

*The City of Houston
Planning & Development Department
2007 Annual Report*

MAKING A

DIFFERENCE

Mayor
Bill White

Controller
Annise Parker

Houston City Council Members

District A *Toni Lawrence*

District B *Jarvis Johnson*

District C *Anne Clutterbuck*

District D *Ada Edwards*

District E *Addie Wiseman*

District F *M. J. Khan*

District G *Pam Holm*

District H *Adrian Garcia*

District I *Carol Alvarado*

At Large Position 1 *Peter Brown*

At Large Position 2 *Sue Lovell*

At Large Position 3 *Melissa Noriega*

At Large Position 4 *Ronald Green*

At Large Position 5 *Michael Berry*





Planning *makes a difference!*



This year we emerged as a redefined Planning Department. We made great strides in protecting our cultural and historical assets in the City while setting in motion the wheels of change to create a better future for Houstonians.

Our city is changing. Population is increasing, and we are experiencing redevelopment in many parts of our city. We must harness that change and remain an economic engine for our region. Encouraging growth while ensuring healthy, vibrant neighborhoods is a challenge that requires careful planning. Our staff is up to that challenge.

In talking with employees of the Planning Department, one thing is clear. They are here to make a difference. Beyond the great public servants that they are, they have entered the field of planning because they know their work can change the course of a city.

Today, we see the effects of changes to development codes over the past 10 years. Changes to our tree and shrub ordinance led to a greener city. Lot size and building line protections led to preservation of neighborhood character in many urban neighborhoods. Changes to Chapter 42 led to a newly invigorated urban core.

We are once again at that moment in history where changes being made today will have an enormous impact on our city tomorrow. We are creating new rules to facilitate development along areas planned for light rail and guided rapid transit. We are adding new protections for neighborhoods. We are working on mobility plans, additional green space requirements and critical development changes that will encourage key growth patterns. For the first time, we are teaming up with other departments and building on each other's strengths and knowledge to make a difference.

We are also working on one of the most singularly important technological improvements in the history of the Planning Department. We are moving to an Enterprise Geographic Information System that, when completed, will support the real time sharing of data, GIS services and resources.

The process of planning requires a city to reflect deeply on its values, goals and vision for the future. If undertaken in an open, transparent and inclusive way, planning can provide legitimacy through consensus-building that will empower local government to act in decisive ways to shape a shared tomorrow. Planning makes a difference in the lives of all Houstonians.

Sincerely,

Marlene L. Gafrick
Director

Policies for growth *make a difference*

Land planning



The Planning Commission, a 26-member board appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council, reviews and approves subdivision and development plats.

The Commission also studies and makes recommendations to City Council on development issues in Houston. In FY 2007, the Commission reviewed and/or acted on changes related to suburban development, mixed use development, mobility, eliminating standard variances, impact of development, development of a general plan and additional protections for older neighborhoods. This resulted in ordinance amendments adopted by City Council regarding:

- + Amenities plans that allow applicants to use detention areas and get up to 100% credit for their compensating open space (required when lot sizes are smaller than standard lot sizes in Chapter 42) by providing certain amenities.
- + Clarifications for what standards reserves must meet in terms of minimum size, street type, street or shared driveway width and minimum street frontage.
- + Minimum lot size and building line protections that allow more areas to qualify.

Working through partnerships, the following items will be considered by City Council in FY 2008:

- + Park space/open space requirements for all residential plats.
- + Creation of rules for mixed use development/pedestrian oriented districts.
- + Revised rules for fire protection standards in development.
- + Revised street standards.
- + Access management rules and traffic impact analysis requirements.
- + Changes to support the lot size and building line protections for neighborhoods.



