



**PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT**

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

JANUARY 31, 2014

**Patrick Walsh, P.E.
Interim Director**

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- Foreign-born Population in Houston
- Foreign-born Residents by Region of Birth
- Top Five Languages Speak English “Less than Very Well” in Houston

Essential Documents

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

On July 31, 2013, Mayor Annise Parker signed Executive Order 1-17 under the authority of Article VI, Section 7a, of the City Charter of the City of Houston. The order mandates all City departments to establish policies for providing information about City services, programs, and activities to residents and visitors with limited English language proficiency (LEP).

The language access order calls for the translation of essential public information into five languages other than English for which there is the greatest need among Houston residents. The Office of International Communities, which oversees the project, will conduct a data-driven language needs assessment, working closely with City departments, international community leaders and stakeholders and university-based experts to identify the five languages that will be adopted into the plan.

The language access executive order is aligned with Mayor Parker's commitment to strengthening the city's economy and improving the quality of life for all Houstonians. The measure authorized city departments that provide essential services directly to the public to determine what type of information should be publicized and what languages should be used in the program.

In addition to the mandate presented by Executive Order 1-17, federal precedents exist for the provision of language access services and which are relevant to the City. The two main legal bases for language access are Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin, and 2000's Executive Order 13166, which affirms Title VI's language access requirement and outlines additional requirements. Any entity receiving federal support, even indirectly, is required to provide language access. Moreover, Title VI applies to a recipient's entire program or activity. This means all parts of a recipient's operations are covered, regardless of whether the recipient is only partially funded through federal funds. Language access requirements are therefore relevant to a wide variety of programs, services and activities provided by Houston city agencies.¹

As per the requirements of Executive Order 1-17, the Planning and Development Department has prepared this Language Access Plan ("LAP" or "Plan") in order to create a set of protocols for providing meaningful access to Department services, programs, and activities (both written and orally communicated) to LEP individuals.

¹ Executive Order 13166 can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2000-08-16/pdf/00-20938.pdf> and related guidance on implementation of the federal Executive Order can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2002-06-18/pdf/02-15207.pdf>

PLANNING DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

Interim Director:

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Houston, the 4th largest city in the United States, is a dynamic, growing city, rich in culture and diversity. The Planning and Development Department's mission is to work to ensure that it remains a vibrant and sustainable city by partnering with decision makers and the community to balance a spectrum of needs and interests while addressing the dynamics of growth and change.

Department Divisions:

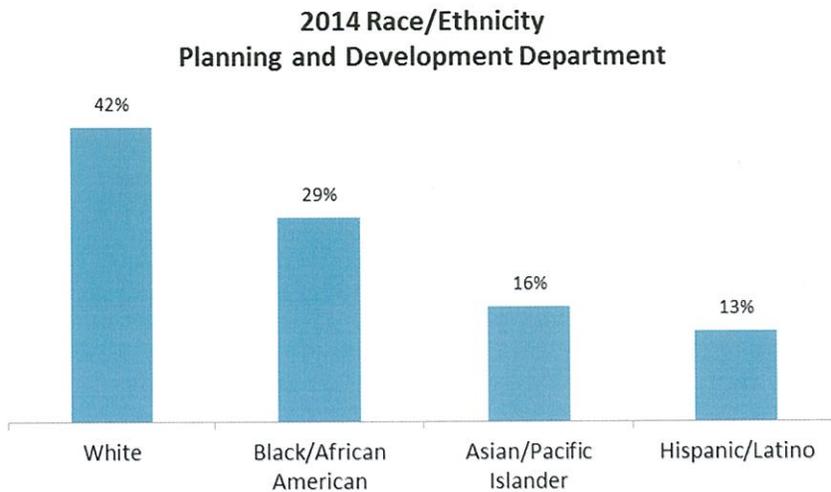
- Community Sustainability
- Development Services
- GIS Services
- Management Services

Planning for the Future:

- Annexations
- Land Development Review
- Neighborhood Preservation
- Historic Preservation
- Mobility Planning
- Building Lot lines
- Demographics, Growth and Analysis

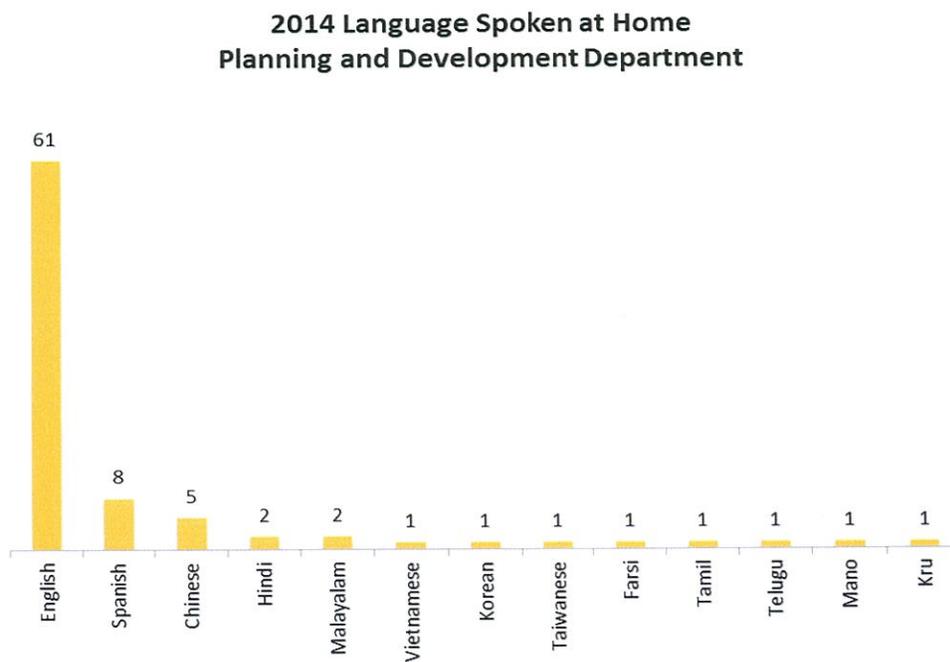
Race/Ethnicity:

The Planning and Development Department's staff distributed by race/ethnicity is shown in the chart below.



