

# CITY OF HOUSTON CORE STRATEGIES

DRAFT - FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

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## ***MAKE YOUR MARK ON HOUSTON'S FUTURE.***

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## Introduction

Houston is a great city. From its winding greenways, to its thriving arts and cultural scene, to its bold entrepreneurialism, Houston is a city of tremendous opportunity. Houston is also renowned for its welcoming culture: a city that thrives on its international diversity, where eclectic inner city neighborhoods and master-planned suburban communities come together. Houston is a place where everyone can feel at home.

Even with its successes, Houston faces challenges on many fronts: from managing its continued growth, to sustaining quality infrastructure, to enhancing its existing neighborhoods and overcoming fiscal hurdles. Overcoming these challenges requires strong and effective government – a City that confidently charts its course and works in coordination with its partners to achieve success. Only through this kind of strategic leadership will the City of Houston be able to secure a healthy future: one that provides the highest possible quality of life for its citizens and positions Houston to compete globally for the best and brightest people, businesses, and institutions.

In short, achieving Houston’s full potential requires a plan.

Realizing this potential is the ambition of *Plan Houston*. In developing this draft plan, we started by looking at plans that had already been created by dozens of public and private-sector groups. We then listened to Houstonians themselves, who described their vision for Houston’s future. Finally, we sought guidance from *Plan Houston’s* diverse leadership groups – notably its Steering Committee, Stakeholder Advisory Group and Technical Advisory Committee.

*Plan Houston* lays out how to achieve the community’s aspirations by identifying the policies, plans, and programs that, taken together, represent the City’s long-term priorities. It’s important to note that *Plan Houston* is not about establishing land use controls. Instead, this plan supports Houston’s continued success by providing consensus around Houston’s goals and policies, thus enabling more effective government: one that is better coordinated, more proactive, and more strategic. *Plan Houston* charts a course to a healthy, prosperous future for Houston for decades to come.

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## Vision

After months of community dialogue, the citizens of Houston expressed a vision for their community:

*Houston offers opportunity for all and celebrates its diversity of people, economy, culture, and places. Houston promotes healthy and resilient communities through smart civic investments, dynamic partnerships, education, and innovation. Houston is the place where anyone can prosper and feel at home.*

***Houston: Opportunity. Diversity. Community. Home.***

## Goals

Houston's citizens also identified a set of 32 goals that further describe this community vision. These goals are listed in Appendix A at the end of this document.

## Core Strategies

This draft Plan Houston proposes twelve (12) core strategies for the City of Houston. These directives identify City priorities necessary to achieve the community vision and goals. These directives are below.

In order to achieve the community's vision and goals and to provide for the needs of all Houstonians, the City of Houston will do the following:

**Spend money wisely.**

**Grow responsibly.**

**Nurture safe and healthy neighborhoods.**

**Connect people and places.**

**Support a global economy.**

**Sustain quality infrastructure.**

**Champion learning.**

**Foster an affordable city.**

**Protect and conserve our resources.**

**Communicate clearly and with transparency.**

**Partner with others, public and private.**

**Celebrate what's uniquely Houston.**

Greater detail on each core strategy, including an assessment of current efforts as well as the commitments the City is making to facilitate each directive, can be found below.

## **Spend money wisely.**

### ***Assessment:***

Houston has long enjoyed a thriving economy and on-going economic growth, attracting thousands of people to the city and region in recent years. Even within this growing economy, the City faces serious fiscal challenges. To continue enjoying economic success, Houston must regularly assess its long-term financial picture so that it has adequate lead time to implement solutions.

The City faces budget challenges from several directions. On the revenue side, there are increasing limitations to expanding the tax base. A City Charter provision put in place by voters, caps the revenue growth as a percent of population growth. In addition, Houston is limited in its ability to increase its tax base through annexation because of state law restrictions. Population growth outside of the city limits, while it continues to strengthen the regional economy (and Houston's by extension), creates infrastructure and public safety costs to the City as more and more commuters travel into Houston for jobs and other activities. On the expenditure side, the cost of providing services continues to increase, including the cost of personnel and capital improvements.

Understanding these challenges, in 2014 the City Council adopted new policies to ensure fiscal sustainability. These policies call for the City to increase its minimum financial reserves as a hedge against risk, provide clearer communication to councilmembers and the public regarding decisions on spending public funds, and place greater emphasis on long-term planning and forecasting to identify and anticipate budgetary challenges before they become unwieldy.

While government accountability and transparency are important steps for ensuring long-term financial health, the City must constantly balance new expenditures against the cost of providing them. The City needs to continue to improve its financial planning tools so that it can comfortably overcome fiscal challenges. The City must weigh every public expenditure against the need to uphold quality of life standards for residents.

### ***Commitments:***

- Maintain a long-range fiscal plan for the City.
- Align the City's operating budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) annually.
- Prioritize community needs to ensure that essential programs and services are adequately funded.
- Continue to find ways to institutionalize communication and coordination within departments to continuously improve efficiencies.
- Encourage increased cost sharing among departments and partners agencies.
- Support increased development, redevelopment, and neighborhood protection activities by seeking dedicated funding for priority long-term planning and capital projects and related future maintenance costs.

