

Presentations by Marlene Gafrick and Dr. Carol Lewis, Saturday, August 26, 2006

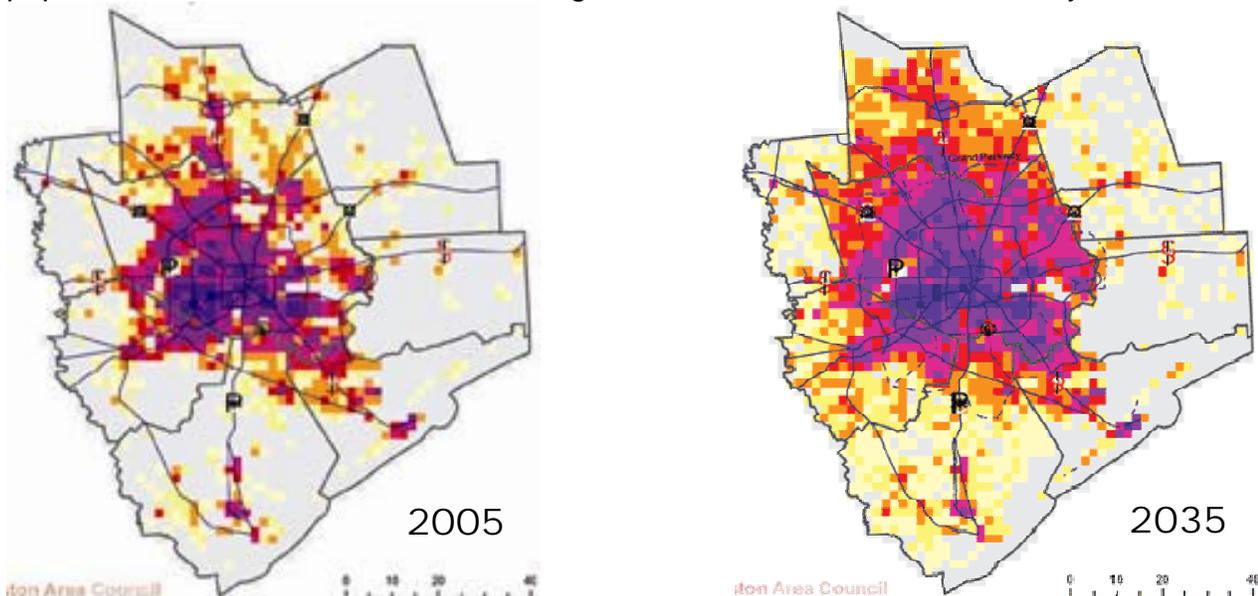
GAFRICK: Good morning and welcome to the first in a series of events where we will be working together to plan for the future of Houston's urban neighborhoods. My name is Marlene Gafrick and I'm the Director of the City of Houston's Planning and Development Department. Thank you for taking time out of your Saturday morning to join us here at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

I'd like to thank three sponsors who have helped the Planning Department make today's event possible; the City of Houston's Convention and Entertainment Facilities Department for the use of the George R. Brown Convention Center, Central Houston (I believe Bob Eury is in the crowd here...), and Aramark for providing the food we'll enjoy today.

Houston, the city we all call home, continues to undergo dramatic growth and redevelopment. You see it as you drive through your neighborhood and on the way to work - new houses, redeveloped properties, expanding businesses, more traffic. The result can be a significant change in the fabric of our existing neighborhoods, sometimes for better, sometimes not. This is particularly noticeable in the urban neighborhoods of the inner city and it is projected to continue into the foreseeable future.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council recently completed their Regional Growth Forecast which looks at population and employment projections through 2035 for the purpose of transportation and community planning. Their projections are in line with those done by other entities. (PAUSE) **The projections for 2035 are staggering.**

The 8-county region will see a population increase in the next 30 years of more than 3.5 million people with 2 million of that concentrated in Harris County. That's the equivalent of adding a second Houston to Harris County in the next 30 years. **In other words, company is coming!** These 2 million new people will form an additional 835,000 households and they'll add more than 1 million new jobs to our economy – a real benefit to us all. Our total population will reach 8,835,000 in the region with 5,840,000 in Harris County alone.