Language Spoken at Home:

Language Spoken at Home of the Planning and Development Department staff is shown below in numerical values. Farsi is spoken by Iranians; Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu are spoken by Asian Indians and Mano and Kru are spoken by Liberians.



KEY DEFINITIONS

Essential Public Information: As per the Executive Order, “Essential Public Information” is any information developed or used by the department and deemed vital for purposes of public safety, public health, and economic development. This term is used interchangeably with the term “vital documents.”

Executive Order 1-17: This is a policy directive signed by the Mayor that mandates all City departments to establish policies for providing information about City services, programs, and activities to residents and visitors with limited English language proficiency (LEP).

Interpretation & Translation: Taken verbatim from the US Department of Homeland Security’s 2012 Language Access plan²: “Interpretation involves *oral* communication. Translation involves *written* communication.

Interpretation involves the immediate communication of meaning from one language into another. An interpreter conveys meaning orally, as a result, interpretation requires skills different from those needed for translation. Interpreting is a complex task that combines several abilities beyond language competence in order to enable delivery of an effective professional interpretation in a given setting. From the standpoint of the user, a successful interpretation is one that faithfully and accurately conveys the meaning of the source language orally, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source message, without omissions, additions, or embellishments on the part of the interpreter. Professional interpreters are subject to specific codes of conduct and should be trained in interpretive skills, ethics, and subject-matter language.

DHS Components utilizing the services of interpreters should request information about certification, assessments taken, qualifications, experience, and training. Interpreters may be physically present, or, in appropriate circumstances, may appear via videoconferencing or telephonically. When videoconferencing or telephonic interpretation are used, options include connecting directly to a specific professional interpreter with known qualifications, or using a company that provides telephonic interpretation services and has in place quality control and privacy safeguards.

If bilingual staff is asked to interpret or translate, staff should be qualified to do so. Assessment of ability, training on interpreter ethics and standards, and clear policies, as noted below, that delineate appropriate use of bilingual staff, or contract interpreters and translators, will help ensure quality and effective use of resources.”³

² Definition available on pages 2 and 3 of US Department of Homeland Security February 2011 Language Access Plan, available at: http://www.lep.gov/guidance/040312_crcl-dhs-language-access-plan.pdf

³ For the purposes of this language access plan, the term “DHS Components” in the definition can be substituted for “Agencies”

iSpeak Cards: These are cards that can be used to help an LEP individual obtain interpretive services. LEP's are instructed to go online to find their language and print them. They can insert their name on the blank line on both the English and the non-English language statements. They then cut along the border lines, place back-to-back with adhesive (glue or paste), and laminate the card. They can keep these cards in their wallet to be used to help them get interpretive services when needed. You can access iSpeak cards at many online resources, including: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/civilrights/PG584.htm>

iSpeak Houston: This is the Mayor's designee for all language access activities in the City of Houston. As a part of the Department of Neighborhoods, iSpeak Houston oversees the City of Houston Language Access Task Force and liaisons with the City departments through the Language Access Coordinators, who also serve as members of the task force. In addition to serving as the hub for all language access activities, iSpeak Houston offers language access technical support and services to City of Houston staff.

Language Access Coordinator: These individuals are responsible for devising and ensuring that the City department they represent is in compliance with the Mayor's Executive Order 1-17, and that their department adheres to its language access policy directives, plan, and procedures to provide meaningful access to LEP persons. They also represent their department on the City of Houston Language Access Task Force.

Language Line/Telephone Interpreting: This is a service that connects human interpreters via telephone to individuals who wish to speak to each other but do not share a common language. The telephone interpreter converts the spoken language from one language to another, enabling listeners and speakers to understand each other. Interpretation over the telephone most often takes place in consecutive mode, which means that the interpreter waits until the speaker finishes an utterance before rendering the interpretation into the other language. Telephone interpreting is one modality or delivery mechanism for providing interpreting services. Other forms of delivering interpreting services include in-person interpreting and video interpreting for the deaf and hard of hearing. For the City of Houston, the service can be accessed through the 3-11 service help line at no cost to constituents. Departments that utilize the service line, however, will be assessed a fee for utilizing the service. Fees are charged by the minute, and fees per language may differ.

Limited English Proficient (LEP): For the purposes of this plan and the activities to be undertaken in its execution, an LEP individual is someone who is not able to speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with Department staff. Individuals maintain the right to self-identify as a LEP person and should not in any circumstances be expected to pay for translation or interpretation services in order to effectively communicate with the Department.

LANGUAGES COVERED

Executive Order 1-17 mandates City agencies to provide essential public information in a *minimum* of the City's top five languages spoken by LEP individuals. Given the particular nature of interaction, both orally and in writing, the Planning Department has with the public, the Planning Department has determined that the following languages will be covered for translation and interpretation services:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Chinese
- Arabic
- Urdu

The top five languages in the above list might not necessarily cover the languages of all individuals seeking programs, services, and activities from the department. In an effort to avoid the misperception of unequal services or uneven coverage of language access services to communities who speak languages not identified in the list, the department will follow the City-wide protocol for handling LEP individuals.