Urban corridors

The City of Houston, in partnership with METRO, the Main Street Coalition and numerous stakeholders, embarked on the Urban Corridor Planning initiative. It will result in modifications to the City's existing development regulations and infrastructure standards in order to create a quality urban environment in the areas surrounding METRO's light rail and guided rapid transit corridors: Main Street, Uptown, East End, North, Southeast and University. In FY 2007:

- + 700 people attended workshops regarding this process and provided input about their communities and opportunities for change along their corridors.
- + Initiated the process to draft policies and ordinances that will be presented in FY 2008.
- + Established a web site to promote Urban Corridor Planning and facilitate the review of information.

Mobility

The Department coordinates with city leaders and other agencies including Public Works and Engineering, METRO, Harris County, Texas Department of Transportation, the Harris County Toll Road Authority and other related entities. Projects initiated in FY 2007 include:

- + The process to create the first City Mobility Plan, a joint effort between Public Works and Engineering and Planning, will combine land use, development, traffic count and transit data to manage capital improvement project development and Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan updates. It will include traffic impact analysis and access management principles.
- + Revision of the Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan (MTFP) requiring workshops with applicants and increased opportunities for public participation.
- + Increased participation in Houston-Galveston Area Council's regional transportation planning process.



Planning for change *makes a difference*

Development compliance

The Department reviews subdivision plats; development site plans, and applications for the locations of certain types of development such as hotel/motels, hazardous material storage facilities and cellular towers to ensure compliance with the city's land development codes. The Department also reviews amendments to the Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan. In FY 2007:

- + 4,461 subdivision plats and 413 subdivision plat variances were reviewed.
- + 1,611 subdivision plats were recorded.
- + 1,182 development site plans and 35 development site plan variances were reviewed.
- + 37 cellular tower applications were reviewed of which nine were referred to the Tower Commission, a seven-member board that considers requests for waivers, appeals on disapproved towers, and appeals from affected property owners, associations or groups on tower permit applications. Five were approved by the Commission.
- + 12 hotel/motel applications were reviewed.
- + 11 major thoroughfare and freeway plan amendments were reviewed.

Expansion opportunities

The Department continued the policy of annexation for limited purposes. A municipal utility district may request a portion of that district be annexed for limited purposes through a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) approved by the utility district and City Council. Typically, the City levies a one cent sales tax that is divided equally between the utility district and the City. In FY 2007:

- + 30 new agreements were approved for a total of 124 SPAs. The program generated net revenue to the City of \$63.5 million.
- + The Department developed a system to improve the speed and accuracy of compiling business lists for each agreement.

Changes in our City

The Department researches and analyzes population growth and trends to provide accurate demographic data and estimates for the city. In FY 2007 the Department:

- + Successfully challenged the 2005 Census Bureau's numbers which underestimated Houston's population by 58, 607. The revised estimate brought the population total to 2,076,189.
- + Determined the number of Katrina evacuees that still reside in the Houston area as well as identified the number of evacuees that are still receiving economic assistance.
- + Provided neighborhood demographic data for the City's weatherization project.
- + Provided population forecast data for specific areas in the City to determine future major thoroughfares.
- + Analyzed population growth patterns for the City using new water/sewer connections, building permits and utility connections data.
- + Initiated work on U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 Local Update of Census Addressing (LUCA) for the City.

Development opportunities

The Department continually researches methods to facilitate growth inside the City limits. In FY 2007, the Department:

- + Facilitated a groundbreaking agreement to provide public finance assistance in order to ensure quality development inside the city limits.
- + Provided financial analysis on the various tools available for infrastructure improvements in areas undergoing significant redevelopment.
- + Began work on a City policy that addresses the use and implementation of public improvement districts.



Strong neighborhoods *make a difference*

Capacity Building

The Department helps to build the capacity of neighborhood organizations and super neighborhood councils. In FY 2007:

- + 130 citizens attended the Neighborhood Leadership Boot Camp held in collaboration with Texas Southern University. Topics included creative problem solving; partnerships and collaboration; recruiting, retaining and rewarding volunteers and developing and managing projects.
- + 25 representatives from two super neighborhoods attended a Project Institute designed to address community issues and improve neighborhoods through the completion of collaborative projects. The Independence Heights and Gulfton super neighborhood councils are initiating community projects.
- + 30 Hispanic leaders participated in a Spanish language Project Institute to increase civic awareness and involvement in the Hispanic community.
- + 40 youth attended a newly established Youth Leadership Institute to promote civic involvement.
- + 240 people attended the five workshops held in association with district council members on how to strengthen, amend, or create deed restrictions.



