

# **sunnyside**

healthy community design

**ideas book**



## SUNNYSIDE: Healthy Community Design Ideas Book

Community Design Resource Center  
University of Houston  
in partnership with the  
Community Transformation Initiative  
through the Houston Department of  
Health and Human Services

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# Introduction



# Introduction

Community Transformation is a movement taking place across the nation that is changing the way we look at health and prevention of chronic diseases. Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a strategy to improve the health of the population by addressing factors outside the health system that have important health effects. These factors relate to our common life: what we eat and drink, where we live, how we work and how we spend our leisure time which may have positive or negative effects on our health.

The HiAP approach has gained support from health advocates in the United States. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) acknowledges that policies made outside of the health sector shape the environments people live in and the choices they make. They note that some public health problems are sufficiently complex that they are best tackled not just through traditional health policy but also through policies and issues that affect the social determinants of health such as schools, zoning, food advertising, public transportation, parks, workplaces, restaurants, and tax policy. The IOM recommends implementing a HiAP approach in order to more fully address the determinants of health, better coordinate efforts across sectors, and more effectively use public resources.

The National Prevention Strategy, published in June 2011, calls for increased coordination between government agencies, as well as partnerships with community organizations, businesses, healthcare providers, and others. The National Prevention Strategy prioritizes work around four strategic directions: creating healthy community environments, empowering individuals to make healthy choices, integrating clinical and community preventive services, and reducing health disparities. This can be accomplished, for example, through ensuring more neighborhoods have better access to fruits and vegetables, opportunities for physical activity, active transportation options, and clean air.

The Community Transformation Initiative through the Houston Department of Health and Human Services has promoted a Health in All Policies approach in its recent efforts. This project in collaboration with the University of Houston's College of Architecture and the Community Design Resource Center (CDRC) represents one current example of this approach.

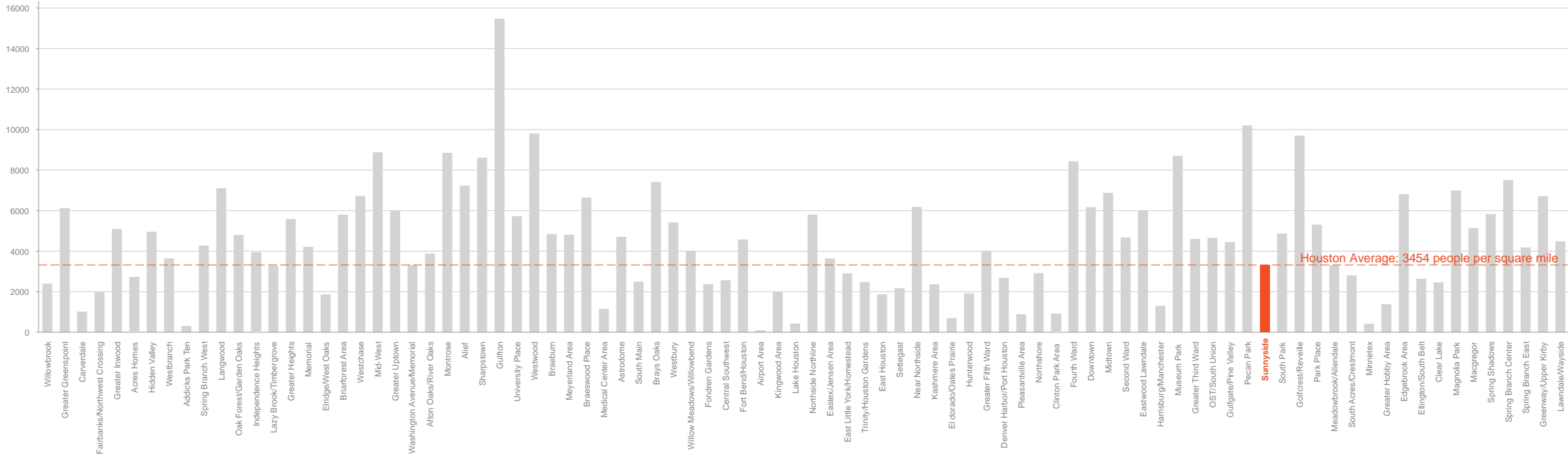
Our partnership with the College of Architecture and the CDRC has been mutually beneficial. For example, students and faculty at the College of Architecture and CDRC have integrated ideas about healthy communities into a comprehensive approach to community change. At the same time, the Community Transformation Initiative team has an increased understanding of the built environment and has gained new insights into the challenges and opportunities for health impact planning. Another key element of our collaborative approach has been to actively engage community leaders and stakeholders in the process, bringing community voices to the table as partners in our efforts to imagine and create healthy communities. This has included a series of community meetings and listening sessions held in each neighborhood. Finally, experts and professionals from a diverse array of disciplines, including community development, public health, urban planning, architecture, and non-profit leaders shared their expertise with community stakeholders at a day long community design charrette. In the end our goal has been to create a collaborative and comprehensive approach to community health and community design that is based in partnership, and works across disciplines, policies and scales to generate real solutions.

# Context

# Context

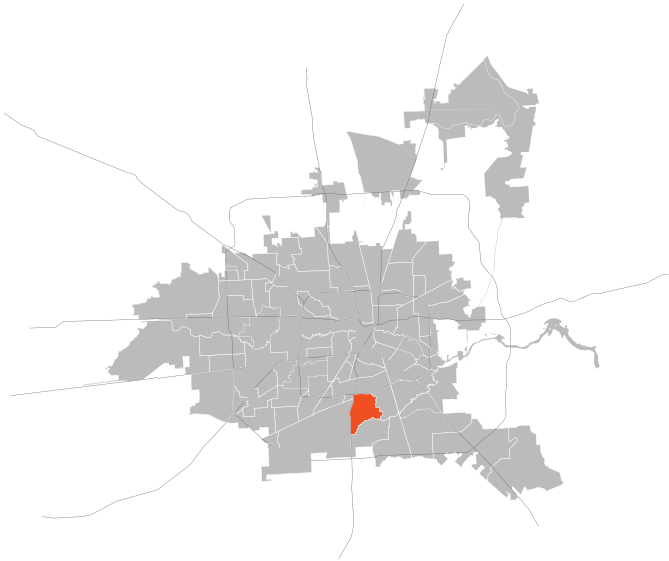


BELOW: Population Density by Super Neighborhood, 2010  
BELOW, Right: Sunnyside Location Map



communities as a means to shape and create new jobs, enhancing access to open spaces, recreation, and trails as means to build healthier communities, and working towards achieving sustainability in its fullest and most meaningful definition—which includes achieving a balance between equity, economy, and ecology in all that we do.

Participatory, proactive, and asset-based community processes have the potential to point us towards opportunities for meaningful and sustainable change that will create thriving and healthy communities. To this end the strategies included in the Sunnyside Healthy Community Design Ideas Book have been developed over the course of a year and based on interdisciplinary problem-solving, community engagement and collaboration. Nearly 100 people from diverse backgrounds, including students, residents, stakeholders, and professionals have been engaged in the process. The publication is intended to be a guide, or toolbox, for change—as well as point to potential strategies and tactics in communities across the country.





Houston, the fourth largest city in the U.S., is a study in contradictions. It is simultaneously diverse and divided, connected and isolated, sprawling and dense, rich and poor, urban and rural. In Houston, and across the nation, health is directly related to the socio-economic conditions of our neighborhoods. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that “the socioeconomic circumstances of persons and where they live and work strongly influence their health.”

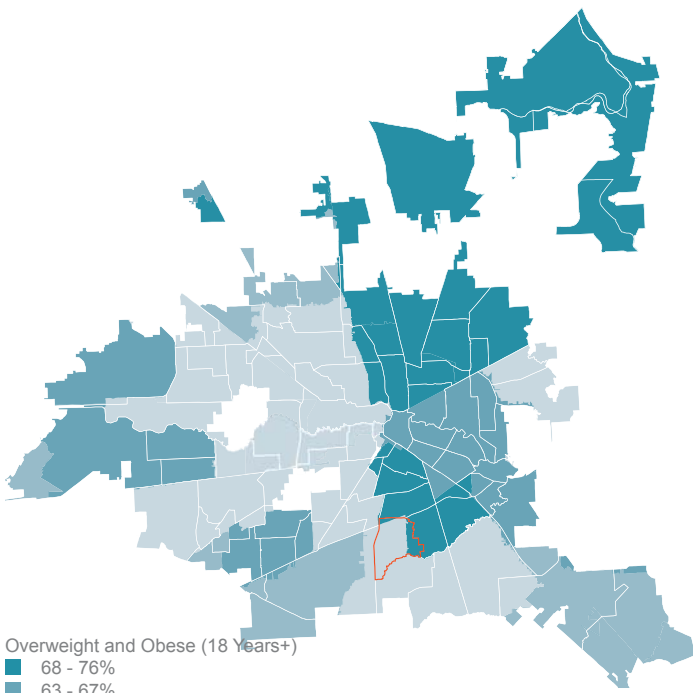
Houston, while incredibly diverse, is also profoundly divided by income, education, and opportunity. This division is reinforced by ethnic and gender disparities that continue to define inequality in the city. The socioeconomic conditions that divide us have also created geographic disparities where some neighborhoods are rich with resources and others are without even the most basic of necessities. Finally, the neighborhoods that face the most

severe economic hardships are more often than not the same neighborhoods that have significant health challenges.

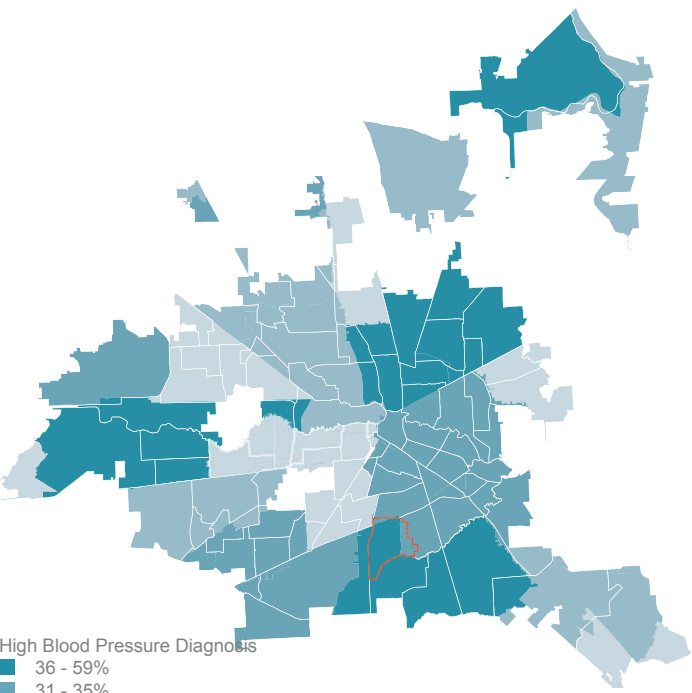
Community design has a role to play in advocating for and creating healthy communities. The first step is to understand and illustrate the qualities and conditions that exist in our neighborhoods and identify both the assets and constraints. The second step is to understand the factors that design has the power to impact. For example, design can influence the quality of public spaces, creating attractive and useful places for exercise, recreation and play. Design can impact safety by working to ensure that places are active, visible, and free from hazards. Design can transform our neighborhoods, by advocating for development that is compact, walkable, and affordable. Design can help to create alternative networks for pedestrians and cyclists. And finally, design has the power to innovate, creating new models for

partnerships and processes that have the potential to transform neighborhoods.

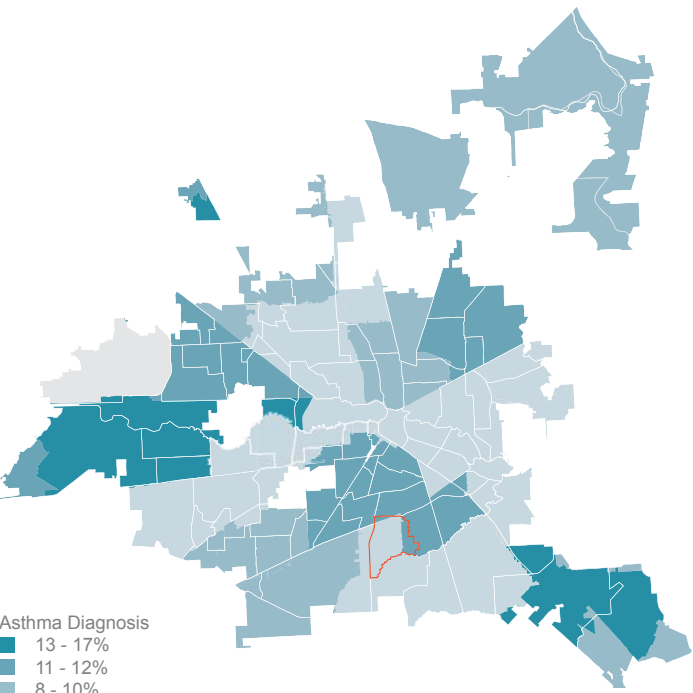
As health care costs continue to escalate and decades of gains in longevity are at risk because of sedentary and unhealthy lifestyles there is a new emphasis on the relationship between where we live and our health. This emerging emphasis points to the need for new ways of thinking about change in our neighborhoods, and the need for a new process that departs from standard ideas about planning and design to create a more inter-disciplinary and dynamic process which incorporates a comprehensive vision for community health. Healthy communities are a goal across the nation, and a hope for Houston. By focusing on creating healthy communities we can begin to move toward a goal of ensuring that all of our residents have the opportunity for healthy and productive lives.



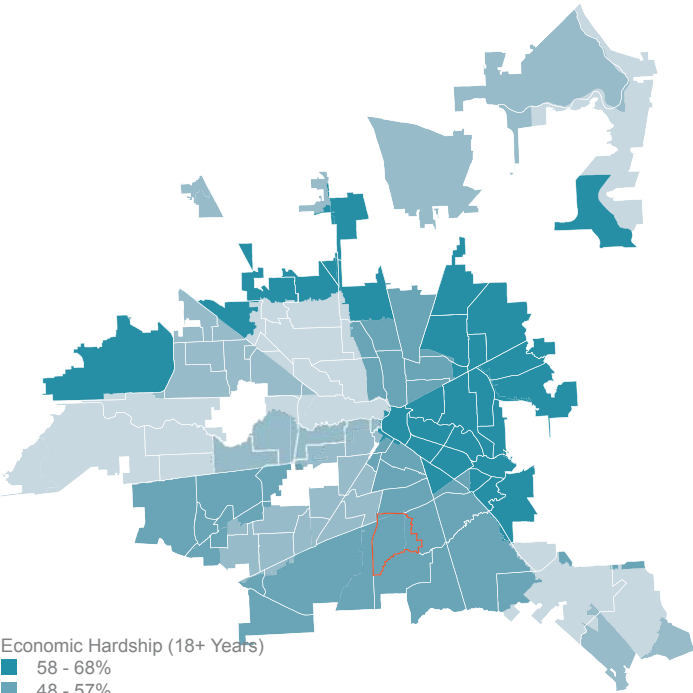
Houston Average: 63%  
Source: Health of Houston Survey 2010



Houston Average: 30%  
Source: Health of Houston Survey 2010



Houston Average: 9%  
Source: Health of Houston Survey 2010



Houston Average: 48%  
Source: Health of Houston Survey 2010

# Health and Community Design

The built environment, including our homes, businesses, parks and green spaces, infrastructure, transportation networks, and public buildings, shape our neighborhoods. These same factors impact opportunities for walkability, economic opportunity, recreation, play, safety, social cohesion and health—in other words these factors are both determinants of the health of a neighborhood and determined by the health of a neighborhood.

As a result the neighborhoods where we live impact our chances to live healthy lives, rich with opportunities. In cities across the U.S., including Houston, the distribution of resources and the quality of our built environments, public spaces and neighborhoods are not equal. The socio-economic context of our neighborhoods— income, race, housing, education, and employment—is more often than not directly correlated to the health of the people that call them home. Some neighborhoods have plentiful fresh food options while others are food deserts, some neighborhoods have well-maintained parks while others do not, and some neighborhoods thrive while others decline.

The goal of this project has been to identify the determinants of health that can be impacted by community design. Much work has been done to this end over the last decade, as more and more resources are expended on addressing existing individual health problems, instead of understanding how the larger environment effects health issues and proactively working to ensure that all of our communities and the people who call them home have an opportunity to be healthy. At the national level, the Healthy People 2020 program includes two broad goals that can be addressed through community design. First, creating social and physical environments that promote good health for all. Second, promoting quality of life, healthy development, and healthy behaviors across all life stages.

Seven strategies for building healthy communities were identified. The strategies include: Food Security, Education, Environmental Justice, Neighborhood Stability, Economic Opportunity, Safety, and Public Spaces and Amenities. Each strategy is defined and detailed on the pages that follow, including the potential impacts.

"Where people live affects their health and chances of leading flourishing lives."