If a request is made for an essential document that is not available in the above list of languages, when feasible, the department will utilize the City-wide translation vendor to translate the requested essential document. The decision to translate the document will be determined by the department director, or his/her language access representative.

The selection for the five languages was approved by the Mayor. The data is from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2008-2012. The list of languages with selection rationale by the Houston Planning Department is found in the Appendix.

LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES

The Planning and Development Department proposes a number of activities to fulfill its responsibilities under Executive Order 1-17. The intention of the Department is to provide timely, quality language access services to city residents who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The Department ensures that its programs and activities would be accessible to individuals with LEP.

Translation of Essential Public Information

The Department will be responsible to create, develop and implement the written policies and procedures that ensure LEP individuals have reasonable access to its plans, programs and activities. The department will also update its policies and procedures as and when need arises. Currently the Department has eight bi-lingual staff who assist in Spanish translations during meetings and public hearings as needed. The department will use the following criteria for determining what constitutes Essential Public Information, what to translate or provide interpretation services for and how to assess the functioning of the plan:

- Managers will provide the Language Access Coordinator and the Department Director with a list of documents they consider essential/vital information.
- Managers will provide a brief written explanation of why they consider the documents/information essential.
- The Department Director will work with iSpeak Houston to review the documents.
- The Department Director will determine which information/documents are essential/vital for the department.

Implementation of Translation Services

Translation is the conversion of written text from one language into another. The Planning and Development Department will follow the below procedures to translate the essential public information:

- Documents will be translated using the City's approved vendor for translation/interpretation services in accordance with procedures set out by the administration.
- To ensure quality assurance, all documents that have been translated will be reviewed by the Community Language Access Committee of the Mayor's International Communities Advisory Task Force, and the Language Access Coordinators.
- If the documents are approved for translation, then they will be made available to the public online in PDF format on the Department's webpage.
- When feasible, the documents in print format will be made available in public areas.

- If the documents do not meet the quality assurance standards identified by the committee, then the committee will be sent back to the translation firm with specific instructions that will improve the content of the information.
- The revised documents will be submitted for review by the committee. If the documents are approved, they will be sent to the Department Director, who will send an approved copy of the document to the Division Manager.
- Copies of the approved document will be on file at the Department's Public Information Office.

Interpretation Services and Implementation

The Planning and Development Department will provide feasible, interpretation services when it conducts in-person or telephonic or otherwise orally-communicated business with LEP individuals. Refer to the Appendix for a copy of the Administrative Procedure.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND EMPLOYEE TRAINING

Reporting Requirements

The reporting requirements as laid out in the Executive Order 1-17, will be facilitated through the Mayor's designee, the Office of International Communities. Per the Executive Order, the reporting requirements are:

- 7.5.1 All Coordinators shall report plan progress, assessments and recommendations periodically to department heads and the Mayor's designee.
- 7.5.2 The Mayor's Designee will establish a reporting format, report submission interval and technical assistance to departments. Reporting logistics should be established within 6 months of this Executive Order.
- 7.5.3 The Mayor's Designee will work with the Coordinators to develop protocols used to measure the progress by the department, as well as by feedback from the public constituencies with limited English proficiency served by the City department.

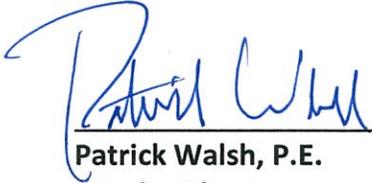
Employee Training

Under the requirements laid out in the Executive Order 1-17, the department will provide the following:

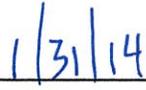
- All employees who routinely have direct, substantive interaction with the public (front-line employees) shall be trained in language access policies and procedures that shall include protocols for assisting LEP populations. Training shall be provided by the Mayor's designee.
- The Department will comply with all training requirements.

APPROVAL SIGNATURE PAGE

The Planning and Development Department's Language Access Plan was approved on January 31st, 2014, and was submitted on the same day to the Administration as required by Executive Order 1-17.



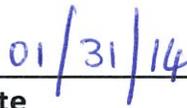
Patrick Walsh, P.E.
Interim Director



Date



Bala J Balachandran
Language Access Coordinator



Date

APPENDIX

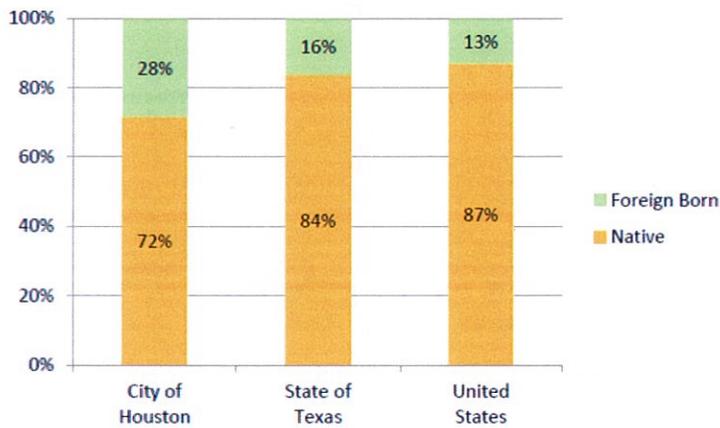
Foreign Born City of Houston, State of Texas and the United States



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Source: 2008-2012 American Community Survey,
US Census Bureau
Date: January 15, 2014

Foreign Born



- Foreign Born population is computed from the total population.
- 28% (of total persons) are Foreign Born in Houston compared to 16% and 13%, respectively for Texas and the United States.
- Houston's share of Foreign Born population (596,552 persons) is twice as much as in the United States.
- Among the Foreign Born population in Houston, 27% are naturalized US Citizens.