Sustaining neighborhoods

The Department supports programs and initiatives designed to encourage the stabilization or revitalization of neighborhoods. In FY 2007:

- + 42 super neighborhood action plans were submitted by super neighborhood councils and reviewed by staff.
- + 5 civic clubs sought to enact or amend deed restrictions in their neighborhoods through the Houston Bar Association's pro bono legal assistance program. The Department provided technical assistance and four are actively working on their restrictions.
- + 940 tax delinquent parcels were considered for possible inclusion in the City's Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority program.
- + 432 homes were identified, targeted and mapped for potential addition to the Houston Hope home repair program.

Neighborhood style

The City adopted amendments in FY 2007 that make processing applications to establish a lot size or a building line easier and changed the definition from "prevailing" to "minimum" making the protection available to all blockfaces inside Loop 610 without deed restrictions. In FY 2007:

- + 100 minimum lot size applications were processed by staff. Since the inception of the program, 201 lot size applications covering 517 block faces have been approved by Council.
- + 41 minimum building line applications were processed by staff. Since the program's inception, 86 building line applications covering 167 block faces have been approved by Council.



Historic preservation *makes a difference*

Our history

The Planning Department supports the Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission (HAHC) and works in conjunction with the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs on historic preservation. In FY 2007, this resulted in raising public awareness about preservation issues, eliminating barriers and providing incentives for preservation. Changes to the Historic Preservation Ordinance and related ordinances this year included:

- + Reducing support to initiate a historic district by petition to 51% making it easier for neighborhoods to apply for historic designation.
- + Prohibiting an owner who illegally demolishes a designated historic site from obtaining a building permit for two years.
- + Requiring HAHC to issue Certificates of Non-Designation and if the building is worthy of designation, the certificate will not be granted for 180 days to protect the site while the HAHC considers initiating designation and exploring other alternatives for preservation.
- + Simplifying and expediting the designation process.
- + Suspending demolition of properties in the Old Sixth Ward historic district pending the creation of a "protected district" where properties would not be subject to the 90-day waiver.
- + Providing a 100% exemption capped at \$30,000 per structure for certain historic structures originally built for commercial use and designated as a "protected landmark."

Our landmarks

The Department works with property owners in historic neighborhoods and of historic properties to encourage the preservation of these valuable historical attributes in Houston. In FY 2007:

- + 68 Certificates of Appropriateness were reviewed by staff of which 61 were approved by HAHC.
- + 65 properties were designated as historic landmarks and 26 were designated as protected landmarks by Council, a 264% increase over last year.
- + One historic district, Broadacres, was approved for a total of eight designated historic districts.
- + 400 customers were offered information on economic incentives for historic preservation.
- + 8 neighborhoods seeking designation received education and assistance from staff.



Access to Data and Sound Management *makes a difference*

Geographic information

The Department continued developing an enterprise geospatial system for the City's geographic information system (E-GIS). The long term goal is to create a regional GIS environment that supports sharing data, GIS services and resources among city departments, area governments, utilities and related agencies.

