

Major Developments

2003 Annual Report



The City of Houston
Planning & Development Department



Letter from the Director

Dear Houstonians:

This year brought many new challenges. The Planning and Development Department continued to seek innovative ways to provide the same level of service with less resources. The Department is committed to using taxpayer dollars effectively, while providing Houstonians with the highest level of customer service. This report reflects upon our “Major Developments” for 2003.

At the beginning of the fiscal year 2003, the Neighborhood Protection Division (NPD) was transferred to the Planning and Development Department from Public Works & Engineering. The Department reorganized and established new priorities for NPD for handling major nuisance violations such as abandoned buildings, junk cars, and weeded lots. Management was strengthened, new data systems are being implemented and inspectors are spending more time in the field.

The Super Neighborhood Initiative grew in strength with the adoption of the Super Neighborhood Ordinance codifying the role of Super Neighborhood Councils. It also included formal recognition by the Mayor of the Alliance as an advisory council to the Mayor and City government. The Alliance consists of all the council presidents or chairs.

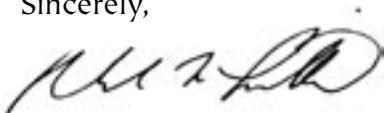
The Department focused on quality of life issues by expanding the permit only parking program citywide; preparing the Tree and Shrub Ordinance to increase tree planting requirements for development, which was approved by Council; and continuing our involvement in the Main Street Corridor Revitalization Project, which received an additional \$1 million in federal funding.

The Department also received notice of \$1.5 million in federal funds to complete the Houston Technology Center in partnership with the Midtown Redevelopment Authority.

New advancements in technology provided enhanced customer service in the Department. For instance, the Building Inspection Division’s Telework project offers customers real time inspection results, and the Permit E-report provides citizens with information about weekly permits approved for new construction, remodeling and demolition projects.

These are just a few of our achievements throughout the last year. The following report will detail our accomplishments for 2003 and our goals for 2004. I sincerely hope you find our “Major Developments” useful and know we are committed to Houston’s future.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Litke
Director

Code Enforcement

The Code Enforcement Group ensures that all new building construction and renovation activities are carried out in compliance with the City's building code. The process includes review of building plans, issuance of permits, and on site inspections at various stages during the construction process. Code Enforcement also enforces the Houston Sign Code.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ✧ Fully implemented Telework, the first wireless building inspection solution in Texas, transferring inspection data from the field to the Department's core database which can be accessed by contractors and builders in a real time environment.
- ✧ Launched the Permit E-report, a weekly e-mail report that provides citizens with information about weekly permits approved for new construction, remodeling and demolition projects.
- ✧ Implemented the Energy Code addressing code requirements designed to enhance the energy efficiency of buildings.
- ✧ Reviewed and permitted \$3.7 billion in construction value for a five year total of \$18.5 billion.
- ✧ Sold 131,392 permits, including 21,344 through the city's online permits system.
- ✧ Building inspectors conducted 498,729 field inspections.
- ✧ Plan Analysts reviewed 10,788 single family plan submittals.
- ✧ Plan analysts reviewed 28,530 commercial and multi-family plan submittals.
- ✧ Sign Administration sold 29,701 sign permits and performed 33,439 field inspections to ensure compliance with the City's sign code.
- ✧ Removed more than 168,000 "bandit" signs, signs placed illegally in the right-of-way.

GOALS

- ✧ Expand the capability of Telework to include the Occupancy sections, track mileage and inspection time.
- ✧ Create ability to schedule inspections online and through cell phone text messaging.
- ✧ Create ability to send inspection results through cell phone text messaging.
- ✧ Continue replacing aging fleet vehicles with the fuel efficient gas-electric hybrid vehicles.

Commission Support

The Department provides support to four regulatory commissions:

BUILDINGS AND STANDARDS COMMISSION

The Buildings and Standards Commission reviews and makes determinations regarding cases of alleged ordinance violations related to dangerously damaged or deteriorated buildings, improvements, or conditions caused by the accumulation of refuse, vegetation, or other matter that creates a breeding or living area for insects and rodents.

The Commission consists of four commission panels, with each panel composed of five regular and four alternate members who are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.

- ✧ The Commission reviewed 281 cases and issued 178 orders.

HOUSTON PLANNING COMMISSION

The Houston Planning Commission is a twenty-member board that reviews and approves subdivision plats and studies the development issues relevant to the Houston area and provides recommendations to the City Council.

- ✧ The Commission considered 3,778 subdivision plats, 24 special exceptions and 272 variance requests.

HOUSTON ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission is an eleven-member board that makes recommendations to City Council on historic properties. The board reviews requests for historic district designations, landmark and archaeological sites, and information on certificates of appropriateness.

- ✧ The Commission granted 50 certificates of appropriateness and approved four historic landmark applications.

