

City of Houston

General Plan Scoping Study

Memorandum No. 3

Draft General Plan Scope

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PLANNING &
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DEPARTMENT

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Introduction

In the fall of 2013, at the direction of Mayor Parker, the City of Houston Planning and Development Department began hosting conversations regarding citywide planning issues with various groups and thought leaders from across the community. Representatives from business, neighborhoods, arts and culture, major institutions, various governing agencies, and others were engaged. A Project Advisory Group (PAG) comprised of public and private sector representatives was established to provide input and guidance for the study. A City Leadership Advisory Group (CLAG) comprised of key staff from various City departments and agencies was also created to actively engage the City's internal leadership in the work.

A deliberate process of information gathering and analysis included over 30 key-person interviews, 7 focus group meetings, an all-day workshop with more than 60 City of Houston staff from 14 departments participating, and several PAG and CLAG meetings. After significant consideration of the information gathered and input received, Mayor Parker directed the Planning and Development Department to lead the preparation of a general plan for Houston.

Although Houston currently does not have a general plan with goals and policies that articulate an overall City vision, it has many plans and regulatory standards. However, these tools are not based on a common platform with coordinated implementation strategies to guide future development and City investments toward an intended future. Individually, however, these tools have contributed to Houston's many successes and are products of various community engagement and cooperation efforts. The preparation of the Houston General Plan will build on existing plans, studies, policies, practices, and regulations that make Houston a prosperous, healthy and sustainable city. It will rely on the results of past community engagement and visioning exercises.

This document, *Memorandum No. 3 – Draft General Plan Scope*, provides a description of the plan contents, major activities, leadership structure, and next steps associated with creating a citywide general plan. The recommendations are based on *Memorandum No. 1 – Key Talking Points on Progress to Date, Key Findings, and Future Steps*; *Memorandum No. 2 – Scope and Approach Alternatives*; input from the Project Advisory Group (PAG), City Leadership Advisory Group (CLAG), and city staff; and direction from the Office of Mayor Parker.

Part 1: Plan Contents

Successful plans focus on *outcomes*. Successful plans are clear about their fundamental *purpose* and *how* they are to be used and implemented. Successful plans are constantly relevant in decisions regarding growth, development, and the overall well-being of the city.

The fundamental purpose of the Houston General Plan will be to strengthen and sustain the quality of life for its people now and in the future. The six primary components of the Houston General Plan will include:

- A Vision Statement;
- A Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy;
- A Growth and Development Strategy;
- An Implementation Strategy;
- An Interactive Website of Plans, Policies, and Projects; and
- Performance Indicators.

The General Plan will “live” on an interactive web platform that clearly communicates plans, policies, and projects with easy-to-use maps and word search functions.

Preparation of the plan will be guided by the following assumptions:

- The plan will build on the vision; neighborhood enhancement, growth, and development strategies; and implementation strategies contained in existing plans, studies, policies, practices, and regulations.
- The plan will rely on the results of past community engagement and visioning exercises; preparation of the plan will include limited new community engagement.
- The Planning and Development Department will lead the effort and will engage City Departments, related agencies and organizations, and the public.
- The Houston Planning Commission will oversee the effort.
- A major product will be delivered in early February 2015 and the plan will be submitted to the Houston City Council for consideration in 2015.

Vision Statement

The Vision Statement will describe Houston’s desired future. It will provide a clear picture of the city Houston aspires to become in the next 5-10 years and beyond.

A shared community vision

The Vision Statement will provide a "blueprint" for the city’s development that represents the community's view of its intended future. The vision would apply to areas where the City has direct influence and authority on development

within the City's incorporated boundaries and the surrounding Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ).

Building on existing visions

The Vision Statement will be based on the collective community visions, values, and aspirations (both expressed and implied) found in existing City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ.

The Vision Statement will guide subsequent planning initiatives and policies and will be updated as needed in future updates of the General Plan.

Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy

The Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy will provide principles, policies, and priorities for the enhancement, preservation, protection, and maintenance of Houston's neighborhoods.

Protecting neighborhood character

The Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy will serve as a guide for development and redevelopment in the City of Houston's established communities. It will be the communication bridge between developers, residents, and government agencies sharing the wants, desires, needs and goals of each with one another. Recognizing there are many different types of communities, the Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy will communicate which neighborhoods prefer to retain their existing character through the use of self-initiated protection tools.

Care and maintenance of Houston's neighborhoods

Although Houston's neighborhoods are flourishing, spurred by the influx of new residents from across the country and continued growth of the existing economy, there are pockets of blighted and sometimes abandoned neighborhoods. Some of the main causes date back to the 1970s and 1980s when families moved to the suburbs or left the city entirely in an attempt to flee the oil bust. This outmigration left once stable neighborhoods riddled with vacant lots and weeded lots, mounting unpaid taxes, graffiti, dilapidated abandoned structures, broken sidewalks, pothole ridden streets, etc.

The Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy will provide a framework for turning these neighborhoods back into assets for the community, stabilizing the value of neighborhoods and enhancing commercial corridors. The General Plan will build on the progress already initiated by local residents, civic groups and nonprofit organizations that have made a commitment to stay in and improve the health of their own neighborhoods. Resources and programs can be developed to further enhance the neighborhood setting, enrich beautification efforts and protect the value of properties in the area.

Building on existing strategies

The Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy will be based on existing strategies and initiatives found in existing City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ.

The Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy will guide subsequent planning initiatives and policies and will be updated as needed in future updates of the General Plan.

Growth and Development Strategy

Approximately 7% of the land within the City of Houston's boundaries is undeveloped. These areas, combined with numerous infill and redevelopment sites provide significant opportunities for accommodating future growth. The Growth and Development Strategy will serve as a guide for balancing new development with existing neighborhoods as Houston grows by more than 1 million new residents in the metropolitan area in the next decade and 3.5 million by 2035 (per H-GAC estimates).

Embracing the opportunity of growth

The Growth and Development Strategy will consolidate principles, policies, and priorities related to Houston's future growth. It will provide a *proactive* citywide perspective for maximizing the opportunities of growth and minimizing the negatives impacts of uncoordinated development. The Growth and Development Strategy will address issues, opportunities, and concerns of people across the city; build upon the successes of the past; and guide equitable prosperity as Houston continues to evolve and change.

Building on existing strategies

The Growth and Development Strategy will be based on growth and development strategies and initiatives found in existing City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ.

The Growth and Development Strategy will guide subsequent planning initiatives and policies and will be updated as needed in future updates of the General Plan.

Implementation Strategy

The Plan will be implemented by various public and private entities. The Implementation Strategy will be action-oriented and clearly describe tools that bring the General Plan Vision to reality.

Multiple implementation tools

The Implementation Strategy will be organized in categories such as infrastructure (e.g., streets, sidewalks, trails, parks, libraries, drainage, utilities, and related activities including funding, design, construction, and

maintenance), development regulations (e.g., the various laws and processes that apply to land subdivision, development review, and construction), and partnership opportunities (e.g. cooperative efforts between the City and other public and/or private entities that catalyze Plan implementation) and other categories to be determined in the plan preparation process.

Basis for decision-making

The Implementation Strategy will provide guidance for City Council, the City's advisory boards and commissions, and City staff to make decisions regarding funding and budget allocations; City programs and services; capital infrastructure investments; cultural and recreational amenities; and regulations and standards related to public and private land development.

Decision-making in the City of Houston is made at many levels and affects day-to-day activities and, ultimately, the overall quality of life in Houston. The Implementation Strategy will ensure broad consensus so that all parties are "on same page," making for faster and more effective decisions. Such clarity will also empower City staff to make decisions with greater confidence and consistency.

Near, mid, and long-term actions

The Implementation Strategy will organize near, mid, and long-term. Timing and priority of initiatives will be determined by criteria such as market viability, public necessity, infrastructure condition, catalytic potential, political support, and other factors to be determined in the plan preparation process.

Clear roles and responsibilities

The Implementation Strategy will include clear actions that identify the role and responsibilities of lead and supporting agencies for various implementation activities. It will demonstrate how city departments are aligned with each other and other outside entities such as federal, state, county, and surrounding municipal governments; agencies such as METRO and H-GAC; and various non-profit and for-profit organizations. The Implementation Plan will foster greater cooperation between the private and public sectors to expand opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures of all types and scales.

Building on existing strategies

The Implementation Strategy will be based on existing strategies and initiatives found in existing City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ.

The Implementation Strategy will guide subsequent planning initiatives and policies and will be updated as needed in future updates of the General Plan.

Interactive Website of Plans, Policies, and Projects

The General Plan will “live” on an interactive web platform that clearly communicates plans, policies, and projects with easy-to-use maps and word search functions. The website will provide a “One Stop Shop” for all Houston plans and major policies. The Plan will be available in print form as well as online.

The Plan format (both print and web versions) will be designed and organized so that regular assessments and major updates can be easily prepared.

Data resource

Residents and business interests, non-profit and for-profit entities, service organizations, and major institutions all rely on solid data for their planning purposes. The website will be a clearinghouse of up-to-date information that presents a variety of growth trend patterns relative to the City’s vision, policies, and priorities. Those trends will also be referenced to various planning and implementation activities supported by the Plan.