World Health Organization

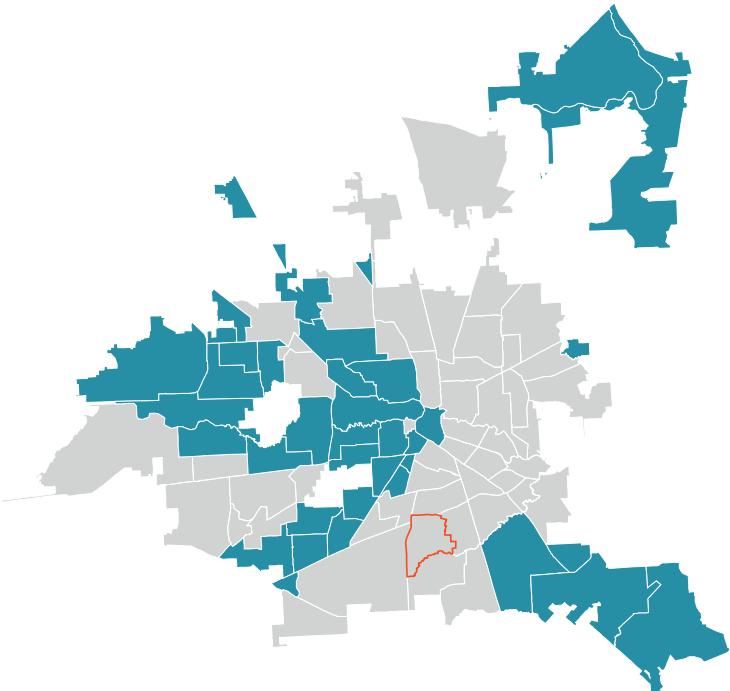
## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Healthy communities depend on healthy economies, equity, and opportunities to succeed, including:

- Employment opportunities
- Access to employment resources, such as computers, job training and learning opportunities
- Wealth building opportunities such as home ownership
- Local businesses
- Entrepreneurial opportunities
- Access to banking services

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- Reduced Stress
- Improved Personal Health
- Greater Equity and Family Wealth
- Safer Neighborhood Greater Social Cohesion
- Improved Property Values



Median Household Income (2010)  
■ Above Median  
■ Below Median

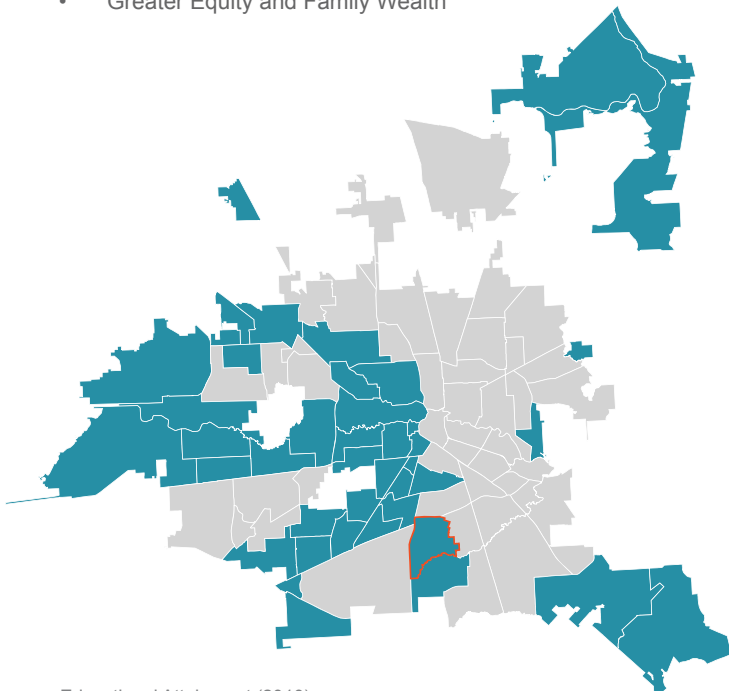
## EDUCATION

Education is the foundation for our future, ensuring quality school environments and lifelong learning opportunities enhances economic success and community health, including:

- Schools that are the center of communities, with shared spaces, resources and programs
- Multi-generational learning opportunities
- Quality after-school programming

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- Increased Physical Activity
- Reduced Obesity
- Improved Personal Health
- Community Activation
- Safer Neighborhood
- Greater Social Cohesion
- Economic Prosperity
- Greater Equity and Family Wealth



Educational Attainment (2010)  
Percent of Population over 25 years  
With a High School Diploma  
■ Above Houston Average (74%)  
■ Below Houston Average

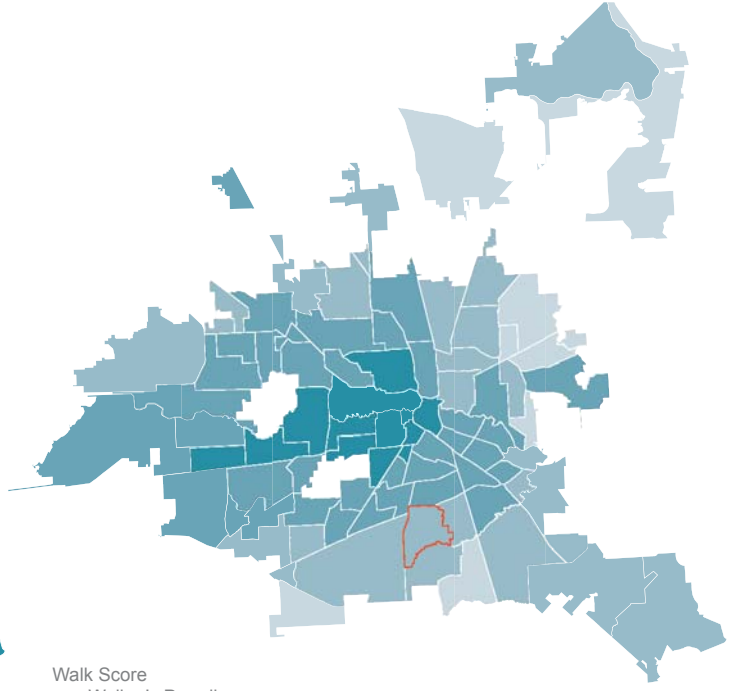
## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

A neighborhood free from environmental hazards is a healthier community, including:

- Accessible waste and recycling systems to eliminate litter and dumping
- Freedom from pollution, including hazardous air, soils and industries
- Elimination of blight and abandoned or hazardous properties
- Transit options that eliminate air pollution

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- Improved Personal Health
- Community Activation
- Reduced Stress
- Improved Property Values



Walk Score  
■ Walker's Paradise  
■ Very Walkable  
■ Somewhat Walkable  
■ Car Dependent  
■ Extremely Car Dependent

**FOOD SECURITY**

Creating neighborhoods where the healthy choice is the easy choice begins with the basics, access to healthy food, including:

- Convenient access to fresh, affordable, and nutritious foods, whether at nearby grocery stores, community gardens, or local farmers markets
- Healthy restaurant options
- Limited fast food, liquor and convenient stores
- Urban farming and garden programs
- Nutrition and cooking classes

**POTENTIAL IMPACTS**

- Healthy Eating
- Increased Physical Activity
- Reduced Obesity
- Improved Personal Health
- Greater Social Cohesion

**NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY**

The strength and stability of a neighborhood impacts the health of residents through social engagement, ownership and empowerment, including:

- Building community pride and identity
- Engaging residents to invest in their neighborhood
- Locally organized civic events to bring people together
- Multi-generational activities, especially at schools or senior centers
- Programs that celebrate the history and future of a neighborhood

**POTENTIAL IMPACTS**

- Community Activation
- Safer Neighborhood
- Greater Social Cohesion
- Increased Community Pride
- Reduced Stress
- Improved Property Values

**PUBLIC SPACES AND AMENITIES**

Neighborhoods designed to promote healthy lifestyles have quality public spaces and the infrastructure to make it easy to walk or bike as part of a daily routine, including:

- Complete Streets (streets designed for transit, pedestrians, and cyclists)
- Greenery and shade along pedestrian routes
- Wide sidewalks
- Dense, mixed-use and mixed-income neighborhoods
- Accessible libraries, clinics, parks, schools and recreational centers
- Safe routes to schools

**POTENTIAL IMPACTS**

- Increased Physical Activity
- Reduced Obesity
- Improved Personal Health
- Community Activation
- Safer Neighborhood
- Greater Social Cohesion

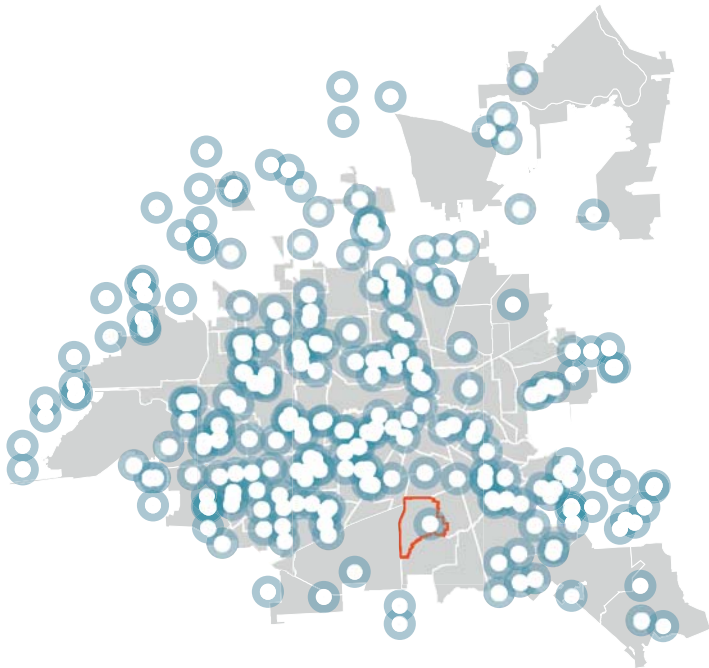
**SAFETY**

A healthy community is a safe community, and safety is influenced by how well a neighborhood is cared for, including:

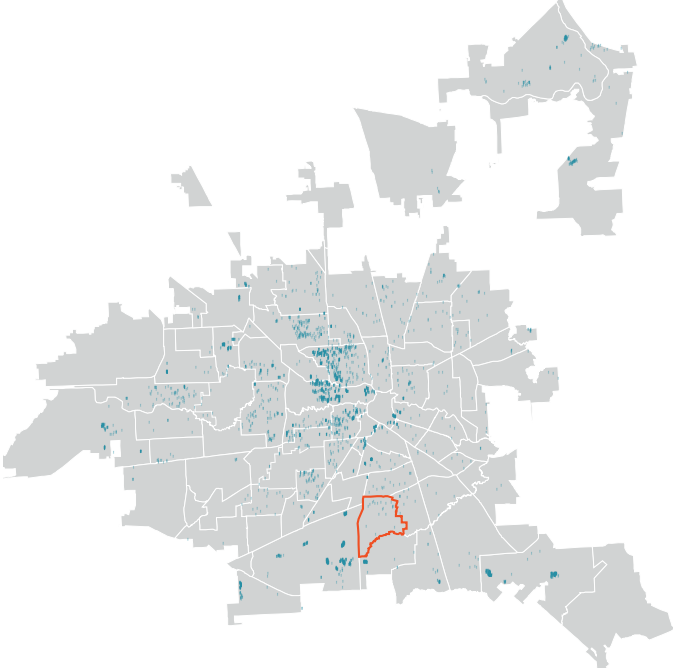
- Freedom from crime and violence
- Adequate street lighting
- Freedom from stray animals
- Resident led safety programs, for example Neighborhood Watch
- Well maintained vacant lots and vacant homes
- No littering or dumping

**POTENTIAL IMPACTS**

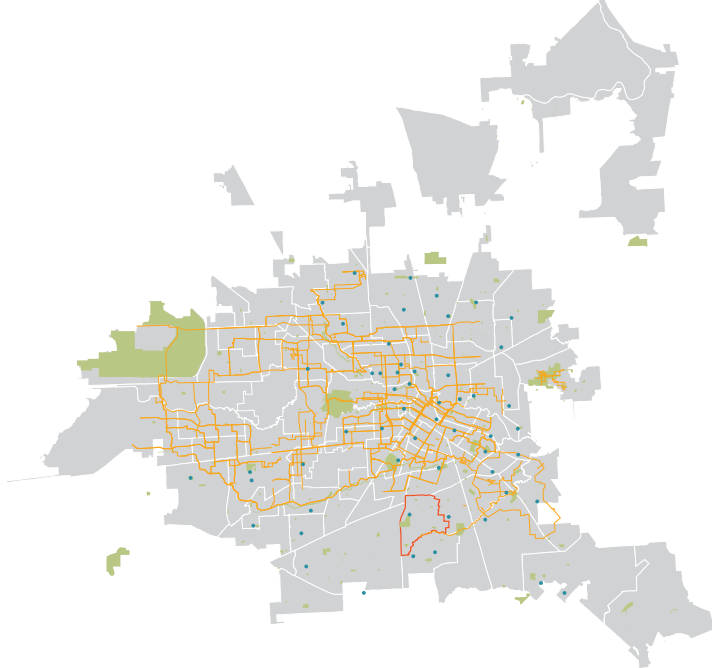
- Increased Physical Activity
- Reduced Obesity
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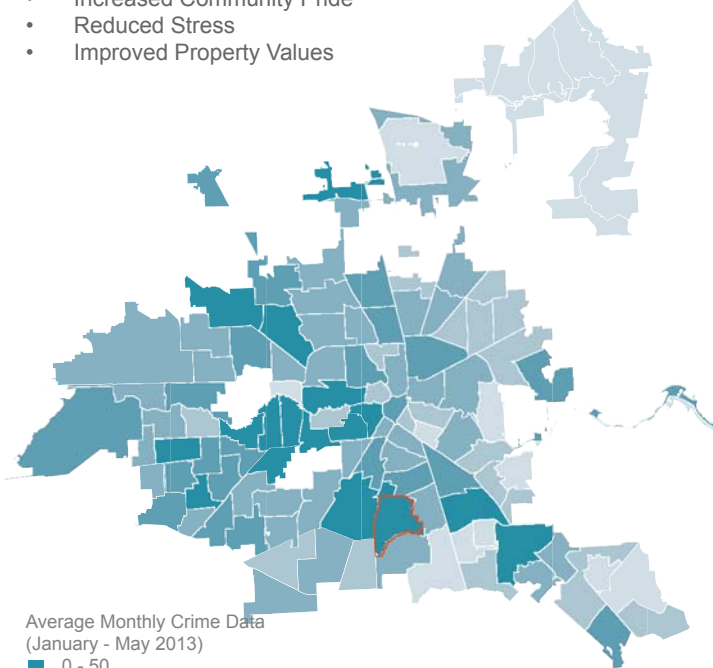
Map of Grocery Stores (2011)



Single-Family Housing Permits (2012)