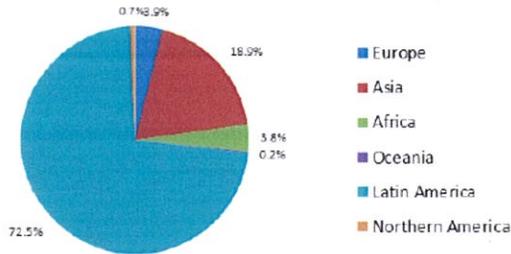
Foreign-born Residents by Region of Birth City of Houston, State of Texas and the United States



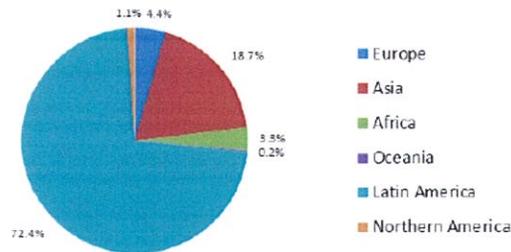
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Source: 2008-2-12 American Community Survey,
US Census Bureau
Date: January 16, 2014

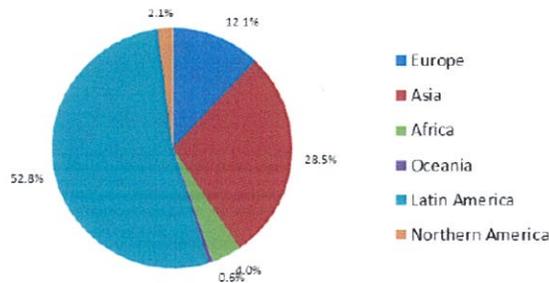
City of Houston



State of Texas



United States



- In Houston, of the total 2.1 million residents, about 595,000 or 28% are Foreign-born. If ranked, this population would make it the 39th largest city in the United States.
- Data compiled from the 'World Region of Birth of Foreign-born' table.
- The percentage share in City of Houston is a mirror image of the share of State of Texas. About one-fourth of the Foreign-born is from the combined regions of Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania and North America.
- Among the Foreign-born, the percentage share of Asian population in the United States is 10% higher than the share in City of Houston and in State of Texas.
- *Note1:* Oceania is the region consisting of Australia and proximate islands.
- *Note2:* Northern America excludes the United States.

Ability to Speak English “Less Than Very Well” in City of Houston



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Source: 2012 American Community Survey,
U.S. Census Bureau
Date: January 17, 2014

Introduction

Data on ‘Language spoken at home by Ability to Speak English’ were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. The data includes only population 5 years and over who have the ability to speak a language. This data is collected in an effort to measure the current use of languages other than English. The ACS collects information from a large annual sample of approximately 3 million housing unit addresses and therefore provides more reliable statistics. The usefulness of the self-rated English-speaking ability question was established in the 1980s.

Respondents were instructed to print the name of the non-English language spoken at home. If the person spoke more than one language other than English, the person was to report the language spoken more often.

City of Houston

English-speaking ability varied widely among the speakers of the top ten languages spoken in the City of Houston. The top ten languages spoken in Houston are: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, French or Creole, Urdu, Arabic, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines) and Korean.

The Census Bureau distinguishes the ability to speak English between “Very Well” and “Less Than Very Well”. In Houston, the “Less Than Very Well” category ranked numerically are, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, Korean, French or Creole, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines). Those who speak “Less Than Very Well” category varies between 397,429 persons (Spanish) being the highest and 1,551 persons (Philippines-Tagalog) being the lowest. The higher proportion indicates that they have a huge difficulty in conveying information clearly in English from normal conversations to obtaining assistance from non-profit organizations, Government etc.

Recommended 5 Languages based on numerical rank are (Speak English “Less than Very Well”): Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and Urdu.

Language Spoken at Home (Other than English)			
City of Houston			
	Speak English "Less Than Very Well"	Speak English "Very Well"	Total
Spanish or Creole	397,429	332,099	729,528
Vietnamese	21,584	11,701	33,285
Chinese	13,521	10,765	24,286
Arabic	3,324	5,256	8,580
Urdu	2,783	5,090	7,873
Korean	2,498	2,174	4,672
French or Creole	2,486	7,959	10,445
Hindi	2,041	6,162	8,203
Tagalog (Philippines)	1,551	5,434	6,985

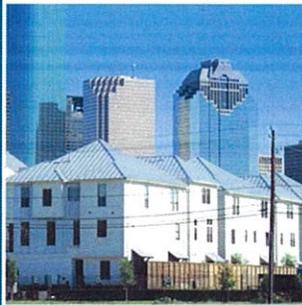
ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS

MAJOR MILESTONES

**HISTORIC
DESIGN
MANUAL**



**NEW LAND
DEVELOPMENT
RULES**



**PLAT
TRACKER**



**MOBILITY
PLANS**



**NEW
OFF STREET
PARKING
RULES**

Planning & Development Department Annual Report 2013

Dear Houstonians,

Our Fiscal Year 2013 Annual Report, “Major Milestones,” celebrates remarkable achievements of the Planning and Development Department. It was an active and successful year that not only brought about changes to our business practices, but also changes that will affect Houston.

Amendments to major ordinances were approved – *Chapter 26, the Off-Street Parking Ordinance* and *Chapter 42, the Land Subdivision Ordinance*. Both were updated to reflect new standards and development practices that support our growing community while ensuring adequate protections for our established neighborhoods.

