Houston in ways that celebrate and reinforce the diversity and culture of the city and its various neighborhoods through identity branding.
- Target neighborhood planning efforts that deliberately speak to Houston's multi-national, multi-cultural makeup and builds awareness of cultural diversity. Identify the specialized needs of residents in these groups and neighborhoods and seek to find solutions to their isolation and economic segregation.
- Continue to work with the Houston Arts Alliance and related organizations to expand its robust public art program to enhance the public realm throughout the city and celebrate the diversity of its unique areas and cultures.
- Ensure that historical interpretation and public art installations throughout the city reflect all elements of Houston's past and represent diverse populations. Promote these elements through walking tours and tourist materials.
- Create a comprehensive, city-wide Historic Resources Plan to encourage voluntary efforts to preserve historic resources, including a survey of potential historic resources, optional incentives for the preservation of historic properties, and standards for rehabilitation of public and privately owned historic properties. Include community input to ensure citizens' concerns and aspirations are captured in the development of plan.

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- Periodically update the Arts and Culture Master Plan to ensure City support for the arts is as effective as possible

***Related goals:***

- ✓ Engaged and informed residents
- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ An integrated community that reflects our cultural diversity and heritage
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ A community that respects its history
- ✓ Unique and internationally-recognized cultural and entertainment opportunities
- ✓ A thriving local arts and creative community

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## **Policy Directive 10: Protect and conserve our resources.**

### Assessment:

Protecting the natural environment in Houston is a multi-faceted challenge. This includes maintaining parks and open space, preserving important natural species and habitat, protecting Houston's bayous, ensuring adequate and high quality air and water, conserving energy, and encouraging reduced consumption of resources. All of these elements are necessary to ensure that as Houston grows, it is doing so in a manner that respects the natural environment, maintains quality of life, and minimizes environmental impact. Many city and neighborhood plans call for the preservation of natural resources, development of parks and connected open space, and sustainable design solutions, including low-impact design (LID) and energy solutions. However, the City's policies regarding natural resources and development standards need updating, accommodating current advances in technology and approaches to sustainability. A regional open space system integrating valuable natural resources contributes to the character of the city and distinct neighborhoods, bringing economic value and sense of place. These elements must be captured and retained to maintain Houston's ability to continue to attract residents, and continue to provide for the well-being of current and future Houstonians.

The City has in place several plans for managing natural resources, but more is needed to protect undeveloped land, to ensure compliance with current policies and programs, and to comprehensively link all of the City's environmental policies under a common vision. Bayou Greenways 2020 is an important step in protecting greenways and enhancing them for recreational use. Ongoing partnerships and funding and coordination with neighborhood plans are needed to ensure the goals of the plan are met.

Additionally, the City has adopted a number of programs and policies that encourage energy conservation. These programs need increased standards, incentives, and public education to be more effective. Similarly, several plans manage water quality and supply, including the Water Conservation Plan and Stormwater Quality Management Regulations for low-impact development and improved water quality in the city. While these plans are important steps, recommendations must be more thoroughly applied. The City also has protections on floodplain use and requirements to increase parks and open space, but lack policies to protect land that provides ecological benefits. Finally, while the City recently expanded its recycling program, service gaps exist based on land use and facilities types, limiting its positive intent.

The City of Houston must comprehensively address natural resources protection and management, going beyond standards required by the State to set a regional example as leaders in sustainability, and conserving the natural environment that makes Houston and the region unique.

### Commitments:

- Create an inventory of valuable environments and habitats in and around Houston. Consider development of programs to strengthen protection of prioritized, beneficial natural habitats.
- Dedicate open space for multiple purposes including recreational greenspace, habitat, flood prevention, and trail connectivity.
- Create development incentives or other approaches to encourage reduced consumption of natural resources in new development (e.g., water and energy).
- Streamline standards for recycling across land use types and continue to explore new technologies and innovations that increase Houston's diversion of waste from landfills.
- Continue to evaluate emerging technologies for water conservation, reuse, and conveyance to meet or exceed state standards.