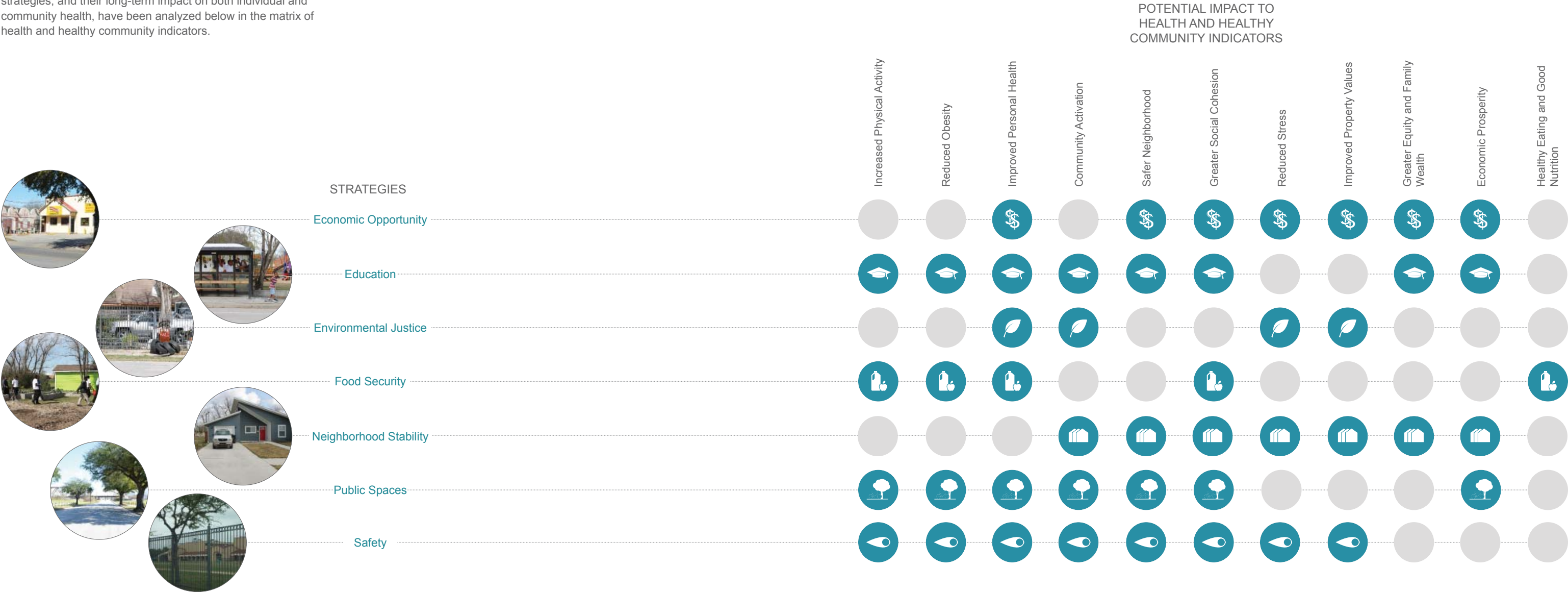


Public Amenities  
Parks  
Bike Routes  
Community Centers

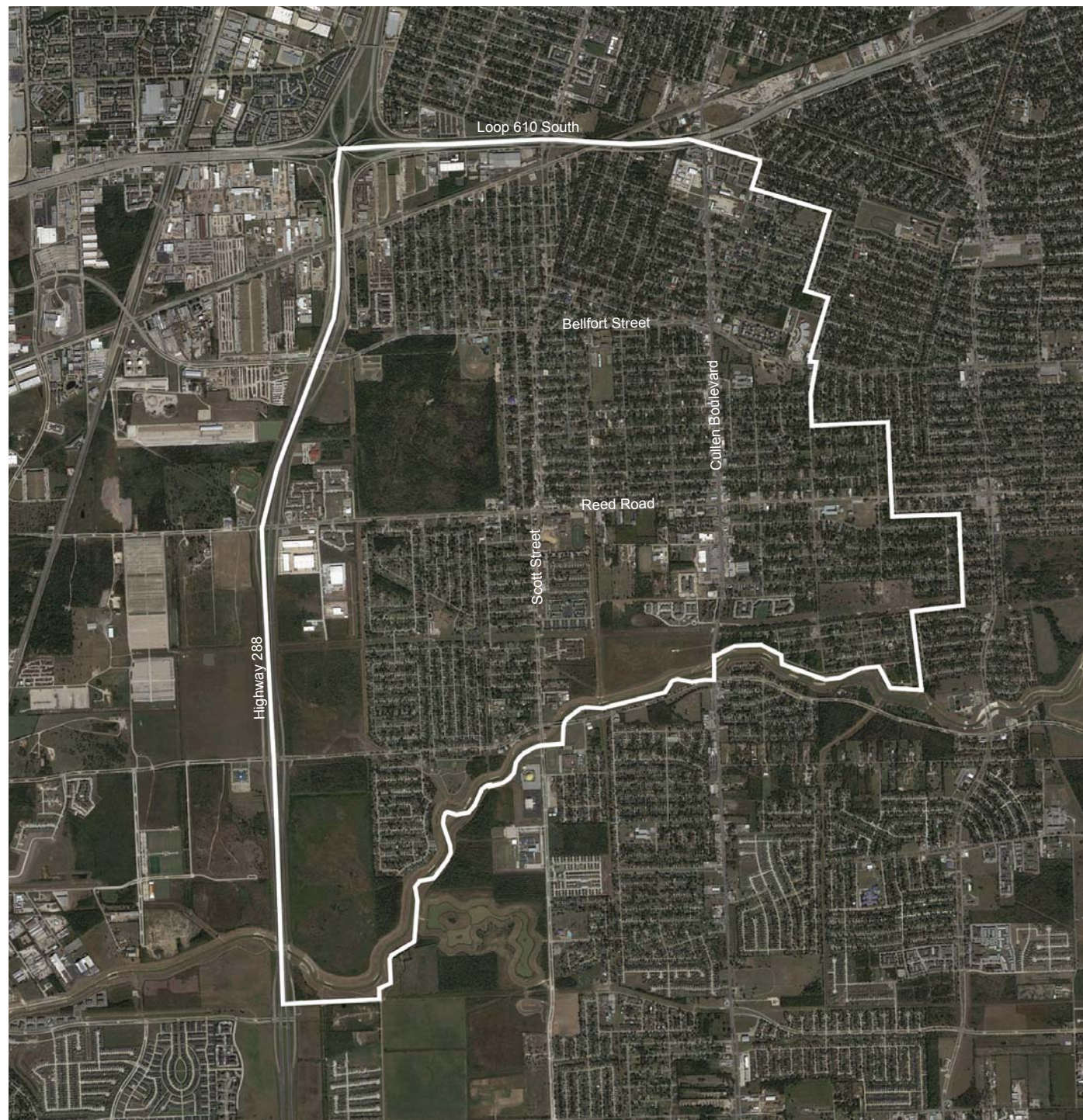


Average Monthly Crime Data  
(January - May 2013)  
0 - 50  
51 - 100  
101 - 150  
151 - 200  
200 +

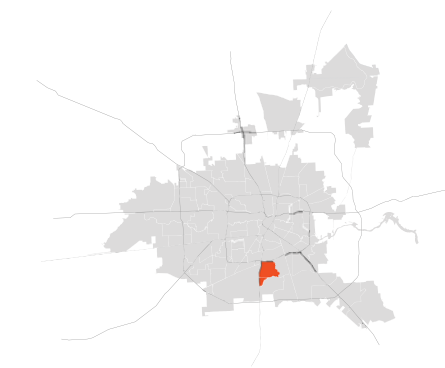
The seven healthy community design strategies address economic opportunity, education, environmental justice, food security, neighborhood stability, public spaces, and safety. The seven strategies focus on building a healthy community by increasing physical activity, social cohesion, economic prosperity, equity and healthy eating, while reducing obesity and stress. The seven strategies, and their long-term impact on both individual and community health, have been analyzed below in the matrix of health and healthy community indicators.



# Sunnyside



# Sunnyside



Sunnyside is located in south Houston, just outside of the 610 Loop and just east of Highway 288. The southern boundary of the neighborhood is Sims Bayou. Sunnyside is the oldest African-American community in south Houston. The neighborhood was first platted in 1912 and by the 1940s area residents had established a water district and a volunteer fire department. During this time, community residents also came together to pave the roads and construct a civic building for meetings and other gatherings.

The neighborhood developed slowly over the decades in a low-density pattern of small subdivisions comprised of single-family homes. The low population density and sparse development has allowed the neighborhood to retain many of its rural characteristics, even to this day. Sunnyside was annexed by the city of Houston in 1956.

Today, Sunnyside is a community with a rich culture and history. Yet the neighborhood faces a number of challenges, including an abundance of vacant land, limited transit options, few sidewalks, minimal basic necessities, aging infrastructure, and lack of economic opportunity and affordable housing. In addition, the community is home to an increasing number of elderly people and children.

There is increasing evidence that the material attributes of “place,” or the physical environment, significantly impacts our health, social engagement and sense of well-being. As a result, we have focused on strategies and resources that enhance the quality of place and can have a significant impact on health—such as safe and affordable housing, access to education, public safety, availability of healthy foods, local health services, quality open spaces, and clean environments free from hazards.



Sunnyside  
Fire Station 55



1953 Aerial



1978 Aerial



1995 Aerial



2013 Aerial

## History

Sunnyside is a historic African-American community with a rich culture and history. First platted in 1912, under the restrictions of the Jim Crow era in the south, the neighborhood was one of the first areas in south Houston to be developed exclusively for African-Americans.

In 1915 residents joined together to open the Sunnyside Colored School, the school became part of the Houston Independent School District in 1927. The first church, Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, opened in 1922. In 1936 Sunnyside Civic Club was first organized to secure better drainage, lighting and general civic improvement. Sunnyside was annexed by the City of Houston in 1956.

Over the last thirty years Sunnyside has been the subject of numerous studies and programs, including several efforts focused on affordable housing, for example the Houston Hope program and the more recent Hurricane Disaster Recovery Program.

The Houston Hope program has resulted in new housing in the neighborhood, yet the condition of the neighborhood's infrastructure is poor, and investment in new roads, community amenities, continuous sidewalks, and services is needed.



**Vacant land, both an opportunity and a constraint, is distributed throughout the neighborhood.**

ABOVE, Left: Figure Ground  
BELOW: Vacant Lot, Photo by H. Pham, C. Ponce, and P. Shah

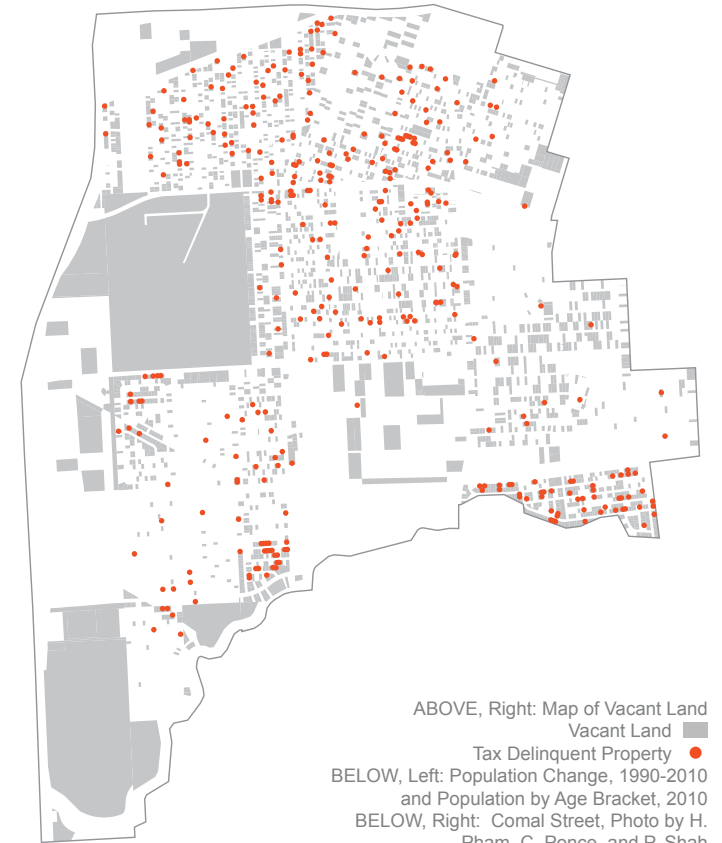


## Context

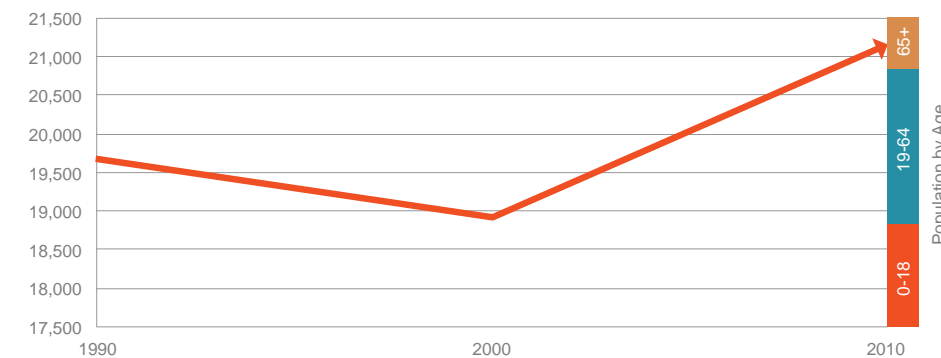
The Sunnyside Super Neighborhood is located in south Houston, directly south of downtown. The neighborhood is 6.4 square miles in area and home to 21,158 people. The population density of the area is approximately 3,342 people per square mile, slightly lower than the average population density in the City of Houston. After several decades of population loss, between 2000 and 2010 the number of neighborhood residents increased by 7.5%. In comparison Houston's population has increased by 29%. The neighborhood is majority African American, 90%, the remaining population is 8% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian.

The neighborhood is home to a large percentage of residents over the age of 65 (16%), compared to Houston's seniors representing 9% of the population. At the same time, the number of residents under the age of 18 has increased by 11% over the last 20 years. The nearly 7,000 residents under 18 represent 33% of Sunnyside's total population.

Vacant land, which is both an opportunity and a constraint, is scattered throughout the community, with very large vacant tracts along the western edges of the neighborhood. In addition, there are 346 tax delinquent parcels in the neighborhood. Developing a strategy to take advantage of vacant land by focusing public investment and development in areas where there are existing amenities such as parks, schools, shopping, and/or transit should be a priority. There is increasing evidence that maintaining vacant lots, or finding new uses for the land such as community gardens or pocket parks, is one step toward neighborhood stabilization.



ABOVE, Right: Map of Vacant Land  
Vacant Land ■  
Tax Delinquent Property ●  
BELOW, Left: Population Change, 1990-2010 and Population by Age Bracket, 2010  
BELOW, Right: Comal Street, Photo by H. Pham, C. Ponce, and P. Shah





ABOVE: Map of Parks, Schools and Easements

Parks and open spaces that are easily accessible to residents, safe, and well-maintained have a substantial impact on the health of a community and have also been found to increase property values. For example, studies have found that children who live within two-thirds of a mile from a park with a playground are five times more likely to have a healthy weight. Today, one out of three children in the U.S. are overweight or obese.

The Sunnyside neighborhood has five parks, Sunnyside, Sunflower, Bricker, Grimes, and Taylor. The parks total 241 acres, or approximately 500 square feet per person, which far exceeds standards in the City of Houston. The parks are distributed near the edges of the neighborhood, which has led to limited park access in the central areas.

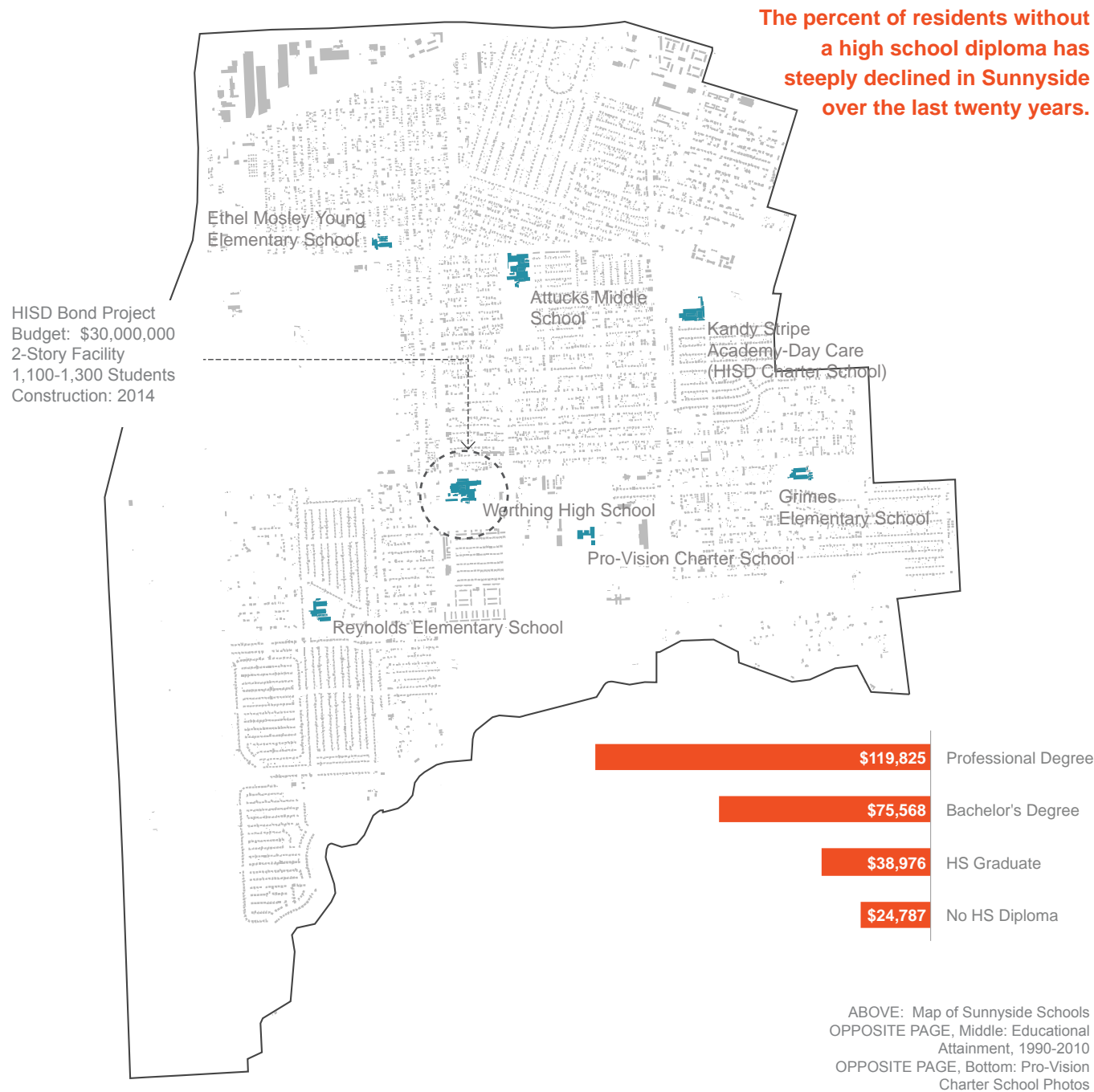
A new linear park is currently under construction by the City of Houston. The park and trail travel along the west side of Comal Street, connecting to Sunnyside Park and Young Elementary School on the north (Bellfort) with the Johnson Public Library and Worthing High School to the south (Reed Road).

There are a number of utility and drainage easements that weave through the neighborhood. The easements have the potential to be re-purposed for use as hike and bike trails connecting important destinations throughout the community.