For additional information from HGAC, see www.h-gac.com/HGAC/Programs/Regional+Forecast/default.htm

Houston is a young city and we have seen great spurts of growth in our past. We've learned there are three ways we can respond to growth. We can choose to ignore it and be driven along on its tide without direction. We can fight it and hope that its challenges are mysteriously diverted (a strategy that seldom works). Or, we can harness the growth and its opportunities to reshape our city and improve our quality of life. In Houston, we've shown that harnessing growth and change can reap big rewards.

Growing up always has its challenges. And when you're a big, spread-out city like we are, these challenges can be daunting. Our land area now encompasses 640 square miles – a huge area to serve. Let's put that into perspective. You can fit Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Miami, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, St. Louis AND Washington, DC inside of our city limits and still have 18 square miles to spare.



A population comparison shows that the city populations of Atlanta, Sacramento, Boston, Orlando and Pittsburgh would all fit within our 2016 population of 2,016,582. When using other communities as examples, we need to keep this in mind.



Even with all of these people we still have plenty of room to fill in as a city. Approximately 25% of the available land within the city limits is undeveloped, and within the 610 loop about 17% is undeveloped. The inner city is already seeing a great deal of infill, leading to increases in property values and the creation higher-density development. This is a great opportunity for key parts of our community to mature.

Adding an additional 2 million people to our area is obviously going to put stress on services like police, fire and schools. It's going to challenge our water, sewer and drainage systems, our air quality and more. One of the biggest impacts will be on transportation. But this is also an area where some very interesting benefits can be derived as we look for opportunities to harness the growth.

We can grow in a manner that preserves the positive characteristics of our neighborhoods while improving the quality of life for current and future residents. We are here today to discuss how our urban transit corridors can develop to achieve these goals because they are crucial to our future. We're going to ask some critical questions about the change and growth to come. What should it look like? Will it harm or help existing areas? What do we want to preserve and protect? What do we want to change or recreate? Together, let's take a proactive look at our future.

INTRODUCE DR. CAROL LEWIS, Chair of the Houston Planning Commission and Director, Center for Transportation Training & Research at Texas Southern University.

DR. LEWIS: Thank you Marlene. Good morning and welcome! I'd also like to thank you for being here this morning. Marlene has painted the picture for us of what the future has in store. So how do we plan for this future? We could try to make a list of what we think should go where, but experience has shown that plans like this seldom see the light of day. Instead we have a different model to pursue – one that has served us well before.

The Houston we walk and drive through each day – the built environment of our city - is the result of a set of policies, rules and regulations that dictate how we want our city to grow and develop. These rules lay out the width of streets and sidewalks, where curb cuts go for vehicle access, the distance buildings set back from the streets, how many parking spaces a business must have, what landscape elements must be added and much more. Each of these seem like a minor issue, but when taken in whole, they create the world we move through.



To most people these rules are invisible. But to the people that build our city, from homebuilders to developers and government agencies, these rules are the DNA of our community. If you remember from way back in Biology 101, or maybe more recently from watching a detective show on TV, DNA is the genetic instructions, or building blocks, for how our body grows. It determines what we will look like and how we will develop over time.

Like DNA, these seemingly unimportant rules and regulations dictate how our city will grow. While we can't change our DNA to get straighter teeth or longer legs (at least not yet!), we can alter the DNA of our city to get better results. And that's just what we propose to do: to take a good look at our rules and see how we can improve them so that the Houston to be built in the future works better. Here's an example:

Prior to 1990 the city did not have landscaping requirements for new development. By modifying our rules, or DNA, to require landscaping we were able to create an enormous visual difference across Houston with each new development. It was so well received that Harris County has since adopted the same rule. And we all benefit from the beautification, cooling and increased walk-ability that these trees have added.

