Houston Midtown Livable Centers Study

Texas American Planning Association

2010 PROJECT PLANNING AWARD

2010 APA Texas Chapter Planning Awards - Entry Form

AWARD CATEGORY (check one - complete a separate entry form for each nomination)

__Comprehensive Planning Award
__ Current Planning Award
__Student Project Award
✓Project Planning Award
__ Community of the Year Award
__Texas Chapter Award (Section Only)
__Chapter President's Award
__Journalism Award
__Planning Commissioner Award
__Long Range Planning Award

Project Name: Houston - Livable Centers Study, Midtown TOD Plan

Nominee: Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)

Nominating Texas APA Member and Member Number: Rebecca Leonard - 109455

Address: 801 Congress Avenue, Suite 330

City/State/ZIP: Austin, TX 78701 Telephone: (512) 499-0229

Additional Contact: Patricia Albright

Address: 801 Congress Avenue, Suite 330

City/State/ZIP: Austin, TX 78701 Telephone: (512) 499-0222

APPLICANT CHECKLIST - Complete application packages should include the following documents:
All submittals are non-returnable.

✓ **Entry Form** - 10 copies

✓ **Nomination Summary Statement** (500 words or less) - 10 copies. ***Please do not exceed the imposed word limit or you risk not having the summary statement forwarded to the Committee*.**

✓ **Letter(s) of Recommendation (optional)** – As many as desired but 10 copies of each.

✓ **Support Materials** (reports, photographs, news articles, or other materials) - 10 copies
It is important that all 10 copies are received. Note that copies of a CDROM version are acceptable in lieu of large documents. *If you send one large document there is a good chance that the Committee will not have time to review it. This may affect the voting.*

___ **Video Tape or other media (optional)** - 10 copies

✓ **Application Fee** - $50.00 (payable to Texas APA)

Submit Completed entries to:
Cameron Walker, AICP, Texas APA Awards Committee Chairman,
City of Midland Planning Division, 300 N. Loraine, Midland, Texas 79701

Entries must be postmarked no later than Friday July 30, 2010.

H-GAC Livable Centers Study: Midtown TOD Plan

Houston, Texas

Located immediately south of Downtown Houston is Midtown, an emerging arts and entertainment district centered on a series of light rail stops directly linking both the Downtown and the Medical Center. Midtown began as an early 1900s suburban neighborhood. In the 1920s, commercial retail development replaced residential buildings, which only intensified through the 1950s when the U.S. saw an exodus of residents and businesses to the suburbs. New townhome and office developments were being lured back to the district by cheap and vacant land by the late 1970s and the recent construction of the METRO Red Line reinforced the neighborhood's status as an inner city frontier.

The aspiration of H-GAC's Livable Centers Program is to facilitate the creation of walkable, mixed-use places that provide multi-modal transportation options, improve environmental quality, and promote economic development. With commanding views of the Downtown skyline, access to a variety of historically and culturally significant neighborhoods, close proximity to Houston Community College and location between Downtown and the Medical District, it was determined that Midtown has the opportunity to emerge once again as an attractive location for high-quality development along the transit line.

The "Z" Connection

Despite its prime location and the national phenomenon of reinvestment in urban areas, Midtown is a neighborhood that has only minimally succeeded in encouraging redevelopment and eliminating blight. Even before the current real estate recession, new development has been stagnant. There is a significant gap, especially around the light rail station, between land prices and the development costs for the many vacant lots scattered throughout the neighborhood. Additional planning challenges included a lack of city process for plan adoption, lack of conventional zoning tools, minimal capital investment, and a splintered property ownership pattern in the community.

The interdisciplinary team of consultants included architects, planners, urban designers, economists, transportation and civil engineers and public engagement coordinators. The study team examined the existing conditions in the study area and identified three distinct, isolated sub-districts: the Design District with retailers to the west, the Station District with entertainment venues around the light rail station, and the Student District created by the Houston Community College to the east. Evaluating local infrastructure systems and networks led to recommendations on connectivity and integration. The team, local leaders, and change agents such as political representatives, property owners, community