The Department launched the long awaited update to our online plat submittal system named *Plat Tracker*. It is a game changer for how applicants submit plats and how review is handled along with increased transparency for the public to view the upcoming plats. This is a milestone we are particularly proud of as the work was done in house by a very dedicated team.

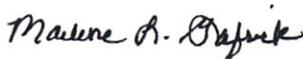
The Department’s increased focus on mobility meant the completion of some and the initiation of other *mobility plans* for specific areas in order to define both short-term and long-term projects. This is already having results and helping the City get ahead of transportation challenges related to growth.

The Department provided new products designed to provide extensive information on how to restore historic structures. These included the *Historic Preservation Fair* and the *Historic Design Manual*.

The Department also hit major milestones related to community education by producing 27 *Community U* events, covering information from deed restrictions to how to utilize new neighborhood lot character tools available with the adoption of Chapter 42 amendments.

The Planning and Development staff all contributed to creation and implementation of these and other accomplishments. This was an amazing year. I’m very proud of our staff and the work we do every day for Houstonians. We are pleased to have achieved these “Major Milestones.”

Sincerely,



Marlene L. Gafrick

Director



MILESTONES IN DEVELOPMENT

After six years of work, City Council approved the amendments to Chapter 42 and Chapter 10 of the Code of Ordinances.

These amendments provide additional resources for neighborhoods to manage their future, make the City more competitive with the suburbs outside the City limits, improve development standards that lead to a better quality built product, increase opportunity for single-family residential, and eliminate confusion/discrepancies contained within the existing code.

Changes were also approved to the City's Off-Street Parking Ordinance, found in Chapter 26 of the Code of Ordinances, largely untouched since it was first adopted in 1989.

The primary benefits includes rules that require and incentivize bike parking for new businesses, the ability for an area to establish a Special Parking Area with alternative standards to account for unique parking demands, reduced parking requirements for designated historic buildings and greater shared parking options between uses to reduce the total number of parking spaces needed. The Ordinance includes revised parking standards for many other uses to more accurately reflect today's needs.

PLATTRACKER

The Planning and Development Department developed and launched a new online plat application and review system known as Plat Tracker. www.HoustonPlatTracker.org. It is a web based program that allows land planners, civil engineers, and surveyors to submit subdivision plat applications for review and presentation to the Houston Planning Commission.

The application tracks the status of a plat in real time which allows transparency with applicants, the public, and other stakeholders about the latest proposed developments throughout the city. Plat Tracker is also connected to the My City website.

In FY 2013, the Department:

- » Reviewed 879 Development plats
- » Reviewed 2,178 Subdivision plats
- » Reviewed 15,137 plans
- » Recorded 1,171 plats



MILESTONES IN MOBILITY

The Department continued its focus on mobility planning, much of which is done in conjunction with the Public Works and Engineering Department and the Houston-Galveston Area Council. A series of sub-regional mobility plans being developed that will identify short, medium and long range projects intended to promote better mobility, and to consider and develop a multi modal classification for streets within the study area.

The results have led to proposed changes in our major thoroughfare classifications and further amendments to our Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan.

Projects Completed in FY 2013:

- Washington Avenue Livable Center Grant Study
- Inner West Loop Mobility Study
- East End Mobility Study
- Urban Houston Framework Study
- Mobile application for Consolidated Transportation Plan
- Review of 55 proposed Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan amendments

Projects Started in FY 2013:

- Heights-Northside Mobility Study
- Northwest Mobility Study
- Greater West Houston Subregional Planning Initiative
- Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant
- Regional Transportation Plan in conjunction with H-GAC
- Texas Medical Center Study

MILESTONES IN GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS

System developers in the Department's GIS division developed the Plat Tracker web based system. Plat Tracker includes GIS solutions that improve and quicken the planning business process, which is all made possible by requiring a computer aided design (CAD) standard file. Processing the CAD files into GIS makes proposed land development viewable by citizens quicker and more easily than ever before. It allows automation of other GIS data, which reduces human error and quickens the review process.

Plat Tracker was awarded a Public Technology Institute Solutions Award in the Technology Category for cities with population over 750,000.

Other GIS projects in FY 2013 included:

- » Integrated GIS personnel from the Houston Emergency Center (HEC) into Planning in order to improve efficiencies in 911 addressing and HEC GIS systems
- » The modification/creation of 53,540 addresses and 17,704 road segments

The Public Technology Institute Solutions award presented to the GIS staff for their work with Plat Tracker.



MILESTONES IN COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Community Tools

With the adoption of Chapter 42, the provision allowing neighborhoods to apply for tools to establish a minimum lot size or special building line are now available citywide. The ordinance also established a provision to create a minimum lot size area that covers up to 400 homes, or 500 homes in a platted subdivision.

Staff conducted 23 Community U training sessions across Houston to help communities understand how to apply for the new protections.

In FY 2013:

- » The Department reviewed nine Minimum Lot Size applications and one Special Building Line application.
- » The Department processed 13 new Prohibited Yard Parking (PYP) applications.
- » The Department produced one city-wide Community U conference and two local deed restrictions training sessions.



Community U! Conference was half-day event where residents learned about ideas and resources to improve their community.

Growth, Trend Analysis and Special Projects

The Department completed a number of special projects that included the release of demographic profiles of 11 council districts and updated demographic information for 88 super neighborhood areas. The Department completed the Loop 610 study that provided a snapshot of the forty-two mile loop around the traditional inner city of Houston. The report included information on housing, ethnicity, age, jobs, education, income, land use, population and a few other points.

