

ASSESSMENT/ GAPS

PEOPLE

Equal access to opportunity and prosperity



Assessment:

- Key issues: lack of policy on, and access to affordable housing and social service programs, affordable transportation options, education and training for jobs, and healthy life choices and healthcare to support populations in need
- Various entities, programs and initiatives are in place or planned to address equity issues – many of them in the private/nonprofit/ philanthropic sectors
 - United Way programs work to improve lives of individuals through collective impact. Provide programs and partnership for education, homelessness, and financial stability. (example: THRIVE program)
 - Greater Houston Partnership has programs to enhance workforce development and education
- Numerous existing plans call for *equity* yet few tools/ordinances available to match policies
 - End Homelessness in Houston partnership between the City, HHA and 30-some other agencies has achieved remarkable results in ending homelessness
- Houston offers a wide diversity of moderately affordable education options

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PEOPLE

Equal access to opportunity and prosperity



Strategies:

- *Develop policies to encourage housing choice, and affordable housing in particular*
- *Develop policies for coordinating the provision of transportation options and facilities (especially transit) to connect affordable housing and jobs*
 - Make major destinations accessible to all by designing and adopting an all-mode circulation plan for major centers throughout the city
- *Facilitate public private partnerships to support the creation and implementation of programs promoting equitable TOD, affordable housing, education and job training*
 - Continue to support programs like Early Matters and the school system in helping prepare children to perform at higher levels by ensuring access to high-quality early childhood education
 - Continue to support the library system's mission to provide free and equal access to high-quality, cost-effective services that improve quality of life across the community
- *Coordinate the work of city departments (HCD, etc.) to improve service provision at the neighborhood level*
- *Explore the concept of nexus (integrated) planning as a means to create and deliver better service infrastructure to all neighborhoods*

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PEOPLE

Engaged and informed citizens



Assessment:

- Existing plans and programs make community empowerment a priority, calling for public involvement in future and ongoing planning, but the city lacks an overarching public engagement policy that defines objectives and process
- Some instances of neighborhood and citywide plans have successfully engaged the community to support goals and foster community awareness (e.g., safety, disaster preparedness)
- Tools exist to inform citizens what is planned in neighborhoods, but they are not always effective in communicating the complete picture and how individual actions or projects contribute to that complete picture
- Just started For Houston/By Houston (portal), but more is needed

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PEOPLE

Engaged and informed citizens



Strategies:

- *Develop a citywide public engagement policy and public engagement plan, establishing clear goals/expectations and processes*
- *Set up ongoing communication protocols with other groups in the City (Planning Commission, Chamber of Commerce, HISD, etc.) to promote planning coordination and consistency with common goals and objectives, with each group focusing on the responsibilities best suited for them*
- *Continue work to ensure that the City's codes are transparent and understandable*
 - *Review, update and streamline regulations, processes and procedures to improve simplicity, predictability, and user friendliness*
 - *Establish indicators and metrics to allow the City's progress on commitments to be measured and evaluated*
- *Continue improving For Houston/By Houston to become an effective portal for promoting public engagement*

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PEOPLE

Engaged and informed citizens



➔ Strategies (Cont'd):

- *Identify, promote and leverage General Plan elements (goals, strategies, and actions) that will require citizen support and involvement to accomplish*
- *Work with local groups to increase volunteer and community service opportunities, as well as public awareness of those opportunities*
- *Continue to support the work of local civic organizations to engage and connect the community (e.g., Houston Literacy Center)*

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PEOPLE

Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations



Assessment:

- Neighborhood involvement, leadership, and communication → numerous neighborhood and citywide plans cite as mechanisms to support economic development, supportive services, and neighborhood empowerment
- Stronger tools are needed for grassroots planning and to support ability of Civic Clubs and Super Neighborhoods to enact change
- Numerous nonprofits are providing services within communities (e.g., Neighborhood Centers, Inc., Community Assistance Ministries, Covenant Community Capital, United Way)

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PEOPLE

Strong social ties supported by strong social, civic, and faith organizations



Strategies:

- *Strengthen neighborhood community centers*
- *Program parks and rec centers to be social gathering spaces*
- *Launch Neighbor Support Night (NSN) program (annual or bi-annual) with events focused on strengthening community ties, elevating public spirit, and encouraging citizen engagement*
- *Create structure/process for the creation of Sub Area/ Small Area plans to encourage proactive neighborhood planning, community involvement, and adopted, implementable plans*
- *Promote access to arts and culture in underserved areas, schools, and neighborhoods that lack resources to get to performance venues.*

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Affordable, high-quality health care for all



Assessment:

- Several documents provide snapshots of the health profile of Houston and region (i.e. *Healthy Communities Indicator* reports)
- Houston has several Federal Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to provide comprehensive health care services to underserved communities. (i.e. Hope Clinic)
- Foundations (e.g., Episcopal Health Foundation) are doing effective work in the greater Houston area to help local nonprofits improve health care delivery and community development (services) – focus on capacity building, but they’re looking for coordination between public and private sectors
- While health care access is addressed in citywide policy (accessible health care/ disease prevention) and neighborhood recommendations (medical clinics and programs to address local health needs), health and environment are not prioritized and are subject to political fluctuations
- There is little connection between health and neighborhood planning
- Tension with County is a challenge to do coordinated health planning, leading to competing/contrasting policies

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Affordable, high-quality health care for all



Strategies:

- *Address health issues at their root through comprehensive Healthy Communities planning and chronic disease prevention*
- *Require Health Impact Assessments for new development*
- *Encourage further connections between TMC and communities and planning*
- *Expand number of FQHCs in Houston to make use of federal funds to provide health care for all*
- *Support and coordinate with health foundations and nonprofits that promote improvements in health care delivery*
- *Develop standards for nursing home facilities and care available to seniors, and guidelines for Aging in Place*

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Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups



Assessment:

- Existing citywide and neighborhood plans call for ample social services for populations in need and at-risk groups (seniors, youth, homeless, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, crime prevention)
- Numerous nonprofits provide services within communities (i.e. Neighborhood Centers, Inc., Community Assistance Ministries, Covenant Community Capital, United Way, Bank on Houston)
- Work of Mayor's office, United Way, and Greater Houston Partnership aimed at providing homeless, financial literacy, education, and workforce development services
- A gap exists in the ability to tie tools and funding sources to neighborhoods/ communities of greatest need.
- Need to better communicate availability of these services to populations in need, and to better communicate the need for these services to the community at large

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Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups



Strategies:

- *Continue to support implementation of THRIVE, UPSKILL, and Early Matters programs*
- *Use success of End Homelessness campaign as model for successful City leadership in tackling important issues*
- *Increase funding for enhancement of city-owned service centers*
- *Encourage more joint use agreements within city departments to increase effectiveness and efficient use of resources*
- *Conduct service needs assessments among stakeholder groups and facilitate the use of needs assessment findings in the planning of new service offerings or in revising existing offerings*
- *Promote awareness of supportive service offerings and their benefits, and how to apply*

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An integrated community that reflects our international heritage



Assessment:

- Houston has been branded “most diverse city in the nation”
- Houston’s diversity is an advantage but if not nurtured and leveraged, it could end up impairing the city’s economic growth and competitiveness
- The Office of International Communities (OIC) and Global Houston program are city-led initiatives aimed at welcoming newcomers to the Houston area
 - The Office of International Communities “brings together Houston’s international community by promoting their well-being and connectedness and facilitating their successful civic, economic, and cultural integration in Houston”
 - Global Houston was developed “to foster better communication and collaboration within Houston’s international community. It serves as Houston’s link to international resources”
- All ethnic and racial groups do not equally experience prosperity and the city has pockets of increasingly severe ethnic and economic segregation
- Neighborhoods are not balanced in range of incomes and ethnicities

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PEOPLE

An integrated community that reflects our international heritage



Strategies:

- *Develop program(s) that deliberately speaks to our multi-national/cultural makeup or builds awareness of cultural diversity*
 - *Continue to support and develop OIC and Global Houston programs, and other initiatives that welcome and help newcomers integrate into and succeed in the community*
 - *Consider becoming involved in the Welcoming America Cities and Counties Program (<http://www.welcomingamerica.org/get-involved/cities/>)*
- *Strengthen historical designation program to celebrate multi-cultural identifiers*
- *Update public art program to highlight culture*
- *Create structure for the creation of Sub Area/ Small Area plans to encourage proactive neighborhood planning, community involvement, and prosperity that reflects multi-cultural identities*

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A safe, secure community



Assessment:

- Safety and security is a widespread theme in citywide and neighborhood planning documents (including bicycle and pedestrian safety, community policing, CPTED, vacancy abatement, and disaster preparedness)
- Numerous tools, plans, programs and initiatives are in place/ongoing, including many promoted by the Houston Police and Fire Departments. (e.g., Keep Houston Safe, Positive Interaction Program, Smoke Detector Giveaway Program, etc.)
- A gap exists to connect planning policy to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety to programs and tools that reduce fatalities
- The city faces funding issues in responding to needs and ROW challenges to implement Complete Streets
- Disaster preparedness in Houston is strong due to leadership of city department and federal programs – but people are the infrastructure for preparedness and they are not being used effectively yet

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A safe, secure community



Strategies:

- *Continue to work with police department to address community policing in underserved or crime-affected areas*
- *Continue work on programs that build trust between the community and the city's core public safety services (police and fire)*
- *Combine PIP, OEM and other public safety agency meetings with community interaction for safer communities*
- *Develop combined training and community-level preparedness programs*
- *Continue to implement homelessness reduction campaign*
- *Implement programs such as a Pedestrian Plan, updated Bike Plan and Complete Streets Plan to ensure adequate sidewalks and other measure to ensure pedestrian and cyclist safety*
- *Coordinate the work of city departments and integrate CPTED principles to ensure adequate lighting and safe landscaping in the public realm*
- *Leverage Federal grant programs to mitigate natural disasters (funding for preparedness)*

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Attractive, walkable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character

Assessment:

- More connected, compact, self-sufficient neighborhoods with mobility options are needed, but this is difficult to achieve without an integrated land use and transportation policy
- Food deserts also hinder the ability of neighborhoods to be self-sufficient
- Many sidewalks are obstructed (poles, trees, illegal dumping, etc.), impeding safe walking and ADA accessibility
- Solid waste service not connecting/able to respond to needs of higher density housing (MF)
- Tools to maintain community character (Deed Restrictions, Lot Size Ordinance, Building Line Ordinance, Historic Preservation) provide a good start for local control, but more is needed to preserve character while encouraging revitalization
- Many neighborhoods are becoming less diverse over time as gentrification occurs and affordable housing options diminish
- A variety of federal programs and funding are available to support affordable housing (CDBG and HOME) but no citywide policy or plan on affordable housing exist
- Without zoning, developing neighborhoods with housing choice is challenging

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Attractive, walkable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character

Strategies:

- *Incorporate policies for connected streets and sidewalks and context-sensitive design of streets into future Mobility Plan(s)*
- *Develop incentives for affordable housing opportunities*
- *Develop incentives for public transit use (all income levels)*
- *Develop incentives for mixed income communities*
- *Encourage mixed-use --and consider establishing set-asides for affordable housing— for transit-oriented development (i.e., within walking distance of transit corridors)*
- *Explore channeling TIRZ funding to support affordable housing in infill sites*
- *Establish mechanism to create Sub Area Plans for Super Neighborhoods*
- *Review and adjust the parking ratios and related regulations for urban housing, particularly in and around transit corridors*
- *Develop policies and programs to help develop a network of ample, safe, accessible sidewalks (e.g., pedestrian sidewalk repair program)*

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Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places



Assessment:

- A comprehensive citywide green space network is envisioned for the city and region, as well as parks and public spaces to serve individual neighborhoods. Bayou Greenways 2020 is important step
- Plans are in place for Emancipation Park, Buffalo Bayou, Memorial Park, etc.
- Tools to facilitate parks include Chapters 32 and 42 of Code (Open Space Ordinance), Parks Master Plan, CIP, Scenic Houston, Houston Parks Board
- Gap exists in ability of neighborhood groups to support community-based park planning. Many parks have limited amenities (playgrounds, parking, courts, lighting), which in turn limits their utilization
- Many new residential subdivisions, especially small to mid-size developments, pay fee-in-lieu of and are too distant from parks
- Open Space Ordinance (2007) is a good start but has not been revisited for effectiveness/equity
- Recycling is not available in parks and other locations that generate significant recyclable waste

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Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places



Strategies:

- *Build on Bayou Greenways to complete the “green grid” with north/south and east/west connections*
- *Require new development to provide on-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities for safe access to parks from neighborhoods*
- *Encourage shared use facilities with libraries, schools, etc.*
- *Ensure that all citizens have access to parks within ½ mile/ 10 minute walk*
- *Continue public private partnerships to generate funding for parks*
- *Review/update Open Space Ordinance*
- *Leverage existing city facilities for uses/services not currently provided (e.g., recycling)*
- *Adopt ordinance to support recycling at all public facilities*
- *Balance green open space with appropriate amenities in the design/programming of local parks*
- *Continue and expand strategy for creating multi-use open spaces (e.g., parks/flood control/trails)*

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Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces



Assessment:

- The desire for a beautiful, clean, well-maintained public realm unites numerous citywide and neighborhood plans.
- Recommendations include neighborhood clean-up, streetscape improvements, elements to beautify and highlight community character, such as public art, and removal of blight
- Most tools are reactive (not proactive) and geared at litter prevention/removal, code enforcement, and demolition of nuisance properties, rather than at beautification or streetscape improvements
 - Keep Houston Beautiful Ordinance focuses on litter abatement but is extremely underfunded
 - Illegal signage is a pervasive problem
- A gap exists in connecting citywide and neighborhood plan goals to projects. The majority of neighborhood beautification happens in TIRZ/Management Districts.
- Some new developments do not provide an adequate public realm, particularly in denser urban areas
- The city contracts with Houston Arts Alliance to oversee the selection, acquisition and management of artworks for the city. Public art is primarily funded through the 1.75% civic art allocation from eligible Capital Improvement Program (CIP) building projects.