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- Expand public education programs promoting recycling, materials reuse and reduction, energy and water conservation to increase citizen participation in such programs.
- Continue to address the effects of climate change on the region by developing robust resilience policies and coordinate policies and programs across citywide plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions via transportation and performance standards.
- Continue to expand renewable energy purchases and usage, using tools such as renewable energy credits, solar installations, and combined heat and power.
- Encourage preservation and enhancement of the city's tree canopy to improve air quality, including conserving and replacing, as needed, existing tree cover in parks and open spaces and planting of new urban street trees to increase shade, reduce stormwater runoff, improve air quality, provide habitat, create urban character, and improve pedestrian comfort.
- Strive to improve water quality in the city and region by meeting or exceeding state standards. Actively expand park preserves and natural areas to protect natural resources. Support the Houston Parks Board's implementation of Bayou Greenways 2020.

### Related goals:

- ✓ Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ Efficient use and reuse, and conservation of resources
- ✓ Clean, plentiful, and accessible water, air, land, and food resources
- ✓ Resilient man-made and natural systems that protect citizens and assets from disasters and other risks

## **Policy Directive 11: Communicate clearly and with transparency.**

### Assessment:

The Plan Houston process created a great platform for public input, setting an excellent precedent for more ongoing, meaningful community-wide engagement and to strengthen the citizenry's confidence in government. Many existing plans and programs identify community empowerment as a priority, but the City lacks an overarching public engagement policy that defines objectives and process. A perceived absence of clear access to information and meaningful opportunities for involvement can lead to misapprehensions and conflict.

Houston's diverse population brings a wide range of languages and socio-economic groups that influences how people receive information. Reaching all groups is essential for future planning, as Houston must respond to the needs of all populations equally to support the city's economic growth and competitiveness. To accomplish this goal, empowering individual neighborhoods through the Super Neighborhood framework is important to ensure that all citizens are being reached, have the opportunity to participate in neighborhood planning, and can stay informed about changes affecting their quality of life.

Several tools exist today to inform citizens of what is planned in neighborhoods, but they are not always used effectively to communicate the complete picture in ways the community can understand. In recent years, the City has increasingly utilized and institutionalized data-based performance management techniques to measure and improve performance. These methods have been successful in enabling the City to establish objective, measurable benchmarks for performance, creating greater transparency and ensuring a more systematic approach to improving City services. However, this approach is relatively new, continues to evolve, and its capabilities can be expanded to reach greater payoffs. Furthermore, at present this approach is focused on primarily operational performance (e.g., potholes filled) and is less linked to broader community goals. Clear and seamless communication is necessary also for disseminating information to support the community in times of crisis, such as sharing information about disaster preparedness and recovery.

Effective communication and government transparency is also necessary to achieve streamlined interaction between city departments. This is essential for effective and coordinated planning and for efficient use and management of financial resources. Instituting standards for government communication protocols and breaking down silos between departments is crucial to the successful implementation of Plan Houston goals and ongoing fiscal resilience.

### Commitments:

- Maintain policy for fiscal transparency at all levels.
- Ensure that information regarding government policies is transmitted to the public in formats they can use and understand.
- Continue to use up-to-date technologies to put information about city department operations and decisions online and readily available to the public, and foster civic innovation.
- Develop a citywide public engagement policy and public engagement plan, establishing clear goals, expectations, and processes, and a priority from the citizens' perspective with opportunities for those with diverse backgrounds to participate fully. Engage the community in the update of all citywide plans and in programming for new arts and culture events, public art, and community facilities, including parks and recreational resources. Set up ongoing protocols with the City's internal and external partners to institutionalize public engagement.
- Institutionalize links between the City of Houston's organizational performance and broader community goals and metrics. Utilize Plan Houston metrics to gauge the City's success in responding to community

needs. Partner with organizations that have robust community performance metric functions to augment the City's ability to track and measure improvements in effectiveness.