Interactive map

The website will coordinate links to all relevant plans with sophisticated search engine capacities on a user-friendly interactive map. Plans, policies, and projects will be easily visible and accessible with simple word search prompts and/or active “map buttons” with adjustable transparency that allow for simultaneous display of multiple maps and boundaries.

Platform for engagement

The website will provide multiple channels for regular collaboration between the people of Houston and their municipal government. It will provide opportunities for all Houstonians to participate in the creation, monitoring of progress, and future updates of the General Plan.

The website will serve as an engagement tool for proactive communication between multiple departments within the City as well as other levels of government. It will also serve as a critical tool for engaging business and development interests. The website will facilitate exchange of insights on Houston’s growth opportunities and priorities to provide greater predictability and support for public and private sector investment success.

Broadcasting the brand

The General Plan will rely on a strong identity or brand for its long-term success and the website will be the primary venue for the broadcasting the brand. To have the intended influence for years to come, the brand needs to connect with the people of Houston and its more than 21,000 City employees in meaningful ways so they support its purpose and necessity. The brand should explain the Plan’s vision simply and clearly. The brand for Houston will capture that which is uniquely Houston and its collective point of view regarding its future.

Performance Indicators

The General Plan will be results-driven and the Performance Indicators will be used to measure success over time and provide a basis for future amendments and updates.

Measuring different scales and types of progress

The General Plan will influence both qualitative and quantitative outcomes in Houston in various ways at various scales. The Performance Indicators will provide a way to measure progress on the General Plan's implementation and effectiveness of the outcomes.

The indicators will be comprehensive and organized to address outcomes at different scales and in various ways. For example, some might be measured at the district, city, and regional scale while others would provide comparative evaluation to other peer cities/regions or specific goals, principles, or priorities articulated in the General Plan.

Meaningful indicators

To be useful, the Performance Indicators will measure outcomes relevant and familiar to Houstonians and expressed in a manner that is easy to understand. One possible approach could be based on a common set of Quality of Life Indicators such as:

- Delivery of City services
- Fiscal Conditions
- Public Safety
- Health/Environment
- Economic Opportunity
- Parks and Amenities
- Education, Arts and Culture
- Affordability
- Built Environment/Infrastructure

Future website integration

In the future, the Interactive Website could be further enhanced to monitor plan implementation progress relative to the performance indicators.

Carry forward existing performance measures

The Performance Indicators will utilize measures found in existing City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ.

The Performance Indicators will guide subsequent planning initiatives and policies and will be updated as needed in future updates of the General Plan.

Part 2: Major Activities

TASK 1: Inventory and Analysis

Existing Conditions, Projects, Trends and Forecasts

This will provide a comprehensive assessment of existing conditions and current projects in relation to current and forecasted trends (e.g., physical, economic, demographic, land use, projects, etc.). Much of this information exists within the Planning and Development Department, other departments or outside agencies. Updating these data sources and identifying gaps are critical to understanding key opportunities for development, redevelopment, conservation, and stabilization initiatives.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Determine what information and data sets are relevant (local, regional, national, and international contexts)
2. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
3. Prepare a summary of major findings.

New Content: Minor
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Support
Approximate Timing: Now-end of August

Visions in Existing Plans, Studies, Policies, and Regulations

This will identify existing visions (and gaps) in current City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ. This will use existing information within the Planning Department, other departments and/or outside agencies. (Blueprint Houston, HGAC, TIRZ's, MD's, TxDOT, etc.)

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Prepare a methodology for extracting aspirations and visions embedded in existing plans, policies, and regulations
2. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
3. Prepare a summary of existing aspirations and visions from past planning/visioning efforts and studies

New Content: Minor
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Support
Approximate Timing: Now-end of August

Neighborhood Enhancement Strategies in Existing Plans, Studies, Policies, and Regulations

This will identify existing neighborhood enhancement-related strategies and practices (and gaps) in current City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ. This will use existing information within the Planning Department, other departments and/or outside agencies.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Prepare a methodology for extracting existing neighborhood enhancement strategies in existing plans, policies, and regulations
2. Identify gaps and opportunities w/emphasis on interrelationships between different strategies
3. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
4. Prepare a summary of existing neighborhood enhancement strategies from past planning/visioning efforts and studies

New Content: Minor
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Support
Approximate Timing: Now-end of August

Growth and Development Strategies in Existing Plans, Studies, Policies, and Regulations

This will identify existing growth and development-related strategies and practices (and gaps) in current City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ. This will use existing information within the Planning Department, other departments and/or outside agencies.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Prepare a methodology for extracting existing growth and development strategies in existing plans, policies, and regulations
2. Identify gaps and opportunities w/emphasis on interrelationships between different strategies
3. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
4. Prepare a summary of existing growth and development strategies from past planning/visioning efforts and studies