BEFORE ORDINANCE



AFTER ORDINANCE



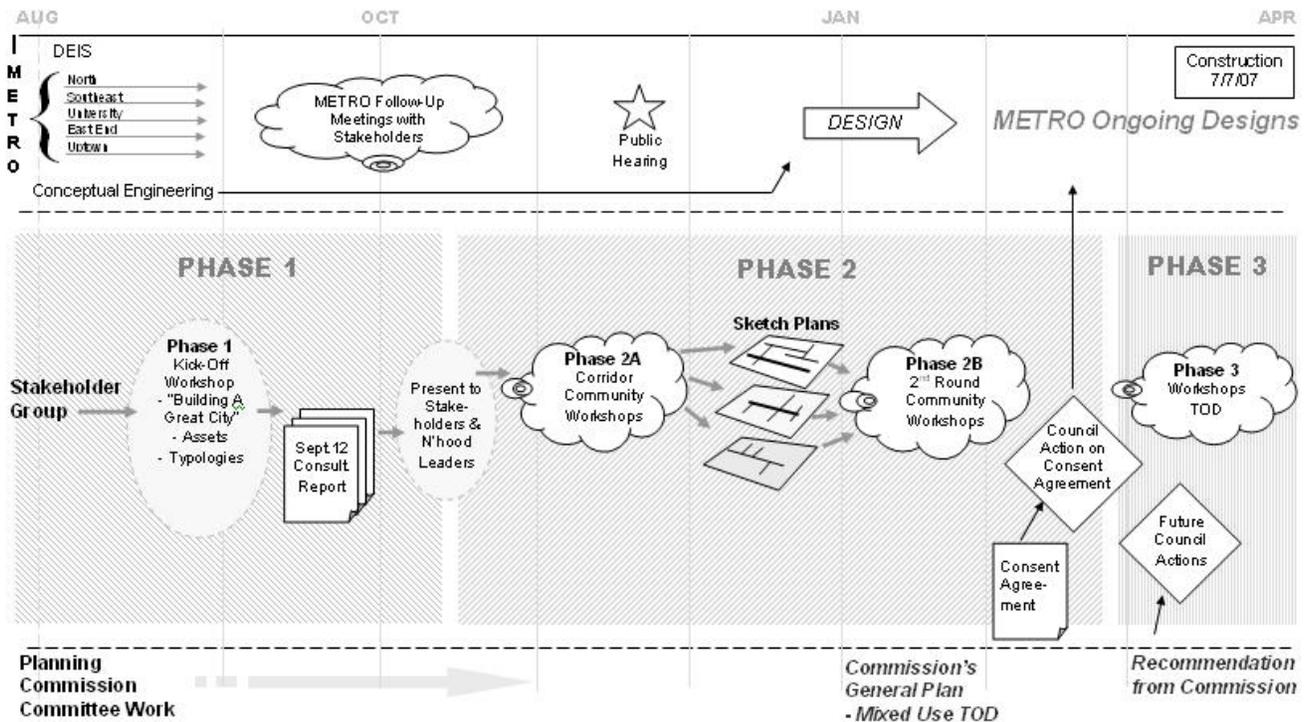
How was this accomplished? Not by creating a plan and saying we're going to put a tree here, here, and here (if we can pay for it). Instead, we changed the DNA of our city and the result was a different environment as the city continued to grow. That is exactly the formula we're going to focus on here today. In a city that's growing rapidly these improvements to our built environment occur with each new development.

It is possible for us to set new standards where urban development is occurring, such as in the six transit corridors. These can help to mitigate negative impacts of development while reshaping our communities in positive ways. Here's the process that we are undertaking, starting with this meeting today.

Walk Through Process Chart (ATTACHED)

- 1. Simultaneous timeline with Metro and Planning Commission Committees**
- 2. Brief description of key Planning Commission Committees**
- 3. Timeline: from now through March of 2007**

4. Phase 1 – Kick off workshop “building a great city”
5. Phase 2 – Corridor Community Workshops (2 rounds of workshops)
6. Phase 3 – Workshops TOD



Many of you may have participated in past planning activities such as Blueprint Houston or Envision Houston which dealt with our vision for the region and the city as a whole. This process will build on them and complement their work while focusing specifically on the six transit corridors. Likewise, this process will compliment the smaller area plans compiled by neighborhoods, management districts and other organizations.

I'm grateful that you are here this morning to lend your ideas and vision to this critical process. Next, we're going to learn a little about how design of public spaces can shape the quality, character, locating and connectivity of our neighborhoods. Then we'll roll up our sleeves and really put you to work.

(Introduce consultants)