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- Ensure that existing City assets are adequately maintained to reduce unnecessary capital expenditures for replacement.
- Determine the impact long-term growth will have on the City's fiscal sustainability and return on investment.
- Ensure that revenue and expenditures streams are equitable and that City services are distributed fairly.

## ***Related goals:***

- ✓ Fiscally responsible, accountable, and responsive public services and investments.
- ✓ Ample, efficient and well- maintained infrastructure.
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders and residents
- ✓ Equitable access to opportunity and prosperity.

## Grow responsibly.

### *Assessment:*

The City of Houston is located in one of the fastest growing urban regions in the United States. Houston has long enjoyed a cooperative relationship with the development community whereby both the public and private sectors contribute to, and benefit from, that growth. While growth is positive for the economy and regional competitiveness, the continual expansion of the city can also have negative consequences. It can stress infrastructure and exacerbate traffic. It can consume valuable green space. Development patterns also have implications on a city's financial sustainability and even the health of its residents. To grow responsibly into the future, the City of Houston must consider new development policies.

Houston needs to develop in ways that bring jobs and activities closer to home. Compact, mixed-use activity centers enable economic development and improve quality of life while minimizing impacts to traffic and infrastructure. These centers provide community interaction, celebrate identity, and feature a diversity of land uses, while also increasing walkability and reducing auto dependency. Areas such as downtown, Uptown, Westchase and Memorial City offer such opportunities. The City should develop policies to encourage more centers throughout Houston.

Alongside the increased interest in compact development inside the city, there continues to be a great draw to suburban communities. The City must find ways to accommodate and sustain both of these options.

Houston must be careful that the benefits of growth are balanced alongside the need to protect existing neighborhoods. Maintaining mixed-income neighborhoods is also important.

One important factor in supporting responsible development for Houston's future is to determine an equitable approach to upgrading existing infrastructure to accommodate growth. While these upgrades will better serve the higher density development desired by the community, it is important to develop an approach that balances public and private investments. This balance is necessary in order for the public and private sectors to continue to provide, within their own areas of responsibilities, the highest standard of services for Houstonians.



## **Commitments:**

- Work directly with neighborhoods to identify civic investments needed to maintain quality of life.
- Continue to evaluate tools that could help protect neighborhoods from incompatible development.
- Anticipate growth and plan for it, including processes to ensure infrastructure can accommodate growth.
- Adopt policies to support new and future activity centers.
- Periodically conduct studies to determine appropriate developer contributions for new development.
- Continue to support METRO's investment in public transit and adopt development policies that better coordinate transit with supporting land uses.
- Coordinate thoroughfare planning to include all modes of transportation and context sensitive design principles.
- Update transportation and infrastructure plans on a defined schedule.
- Assess long term impacts of regional growth patterns on issues such as mobility, drainage and financial sustainability and adopt policies to mitigate impacts.

## **Related goals:**

- ✓ Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ Vibrant and connected activity centers
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ An affordable, multi-modal transportation network providing convenient access and mobility throughout the region for people and goods
- ✓ Ample, efficient, and well-maintained infrastructure



## **Nurture safe and healthy neighborhoods.**

### ***Assessment:***

Houston has long prided itself on the strength, quality and diversity of its neighborhoods. The city's neighborhoods provide the basic building blocks for community life. But while Houston is known as one of the largest and most prosperous cities in the nation, not every Houstonian has the opportunity to live in a safe and healthy place.

Houston includes neighborhoods that are severely distressed, and residents of these areas face serious challenges. Some of the most critical challenges include lack of adequate infrastructure, limited community services and public safety, food deserts, incompatible development and poor air quality. Communities with fewer fiscal resources are particularly at risk. Proper controls must be put in place that ensures environmental justice and superior services to all Houstonians.

One area of high importance is Houstonian's access to health care. Houston is known for having an abundance of high-quality health care providers, but this supply does not always translate to high-quality health care for all Houstonians. Nearly one third of Houstonians are without health insurance and adequate access to health care. The City should develop an overarching policy for the City to support and provide leadership for health and the environment.

Ultimately, achieving healthy neighborhoods requires the integration of health, recreation and activity programming, coordinated transportation and land use, and ensuring multi-modal connectivity. This only comes about with targeted, localized area planning. The planning process typically results in a community vision and goals, and an action plan. This process generates consensus and enthusiasm from both public and private partners and can result in real improvements. Currently, the City's neighborhood-level planning efforts are limited and it pursues these plans only when outside partners offer funding. A more robust neighborhood planning function is necessary to fully assist Houston's local communities.