ABOVE: Map of Parks (1/2 and 2/3-mile radius)  
BELOW, Left: Sunnyside Park Trail  
BELOW, Right: Sunnyside Park





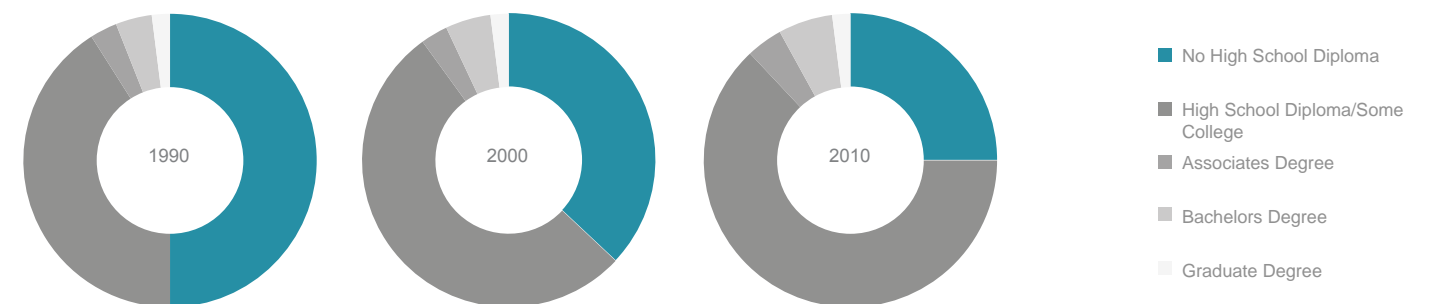
The Sunnyside neighborhood has three elementary schools (Young, Grimes, and Reynolds), one middle school (Attucks), and one high school (Werthing). The neighborhood is the former home of HISD's flagship Carnegie Vanguard High School. In 2009, after discussions to combine the Carnegie campus with Werthing High School failed, the District made the decision to construct a new building for Carnegie Vanguard H.S. on a centrally located site in the Fourth Ward.

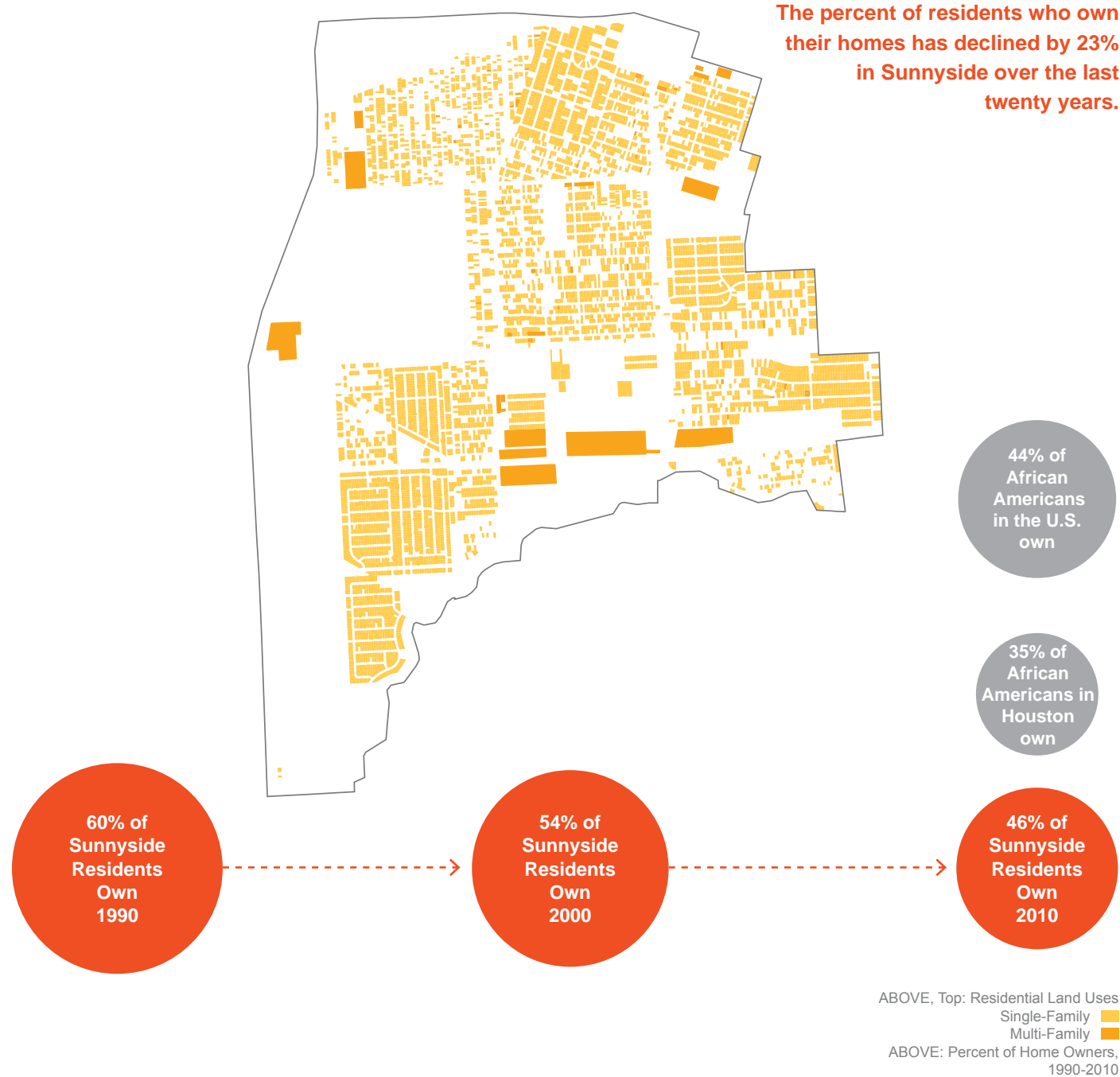
Werthing High School is slated to be reconstructed as part of the HISD Bond program. The proposed \$30 million facility will be two stories and serve between 1,100 and 1,300 students. The building is expected to begin construction in 2014.

There are two major charter schools serving the Sunnyside community. Pro-Vision Charter School, located on Wilmington,

is a 21-acre campus with an urban farm program, a middle school, a high school and year round enrichment and job training programs. Pro-Vision addresses the needs of young men who are underserved by society and are at risk of dropping out of school, and for whom traditional schools have failed. KIPP Sunnyside High School is located just south of Sims Bayou on Scott Street, right outside of the neighborhood boundaries.

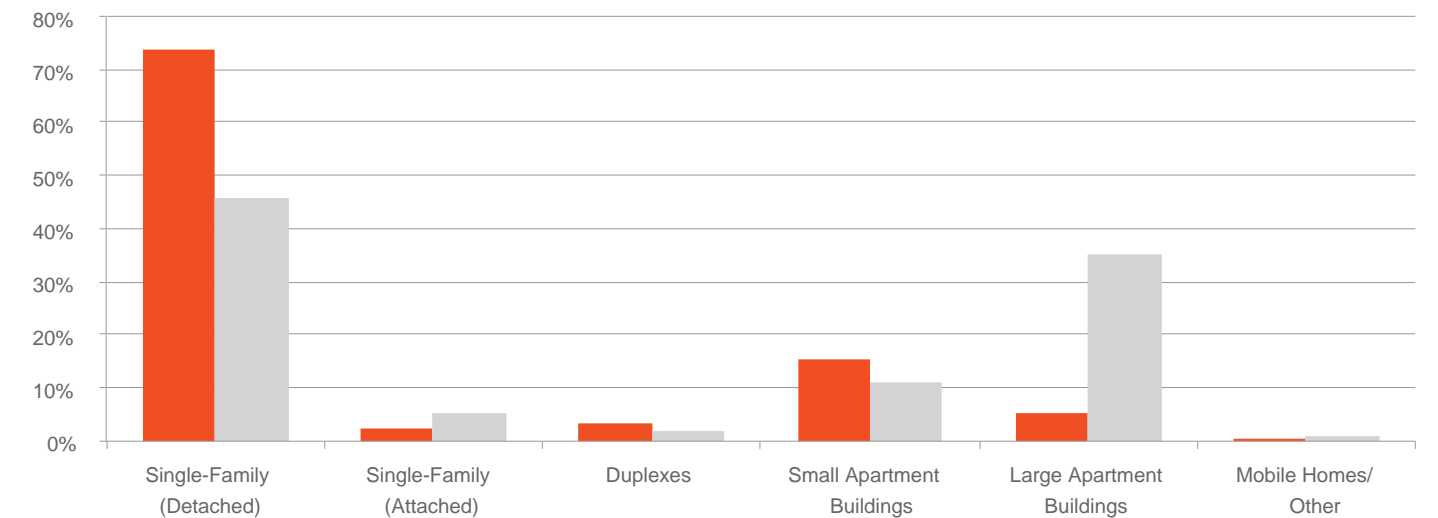
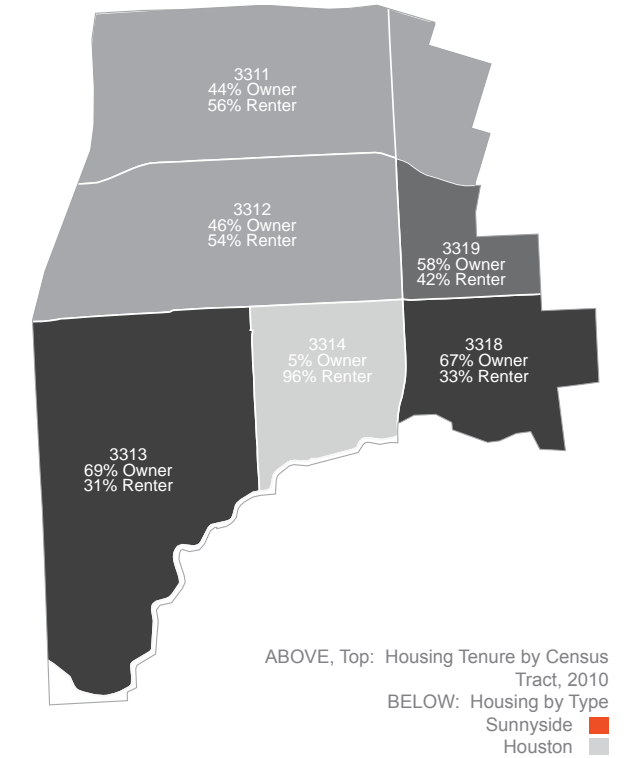
Major gains in education have occurred in Sunnyside over the last twenty years, including a doubling of the percent of high school graduates. For example, in 1990 50% of residents did not have a high school diploma, by 2010 the number had dropped to 25%. 63% of Sunnyside's population has a high school diploma/some college, higher than the Houston average at 41%. However only 8% have a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to 29% of Houston's population.

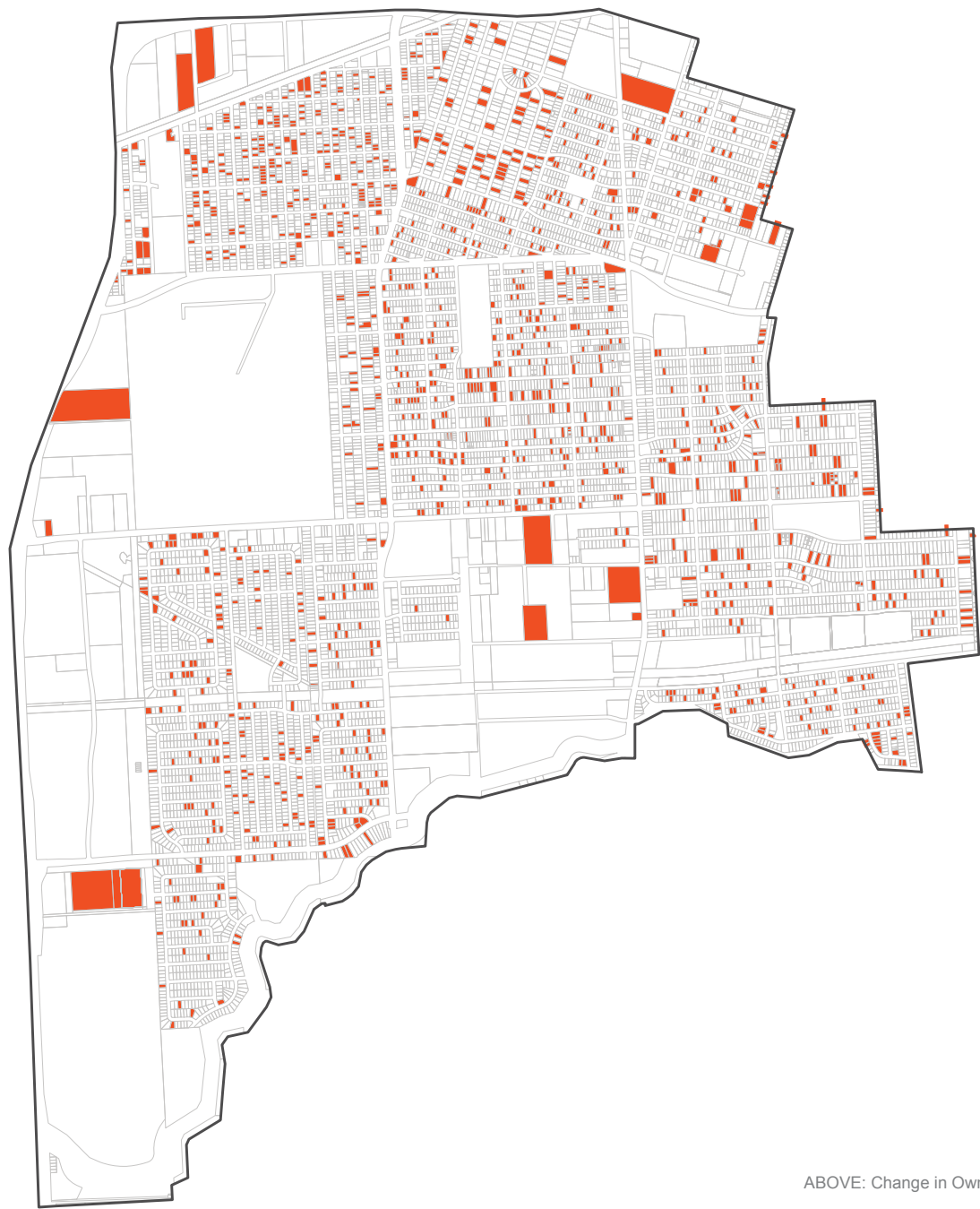




The Sunnyside Super Neighborhood is characterized by small and diverse subdivisions of modest single-family homes. Approximately 74% of all housing in the neighborhood is detached single-family. Over the last ten years new multi-family housing has been developed along the southern boundary of the neighborhood and adjacent to Highway 288. Sunnyside is home to Wilmington House, a Houston Housing Authority development. Wilmington House was built in 1974 and acquired by the Houston Housing Authority in 1983. The 107-unit development is slated to be demolished and replaced with 148 units. The budget for the project is over \$16 million.

High rates of home ownership have characterized the Sunnyside neighborhood since its founding. Over the last twenty years, however, the percent of homeowners has declined from 60% in 1990 to 46% in 2010. There are two factors that could be impacting the home ownership rates in the neighborhood. First, the recent construction of a number of multi-family projects and second a possible increase in the number of properties purchased for investments, that are subsequently rented. However, the decline in home ownership for African American householders is a national trend. The 2013 "State of Nation's Housing" report states that "at 43.9 percent, the homeownership rate for African-American households is at its lowest level since 1995." The report goes on to note: "The share of single-family homes rented has increased sharply in recent years, with investors accounting for one in five home sales nationwide in 2012."

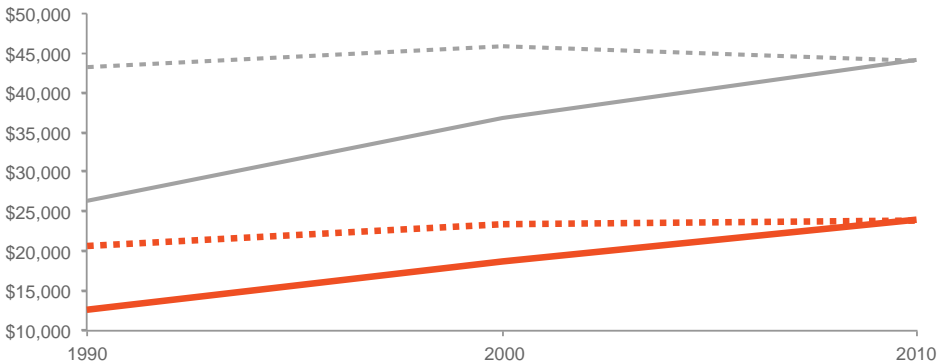




ABOVE: Change in Ownership, 2009-2011  
(red parcels)

Between 2009 and 2011 12% of all lots in Sunnyside changed ownership. This fact furthers the hypothesis that former homestead properties are being purchased by investors and added to the rental market.