Projects related to growth in FY 2013:

- » The Department facilitated strategic partnership agreements (SPAs) for the limited purpose annexation of 24 utility districts. There are currently 310 SPAs with 226 utility districts that have generated more than \$214 million for the City of Houston. The SPAs represent 6.5% of all sales taxes collected for the city.
- » The Department facilitated one full purpose annexation (The Commons at Lake Houston) adding 148 acres to the full purpose city boundary.
- » The Department assisted in the execution of more than 93 Industrial District agreements for properties in the Houston Ship Channel with annual revenues of \$14 million.

Historic Preservation

The Germantown Historic District was designated as the City's 20th Historic District. Germantown is a small wedge of land located east of Woodland Heights to the west, I-45. Of the 71 structures in the district, 83 percent are over 50 years of age and classified as contributing to the district.



The Department published an online how-to guide for the renovation of historic properties.

The Historic Preservation Manual provides information on how to modify or maintain a landmark or property located within a historic district; navigate the Certificate of Appropriateness process and the criteria used to evaluate and approve your historic property enhancement project and learn about the City of Houston's Historic Districts.

The Department held its first Historic Preservation Fair. The Fair provided residents and professionals the opportunity to interact and discuss challenges related to caring for older structures.

Topics covered alterations and additions to historic properties, repairing historic windows, historic district and landmark designation process, historic site tax exemptions, and appropriate new construction.

In FY 2013:

- » 19 new applications for Landmarks/Protected Landmarks were reviewed by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission. There are a total of 249 Historic Landmarks and 103 Protected Historic Landmarks designed by Ordinance.
- » The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission reviewed 395 Certificate of Appropriateness agenda items.

*Planning & Development
Department now has
plaques available for
purchase by owners of
historic landmarks and
protected landmarks.*

*Mayor Annise Parker holds the new
plaque for historic protected landmarks.*



HOUSTON PLANNING COMMISSION



Commissioners pictured left to right front row are Lisa Clark; Sonny Garza, Vice Chairman; Mark Kilkenny, Chairman; Marlene Gafrick, Planning Director and Susan Alleman. Back row: Linda Porras-Pirtle; Kenneth J. Bohan; Shaukat Zakaria; Eileen Subinsky; Raymond Anderson, P.E., Harris County representative; Truman C. Edminster III; Richard W. Stolleis, P.E., Fort Bend County representative; Antoine Bryant; Keiji Asakura; Paul Nelson; Mark Mooney, P.E. Montgomery County representative; James R. Jard; Marty Stein; Blake Tartt III and Algenita Davis. Not Pictured are Brandon Dudley and Fernando Brave

HOUSTON ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Commissioners pictured from left to right are Deputy Director Michael Schaffer, Secretary; Jorge Garcia-Herreros; Edie Archer; John Cosgrove; Phoebe Tudor, Chair; Minnette Boesel, Mayors Assistant for Cultural Affairs, Romulo Tim Cisneros; R. Maverick Welsh III; Vice Chairman, Ann Collum; Charles Stava; and David Bucek. Not pictured are Anna Mod, Debra Blacklock-Sloan, Rob D. Hellyer, Paul Homeyer and Douglas Elliott



HOUSTON TOWER COMMISSION



Commissioners pictured from left to right are Antonio M. Salinas; Christy B. Smidt; Rodney Louis Jones; Deputy Director Michael Schaffer; Rob Todd, Chair; John Melcher; Ignacio Osorio and Dr. Shin-Shem Steven Pei



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DEPARTMENT

For information on land development or to ask specific information on a plat:

Planning and Development Department
713-837-7701
(ask for Planner of the Day)

Public Affairs:
pd.planning@cityofhouston.net
www.houstonplanning.com

Classes of Plats

A **Class I plat** is only for residential and either amends a previous plat or:

1. Creates no more than four (4) lots, each fronting on an existing street;
2. Does not require or propose the creation of any new street;
3. Does not require or propose the dedication of any easement for public water, wastewater collection or storm sewer lines; and
4. Is not a replat.

There is a one-time submittal process for class I plats. Class I plats are not very common.

A **Class II plat/replat** is a subdivision plat that:

1. Does not require or propose the creation of any new street;
2. Does not require or propose the dedication of any easement for public water, wastewater collection or storm sewer lines; and
3. Can be a replat but does not require notification of adjacent property owners for replatting purposes.

There is a one-time submittal process. A variance or a special exception may be sought with a Class II plat/replat. All variance or special exception applications within the city limits of Houston require notification of adjacent property owners.

A **Class III plat/replat** is required for subdivisions that require or propose the creation of any new street or the dedication of any easement for public water, wastewater collection or storm sewer lines. A class III plat is also required for a voicing plat. A Class III plat requires two submittals: a preliminary and a final. A variance or a special exception may be sought with a Class III preliminary plat/replat and all variance or special exception applications within the city limits require notification of adjacent property owners. Objections from adjacent property owners should be raised during the preliminary platting process. A preliminary plat application can be filed on land that is being considered for purchase. In many cases, final purchase may depend on the outcome of the plat submittal.



2007

Planning and Development Department Land Regulation and Development



Houston Planning Commission

Approval by Planning Commission is often the first step required in the development process. The Planning Commission is a 25-member board appointed by the Mayor and approved by City Council with responsibility for reviewing and approving subdivision plats and variances in the City and the ETJ. The Commission also reviews development site plan variances within the city limits.

The Commission meets every other Thursday at 2:30 p.m. in City Hall annex chambers, 900 Bagby, unless otherwise posted. The agenda is posted three days in advance on the Department's web site at www.houstonplanning.com. Items on the agenda posted as consent are typically considered all in one grouping. Items considered separately include replats requiring a public hearing and variances.

Members of the public can sign up to speak on any agenda item at the meeting. Speakers are allowed two minutes and can only speak once per item (if the item is deferred, speakers must choose at which meeting to speak).