### ***Commitments:***

- Expand partnerships and joint use agreements among all aspects of the community.
- Bolster awareness of existing and future programs that address public health and safety.
- Streamline and coordinate health care delivery and wellness programs provided by all relevant public and private-sector providers.
- Address health needs beyond the hospital system, such as senior care and mental health services.
- Develop a regimented, robust formal neighborhood-level planning function to ensure neighborhoods are able to reach their full potential.
- Consider a program that recognizes new developments fostering healthy lifestyles.
- Improve the coordination among City departments, counties, and other public agencies to ensure that safe, healthy neighborhoods are a priority in their programming.

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- Continue to work, in collaboration with partner agencies, to address community policing in underserved or crime-affected areas and maintain community safety throughout Houston.
- Adopt and support the application of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles and techniques in both public and private development.
- Ensure growth is adequately served by infrastructure and is preserving the quality of life in existing neighborhoods.

## ***Related Goals:***

- ✓ Affordable, high-quality health care for all
- ✓ A safe, secure community
- ✓ Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ An affordable, multi-modal transportation network providing convenient access and mobility throughout the region for people and goods



## Connect People and Places.

### **Assessment:**

Transportation is a chief priority among all Houstonians. The city's quality of life and is inextricably linked to the growth patterns of the city and region. Clearly, the densification of the city and regional growth are placing increasing strains on Houston's mobility systems.

Traditionally, transportation planning in Houston has considered the automobile as its primary mode of transportation. In the past, the City has focused its transportation efforts on increasing roadway capacity. Recently, it has adjusted its focus to include considerations such as walkability, bicycle and trail connectivity, and transit use for users of all physical abilities. As the city continues to become denser, the increased use and coordination of all of these transportation options becomes more important. The City needs a coordinated, overarching policy and plan to integrate these modes.

This plan should encourage more transportation facilities as well as land-use arrangements that support a multi-modal transportation system. Better policy is needed to encourage density and a mix of uses around planned activity centers and along corridors. This *centers* approach will enable access to jobs and services with the least possible strain on existing infrastructure, and will enhance walkability and quality of life. Developer incentives and economic tools to this type of development should also be considered.

Meeting these mobility challenges will require enhancements to the City's existing mobility planning tools. The City's traffic impact policies should also be revisited. These policies should ensure new development does not further strain infrastructure and that the mitigation costs of traffic impacts are shared equitably.

Houston's continued economic growth is dependent on transportation system that connects people, goods and places, while balancing quality of life considerations. Transportation planning needs to be integrated into neighborhood planning, should consider new technologies, and be coordinated regionally with H-GAC to ensure regional streamlined growth.

### **Commitments:**

- Develop a comprehensive mobility plan.
- Coordinate land use and transportation planning to encourage neighborhood reinvestment and economic development, while minimizing mobility impacts.
- Coordinate with METRO to encourage transit-oriented development (TOD) around transit corridors, including working to attract the type of development that makes transit feasible.

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- Explore policies to encourage compact, mixed-use developments near high capacity transit facilities, including both rail and rapid bus corridors. Encourage transit-oriented development, encourage more improvements to the public realm, and appropriate maintenance of sidewalks.
- Comprehensively revisit the City's thoroughfare and street network planning tools, and ensure these tools consider a mix of transportation modes and sensitivity to roadway context.
- Include bicycle and pedestrian mobility options.
- Create an overarching parking strategy that supports economic development, protects neighborhoods, and achieves vibrant activity centers.
- Work with METRO to improve the image of transit and increase transit use among Houstonians of all income levels.
- Continue and expand coordination with H-GAC for funding for neighborhood and mobility planning, coordinated regional planning protocols, and guidance regarding commuter and high speed rail.
- Ensure new development addresses impacts on the transportation network equitably and adequately.
- Coordinate with regional partners to increase the safety and efficiency of the freight rail network while minimizing conflicts in the neighborhoods.

## ***Related Goals:***

- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ Vibrant and connected activity centers
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ An affordable, multi-modal transportation network providing convenient access and mobility throughout the region for people and goods
- ✓ Ample, efficient, and well-maintained infrastructure
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders, and residents

## Support a global economy.

### *Assessment:*

Houston has long enjoyed an internationally-recognized, robust economy. As Houston looks to the future, it must position itself to be recognized as a desirable place to do business and to live, offering amenities desired by employers and employees alike. These amenities include an eclectic culture, parks and recreational resources, a range of mobility and housing options, and high quality education and community services.

A major contributor to the city's economy is Houston's diversity of industries. Houston is a leader in energy, health care, nanotechnology, aerospace, and information technology. The Port of Houston, the Texas Medical Center, numerous universities and large activity centers draw economic development from around the world. More diversification is needed, however, to make sure the City can weather a significant downturn in any one key industry.

Another important ingredient in Houston's strong economy is the strength of its small businesses. Generally, Houston presents a low barrier of entry and offers a good support system for starting small businesses, especially those owned by women and minorities. Houston's large foreign-born population (in 2013 one in five Houstonians was foreign-born) also gives the city an edge for conducting business internationally. Additional incentives and improved information would help these business owners achieve long-term success.