TOWER COMMISSION

The Tower Commission is a seven-member board that considers requests for waivers, appeals on disapproved cellular towers, and appeals from affected property owners, associations or groups on tower permit applications.

Development Services

The Development Services Division reviews subdivision and development plats for compliance with development codes; reviews development site plans; reviews applications for the locations of hotels/motels and hazardous material storage facilities; and reviews applications for historic designation. The division provides staff support to three regulatory commissions, Planning Commission, Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and the Tower Commission.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ✧ Amended Chapter 33 of the Tree and Shrub Ordinance to provide additional tree canopy. The amendments were a result of a blue ribbon committee appointed by Mayor Brown.
- ✧ Planners reviewed 3,778 subdivision plats, up 18% from last year and reviewed 11,652 development site plans, up 21% from last year.
- ✧ Planners assisted 53,831 walk-in customers and callers with development information.
- ✧ Planners reviewed 8 cell tower and 17 hotel/motel applications.
- ✧ Planners recorded 1,498 plats, 11% more than last year.
- ✧ Reviewed 22 prevailing building line applications of which 16 were approved by City Council.
- ✧ Reviewed 37 minimum lot size applications, of which 21 were approved by City Council
- ✧ Reviewed 60 certificates of appropriateness of which 50 were approved by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission, and recommended four historic landmarks for designation.

GOALS

- ✧ Propose amendments to Chapter 42, the City's land development ordinances, that include technical changes on platting and provide enhancements for suburban development.
- ✧ Add e-pay element to the online plat submittal system providing enhanced customer service.
- ✧ Recognize City designated historic landmark buildings by installing medallion plaques in partnership with Historic Houston.

Economic Development

The Economic Development and Revitalization Division works to provide communities and businesses with access to tools that help strengthen and sustain the local economy. Incentive programs are available to encourage business and industry to choose Houston when making expansion or relocation decisions.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ✧ Facilitated the redevelopment of two additional abandoned downtown properties into boutique hotels, the Marriott and 220 Main. Each hotel receives a ten year historic tax exemption with a rebate of certain occupancy taxes in return for allowing the City access to 70% of their rooms a minimum of 14 nights per month to assist the City in selling future convention business.
- ✧ Secured a \$1.5 million supplemental federal grant to construct a 21,000 sq. ft. addition for Houston Technology Center (HTC) which will fully complete the HTC space needs. HTC is a business accelerator and resource center dedicated to supporting, promoting and assisting entrepreneurs and emerging companies arising from greater Houston's key technology sectors: energy, life sciences, information services and NASA.
- ✧ Approved two tax abatement projects, Landry's Management LP and Kerr-McGee, that will create 174 new jobs with a total investment of \$49 million. The city of Houston has 41 active tax abatement agreements for a total investment of \$1.1 billion.
- ✧ Continued oversight of 20 tax increment reinvestment zones (TIRZs) whose developments include 3,125 single family homes, 18,182 multi-family units, and 9.1 million square feet of commercial development.

GOALS

- ✧ Implement two potential tax increment reinvestment zones: one in the Hardy/Near Northside area which will encompass the former Union Pacific rail yard for an urban mixed-use redevelopment and one in northeast Houston for affordable housing.
- ✧ Begin construction on Phase II of HTC.
- ✧ Pursue additional federal Economic Development Administration grant funding.
- ✧ Facilitate capital improvements and development in existing TIRZs.
- ✧ Develop options for stronger use of the State Enterprise Zone program given significant changes in state economic development legislation.

Long Range Planning

The Long Range Planning Division analyzes Houston's demographic trends, capacity for growth and works through public/private partnerships on plans to sustain long-term growth in key parts of our city. One of the major projects of the Division is the Main Street Corridor Revitalization Project. This award winning landmark civic venture began in partnership with the Main Street Corridor Coalition to create a signature transit and pedestrian-oriented corridor. The Department successfully secured five federal grants for Main Street that are leveraged with private resources to carry out the improvements.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ✧ Received a \$1 million federal grant for a total of \$6.1 million for Main Street and related projects.
- ✧ Completed planning efforts aimed at connecting the Third Ward neighborhood to the Main Street rail system through pedestrian and transit improvements.
- ✧ Completed the Inner Katy Transit Oriented Development Study, the first step towards assessing the feasibility and impact of implementing high capacity transit in the corridor along I-10 between Silber and the downtown area. The study proposed two routes and will be used as a framework for more detailed planning efforts in the area.
- ✧ Updated Connections, CBO Toolbox and Almanac resource publications.
- ✧ Completed the Southern Houston sector study, which analyzes the future growth potential by assessing the current conditions, needs and trends and then makes recommendations for attracting future investment while enhancing existing commercial and residential development.
- ✧ Completed the Land Use and Demographic Profile chronicling the changes and trends in the City's vital statistics between 1990 and 2000 during which time the City grew in population by nearly 20%.
- ✧ Completed detailed demographic profiles of each census category by super neighborhood, providing a comprehensive look at each neighborhood.