Platting

A plat provides for the subdivision of land that can be legally defined (i.e. Lot 29, block 19 of the Happy Trails subdivision). Subdivision plats are required to show how land will be subdivided. The plat must reflect adequate streets and right-of-way for the project. The plat is checked to assure it abides by all development rules as established by Chapter 42, the City's land development ordinance. By law, the Commission is required to approve plats that meet the requirements of Chapter 42.

Undeveloped land must be platted before development occurs. If land is platted, it can be replatted to further subdivide the existing subdivision plat or change the use of the property (i.e. from single-family to multi-family). Typically, a replat will make changes to the layout of lots, reserves, building setback lines and easements.

Plats must be considered and either approved or disapproved within 30 days or state law mandates that the plat is automatically approved if no action is taken. Plats can

The Department of Planning and Development regulates land development in Houston and within its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Since Houston is not a zoned city, development is governed by codes that address how property can be subdivided, but city codes do not speak to the land use. Deed restrictions are the only tool that restricts land use. Not all areas of Houston are deed restricted.

The Department reviews plats for compliance with development codes and recommends action on the plats to the City's Planning Commission. Plats are submitted to the city every two weeks for consideration by the Commission the following week.

The Department checks development and subdivision plats for the proper subdivision of land and for adequate street or right-of-way, building lines and for compliance with Chapter 42, the City's land development ordinance.

be deferred twice but action must be taken within the 30 days. Residents who were notified of a public hearing or variance will not receive a second notice if the item is deferred at Planning Commission. The item will automatically come up at the next Planning Commission meeting.

The Commission's authority on platting does not extend to land use and therefore cannot disapprove a plat because of the intended use of the property. Other issues applicable to land development such as adequate water, sewer and drainage are handled by other agencies and are not part of the Commission's authority regarding plat approval.

A plat must be prepared by a licensed surveyor, land planner and/or engineer and a licensed surveyor or engineer must sign the plat. If the property is located within Fort Bend County, a licensed engineer must sign the plat in addition to a licensed surveyor.

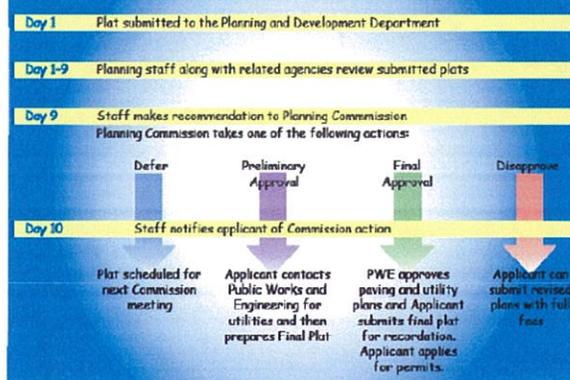
Replat requiring public hearing

A public hearing for a replat is required if single-family restrictions existed within the original plat boundary. Public hearings are held before Planning Commission during the meeting. Residents within 200 feet of the property replat and within the original subdivision boundary will be mailed letters of notification and a sign will be posted announcing the public hearing date. If there are no variances requested, Planning Commission must approve the replat if it meets all the rules according to Chapter 42 and does not violate state law. If the replat violates deed restrictions, the Planning Commission must disapprove the plat.

Variances

Planning Commission does have discretionary authority if a plat requires a variance or special exception. Residents in the city limits that are within 250 feet of the proposed development will be notified of certain variances and have a chance to offer input on how the variance will affect their neighborhood or property. A variance is a deviation from the strict compliance of the rules and regulations of Chapter 42. The applicant must document a reasonable hardship for the variance. This usually means that applying the rules of Chapter 42 would make the land difficult to develop without the variance or that the rules applied to the project are contrary to sound public policy.

The Platting Process



Single-family

Single family designation under Chapter 42 can include more than one housing structure. Examples include a duplex or a house with a garage apartment under 900 square feet. If an area is deed restricted, the restrictions must restrict number of structures and type of structures on a lot to prohibit this type of development.

Reserves

Many plats may include tracts platted as unrestricted or restricted reserves. An unrestricted reserve can be any commercial or non-single-family residential application (i.e. retail center, apartment, office building). A restricted reserve is for non single-family residential purposes but designates the use for the property. An owner can sell off pieces of a reserve but cannot sell off pieces of a single family plat.

Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ)

The City reviews plats in the ETJ which is the area extending approximately five miles beyond Houston's corporate limits into the unincorporated areas of Harris, Fort Bend, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller counties. These areas however are not subject to the City's permitting and building inspection regulations.

Next Steps

Site Plan

Site plans are required for all buildings constructed in the city limits. Site plans are also required if a building is remodeled and the remodeling changes the footprint of the structure. The site plan must include parking, landscaping, building lines, and setbacks. The site plan will show how the structure(s) sits on the lot and how the public accesses the property (i.e. driveway connections). The site plan is reviewed when the owner/builder applies for a building permit.

Permitting

All construction within the city limits must be permitted. This is handled by the Department of Public Works and Engineering's Planning and Development Services Division. City staff reviews the details (blueprints) of the actual construction project. The application must adhere to the City's building code and related construction codes. For more information about this process, contact Public Works at 832-394-9000 or log onto the Public Works and Engineering web site at <http://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org>. It is during the permitting process that applications are reviewed for water and wastewater capacity, drainage and infrastructure.

What's planned for your neighborhood?

Using online resources to research activity



One question that arises on a regular basis is what development is planned for my area. There is no easy answer to this question, but if you track several resources you can stay informed about new development or redevelopment in your area.