Houston has in place a number of economic development tools to support this climate. While these tools are generally successful, a coordinated, proactive policy for their use has not been developed; implementation is often reactive, with decisions made on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, areas not identified as special purpose districts lack the advantages and considerations provided by these districts. An overarching economic development program and policy, including goals and strategies, is needed to ensure Houston continues to be globally competitive and that all areas of the City benefit.

Innovation and a well-trained workforce continue to be vital to Houston's economic success. Houston should pursue strategies to encourage innovation as a way to advantage of cutting edge technology and ideas. Training the workforce, is vital to ensuring Houstonians can fill the jobs that economic development efforts create.

### *Commitments:*

- Leverage the competitive strength of Houston's international diversity to attract international businesses and investors.
- Expand business attraction strategies for marketing Houston outside of Texas and the United States.
- Encourage the installation of infrastructure that supports cutting edge technology.

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- Develop marketing efforts that are geared toward reinforcing the connection between diversity and culture in City branding and identity.
- Develop a coordinated economic development and redevelopment strategy that identifies both areas of opportunity and tools to assist struggling markets.
- Identify economic development strategies at the neighborhood level that are coordinated with neighborhood planning.
- Promote better coordination between appropriate City departments, outside agencies, and non-profits to uphold economic development as a key City policy.
- Establish a centralized location for economic development planning, while providing decentralized assistance at the neighborhood level.
- Provide support for local businesses in the form of streamlined processes and resources to promote local economic development and ensure that small and minority business owners have the tools for upward mobility and sustained success.
- Develop a policy structure around the use of special districts for economic development to ensure consensus on goals, consistent decision-making, and allocation of resources.
- Ensure Houston's long-term economic durability by maintaining a diversity of industries that support Houston's economic strength and provide jobs for skills of all levels.
- Continue to support and expand programs that ensure a skilled and talented workforce. Prioritize projects, programs and initiatives that improve quality of life and connect to the city's ability to attract and retain a creative workforce.
- Strengthen efforts to identify and encourage emerging industries to ensure that Houston's economy is diversified and resilient to economic fluctuations.
- Encourage the establishment of small business and innovation incubators to assist with diverse business types.
- Continue to support and develop initiatives such as Global Houston, which welcome and help newcomers integrate into and succeed in the community.
- Explore ways to expand access to start-up capital for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

## ***Related Goals:***

- ✓ An integrated community that reflects our cultural diversity and heritage
- ✓ A skilled and talented and versatile workforce
- ✓ A thriving, resilient, and diverse economy
- ✓ An exemplary climate for all businesses, with an entrepreneurial spirit and world-wide competitive-ness
- ✓ Job opportunities that support a good standard of living and financial stability
- ✓ A culture that encourages innovation

## Sustain quality infrastructure.

### **Assessment:**

Maintaining quality infrastructure is one of the highest priorities for Houstonians, regardless of their race, ethnicity, income or neighborhood. Houstonians want clean water and a sewerage system that works. They want improved roads and more transportation options. They also want fewer occurrences when roads and homes flood.

Houston has taken steps in the recent past to respond to its infrastructure challenges. Improvements to the City's wastewater systems allow the city to treat more wastewater, protecting the bayous and streams from contamination. Adequate supplies of drinking water have been secured. Perhaps the most noteworthy infrastructure program is the voter-approved *ReBuild Houston*. This program has significantly increased funding for street and drainage improvements by establishing a dedicated funding source. This program prioritizes improvements in areas of greatest need, and its pay-as-you-go approach has relieved the City from the cost of financing infrastructure upgrades. Over time, the *ReBuild Houston* program will continue to pay down existing debt and increase its capacity to improve streets and drainage. Special taxing or assessment districts, such as TIRZ's and management districts, are additional tools for improving public infrastructure and amenities.

While the City has robust tools to support quality infrastructure, Houston must continue to find creative solutions to its infrastructure challenges. The City must coordinate effectively with its regional and localized public agencies, and should seek to work with the development community to find efficiencies that benefit both the private and public sectors. The City should consider a means of accelerating the *ReBuild Houston* program and adopt policies that ensure this program is fully aligned with other directives. Finally, the City must assess its ability to sustain the long-term costs of infrastructure, including infrastructure to support new development and adopt policies that secure the long-term financial sustainability of the City.

### **Commitments:**

- Consider means to accelerate implementation of the *ReBuild Houston* program.
- Ensure that existing infrastructure is adequately maintained to reduce unnecessary capital expenditures for replacement.
- Improve coordination with local agencies with related infrastructure responsibilities. Work together to analyze detention capacity. Leverage the local planning capabilities of special districts to plan for the infrastructure needs of local areas in a comprehensive manner.
- Seek opportunities to partner with the development community to find efficiencies that benefit both the public and private sectors. Consider a regional drainage detention system.
- Continue to coordinate with regional entities to reduce flooding risks.