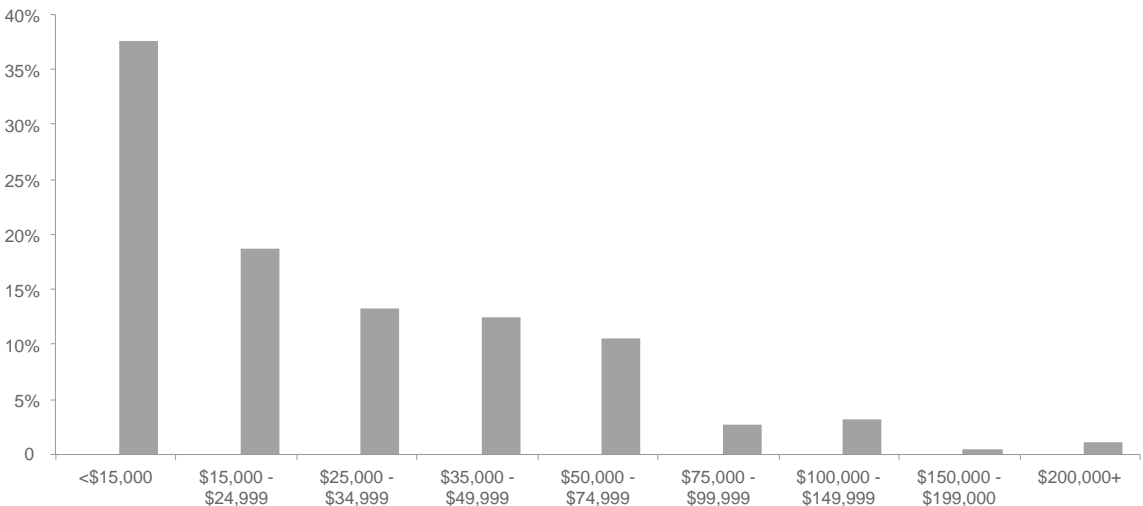
The median household income in Sunnyside is \$23,931, this is far below the Houston median income of \$44,124. Over the last twenty years there has been very little gain in income for residents and families in the neighborhood. Adjusting median household income for inflation, with all years reported in 2010 dollars (see chart



ABOVE: Median Household Income, 1990-2010

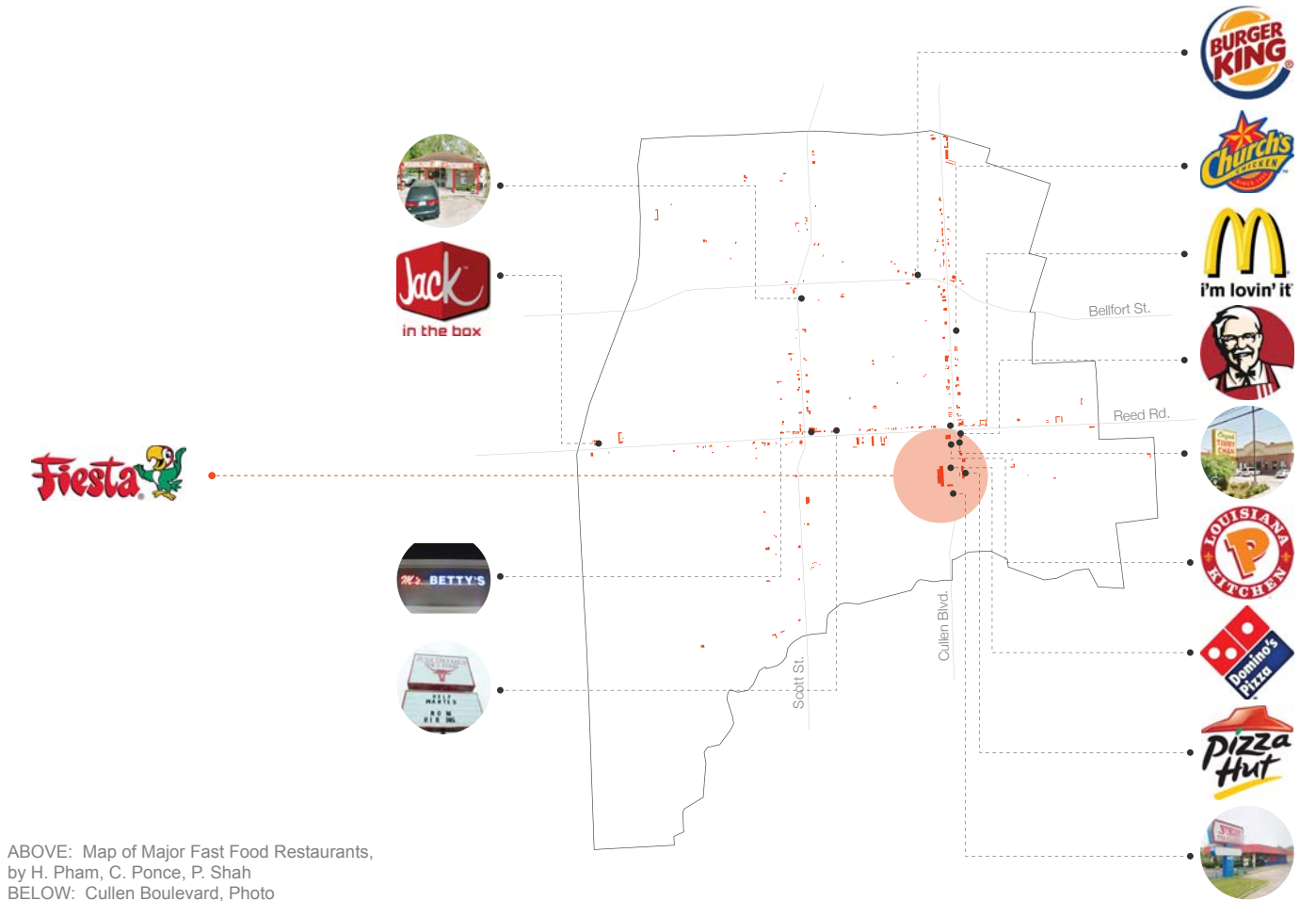
- Sunnyside (Not Adjusted)
- Sunnyside (In 2010 \$s)
- Houston (Not Adjusted)
- Houston (In 2010 \$s)

BELOW: Sunnyside Median Household Income, 2010



below), illustrates that between 1990 and 2010 income has only climbed \$2,000 or approximately 10%.

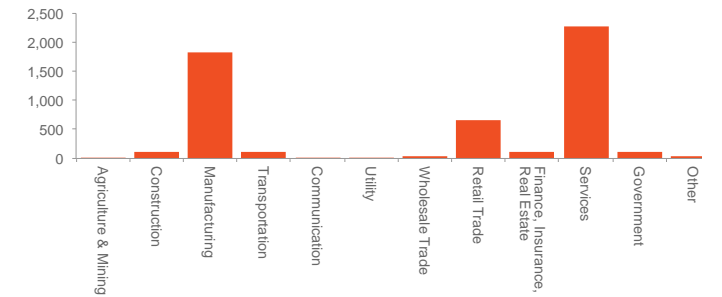
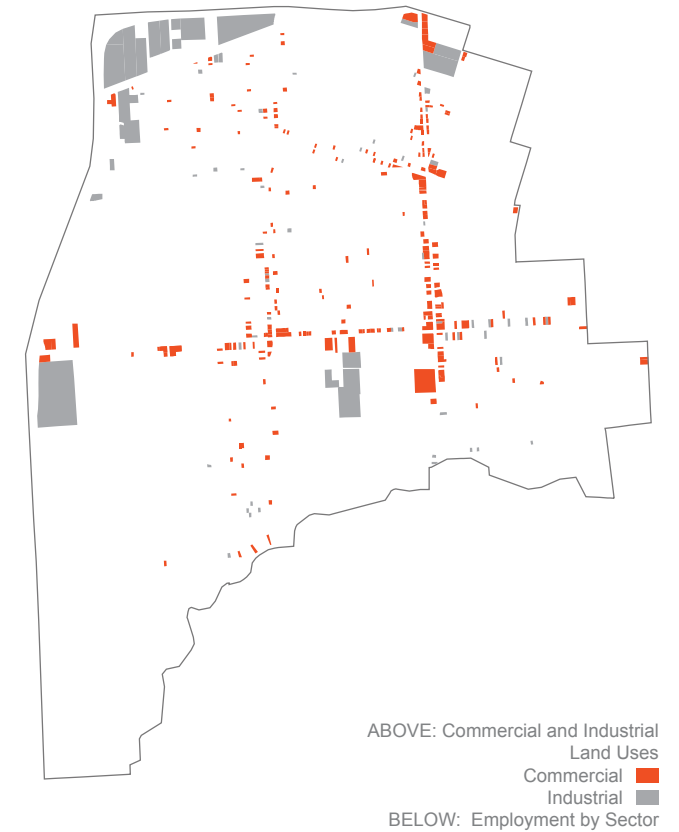
The percent of families living below the poverty level in Sunnyside declined slightly between 1990 and 2010, however poverty continues to be a substantial challenge for residents. According to the Census in 1990 39% of the population lived below the federal poverty line; in 2010 the number was 35%. The poverty rate in Sunnyside is much higher than the Houston average of 22%.

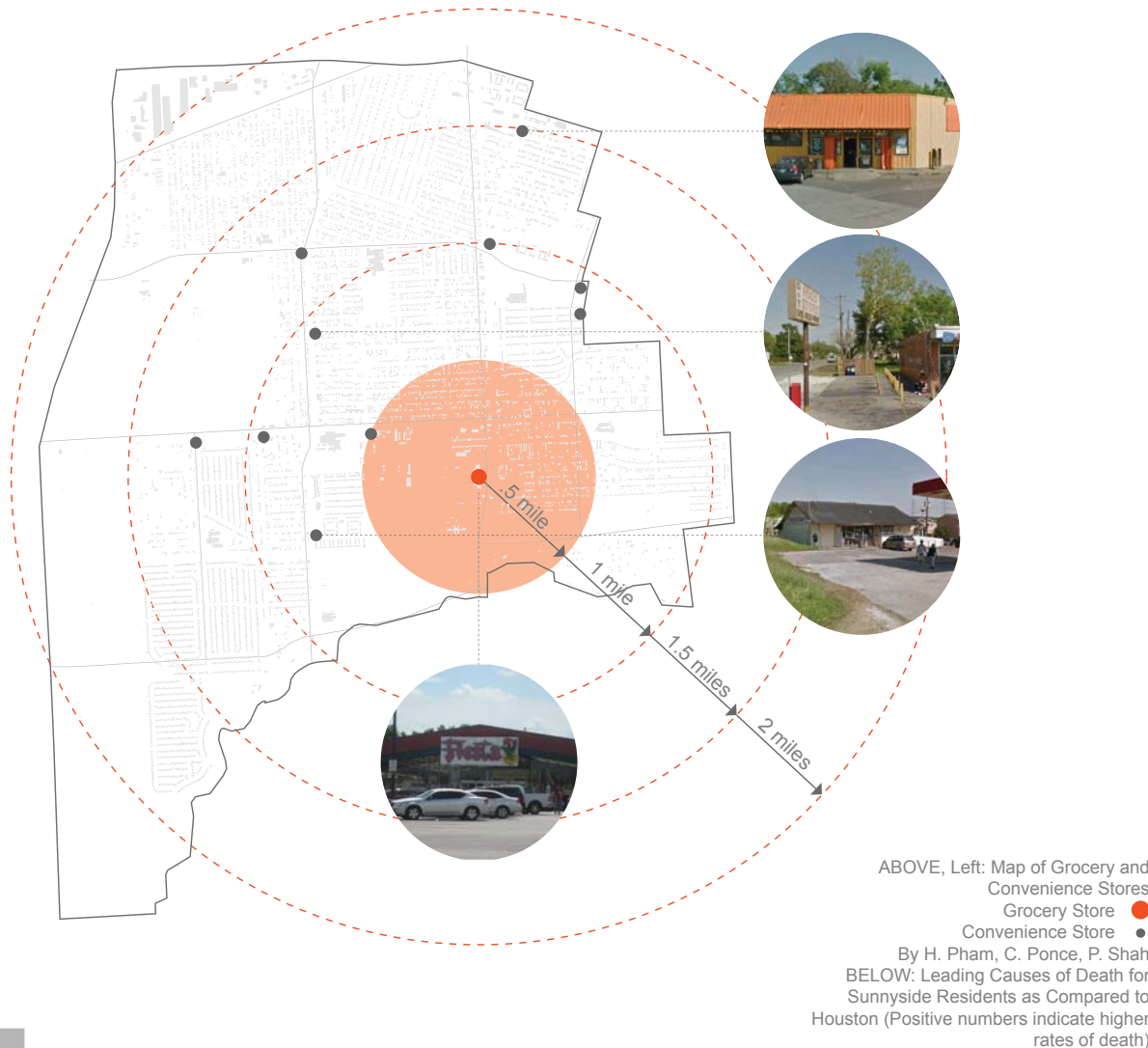


In many ways, where you live is a significant determinant of your health, influencing whether you have opportunities for exercise, sources of healthy food, or access to health care. A recent study completed by the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center found that adults in Houston who live closer to fast food restaurants have a higher Body Mass Index, and the link was particularly strong for lower-income people.

The study focused on a sample of the black community because of the nationwide racial disparities in obesity rates and related health complications. Furthermore, previous research has found that fast food restaurants cluster in higher densities in black communities than in predominantly white ones. The map to the left illustrates that seven fast food restaurants are clustered in a two block area near the intersection of Reed Road and Cullen Boulevard.

There are 5,309 jobs in Sunnyside and 11,150 people between the ages of 20 and 64. The majority of local jobs are in manufacturing and retail trade. There are 1.3 jobs per acre in Sunnyside, as compared to a typical urban neighborhood with more than 250 jobs per acre, or a suburban area with 70 jobs per acre.





A recent study by the Food Trust organization concluded that Houston had fewer grocery stores per capita than other major cities. Easy access to fresh and nutritional food is a key determinant for health. Sunnyside, home to over 21,000 residents, has only one major grocery store, Fiesta on Cullen. Over 50% of residents are more than a mile from this grocery store, and 25% of households do not have access to a vehicle. Small convenience and corner stores are distributed throughout the neighborhood. According to a recent Social Compact Study (2007) Sunnyside residents spend \$8.7 million on groceries outside of the neighborhood each year. The study concludes that Sunnyside could support an additional 25,000 square foot grocery store.

The Community Health Profile for Sunnyside indicates that overall residents of this neighborhood have higher rates of death from heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, accidents, and kidney disease. Sunnyside residents are 1.5 times as likely to die from heart disease as an average Houston resident. These health statistics point to the necessity to develop strategies that address conditions that can lead to poor health, including lack of exercise, nutrition, and lack of accessible preventive health care.

There are a number of organizations working to address health disparities in the Sunnyside neighborhood. For example, CAN DO Houston is working on the Healthy Corner Store Initiative. The program will provide residents of the Sunnyside community with closer access to fresh and affordable produce. Two corner stores have been identified and CAN DO is expecting to launch this initiative in 2013. Detroit has a similar program, the Healthy Corner Stores Project, which currently includes 20 corner stores.

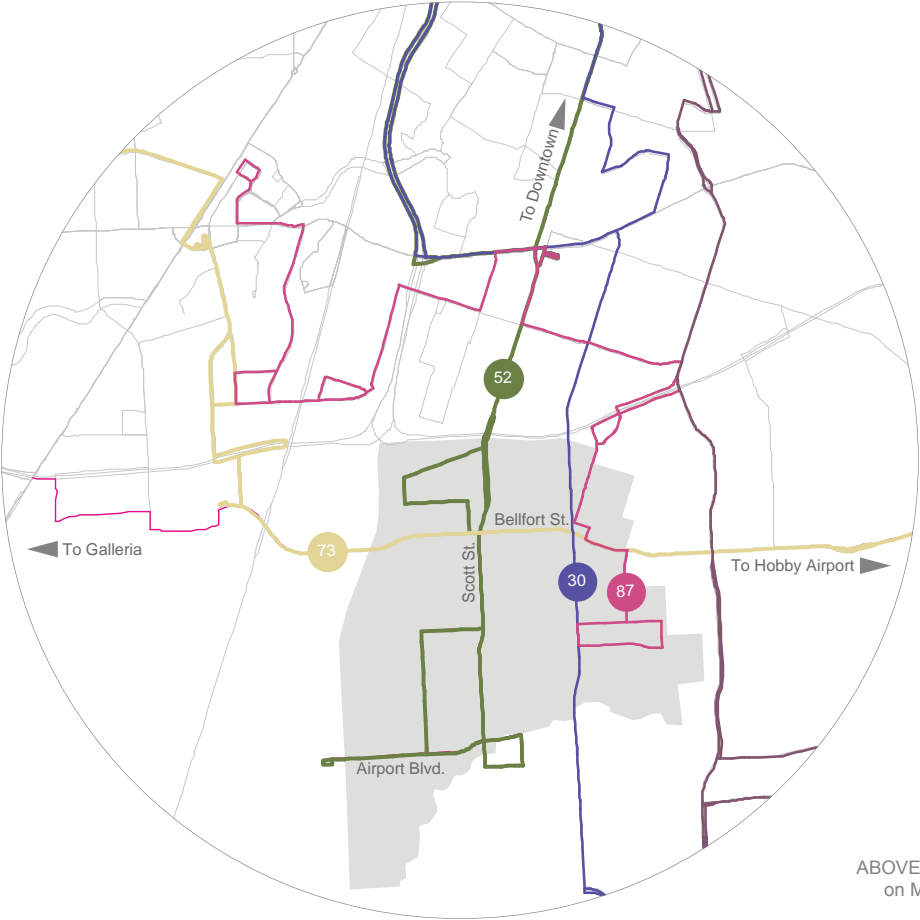
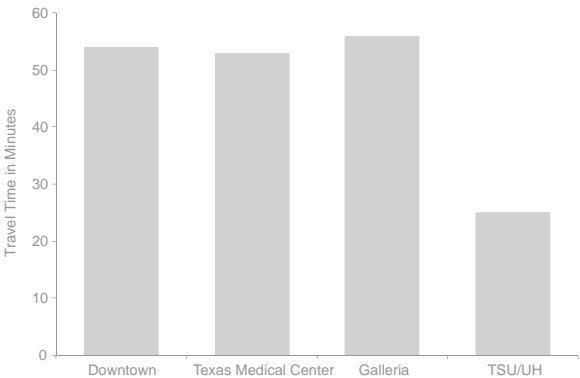


ABOVE: Detroit Healthy Corner Stores Project Poster  
 BELOW: Sunnyside Listening Session



The Sunnyside neighborhood is highly transit dependent. 25% of households do not have access to a vehicle. The neighborhood is served by four bus routes, the 73 Belfort, 52 Scott, 87 Sunnyside/TMC, and 30 Cullen. From the center of the neighborhood, at Worthing High School, it takes 25 minutes to get to the University of Houston; 53 minutes to the Texas Medical Center; 56 minutes to the Galleria; and 54 minutes to Downtown. Nearly all of these trips require one transfer.