- Leverage the City's Performance Improvement Division to continue to expand and improve upon data-based performance management techniques to improve the effectiveness of City programs and transparency.
- Establish a timeline and priority list for creating neighborhood, small area, and sub area plans based on Super Neighborhood or other identified priority areas. This initial step would include the identification of existing Super Neighborhoods, or new areas, based on existing need.
- Regularly assess changes in community demographics to ensure that the City communicates by means that match the audience's needs. Promote opportunities for those with diverse backgrounds to participate fully.
- Partner with City departments and surrounding communities to provide seamless communication (e.g. 311 response) within city limits and beyond to collect and share information with the community, and assist in disaster preparedness.
- Encourage all departments to solicit public feedback in meaningful ways when conducting projects affecting the citizens of Houston.

**Related goals:**

- ✓ Engaged and informed residents
- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ An integrated community that reflects our cultural diversity and heritage
- ✓ A diverse, welcoming culture that is celebrated and respected
- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places
- ✓ Fiscally responsible, accountable, and responsive public services and civic investments
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders, and residents

## **Policy Directive 12: Nurture healthy communities.**

### Assessment:

Houston is known for having an abundance of state of the art, high quality health care providers. However, this supply does not always translate to high quality health care for all Houstonians. Despite the City having several Federal Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to provide comprehensive health care services to underserved communities, nearly one third of Houstonians are without health insurance and adequate access to health care. To exacerbate the problem, twenty-three percent of Houstonians have incomes below the poverty line, compared to 16.8% in Harris County, Texas, and 13.8% nationally. Although the Health Department has policies that address the need for residents to have accessible health care and disease prevention, an overarching policy for the City to support health and the environment has not been prioritized.

Foundations are doing effective work in the Greater Houston area to help local nonprofits improve health care delivery and community development services with a focus on capacity building. However, greater coordination between public and private sectors is needed. Currently, there is no plan that coordinates efforts of the various agencies and organizations providing healthcare services to disadvantaged people. Additionally, both the City and surrounding counties often have overlapping and uncoordinated health care services. Certain community facilities offer health education and limited health care services, such as schools and community centers. The costs and benefits of better coordination between local governments, facilities, and providers need to be studied to determine to what extent service improvements and increased efficiencies can be achieved.

Nationally, the theme of “healthy communities planning” has arisen, driven both by a physical planning and a public health perspective. Goals for healthy communities appear as policy statements in several of Houston’s citywide and neighborhood plans, however, in practice there is little connection between health and neighborhood planning. Achieving healthy communities requires the integration of health, recreation and activity programming, coordinated transportation and land use, and ensuring multi-modal connectivity. The City has improved coordination within the appropriate departments, but more institutionalized coordination is necessary. Additionally, healthy food access is a factor in healthy communities. Currently, Houston has the least number of grocery stores per capita in the state, resulting in significant food deserts. Incentives for providing grocery stores near to affordable housing and encouraging community gardens could help to alleviate this challenge.

### Commitments:

- Increase the number of affordable clinics in Houston that can provide specialized care for all, including preventative healthcare services to disadvantaged communities.
- Expand partnerships between Texas Medical Center (TMC), the City, and communities in need, using community indicators to understand communities in greatest need.
- Streamline and coordinate health care delivery and wellness programs provided by the City, counties, hospitals, health foundations, and nonprofits.
- Address health needs beyond the hospital system, such as senior care (i.e. standards for nursing home facilities and guidelines for Aging in Place), and mental health services (i.e. services available within jail juvenile facilities, court system).
- Develop citywide objectives to support healthy communities planning through all levels of policy, including multi-modal transportation, healthy food and grocery store access, and promoting air and water quality for all citizens.
- Consider requiring Health Impact Assessments for new development.
- Improve the coordination among City departments, counties, and other public agencies to ensure that healthy communities are a priority in their programming.

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- Expand partnerships and joint use agreements between the business community, health department, libraries, schools and parks to foster collaborative programs for health care and health education where services are currently offered.
- Adopt policy to improve access to healthy foods and eliminate food deserts.