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- Ensure that infrastructure can accommodate reasonable growth and develop policies to ensure that growth adequately addresses infrastructure needs.
- Consider the long-term infrastructure maintenance costs created by development patterns and implement policies that ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the City's maintenance programs.
- Consider policies that encourage development of green infrastructure and low impact development.
- Review the City's public engagement policies for new infrastructure, in particular roadway improvements. Use these policies to balance regional needs with interests of the local community.
- Help to maximize the potential of individual neighborhoods by seeking, where priorities align, to implement infrastructure improvements identified in neighborhood-level plans.
- Consider the potential for infrastructure improvements to enhance economic development, while ensuring the infrastructure needs of all Houstonians are equitably addressed.

## ***Related Goals:***

- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ Resilient man-made and natural systems that protect citizens and assets from disasters and other risks
- ✓ Ample, efficient, and well-maintained infrastructure
- ✓ Fiscally responsible, accountable, and responsive public services and civic investments





## Champion learning.

### *Assessment:*

Houston's success is dependent on an educational and training system that prepares all residents for the jobs and other demands of today's global, interconnected world. Despite notable efforts of many organizations, statistics indicate that the community is not adequately prepared for these demands. Currently, one in four adult Houstonians lacks a high school diploma and many adults struggle with basic literacy skills. Furthermore, Houston's high school dropout rate is among the highest for the 50 largest U.S. cities.

These outcomes present a tremendous challenge for Houston's future. Houston needs a sea change across the entire educational spectrum. In order for Houston to keep its competitive economic edge, education aimed at achieving this skilled workforce must remain a priority for the City.

The City needs deliberate policies that more clearly define its role in supporting and partnering with education organizations. All efforts need to connect the multiple partners involved in providing education and related support services. These include public and private schools, community colleges and universities, nonprofits, private companies and City departments that provide education-related services.

Supporting schools is also essential to create thriving neighborhoods, as schools and their surrounding communities depend on each other for their success. Families must be encouraged to support education at home, volunteer at their schools, and make sure that schools are respected and well-maintained. Services provided at other neighborhood facilities, such as parks and libraries, should be leveraged to provide comprehensive services for maximum efficiency and convenience.

Finally, while high skills jobs will continue to be critical to serve the growing professional fields, there is an increasing need for workers with middle skills to fill technical jobs. Houston benefits from the many private and non-profit entities that focus on workforce development, but stronger policy is necessary to ensure that needs are met and matched with current and emerging industries. Significantly greater coordination between educational institutions and the City is needed in order to ensure that Houston has the skilled workforce to advance in today's economic realities.



## ***Commitments:***

- Improve coordination between the City, county, school districts, trade unions and educational institutions to identify gaps and create new partnerships to improve education services.
- Work with all education providers to identify a clear path for education reform.
- Strengthen partnerships between education providers and social service providers to improve wrap-around services such as counseling, behavioral health education, and health care at schools.
- Expand afterschool programs and resources for adult learning and early childhood education in schools, parks, and libraries.
- Promote lifelong learning by providing educational resources at community facilities and working with nonprofits and foundations.
- Strive to provide support for all- families including single parent families and grandparents rearing grandchildren.
- Adopt policies encouraging City departments to support education and provide learning opportunities such as internships.
- Continue to implement and support programs and partnerships with education institutions and nonprofits to provide adult education programs and job training at all skill levels.
- Improve coordination between job training program providers and increase awareness and coordination of all existing programs to connect job seekers with potential employers.
- Support mentorship and internship opportunities to learn applied skills.
- Continue to partner with education institutions to develop and implement programs to infuse and teach innovation through the learning enterprise.
- Support research and development efforts at educational institutions to foster new ideas, entrepreneurship, and growth in technology-related businesses.

## ***Related goals:***

- ✓ Equitable access to opportunity and prosperity
- ✓ Engaged and informed residents
- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
- ✓ Quality learning opportunities from early childhood onward
- ✓ Schools and communities that invest in each other
- ✓ A skilled and talented and versatile workforce
- ✓ Job opportunities that support a good standard of living and financial stability

## Foster an affordable city.

### *Assessment:*

Houston is often hailed as an affordable city with a robust residential real estate market, and many cite the relatively low median housing cost of \$196,000 as evidence of Houston's affordability when compared to other cities. However, the fact that Houston has one of the lowest homeownership rates (47%) of any large U.S. city illustrates that quality affordable housing is a challenge for many Houstonians. Specifically, more than half of Houston families do not earn incomes high enough to gain entry into the homeownership market.

For those continuing to rent, the picture is less about cost and more about quality. According to a 2010 report by the ULI Daniel Rose Center, most of the 573,000 apartments in the Houston metro area that year were developed between 1960 and the early 1980s. The study goes on to assess that about 45% of apartments were Class C or D – generally considered substandard.

While there are affordable housing options in Houston, many areas, especially some in the inner city, are experiencing increased property values that make them inaccessible to lower and middle-income Houstonians. This places a tremendous transportation cost burden on those families who are forced to move further out. This pattern also causes strains on the city's transportation network, as workers must commute longer distances to their jobs. Over time, the City's mixed-income communities are becoming scarcer, and causing a loss of vitality, integration, and ability to support those of lesser means.