Furthermore, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the neighborhood is poor or non-existent. For example, there is not a single City of Houston bikeway in Sunnyside and sidewalks are infrequent, or in very poor condition.



ABOVE, Top: Travel Time in Minutes on METRO to Major Destinations  
LEFT: METRO Bus Routes

There is evidence that development in Sunnyside has been constrained by environmental factors, including a former landfill, referred to as the “Sunnyside Dump,” incinerator, and several salvage yards. The landfill and incinerator have been de-commissioned, but the original site (adjacent to Sunnyside Park) remains undeveloped.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services Community Health Profile for Sunnyside, there are 8 Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) reporting facilities, 3 Large Quantity Generators (LQG) of hazardous waste, 2 major dischargers of air pollutants, and 1 facility which treats, stores, or disposes of hazardous waste within a mile of Sunnyside. The map (bottom center) documents these facilities.



The relationship between crime and health in a neighborhood is difficult to correlate, yet it is clear that the fear of crime will impact the likelihood of someone going out for a walk, or to the park.

Reported crime for Sunnyside during the month of April 2013 is mapped below, on the right. Recently, Neighborhood Scout identified Sunnyside as the sixth most dangerous community in the U.S. Reporting that residents had a 1 in 11 chance of being the victim of a crime, and citing a violent crime rate of 91 per 1,000.



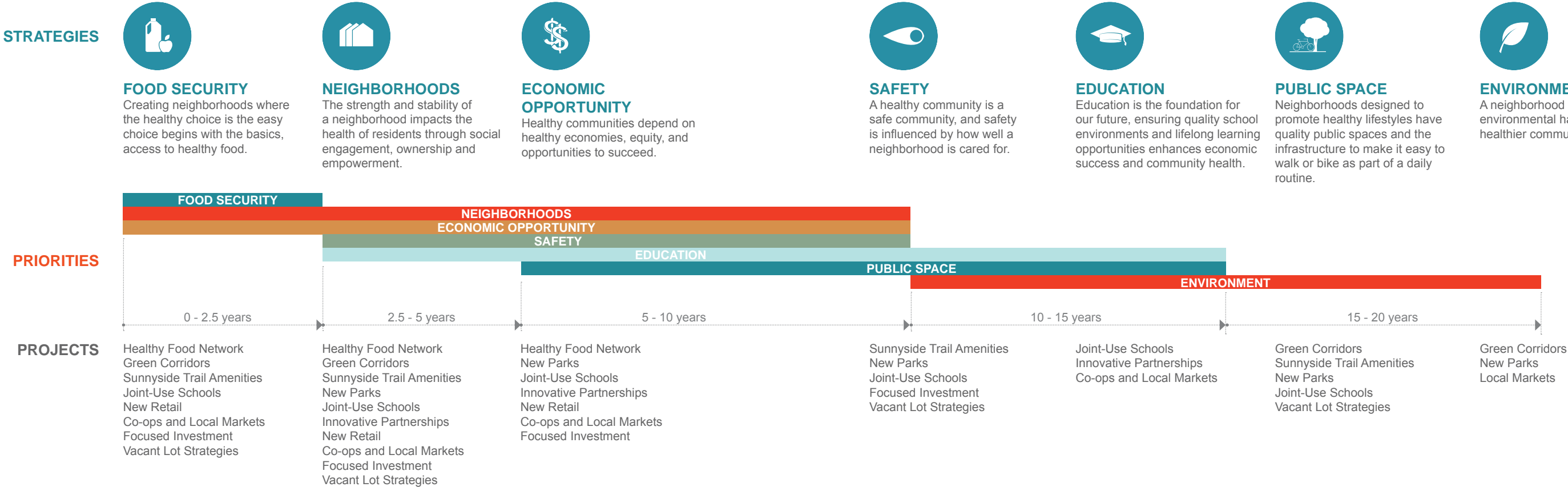
ABOVE: Photo along Belfort  
BELOW, From Left to Right  
Crime Map (My City Map Viewer)  
Sunnyside Environmental Reporting Facilities  
Large Quantity Generator (LQG)  
of Hazardous Waste  
Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) Facility  
Major Discharger of Air Pollutants  
Brownfield Site  
Flood Zones  
100-Year  
500-Year

# Healthy Community Design Strategies

# Healthy Community Design Strategies

Seven strategies, listed below, have been identified to address the challenges of building a healthy neighborhood through community design. The strategies for Sunnyside focus on access to food, stable neighborhoods, affordable housing, and economic opportunity. The emphasis is on focusing investment in areas that have existing amenities, as well as building on resources and developments that are already occurring. High priority projects include addressing food security, neighborhood stability, and the opportunity and change that come with new affordable housing, employment and entrepreneurial activities. Many of the specific community design ideas work across several strategies, for example focused investment in affordable housing adjacent to parks will build neighborhood stability, improve property values, and create economic opportunity. Each design idea is covered in detail on the following pages.

The healthy community design strategies for Sunnyside focus on access to healthy food, stable neighborhoods, affordable housing, and economic opportunity.



# FOOD SECURITY Healthy Food Network

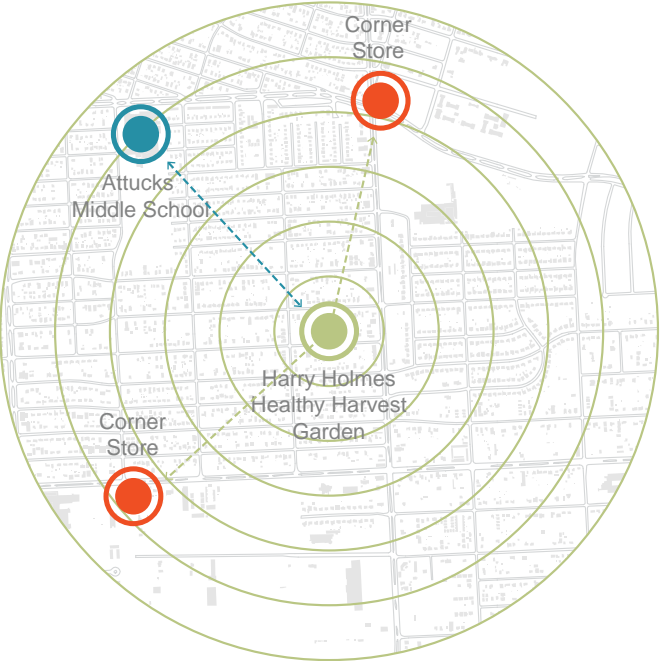
The Sunnyside neighborhood has only one major grocery store, Fiesta on Cullen Boulevard south of Reed Road. Over 50% of community residents are more than one mile from this store, meaning 10,000 area residents do not have easy access to healthy and nutritional food. At the same time the neighborhood has an abundance of fast food outlets and small corner stores that can encourage unhealthy eating and poor nutrition. Creating a healthy food network that would link community gardens, schools, corner stores, schools and additional farming and garden sites would work toward ensuring food security across the neighborhood. The goal is to distribute food grown in local gardens to both corner stores and area schools.

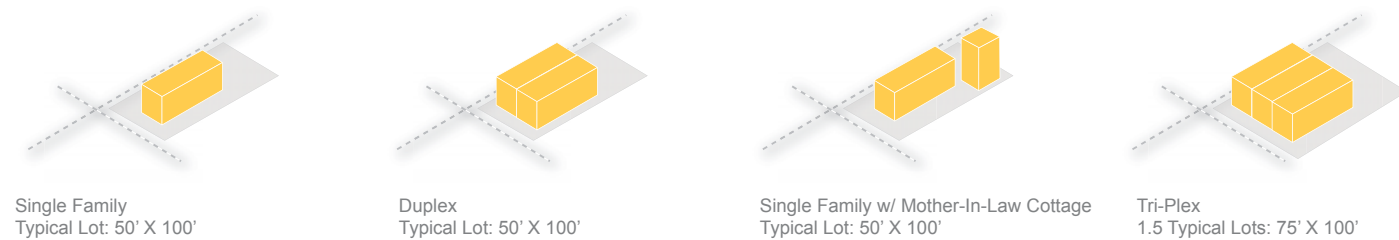
Currently, there are three community gardens in the neighborhood—Sunnyside Park Community Garden, the garden at the Multi-Service Center, and Harry Holmes Healthy Harvest Garden. The Holmes Garden was the first project of Urban Harvest's I-Grow Houston initiative, a program that builds community gardens on vacant land in areas with poor access to healthy fresh foods. Pro-Vision Charter School also has a garden and a large farm on its site. There are ten corner stores and six schools in the neighborhood.

OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: Concept Diagram for the Proposed Healthy Food Network  
 RIGHT: Detail of Healthy Food Network  
 BELOW, From Opposite Page Left to Right: Pro-Vision Charter School Garden and Farm; Harry Holmes Healthy Harvest Garden; and Sunnyside Park Community Garden



Food grown at community gardens would be distributed to local corner stores and area schools.





## NEIGHBORHOODS Focused Investment

Healthy neighborhoods are safe, walkable, dense, in close proximity to transit and parks and have quality affordable and mixed-income housing. In the Sunnyside neighborhood a major public investment has the potential to catalyze an innovative development program focused on new housing and parks and open spaces that will be the center of a successful and stable neighborhood core.

Sunnyside Trail, just west of Comal Street, is currently under construction, and runs north and south parallel to a large parcel of vacant land (300 acres) owned by the City of Houston which was once a landfill. At the north end of the trail is Sunnyside Park and Community Center, at the south side is the Johnson Public Library, and three blocks to the east Worthing High School. The trail (which is nearly complete), is approximately one-half mile in length or a 10-minute walk, will connect these major destinations.

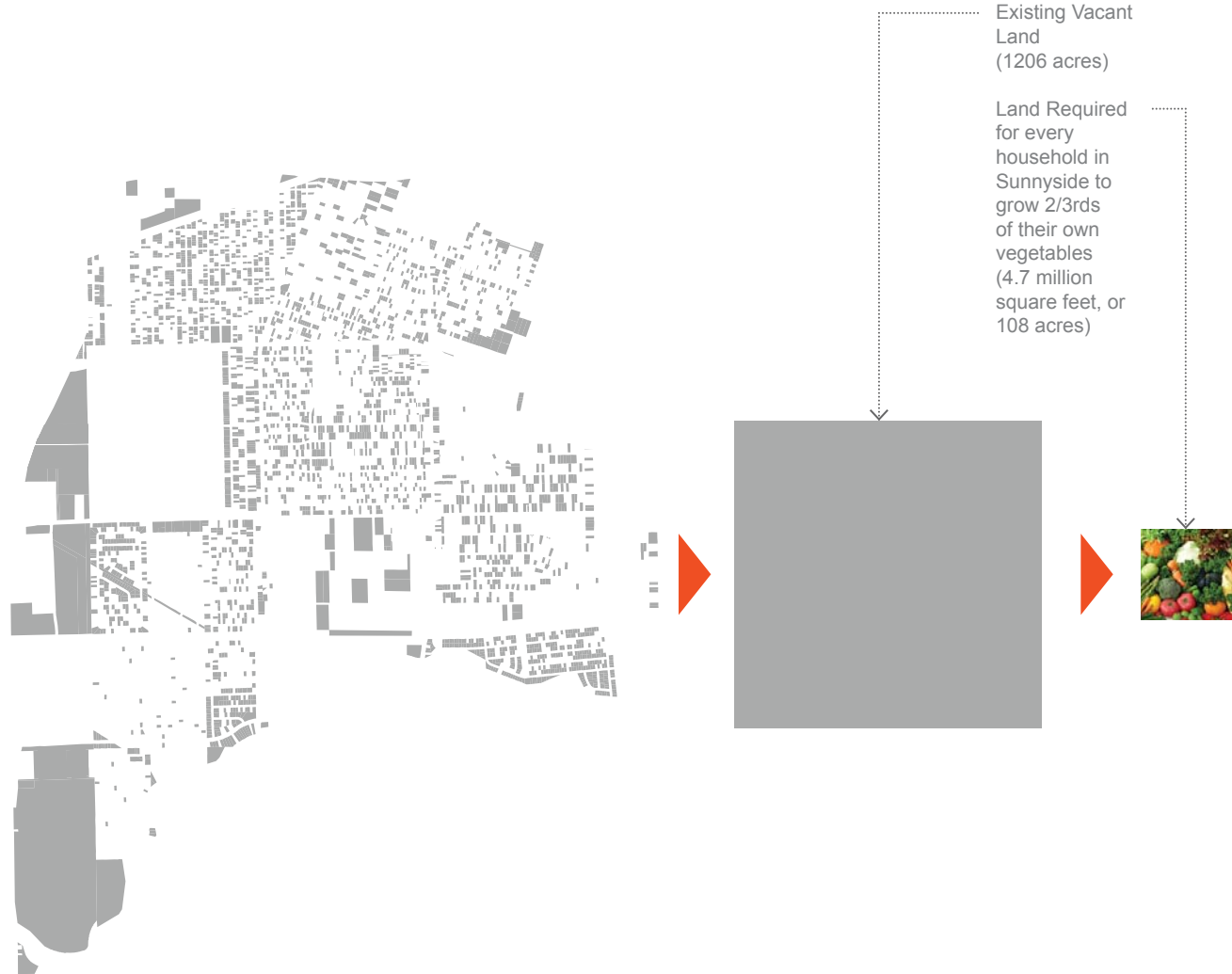
The area just east of the Sunnyside Trail is a prime site for a strategic housing infill program, providing new affordable housing that takes advantage of this major public investment. In the 8-block area (illustrated to the right) there are 108 vacant parcels that could potentially be developed.

As a means to test the potential of this idea a 2-block area, bounded by Reed Road on the south, Comal Street on the west, Maggie Street on the north, and Scott Street on the east was developed in detail (see drawing to the left). The proposal takes advantage of existing vacant land, infilling these lots with new housing and new public spaces, including a linear park connecting to Sunnyside Trail, a community farm and garden, a play area, and sports field. The proposal builds on the public investment in the Sunnyside Trail and creates a concentrated neighborhood core that would provide additional eyes on the park and build population density as a means to draw additional economic development. The focused investment has the potential to ripple throughout the community over time.

RIGHT: Diagram of Housing Focus Area and Adjacent Amenities  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: Proposed Housing Typologies  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Bottom: Focused Investment Proposal, New Housing and Public Spaces



According to author Bruce Stokes, a family of four can produce two-thirds of its vegetables on 600 square feet of land with five hours of cultivation each week.