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Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces



Strategies:

- *Develop tool for streetscape and litter abatement programs in areas not located within TIRZ/ Management Districts*
- *Compile an accurate inventory of public ROW space that can be devoted to quality public realm spaces*
- *Continue to work with the Houston Arts Alliance and related groups and organizations to achieve a well placed, well curated public art program to enhance the public realm throughout the city*
- *Strengthen Transit Corridor Ordinance to encourage improvements to the public realm*
- *Strengthen Neighborhood Matching Grant Program*
- *Adopt design guidelines for the development of quality, context-sensitive pedestrian realms for use in new development and redevelopment (e.g., for use with Planning Commission variances)*
- *Develop unified guidelines for signage in the public realm*

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Vibrant, enjoyable activity centers



Assessment:

- Existing plans and policies envision a city of neighborhoods and activity centers, including Downtown, which are self-sufficient but connected by mobility networks, jobs, housing, and commercial areas, as well as by open space and recreation links.
- No tool exists to implement an overarching framework for creating neighborhood plans for these diverse centers.
- Neighborhood planning is done *ad hoc* and is not linked by an adopted framework to achieve this goal.
- *Urban Houston Framework* provided guidance for identifying and creating urban centers
- The city has few vibrant walkable streets offering unique experiences: retail, art, parks, quality pedestrian realm, etc.
- Present city regulations often push new development and redevelopment into “suburban style” patterns, e.g., wide streets, deep setbacks, large surface parking lots, etc. .

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PLACE

Vibrant, enjoyable activity centers



Strategies:

- *Build on Urban Houston Framework and criteria to map and develop distinct tools for Urban Centers*
- *Continue to reinforce Downtown as the city's center and main activity hub*
- *Conduct Subarea/ Subregional Mobility Plans that integrate land use and transportation planning to accurately assess impacts and promote activity centers*
- *Invest and enhance neighborhood activity centers*
- *Develop Main Street Ordinance to encourage curbside eating, walkable retail and economic development at neighborhood centers*
- *Revisit TOD planning to incorporate METRO System Reimagining Plan*
- *Create a parking management plan for on street and off street parking in and around major activity centers*
- *Encourage infill and redevelopment as well as adaptive rehabilitation of existing buildings and facilities*

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High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents

Assessment:

- Certain types of neighborhood facilities (recreation centers, health facilities, etc.) can be built or upgraded in low- to moderate-income residential areas through the Neighborhood Facilities Development and Renovation Program, funded by CDBG dollars
- There is no unified strategy for the many departments and organizations that house, operate and maintain public/community facilities.
- A comprehensive strategy is needed for prioritizing capital improvements (construction and improvements) and programming/management of community facilities (currently, GSD generates list of candidate facilities based on age, condition, etc.; policies and new project criteria come from departments in charge of candidate facilities)
- City is challenged to fund improvements to existing facilities
- Payment of in lieu fees rather than physical land dedication can act as a barrier in delivering high-quality new facilities in locations accessible to neighborhoods in need

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High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents

Strategies:

- *Create opportunities for equitable access to parks, schools, healthy food, gathering spaces, and community gardens throughout the city*
- *Expand opportunities for community involvement in the programming of future community facilities*
- *Include policies to facilitate joint use agreements between health department, libraries, parks and other service departments and entities in the future master planning of facilities*
- *Work with nonprofits to provide services at city-owned service centers*
- *Develop a comprehensive and coordinated planning strategy for public facilities that complement each other*
- *Consider coordinated/shared parking for multi-use areas*
- *Encourage/incentivize coordination/collaboration between city departments – build on existing synergies (e.g., parks, libraries, health, etc.)*

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A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being

Assessment:

- Healthy communities planning has arisen in citywide and neighborhood plans, driven both by a physical planning and a public health perspectives; ample data exists to support policy development
- No clear policies currently direct implementation of programs
- Propensity to work in silos is a challenge – difficult to overcome
- Additional coordination is needed between public health, parks, and planning to link policy recommendations with implementation
- The city lacks adequate network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities to enable biking and walking as realistic options for mobility and recreation

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A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being

Strategies:

- *Include policies for healthy communities planning and joint agreements between health department, libraries and parks in facilities master plan updates*
- *Focus more attention in planning and designing for social connectivity – provides spaces and means for different groups to interact*
- *Address health issues at their root through chronic disease prevention programs*
- *Require Health Impact Assessments for new development*
- *Plan neighborhoods, housing, and facilities to meet the needs of seniors*
- *Adopt and implement a citywide bicycle and pedestrian facilities master plan*
- *Coordinate the planning and development of sidewalks and pedestrian facilities with transit planning*

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