Houston's affordable housing has historically been left to the free market. These market forces often drive the creation of higher end housing and contribute to rising property values. While this reinvestment has positive benefits, it also results in fewer affordable units, and remaining affordable areas are often disconnected from services and amenities. Ultimately, this makes it difficult for Houstonians to afford housing near their workplace or activities.

Quality affordable housing must be tied to communities, such as activity centers, around jobs, services, facilities, and amenities. The preservation and development of quality affordable housing should both reinvest in disadvantaged areas and also lift those in need into high-opportunity communities. These housing options should be linked with multi-modal transportation options to ensure that living, working, and playing in Houston remains affordable to a mix of household, family and individual incomes.

### *Commitments:*

- Develop a citywide approach to housing to ensure that all Houstonians have equitable access to quality, well-maintained, and affordable housing.
- Ensure that a continuum of housing needs and incomes are met.



- Identify strategic areas in the City to develop affordable housing, focusing on sites that are close to transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, parks, schools and other community facilities, as well as to healthy food options.
- Site affordable and mixed income housing developments according to overarching goals for creating complete neighborhoods and encouraging balanced growth, and the provision of services and infrastructure to support these patterns.
- Create options to make development of affordable and mixed income housing more attractive to developers.
- Establish monitoring system to track affordable housing that is removed through redevelopment to ensure that lost affordable units are replaced with quality units. Develop incentives for developers to preserve affordable housing or build new housing to replace affordable units lost through redevelopment within the same neighborhood.
- Continue to leverage federal funds (CDBG, HOME) and incentives (LIHTC) to build affordable housing, but strive to site developments within urban areas nearby to existing facilities and infrastructure.
- Develop policy to strategically invest state and local bond and development incentives into affordable and mixed income housing throughout the city. Use a balanced and transparent process that distributes funding in the areas of greatest need and to encourage mixed income communities.

### ***Related goals:***

- ✓ Equitable access to opportunity and prosperity
- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents
- ✓ A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles and social well-being
- ✓ Sufficient quality, affordable housing options throughout the community

## Protect and conserve our resources.

### *Assessment:*

Protecting the natural environment in Houston and creating a more resilient city are multi-faceted challenges. This includes maintaining parks and open space, preserving important native species and habitat, protecting Houston's bayous, ensuring adequate and high quality air and water, conserving energy, encouraging reduced consumption of resources, reducing emissions to improve air quality and better protecting the city from floods and storm surges.

All of these elements are necessary to ensure that, as Houston grows, it is doing so in a manner that respects the natural environment, maintains quality of life, minimizes environmental degradation and reduces the risk of damage from storms. These elements must be captured and retained to maintain Houston's ability to attract residents, and provide for the well-being of current and future Houstonians.

The City has in place several plans for managing natural resources, but more is needed to comprehensively link all of the City's environmental policies under a common vision. Bayou Greenways 2020 is an important step in protecting greenways and enhancing them for recreational use. On-going partnerships, funding and coordination with neighborhood plans are needed to ensure the goals of the plan are met.

The City has adopted a number of programs and policies that encourage energy conservation, and the City currently exceeds State energy conservation standards. Still, more work can be done to reduce consumption. Programs need increased standards, incentives, and public education to be more effective. While these plans are important steps, recommendations must be more comprehensively applied.

The City of Houston must comprehensively address natural resources protection and management, continuing to go beyond standards required by the State to provide regional leadership in sustainability, resiliency, and conserving the natural environment that makes Houston and the region unique.

### *Commitments:*

- Create an inventory of valuable environments and habitats in and around Houston. Consider incentives or other policies to increase availability of prioritized, beneficial natural habitats.
- Dedicate open space for multiple purposes including recreational green space, habitat, flood prevention, promoting biodiversity, urban agriculture, and trail connectivity, including partnerships with HCFCD and other regional entities.
- Create development incentives or other approaches to encourage reduced consumption of natural resources in new development.
- Streamline standards for recycling across land use types and throughout public spaces.

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- Ensure recycling facilities minimize conflicts and respect the quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods.
- Expand public education programs promoting recycling, materials reuse and reduction, energy and water conservation to increase citizen participation in such programs.
- Continue programs that educate people about the hazards of illegal dumping and provide affordable options for waste removal.
- Encourage green building approaches including the use the recycled buildings and adaptive reuse.
- Continue to evaluate emerging technologies for water conservation, reuse, and conveyance to meet or exceed state standards.
- Continue to address the effects of climate change on the region by developing robust resilience policies. Coordinate policies and programs across citywide plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions via transportation and land use policies and performance standards. Consider coordinating these efforts through a community sustainability plan.
- Continue to expand renewable energy purchases and usage, using tools such as renewable energy credits, solar installations, and combined heat and power.
- Encourage preservation and enhancement of the city's tree canopy to improve air quality.
- Strive to improve water quality in the city and region by meeting or exceeding state standards.
- Actively expand park preserves and natural areas to protect natural resources. Support implementation of Bayou Greenways 2020.