### Related Goals:

- ✓ Affordable, high-quality health care for all
- ✓ Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ An affordable, multi-modal transportation network providing convenient access and mobility throughout the region for people and goods

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### **Policy Directive 13: Sustain quality infrastructure.**

Assessment:

Maintaining quality infrastructure is one of the highest priorities of all Houstonians, ranging from the highest city officials to community members of all types. Concerns over infrastructure typically include road conditions, including both physical upkeep of roads and sidewalks, and the ability of roads and highways to accommodate traffic. Traffic is challenging all over Houston and failing infrastructure is typically blamed. Although transportation planning in Houston has largely favored the car and been aimed at providing adequate vehicular right of way, the roadway network is vast and continues to grow as the city expands, and is both operationally and financially burdensome to maintain. Adopting sustainable growth patterns and engaging in coordinated land use and transportation planning are important steps in addressing this challenge.

The second chief concern in the realm of infrastructure is drainage. Houston's geographical setting amid its famed bayous consists of many low-lying areas that are susceptible to flooding, exacerbated by a damp climate and frequent precipitation. Providing for drainage systems, including water, stormwater, and sewer, is a basic step in readying new areas for development. Typically this is paid for, at least in part, by private development. In Houston, Municipal Utility Districts (MUDs) are a common means of extending services to new areas. The challenge to the city as a whole regarding infrastructure is twofold. Firstly, while private funds may pay for the laying of the groundwork, it is up to the City to maintain all infrastructure thereafter, placing an immeasurable and ever-growing burden on its operating budget. Secondly, with finite financial sources and expanding need, the City increasingly is unable to keep up with needed infrastructure upgrades in existing parts of the city. This often results in the poorest neighborhoods falling into disrepair, without any dedicated funding source to call upon for necessary improvements.

Houston has taken steps in the recent past to respond to its infrastructure crisis. Special districts, such as TIRZ, 380 Agreements, and management districts, are tools that allow for funds to be generated within given boundaries to pay for public improvements and services. However, the result is that wealthy neighborhoods or those with community capacity have been able to upgrade their local infrastructure needs while simultaneously spurring economic development. *ReBuild Houston* is a more-recently implemented program that responds to infrastructure needs citywide, prioritizing the "worst first" based on standard criteria, including levels of service.

Though these tools have provided patches to the problem, a comprehensive approach to sustaining quality infrastructure for all parts of the city is needed. Additionally, neighborhoods that fall outside of a special district or *ReBuild Houston's* criteria still are in need of a platform in which their needs can be determined, documented, and eventually funded. Empowering communities through neighborhood planning must seek to bridge this divide.

Addressing infrastructure planning both from a top-down, citywide approach, as well as a bottom-up, neighborhood-based approach is needed as Houston looks to its future. Sustaining quality infrastructure is both about maintaining the areas that already exist, as well as systematically rethinking how the city grows and expands new infrastructure at its edges. As new policies are developed, best practices for building infrastructure must also be incorporated, including roadways that accommodate all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, bicycles, and transit, and creating stormwater infrastructure that uses a low-impact development (LID) approach, mimicking natural systems and reducing the potential for flooding and further maintenance cost.

*Commitments:*

- Create citywide approaches to sound growth and transportation, influencing the manner in which the City of Houston provides and maintains infrastructure in the future. (see **Policy Directive 3: Grow Responsibly** and **Policy Directive 11: Connect People and Places**)
- Work with community members and neighborhood leaders to prioritize areas in need of infrastructure investment by neighborhood.
- Provide an action (implementation) plan for recommended infrastructure improvements on a neighborhood basis identifying potential partnerships, phasing and funding sources.
- Craft developer incentives to encourage development within community-identified strategic investment areas to incite economic development and infrastructure investment within specific neighborhoods.
- Create overarching city policy to support regional stormwater detention, including the application of low-impact development (LID) standards into stormwater infrastructure to help mitigate flood potential and support private development mitigation needs.
- Ensure compliance with adopted Stormwater Quality Management Regulations in all new stormwater projects identified in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

*Related Goals:*

- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ Resilient man-made and natural systems that protect citizens and assets from disasters and other risks
- ✓ Ample, efficient, and well-maintained infrastructure
- ✓ Fiscally responsible, accountable, and responsive public services and civic investments