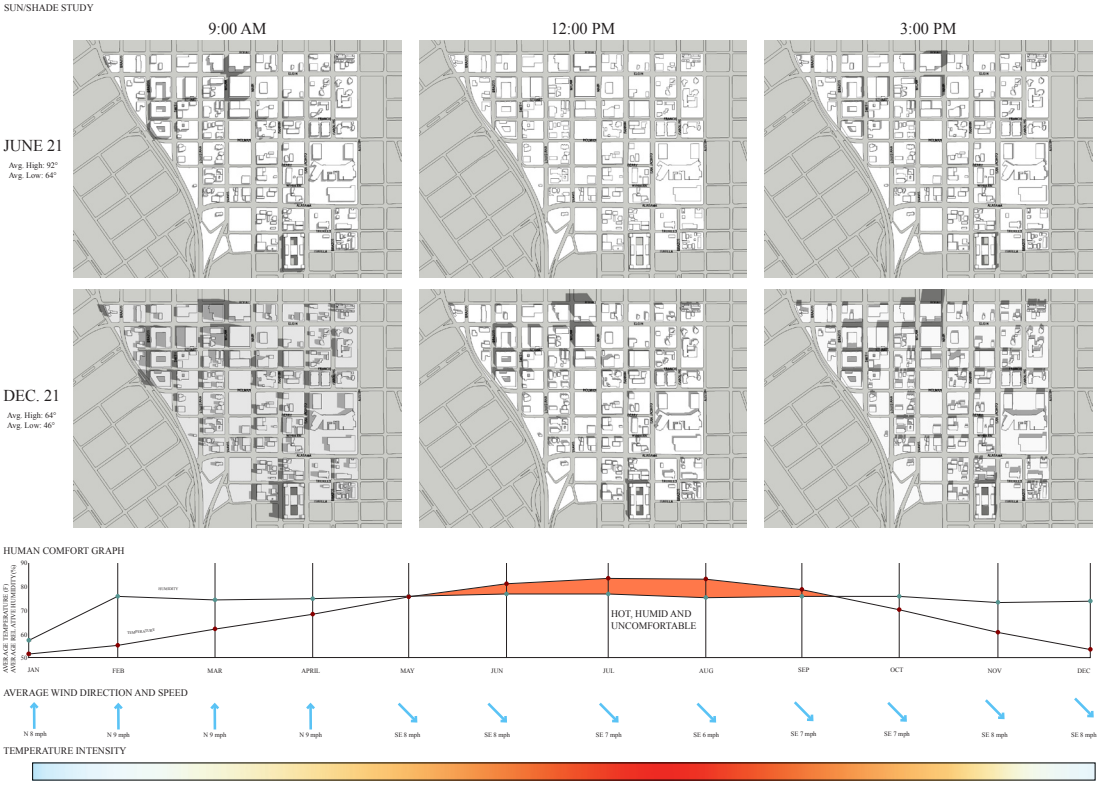
Existing Street Conditions

Proposed Urban Design Improvements

groups, and institutions in the district created a unified vision for the plan. The strategy is to build upon the current neighborhood patterns, develop catalyst projects that will inspire private investment, connect the districts, and meet the needs of the community for better services, affordable housing, and safer places.

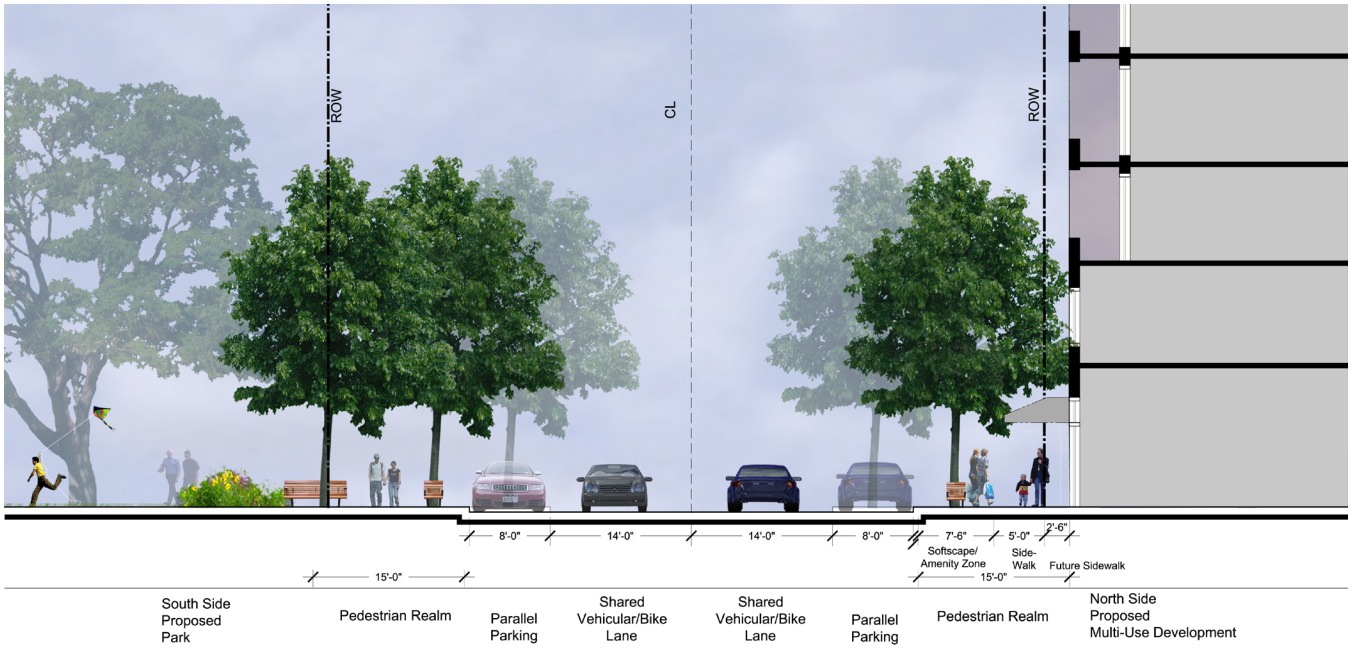
In an environment with no zoning and little land use regulation, the key to pushing a plan forward is developing support and cultivating relationships between stakeholders in the community. A critical path to realizing a vision in the area is finding the leaders that will take ownership of the vision and ensure that it grows and comes to fruition. This begins with a vision aligned with community objectives, focused work, and effective leadership.