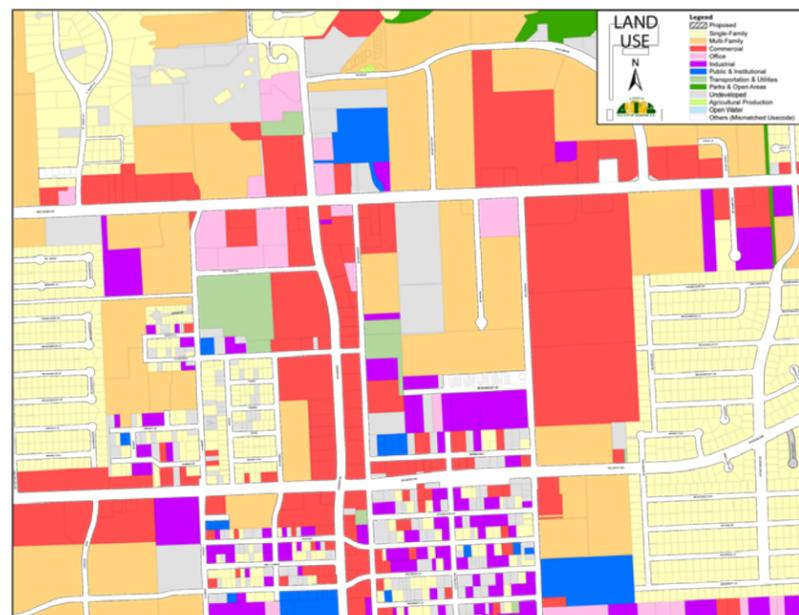
Once complete, E-GIS will:

- + Reduce overall costs of data management through standards-based data design.
- + Support citywide decision makers by designing and developing core GIS Services, specialized GIS applications and an enterprise geodatabase such as Citizensnet or online map data that can be manipulated for analysis.
- + Enable transparent, interdepartmental access to citywide data resources.
- + Design, develop and deploy web-based applications for improved public access to public information.

System improvements

The Department began revising the electronic plat processing system with the goal of making platting information more accessible to the public, streamlining work, and tying into our GIS. Improvements will include:

- + Improved street name search capability to rapidly research street name proposals to determine whether the names are duplicates and/or allowed according to street naming conventions.
- + Conversion of AutoCAD files submitted by applicants directly to GIS.
- + Templates for plat submittals provided to developers for use in submitting their plat proposals.
- + Better citizen access to view proposed plats.



Our philosophy is that the City is a team and that every department works together for the good of our citizens. The Planning Department teams with other city departments on numerous projects. We are more effective as a city when we build on each other's strengths.

Budget Numbers

	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Actual
Expenditures	\$7,154,739	\$6,839,000	\$7,882,858
Revenues	\$6,908,545	\$5,062,822	\$5,210,824

Staffing by section

Planning Services – Neighborhoods	20 employees
Planning Services – Development Services	41 employees
Geographic Information Systems	22 employees
Public Policy	7 employees
Management Services	22 employees



Expert Leadership *makes a difference*

Houston Planning Commission

Honorable Commissioner Ed Chance

John W.H. Chiang

David Collins

Kay Crooker

Honorable Judge Ed Emmett

Marlene Gafrick, Secretary

Sonny Garza

Honorable Commissioner Grady Prestage

James R. Jard

Carol Lewis Ph.D.

Mark A. Kilkenny

D. Fred Martinez

Robin Reed

Richard A. Rice

David Robinson

Jeff E. Ross

Lee Schlanger

Talmadge Sharp, Sr.

Jon Strange

Algenita Scott-Davis

Beth Wolff

Shaukat Zakaria

Alternate Members

D. Jesse Hegemier, P.E., Fort Bend County

Mark J. Mooney, P.E., Montgomery County

Jackie Freeman, P.E. Harris County



Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission

Faye B. Bryant

Rafael Longoria

Sharie Beale

Roger G. Moore

J.D. Bartell

C.K. Pang

Betty Trapp Chapman, Chair

Suraiya Saleem

Paul Fruge Jr.

Scott Slaney

Marlene L. Gafrick, Secretary

Phoebe Tudor, Vice Chair

Houston Tower Commission

Todd C. Litton, Chairperson

Dr. Shin-Shem Steven Pei

Marlene Gafrick, Secretary

Bessie M. Swindle

Elaine Gaskamp

Ray Bailey, FAIA

John Melcher

Eva Garcia Ninman