## NEIGHBORHOODS Vacant Lot Strategies

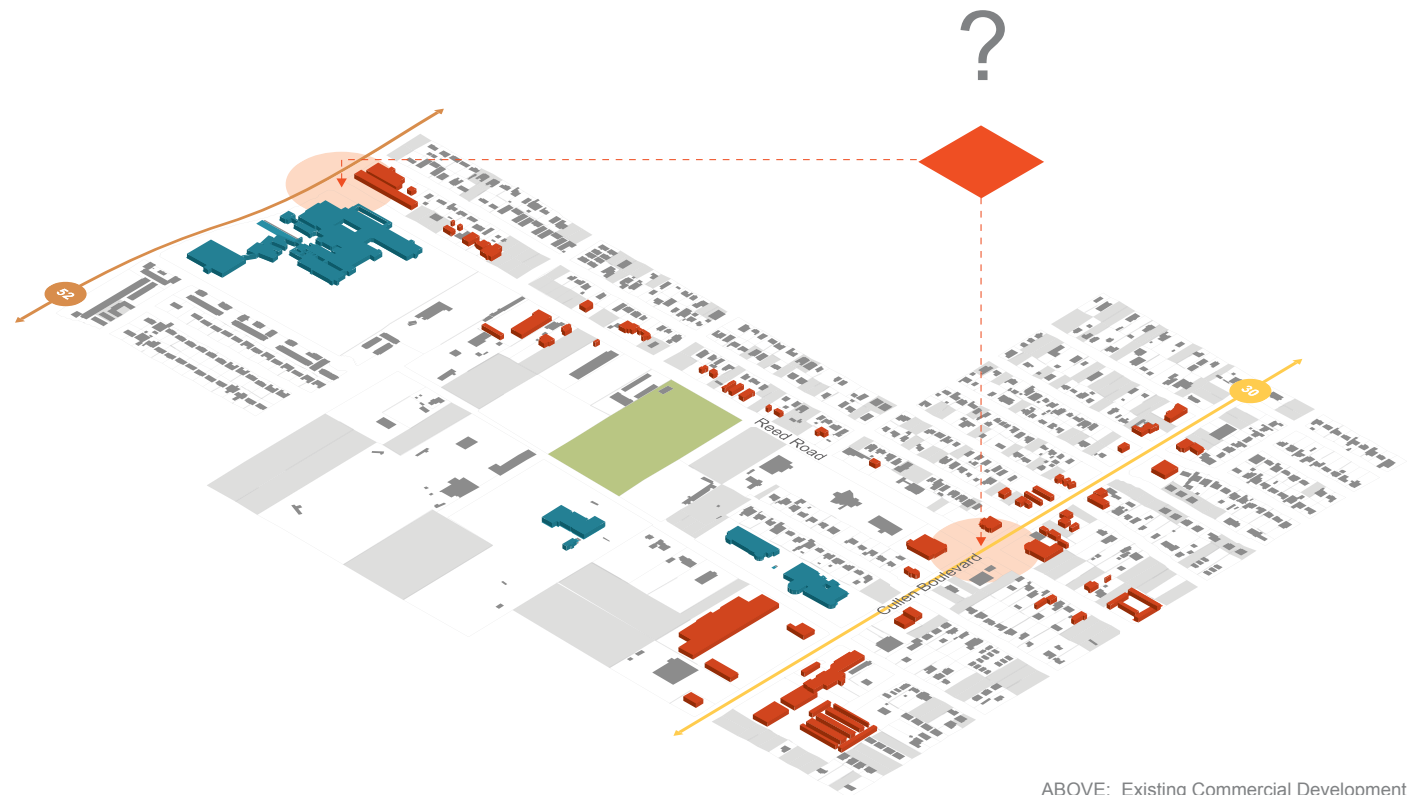


Vacant land, which is both an opportunity and a constraint, is scattered throughout the Sunnyside community, with very large vacant tracts along the western edges of the neighborhood. In total over 1200 acres is vacant, comprising 29% of the total land area in the neighborhood. Developing a strategy to take advantage of vacant land by focusing public investment and development in areas where there are existing amenities such as parks, schools, shopping, and/or transit should be a priority. However, a more local strategy to take advantage of this property should also be developed. There is increasing evidence that maintaining vacant lots, or finding new uses for the land such as community gardens, urban farming, play areas, or pocket parks, is one step toward neighborhood stabilization.

The foundation for this strategy is to look for uses for vacant land that support residents and help build a healthier community. To this end, we identified the amount of land area required for residents to grow much of their own food and illustrated this idea to the left—the results suggest there are opportunities to use vacant land as a means to increase food security in the neighborhood.

OPPOSITE PAGE, Right: Existing Vacant Land  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Middle: Comparison of Existing Vacant Land and Land Required for Sunnyside Residents to grow two-thirds of their vegetables.  
BELOW: Vacant Lot Conditions and Proposals





ABOVE: Existing Commercial Development and Potential Economic Development Nodes  
BELOW: Retail Leakage by Sector, Diagram based on data from the 2007 Social Compact Study

POTENTIAL RETAIL SPACE		RETAIL SECTOR	ESTIMATED LEAKAGE
21,857 square feet		Apparel	\$7.4 million
25,428 square feet		Full Service Grocery	\$8.7 million
28,004 square feet		Restaurants	\$6.5 million

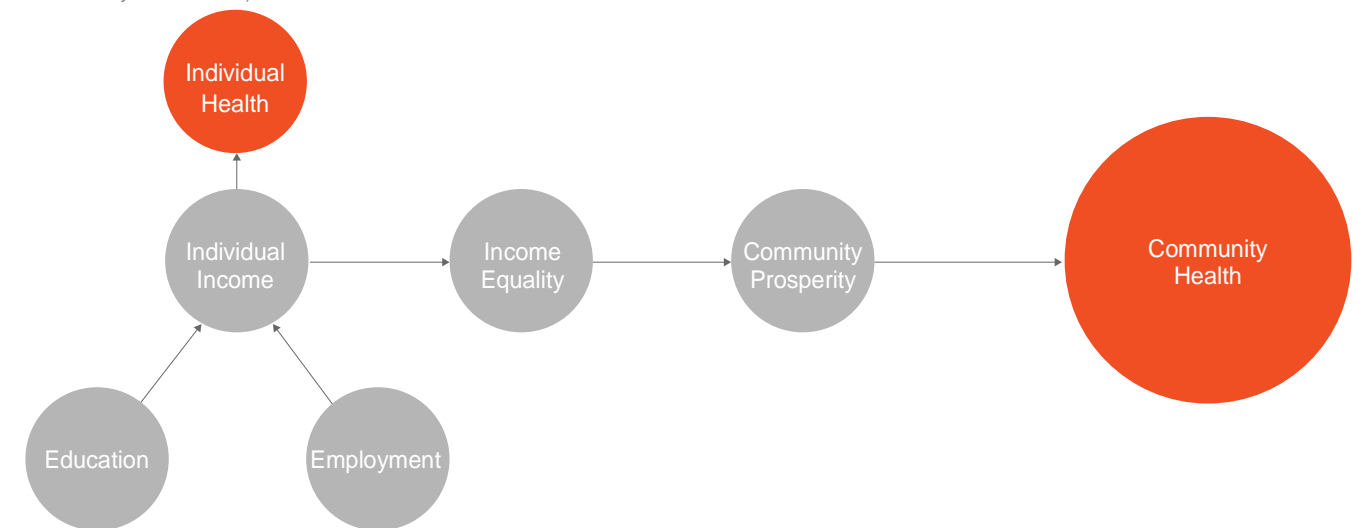
## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

### New Retail

There is a clear correlation between health and wealth. Economic opportunity is connected to education, and the healthiest communities have social equity. Identifying specific strategies for enhancing economic opportunity in Sunnyside is one of the main goals of the project. In support of this goal, a recent study completed by the Clark County Public Health Department concluded that economic opportunity is critical to both the health of individuals and to community-wide health. The study notes, "education and employment increase individual income, leading to improved individual health, community prosperity, and income equality. These all lead to greater community health, which feeds back into improved opportunity for education and employment." The diagram below illustrates this relationship.

Economic opportunity in the Sunnyside neighborhood is very limited. There are few sources of employment and many basic shopping and service needs must be met outside of the community. Residents spend \$22 million annually outside of the neighborhood on groceries and other goods. Two strategies for expanding economic opportunity in the neighborhood have been explored. The first builds on a recent Social Compact Study which identified the need for an additional 75,000 square feet of retail (see image to the left) and the second explores new models for economic development that build on existing assets and strengths (see following page). To this end, a new retail node should be established focused on addressing the unmet needs and filling leakage gaps in the neighborhood, the node could include a mini-transit hub (Sunnyside is one of the few neighborhoods without a transit center). The transit hub could include bike infrastructure to increase incentives for healthy living and create better connectivity in the neighborhood. Currently Metro Bus Routes 30 Cullen and 52 Scott travel to downtown.

BELOW: Concept Diagram, Economic Opportunity and Health (Based on diagram by Clark County Public Health)



**Sunnyside residents spend \$22 million on retail goods outside of the neighborhood annually. There is only one full-service bank in the area, but three check-cashing, payday loan branches, or pawn shops.**



## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY Co-ops and Local Markets

Throughout the U.S. communities are returning to co-operative models for basic retail needs, including groceries and general merchandise. Many of these experiments are funded through community investors and operate as non-profit entities while providing employment and much needed basic services and goods to area residents. The co-operative model could be implemented for a new grocery store, credit union, or a small business incubator in the Sunnyside neighborhood. A coalition of local churches or other institutions could potentially lead the effort.

In addition, identifying economic development strategies that build on the strengths of the neighborhood could positively impact both economic opportunity and employment. For example, focusing on economic development opportunities related to equestrian and farming programs would build on the area's assets. Stables, horse riding trails, and a small community arena could draw people to the neighborhood and create economic opportunity. The Federation of Black Cowboys in New York City operates Cedar Lane Stables which includes approximately 40 horse stalls. In addition to the stable the Federation provides horse, pony, trail, and wagon rides, riding lessons, picnics, parties, and other events. This model, whether for-profit, non-profit or co-operative, has the potential for great success in Sunnyside and could be tied to the two local high schools, Worthing and Pro-Vision Charter School which has an emphasis on agriculture and who's site already includes a large urban farm.

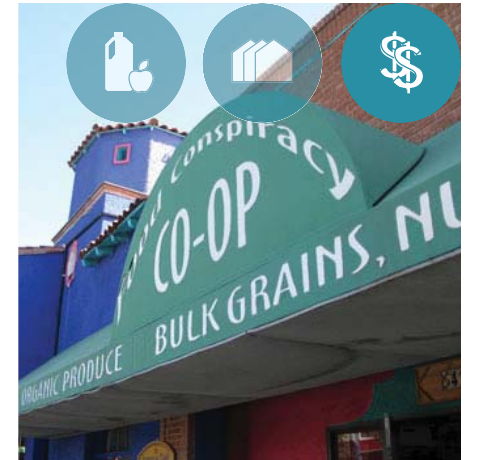
To accomplish this task a plan for 16 miles of continuous horse trails was developed and sites for equestrian programs, such as a stable and an arena were identified. In addition, flood prone areas adjacent to Sims Bayou could become plots for large urban farms or agriculture programs (see maps to the left).

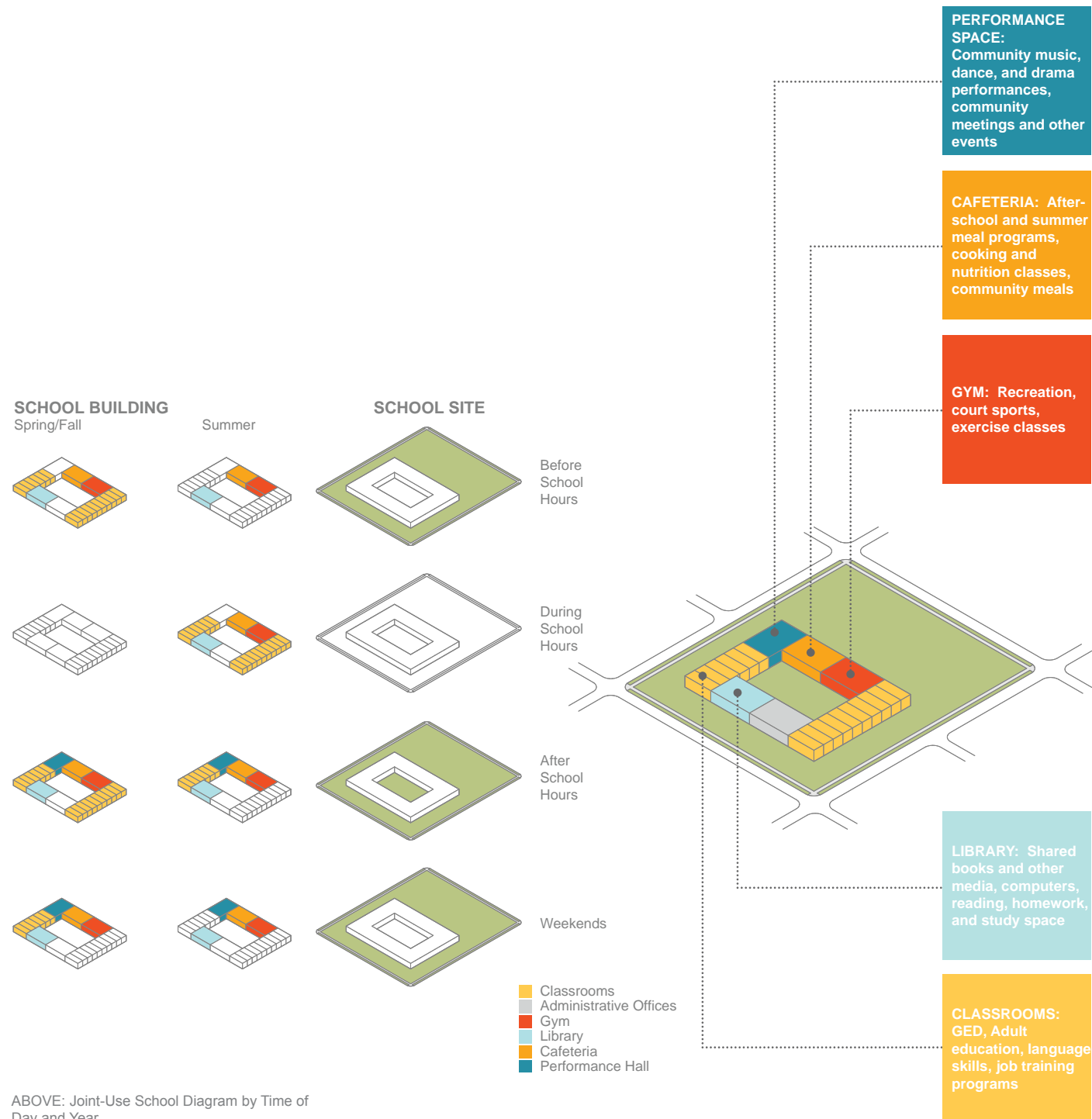
### THIS PAGE

From Top to Bottom: Cooperative Grocery and Pharmacy, and Brooklyn Cooperative Credit Union

### OPPOSITE PAGE

Top Right: Plan for Horse Trails  
Middle Right: Plan of Existing Vacant Sites, Parks, and Easements  
Top Left: Plan of Horse Trails and New Programs including a Horse Stable, Urban Farms, Arena, Equestrian Ring  
Bottom, From Left to Right: Horse Stable, Urban Farming, and Horse Riding



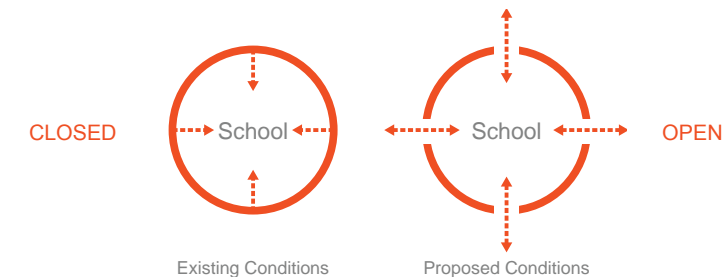


ABOVE: Joint-Use School Diagram by Time of Day and Year

## EDUCATION Joint-Use Schools

There are more public school buildings than any other public facility in the United States; the buildings contain an estimated 6.6 billion square feet of space on more than 1 million acres of land. Demographic shifts, changing housing patterns, and new school capital investments present an unprecedented opportunity to reshape the ways local government and schools work together to provide for the people who depend on them and the resources they manage. This is especially important for low-income, low-resource urban communities who disproportionately struggle to meet community needs.

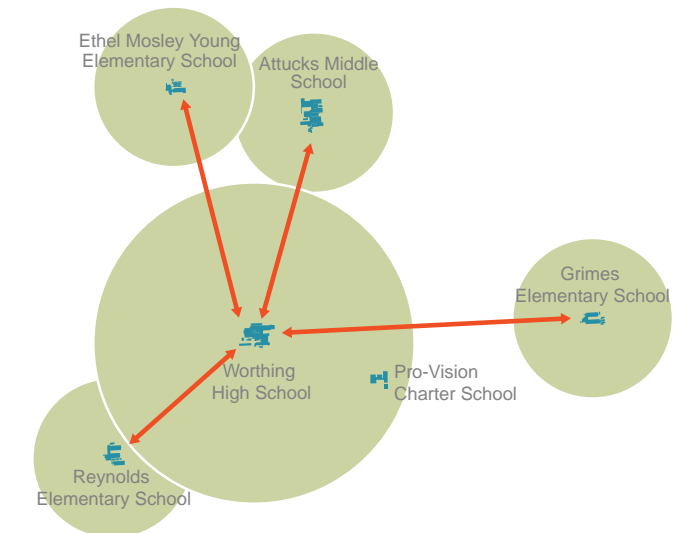
Worthing High School, located in the center of the Sunnyside community, will be improved as part of the recent HISD bond election. The projected cost for the improvements are \$30 million and will include a new library and science labs, as well as a learning center that will be open for all kids in the neighborhood. In addition to the proposed facility improvements, strategies for creating joint-use programs at Worthing High School should be



explored. For example, shared open spaces, sports fields, library, performance space, and cafeteria could help make the school not just the geographic center of the neighborhood but also the activity center. A school that shares its resources with the community is one step toward maximizing public investment to help build healthier communities.