## ***Related goals:***

- ✓ Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ Efficient use and reuse, and conservation of resources
- ✓ Clean, plentiful, and accessible water, air, land, and food resources
- ✓ Resilient man-made and natural systems that protect citizens and assets from disasters and other risks

## Communicate clearly and with transparency.

### *Assessment:*

Connecting with all Houstonians is essential for effective government. The City must reach out to everyone – all socio-economic groups, all ethnic groups, all neighborhood groups – and make sure that they each are empowered and informed citizens.

Houston's diverse population makes this need challenging: each population group brings its own perspective and its own way of receiving information. Because of this, messages must be tailored to the audience. The City should seek out existing community influencers and bring them into the decision-making process. One such structure is the Super Neighborhood framework. This structure has served Houstonians since the mid-1990's and can become more effective with greater support.

Several tools exist today to inform the public about City plans and initiatives. The City increasingly relies on internet and data-based communication methods, but they do not always communicate the full picture effectively. The City must develop an overarching public engagement policy that defines objectives and processes.

Effective communication and government transparency is also necessary to achieve streamlined interaction between City departments. This is essential for effective and coordinated planning and for efficient use and management of financial resources. Instituting standards for government communication protocols and breaking down silos between departments is crucial to the City's effectiveness and ongoing fiscal resilience.

### *Commitments:*

- Ensure that information regarding government policies and finances is transmitted to the public in formats they can use and understand.
- Foster partnerships with libraries and other community facilities to act as clearinghouses of information.
- Continue to use up-to-date technologies to communicate department operations and decisions online and to make datasets available for the public.
- Develop a citywide public engagement policy and public engagement plan.
- Engage the community in the update of all citywide plans and in programming for new arts and culture events, public art, and community facilities, including parks and recreational resources.
- Set up ongoing protocols with the City's internal and external partners to institutionalize public engagement.
- Institutionalize links between the City of Houston's organizational performance and broader community goals and metrics. Use *Plan Houston* metrics to gauge the City's success in responding to community needs.

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- Regularly assess changes in community demographics to ensure that the City communications match the audience's needs. Promote opportunities for those with diverse backgrounds to participate fully.
- Partner with City departments and surrounding communities to provide seamless communication within city limits and beyond to collect and share information with the community, and assist in disaster preparedness.
- Encourage all departments to solicit public feedback when conducting projects affecting the citizens of Houston.
- Fully support the Super Neighborhood program as a means to increase public engagement.
- Continue to utilize City facilities, including libraries and community centers, as a means to engage local communities.

## **Related goals:**

- ✓ Engaged and informed residents
- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ An integrated community that reflects our cultural diversity and heritage
- ✓ A diverse, welcoming culture that is celebrated and respected
- ✓ Attractive, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
- ✓ Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places
- ✓ Fiscally responsible, accountable, and responsive public services and civic investments
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders, and residents



## **Partner with others, public and private.**

### ***Assessment:***

A vital component of Houston's success has been the longstanding tradition of partnerships between the City and other community leaders. It was partnerships that built some of Houston's most notable landmarks and facilities, including parks, community centers and libraries, as well as major entertainment and convention facilities, and the Port of Houston. In the era of constrained public resources, continued use of these partnerships is essential to respond to Houston's needs today and in the future.

Houston should continue to utilize partnerships as a critical tool for achieving its goals. More robust programs are essential to respond to Houston's dire need for education and health care reform. Partnerships are needed to ensure equitable access to parks and open space. Partnerships can support arts and culture activities and improved community facilities, as well as improve social services and job training activities.

Where partnerships currently exist, strengthened ties are necessary to improve resource-sharing, expand programs, and bring services closer to the communities that need them. Better procedures for aggregating public and private dollars are also needed to upgrade existing infrastructure and improve services to Houstonians.

### ***Commitments:***

- Continue to coordinate with adjacent counties to ensure policy alignment, identify overlapping services, and find efficiencies.
- Continue to coordinate the work of City departments to encourage efficiency, joint uses, and to become more involved with service providers.
- Expand the use of joint agreements between City of Houston and the larger community to foster collaborative programs for education.
- Consider expanding opportunities for local non-profits to provide services at city-owned facilities.
- Continue public-private partnerships that generate funding for parks, and seek out ways to increase the equity of funding for park improvements.
- Continue to promote shared use of City-owned facilities to provide opportunities for community interaction, and places and events that foster community pride and identity.

### ***Related goals:***

- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
- ✓ High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents
- ✓ Unique and internationally-recognized cultural and entertainment opportunities
- ✓ A thriving local arts and creative community
- ✓ Schools and communities that invest in each other

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- ✓ A skilled and talented and versatile workforce
- ✓ An exemplary climate for all businesses, with an entrepreneurial spirit and world-wide competitive-ness
- ✓ Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders, and residents



## **Celebrate what's uniquely Houston.**

### ***Assessment:***

Houston is a unique and exciting city. It has incredibly diverse population. It has historic buildings dating back to its foundation in the early nineteenth century. It offers a significant collection of cultural institutions and events. As the fourth largest city in the United States, it has much to offer its two million residents and the nearly 15 million visitors a year. The challenge for Houston is to make sure that all Houstonians have equal access to the city's wealth of cultural assets.