Public Engagement



Human Comfort Analysis

Independent Art Collaborative Catalyst Project



Streetscape Vision

Houston-Galveston Area Council

July 29, 2010

Re: Letter of Support for the Nomination of the Houston-Galveston Area Council Livable Centers Study, Midtown, Houston, TOD Plan

To Whom It May Concern:

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) would like to express support for the nomination of the Livable Centers Study for the Midtown neighborhood of the City of Houston for the 2010 Texas Chapter APA Awards. The Midtown Livable Centers Study is an exemplary example of a plan that not only clearly articulates planning principles but also provides an effective implementation strategy, including an in-depth examination of how to address parking in dense mixed-use neighborhoods that is now being examined for potential adoption in a citywide parking ordinance revision. The study has helped to advance H-GAC's Livable Centers program by creating a dialogue not only in the Midtown neighborhood, but throughout the Houston region, regarding best planning practices.

In addition to its direct impact on Midtown Houston, this study will also have a spillover effect into the surrounding neighborhoods, thereby improving the quality of life for thousands of Houstonians. The study shows a deep understanding of planning principles and displays a broad knowledge of how the area will develop and change in the future. The study process also demonstrated a clear empathy for the views and concerns of the current residents and tenants while also steering the neighborhood firmly into the future.

On behalf of the Houston-Galveston Area Council, I respectfully request that the Texas APA consider the Livable Centers Study for the Midtown neighborhood for the City of Houston for application to the 2010 Texas Chapter APA Awards. I thank you and the committee in advance for your consideration of this worthy project. Please feel free to contact me at 713-993-2443 or meredith.dang@h-gac.com if you have any questions or if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Meredith Dang

Meredith Dang, AICP
Land Use Transportation Coordinator
Houston-Galveston Area Council

Mailing Address
PO Box 22777
Houston, Texas 77227-2777
Phone 713-627-3200

Recycled

Physical Address
3555 Timmons Lane, Suite 120
Houston, Texas 77027-6466
Phone 713-627-3200

Jewett | CONSULTING

Re: Letter of Support for the Nomination of the Houston-Galveston Area Council Livable Centers Study, Midtown, Houston, TOD Plan

To Whom It May Concern:

Jewett Consulting would like to express support for the nomination of the Livable Centers Study, Midtown, Houston, TOD Plan for the 2010 Texas Chapter APA Awards. The suggested outcomes of this study will improve Midtown and the entire city of Houston through its innovative approach to the developing Main Street light-rail corridor. The final report – delivered both verbally and graphically -- outlined the problems, analyses, and solutions in a clear and concise manner that made it understandable to both laymen and professionals in the planning field. Accompanying the thoughtful and forward-looking ideas presented in the report were effective implementation strategies.

In addition to its direct impact on Midtown Houston, this project will also have a spillover effect into the surrounding neighborhoods, thereby improving the quality of life for thousands of Houstonians. The project shows a deep understanding of planning principles and displays a broad knowledge of how the area will develop and change in the future. The project demonstrates a clear empathy for the views and concerns of the current residents and tenants while also steering the neighborhood firmly into the future.

On behalf of the Midtown neighborhood in Houston, I respectfully request that the Texas APA consider the Livable Centers Study, Midtown, Houston, TOD Plan for application to the 2010 Texas Chapter APA Awards.

Sincerely,

Jill Jewett

Jill Jewett

3333 W. Alabama, Suite 110 | Houston, Texas 77098 | 713.874.5875