In addition to Worthing High School, there are four public schools in Sunnyside, Attucks Middle School and three elementary schools. The facilities of these schools should also be explored for joint-uses with the community, so each school becomes a center.

ABOVE: School and Community Concept Diagram  
by N. Hori, T. Lyon, D. Yao  
ABOVE, Right: Sunnyside Schools as Centers



# EDUCATION

## Innovative Partnerships



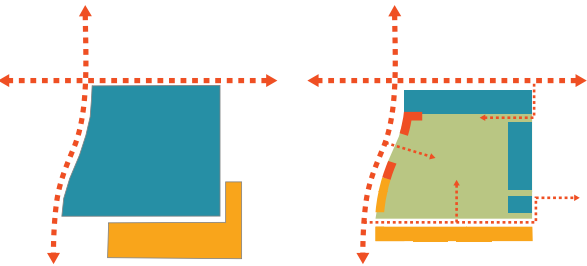
**GYM:** Located at the southeast corner of the site, the gym would be open after school hours and on the weekends for sports and exercise classes.

**LEARNING CENTER:** Located along Reed Reed and connected to the Wilmington House project, the Learning Center is accessible to youth from throughout the neighborhood

**OUTDOOR SPORTS FIELDS:** The outdoor sports facilities would be well-lit and open after school hours.

**YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR INCUBATOR SPACES:** As part of Worthing High School programs an entrepreneur project should be started that provides young people with space to start and incubate their businesses

**WILMINGTON HOUSE:** Is constructed as part of the High School campus, and is connected to the east with a new green corridor along Wilmington



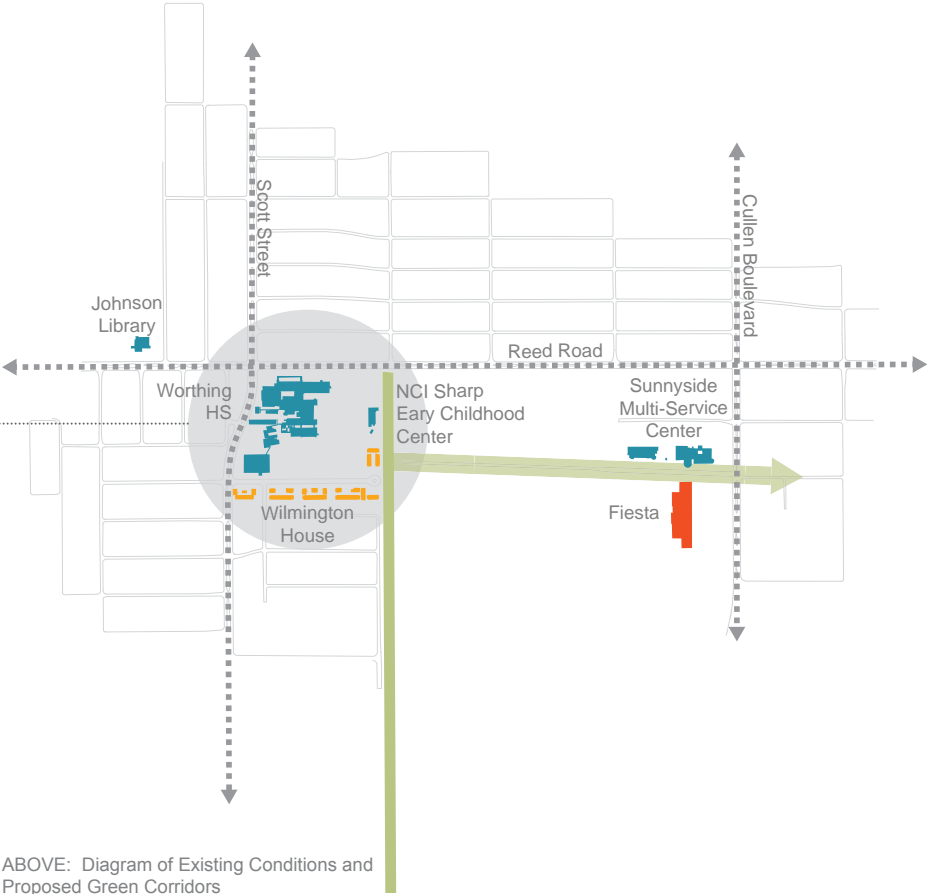
ABOVE, Left: Diagram of Existing High School and Housing  
 ABOVE, Middle: Diagram of Proposed School and Housing  
 ABOVE, Right: Plan of Proposed Worthing High School and Wilmington House

Demographic shifts, changing housing patterns, and new school capital investments present an unprecedented opportunity to reshape the ways local government and schools work together to provide for the people who depend on them and the resources they manage. This is especially important for low-income, low-resource urban communities who disproportionately struggle to meet community needs.

Worthing High School and Wilmington House, a Houston Housing Authority development, are currently slated to be demolished and re-built. The projects combined total \$46.5 million in public investment, \$30 million for Worthing High School and \$16.5 million for Wilmington House. This is an opportunity to reconsider how we might combine investment in schools with new affordable

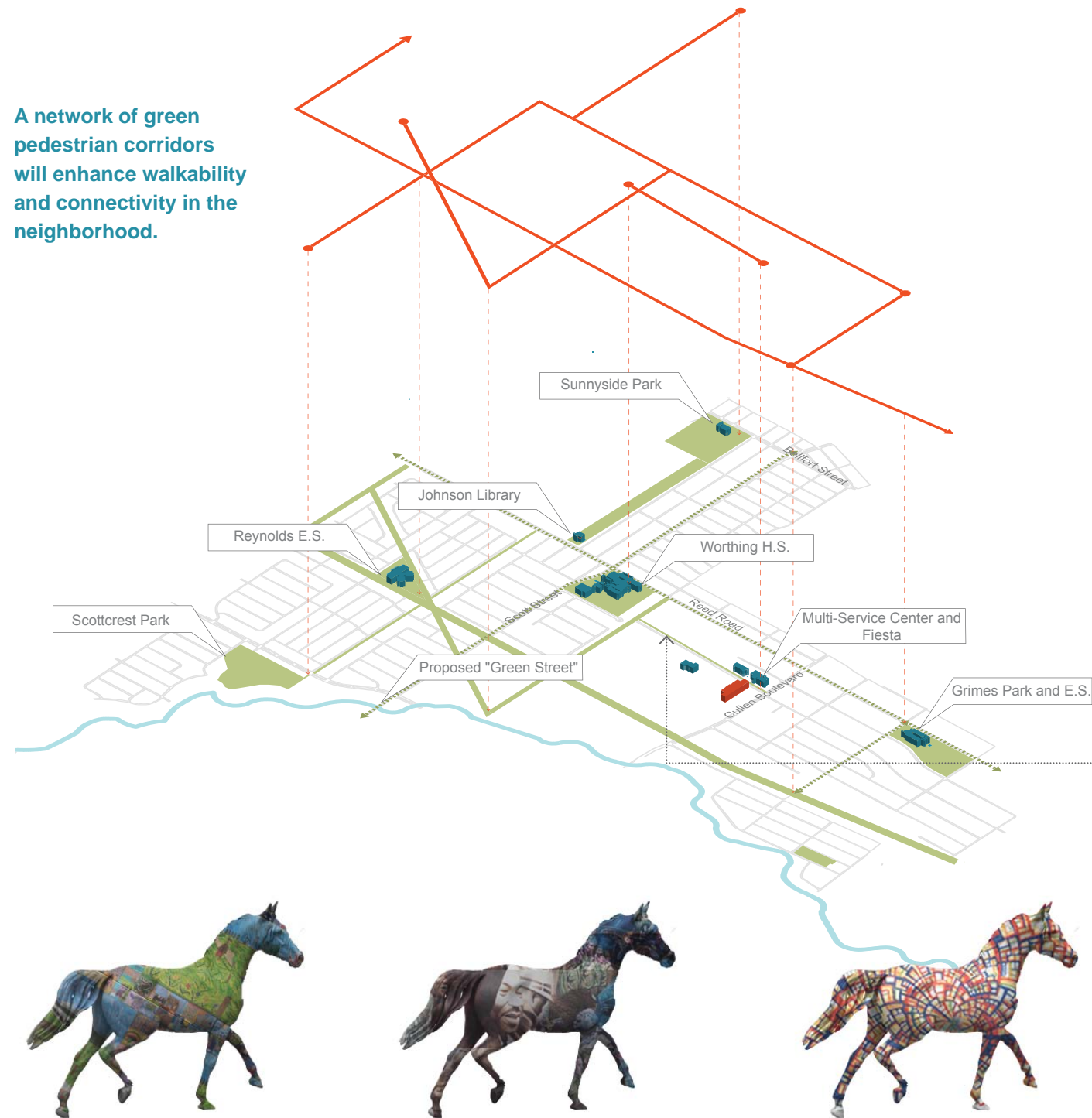
housing--and instead of the two sites being disconnected they could instead become synergistic. For example, the Worthing High School proposal includes a new library and science labs, as well as a learning center that is intended to be open for all kids in the neighborhood--this center would be a great resource for the young people who live at Wilmington House and would work to realize the goal of joint-use schools.

If Worthing High School and Wilmington House were designed as a campus, the two programs could share open spaces, sports facilities, library, performance space, and cafeteria. The outdoor sports fields should also be well-lit and accessible after school hours. The campus would become a center of activity in the neighborhood.



ABOVE: Diagram of Existing Conditions and Proposed Green Corridors

A network of green pedestrian corridors will enhance walkability and connectivity in the neighborhood.



## PUBLIC SPACE Green Corridors

Creating a network of walking and biking trails by capitalizing on the existing system of easements and right-of-ways has the potential to connect residents to important destinations in the neighborhood, including the Fiesta on Cullen, the Multi-Service Center, Sunnyside Community Center, Johnson Library, and neighborhood schools and parks. The network would improve walkability and connectivity in the neighborhood and encourage people to exercise.

The plan for the system of trails, or green corridors (illustrated to the left), would be supplemented with enhanced and improved connecting streets. These "green streets" are proposed for Reed Road and Scott Street, and would include lighting, street trees, and wide sidewalks. The green corridors should have basic amenities to enhance their use and safety, including lighting, seating, and shade. The corridors could also be programmed to generate activity, for example housing local farmers' markets, public art, community gardens, or other amenities. The model for the green corridors is the Sunnyside Trail, currently under construction, that will connect Sunnyside Park and Community Center to the north with the Johnson Public Library to the south. One of the first priorities for the green corridors should be along Wilmington. This corridor connects Worthing High School, Wilmington House, Pro-Vision Charter School, Sunnyside Multi-Service Center, and shopping along Cullen, particularly the area's only grocery store, Fiesta. The goal of the green corridor network is to create safe pedestrian and bicycle routes to improve mobility, increase access to resources, and encourage physical exercise.



ABOVE: Wilmington Street Green Corridor Existing Conditions and Proposal  
Graphics by H. Pham, C. Ponce, P. Shah  
ABOVE, Right: Proposed Green Streets  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: Plan of Proposed Green Corridors  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Bottom: Art Horses, Public Art Proposal by H. Pham, C. Ponce, P. Shah



**Bicycle rental, lighting, seating areas, playgrounds, and shade will encourage active use of the Sunnyside Trail.**



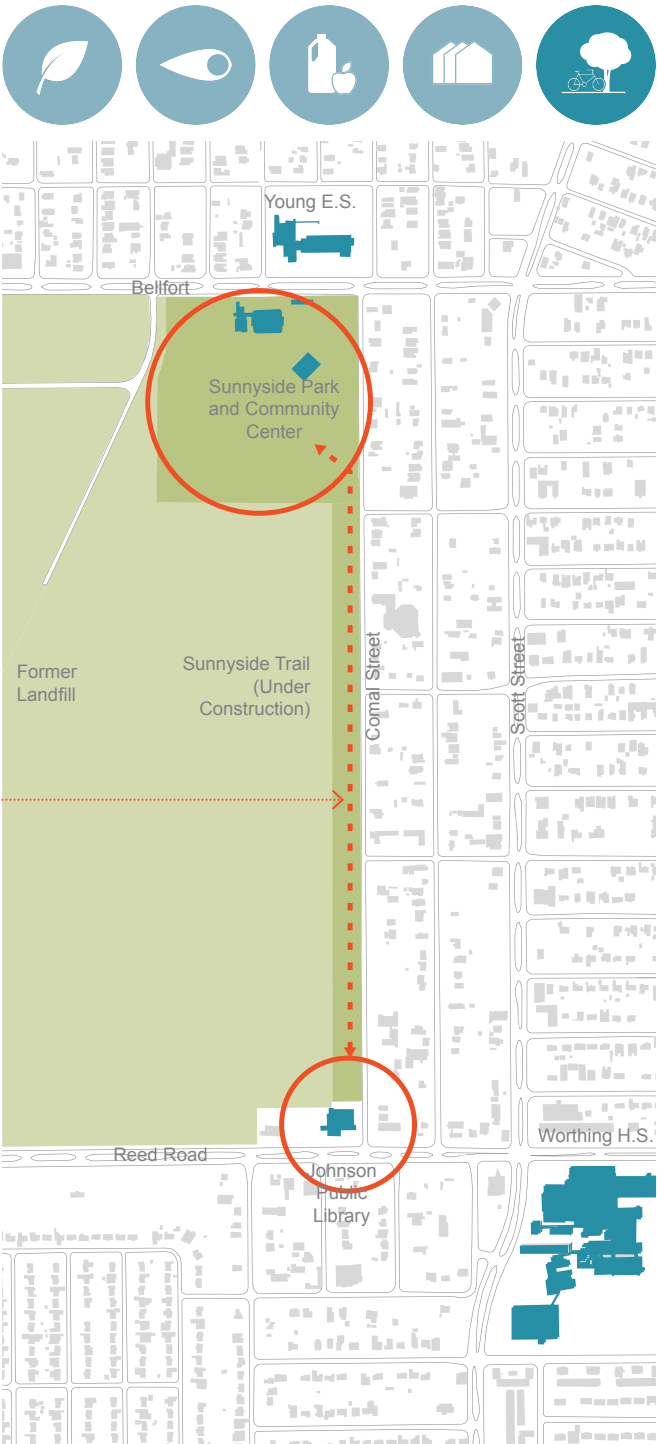
# PUBLIC SPACE Sunnyside Trail Amenities

Comal Street runs north and south parallel to a large parcel of vacant land (300 acres) owned by the City of Houston which was once a landfill. At the north end of the street is Sunnyside Park and Community Center and Young Elementary School, at the south side is the Johnson Public Library, and three blocks to the east Worthing High School. The City of Houston is completing construction on a walking trail along the street to connect these major destinations. The trail will be approximately one-half mile, or a 10 minute walk.

To ensure active use of the trail it is imperative that it is safe and well-maintained. To support this goal additional investment in lighting, seating areas, and shade should be pursued, as well as the introduction of play areas for children. It is recommended that a B-Cycle, bicycle rental station, be installed at Sunnyside Community Center to encourage use and active recreation. Finally, additional programming for the Trail should be explored, and might include community gardens, market stalls, or reading and study areas. As illustrated on the map to the right, there are many vacant lots along Comal Street. Creating a targeted housing infill program for this area would enhance the use of the trail and ensure its safety through additional “eyes on the trail.”

In the future, further remediation of the former landfill site could open up this area for urban farming to address food security in the neighborhood, or equestrian activities such as horse riding trails, stables, and an arena that would build entrepreneurship and enhance economic opportunity. According to the Environmental Protection Agency the landfill site was purchased by the City of Houston in 1937 and was active until 1970. From 1970 through 1977 soil and demolition debris were disposed of at the site. During the mid 1970s, the City of Houston added approximately 2 million cubic yards of soil to the landfill cover. The EPA would require that improvements be made to the cap before redevelopment at the landfill could occur.

RIGHT: Sunnyside Trail Map  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: Houston B-Cycle Program  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Middle from Left to Right:  
Existing Sunnyside Trail and Proposed Improvements  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Bottom: Lighting, Seating, and  
Play Area Precedents



# PUBLIC SPACE

## New Parks



Parks and open spaces have consistently proven to enhance overall well-being and health. To ensure that all Sunnyside residents live within two-thirds of a mile from a park the existing parks were mapped and deficit areas identified (see diagram to the left).

Overall accessible parks can improve physical and mental health, reduce obesity and stress, and build motor and cognitive skills in children. A recent study of parks and open spaces completed in Chicago illustrated that easy access to green space reduces violence and leads to a better quality of life. Specifically, the researchers at the Human-Environment Research Laboratory of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that green spaces, when adjacent to residential areas, create neighborhoods with fewer violent and property crimes and created the conditions where neighbors supported and protected one another. The researchers concluded that parklike surroundings increase neighborhood safety by relieving mental fatigue and feelings of violence and aggression that can occur as an outcome of fatigue. Researchers who are conducting similar studies across the country are finding similar results.

High-quality parks also spur economic development by attracting home buyers and boosting residential property values. A number of studies have indicated that home values increase by as much as 15% if adjacent to a park, translating into greater wealth for residents and increased revenues for cities. This fact also suggests that investment in new affordable housing should be focused around existing or proposed parks, including the Sunnyside Trail area.



RIGHT: Proposed New Park Location  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Center: Sunnyside Park Map  
OPPOSITE PAGE, Bottom Right: Proposed New Park Location

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