GOALS

- ✧ Begin construction on improvements identified by planning efforts in the Third Ward to Main Street connectivity process.
- ✧ Continue work with area agencies and private partners on Main Street's enhancement projects that include Cathedral Square, the Museum District Art Walk, Holcombe Square, Main Street Square and the Wheeler-Blodgett station.
- ✧ Initiate the East Houston Sector Study.

Neighborhood Protection

NPD seeks to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods by reducing blight and substandard living conditions. The Neighborhood Protection Division enforces City Codes related to open and dangerous buildings, junk motor vehicles, weeded lots, and other property nuisances.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ✧ Reorganized to make staff more accountable, increase the inspectors' time in the field, strengthen management, improve the data systems and attack a backlog of nuisance cases.
- ✧ Launched a community education and outreach program known as "Be a neighbor, not a nuisance" to create community partnerships to attack neighborhood blight.
- ✧ Demolished 220 buildings and secured 230 buildings. The demolition schedule is now posted on the City's website at www.houstonplanning.com.
- ✧ Inspected 1,543 dangerous building violations and referred 898 properties for hearing. Of those, 448 hearing orders were issued to secure, repair or demolish and 206 dangerous building violations were corrected by the owner.
- ✧ Created a City-wide Attack Team to handle critical issues such as junk motor vehicles and heavy trash.
- ✧ Inspected an average of 22 sites per day in the spring where junk motor vehicles were identified for a total of 2,680 sites. Of those sites, 1,944 voluntary removals were obtained, 200 vehicles were towed and 109 court citations were issued resulting in fines of no less than \$250.
- ✧ Instituted a partnership with the Harris County Probation Office where probationers are used to cut and maintain lots at no cost to the City. Probationers cut approximately 70 lots a month.
- ✧ Implemented a program with the Houston Police Department to register towing companies who agree to tow junk motor vehicles from private property at no charge to the owner.

GOALS

- ✧ Create partnership between super neighborhood councils and NPD staff to ensure that enforcement is targeted by super neighborhood priorities.
- ✧ Implement a pilot program with Keep Houston Beautiful to support more neighborhood organizations to cut and maintain lots in their community.
- ✧ Implement new protocol for handling nuisance violations. Abandoned buildings, junk motor vehicles, and weeded lots will be the top three priorities. ✧ Demolish 600 abandoned buildings.
- ✧ Institute new data management system to improve management oversight.

Neighborhood Services

The Neighborhood Services Division seeks to strengthen communities' capability to work with government and identify needed neighborhood improvements through the creation of neighborhood driven plans. The Division's neighborhood programs include the Super Neighborhood Initiative, the Decal Parking Program, the Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center and the Neighborhood Leadership Institute.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ✧ Recognized 2 additional Super Neighborhood Councils.
- ✧ Worked with the 36 organized super neighborhood councils who represent 43 areas to submit Super Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAP's) for consideration during the City's budget and capital improvement process.
- ✧ Facilitated the formal recognition by the Mayor of the Super Neighborhood Alliance, an advisory board consisting of all the council presidents or chairs.
- ✧ Prepared Super Neighborhood Initiative for formal adoption by City Council.
- ✧ Integrated routine SNAP items into 3-1-1 system to assure priority handling.
- ✧ Designated 15 parking permit blocks through the decal parking program for a total of 30.
- ✧ Completed review of the pilot phase of the decal parking program and expanded the program citywide. Planners found a 75% satisfaction rate of residents who were surveyed about the program.

GOALS

- ✧ Make further improvements to the super neighborhood initiative especially related to targeted nuisance abatement efforts.
- ✧ Initiate pilot redevelopment and beautification projects within targeted super neighborhoods and identify partners with capacity to assist super neighborhood councils with community development.
- ✧ Amend decal parking ordinance to add enhancements to program.
- ✧ Evaluate up to 400 sites for inclusion in the City's land assemblage program for possible foreclosure by the Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority for use in neighborhood redevelopment efforts.

MAYOR

Lee P. Brown

CITY CONTROLLER

Judy Gray Johnson



COUNCIL MEMBERS

Bruce Tatro - District A

Carol Mims Galloway - District B

Mark Goldberg - District C

Ada Edwards - District D

Addie Wiseman - District E

Mark Ellis - District F

Bert Keller - District G

Gabriel Vasquez - District H

Carol Alvarado - District I

Annise Parker - At Large 1

Gordon Quan - At Large 2

Shelley Sekula-Gibbs - At Large 3

Michael Berry - At Large 4

Carroll G. Robinson - At Large 5



**CITY OF HOUSTON
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
P. O. BOX 1562
HOUSTON, TX 77251
713-837-7701**

WWW.HOUSTONPLANNING.COM