While Houston enjoys some of the most impressive cultural institutions in the world, today not all Houstonians have equal access to their programs, and not all cultural organizations receive adequate funding to highlight the cultures of diverse groups through events, performances, and public arts. Furthermore, the City should consider funding mechanisms that go beyond the current use of the Hotel Occupancy Tax and support cultural activities that may be more locally directed.

Highlighting Houston's unique community and identity is important when prioritizing public investment and support. Houston's culture should be considered when planning new developments and areas of redevelopment. This includes respecting and celebrating the many elements of Houston's character, its history, its cultural institutions and providing for their protection.

As the city grows, Houston should reinforce and highlight the elements of the city that make it unique, maintaining areas of character and identity, which in turn help enhance quality of life. This includes the protection of historic resources. Houston's relentless embrace of change and the future has, unfortunately, resulted in the loss of many unique historic assets. Houston should continue to enhance its historic preservation programs, including means to encourage the voluntary preservation of historic resources.

### ***Commitments:***

- Ensure strong support for arts and culture within the city organization.
- Continue to forge partnerships with cultural institutions and local arts groups to obtain funding opportunities for smaller, local art groups and to support small-scale, neighborhood-oriented or ethnically-specific festivals.
- Promote access to arts and culture in underserved areas, schools, libraries and neighborhoods and ensure that all Houstonians have access to Houston's cultural attractions.
- Continue to market Houston in ways that celebrate and reinforce the diversity and culture of the city and its various neighborhoods through identity branding.
- Target neighborhood planning efforts that deliberately speak to Houston's multi-national, multi-cultural makeup and builds awareness of cultural diversity. Identify the specialized



needs of residents in these groups and neighborhoods and seek to find solutions to their isolation and economic segregation.

- Encourage and support attractive public spaces and right-of-ways.
- Ensure that all residents have safe, accessible and well-connected access to parks within a half mile, or ten minute walk from their homes.
- Continue to expand the robust public art program to enhance the public realm throughout the city and celebrate the diversity of its unique areas and cultures.
- Ensure that historical interpretation and public art installations throughout the city reflect all elements of Houston's past and represent diverse populations. Promote these elements through walking tours and tourist materials.
- Develop policies and programs to encourage voluntary efforts to preserve historic resources, including a survey of historic assets.
- Periodically update the Arts and Culture Master Plan to ensure City support for the arts is as effective as possible.
- Continue to support and develop programs and initiatives that welcome and help newcomers integrate into and succeed in the community.

### ***Related goals:***

- ✓ Engaged and informed residents
- ✓ Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
- ✓ An integrated community that reflects our cultural diversity and heritage
- ✓ Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
- ✓ A community that respects its history
- ✓ Unique and internationally-recognized cultural and entertainment opportunities
- ✓ A thriving local arts and creative community

## APPENDIX A

### Goals

Houston's citizens identified a set of 32 goals that further describe the community vision. These goals are listed below.

#### PEOPLE

1. Equal access to opportunity and prosperity
2. Engaged and informed residents
3. Strong social ties supported by social, civic, and faith organizations
4. Affordable, high-quality health care for all
5. Supportive services for disadvantaged and at-risk groups
6. An integrated community that reflects our international heritage
7. A diverse, welcoming culture that is celebrated and respected

#### PLACE

8. A safe, secure community
9. Attractive, walkable neighborhoods with diverse housing types, values, and character
10. Inviting and accessible parks and public spaces that provide recreation experiences, respect the environment, and connect people and places
11. Beautiful streetscapes and public spaces
12. Vibrant, enjoyable activity centers
13. High-quality community facilities that provide for the diverse needs of residents
14. A city that enables healthy, active lifestyles, and social well-being
15. Sufficient quality, affordable housing options throughout the community
16. A community that respects our history

#### CULTURE

17. Unique and internationally recognized cultural and entertainment opportunities
18. A thriving local arts and creative community

#### EDUCATION

19. Quality learning opportunities from early childhood onward
20. Schools and communities that invest in each other
21. A skilled and talented workforce

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## ECONOMY

22. A thriving, resilient, and diverse economy
23. An exemplary climate for business, with an entrepreneurial spirit, support for innovation, and world-wide competitiveness
24. Job opportunities that support a good standard of living and financial stability
25. A culture that encourages innovation

## ENVIRONMENT

26. Efficient use and reuse, and conservation of resources
27. Clean, plentiful, and accessible water, air, land, and food resources
28. Resilient man-made and natural systems that protect citizens and assets from disasters and other risks

## MOBILITY AND PUBLIC SERVICES

29. An affordable, multi-modal transportation network providing convenient access and mobility throughout the region for people and goods
30. Ample, efficient, and well-maintained infrastructure
31. Fiscally responsible, accountable, and responsive public services and civic investments
32. Active regional cooperation and collaboration among governments, community leaders, and residents