Platting

If a tract of land is being subdivided, a developer/owner must file a plat. If land is already subdivided and the developer/owner wants to change the original platting, they would file a replat. These plats and replats are considered every other week (Thursdays) by the Houston Planning Commission. An email notification is sent every other week that contains items to be considered by the Planning Commission.

To subscribe to this report, go to www.houstonplanning.com and click on Publications, then subscribe to our e-newsletter and sign up for the Plat Summary E-report. The report is in an Excel spreadsheet and you can sort by zip code or key map area to see proposed projects in your area. Aside from the report, you can also pull up the biweekly agenda if you select the Planning Commission button from the same web site and click on "Planning Commission Agenda/DRC system."

If you have questions about a particular plat, the number to the applicant is listed on the report, or you can call the Planning Department's Planner of the Day at 713-837-7701.

Permits

All construction projects (both new and remodel) inside the Houston city limits are required to have building permits. You can track permits by signing up for the weekly email notification of permits using the same site above for platting, but click on "E-permit report." For questions about a particular permit, you can call 832-394-9000. To research permit data, go to www.houstonpermitting.center.org and click on "Code Enforcement Permits" then click "Online Permits."

Other resources

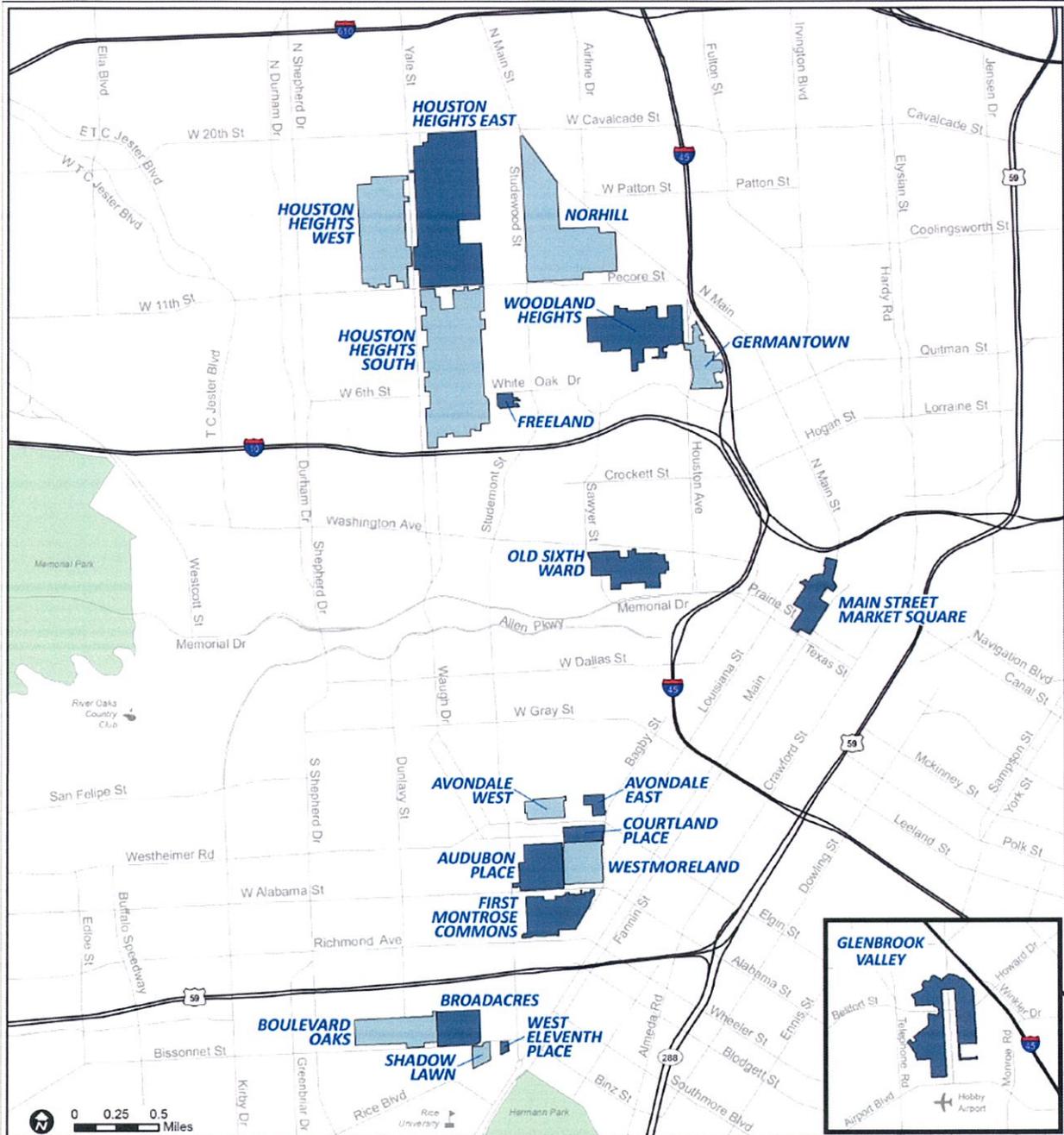
You can check the weekly City Council agenda at <http://www.houstontx.gov/citysec/agenda.html> to check for everything from street construction projects to affordable housing projects that are receiving city funds. If you have questions about a particular item, contact your city council member (<http://www.houstontx.gov/council/index.html>).

For property ownership information, go to the Harris County Appraisal District at www.hcad.org.

To receive periodic emails on important city issues of interest to you or your neighborhood, sign up with CitizensNet at: <http://cohapp.cityofhouston.gov/citizensnet/>.



Revised January 2012



City of Houston Historic Districts

Source: GIS Services Division
 Date: 5/14/2013
 Reference: pj17110

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PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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