New Content: Minor
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Support
Approximate Timing: Now-end of August

Implementation Strategies in Existing Plans, Studies, Policies, and Regulations

This will identify existing implementation strategies and practices (and gaps) in current City plans, studies, policies, initiatives, and regulations as well as those found in other organizations in the city and ETJ. This will use existing information within the Planning Department, other departments and/or outside agencies.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Prepare a methodology for extracting implementation strategies and activities in existing plans, policies, and regulations
2. Identify gaps and opportunities
3. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
4. Prepare a summary of existing implementation strategies from past planning/visioning efforts and studies

New Content: Minor
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Support
Approximate Timing: Now-end of August

TASK 2: Develop & Confirm Vision Statement

Using the results of Task 1: Inventory and Analysis, staff will consolidate the findings and create a Draft Community Vision. The Planning Commission will host community engagement and discussion of the draft to confirm the vision. The Vision Statement will address various issues including jobs and sustainable development, fiscal responsibility, infrastructure, public safety, quality of Life, and others to be determined in the planning process.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Identify and reconcile conflicts and gaps
2. Identify what is maintained
3. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
4. Prepare Draft Vision Statement for public review
5. Engage Community in public process (TBD) to confirm Vision Statement
6. Prepare the Vision Statement

*New Content: Major
New Community Engagement: Moderate
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Primary
Approximate Timing: July-end of October*

TASK 3: Prepare Interactive Website of Plans, Policies, and Projects

A consultant under the direction of the city staff will primarily accomplish this task. Details of the work will be described in an RFQ to be prepared and issued by the City in mid-2014.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Consolidate Analyses of Existing Plans and Major Projects
2. Procure consultant services
3. Create Website (separately hosted?)
4. Launch January 2015

New Content: Major
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Primary
Approximate Timing: July-end of February 2015

TASK 4: Evaluate/Document Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy (COH preparing this)

Using the results of Task 1: Inventory and Analysis, staff will consolidate the findings and prepare the Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Identify and reconcile conflicts and gaps
2. Identify what is maintained
3. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
4. Prepare the Neighborhood Enhancement Strategy

New Content: Minor
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Support
Approximate Timing: July-end of January 2015

TASK 5: Evaluate/Document Growth and Development Strategy

Using the results of Task 1: Inventory and Analysis, staff will consolidate the findings and create the Growth and Development Strategy.

The Strategy will more clearly communicate the tools the City already uses to prioritize growth and development and provide a more coordinated strategy to best employ the tools to accomplish the vision. These tools include but are not limited to development regulations, capital projects, 380 agreements, TIRZ's, and Management Districts.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Identify and reconcile conflicts and gaps
2. Identify what is maintained
3. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
4. Prepare the Growth and Development Strategy

New Content: Minor
New Community Engagement: Minor
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Support
Approximate Timing: July-end of January 2015

TASK 6: Evaluate/Document Implementation Strategy

Using the results of Task 1: Inventory and Analysis, staff will consolidate the findings and create the Implementation Strategy.

The Implementation Strategy will more clearly communicate the tools the City already uses and provide a coordinated strategy that creates greater consistency and consensus on priorities that accelerate implementation of the Plan. This may include tools that more closely tie city planning to capital investment, identify public investment opportunities for infrastructure improvements, streamline and improve development controls, and create development incentives and new partnership opportunities.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Identify and reconcile conflicts and gaps
2. Identify what is maintained
3. Organize the information in a consistent presentation format
4. Prepare the Implementation Strategy

New Content: Moderate
New Community Engagement: Minor (2014), Moderate (2015)
COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary
Consultant Role/Responsibility: Primary
Approximate Timing:
– Approaches: July-end of November
– Initiatives/Projects: After December 2014

TASK 7: Prepare Performance Indicators

The Performance Indicators will use the Implementation Strategy as the primary reference for measuring progress.

While some performance standards may already exist, this task will be a significant effort in defining and calibrating performance indicators.

The primary activities for this task includes:

1. Determine what performance indicators are needed (existing to be carried forward and new) and identify and reconcile conflicts and gaps
2. Establish and calibrate baselines

New Community Engagement: Minor (2014), Moderate (2015)

COH Staff Role/Responsibility: Primary

Consultant Role/Responsibility: Primary

Approximate Timing:

- Identify Metrics: Now–end of April 2015
- Calibrate Baselines: November 2014-June 2015

Part 3: Leadership Structure

Leadership and Guidance

Preparation of the General Plan will be led by the Planning and Development Department. A partnership will be created where all City departments will be engaged and have assigned representatives participating on a regular basis throughout the planning process. Dedicated staff from key partner departments may also be required.

The Houston Planning Commission will provide guidance for the effort and will be assisted by several other groups with community and staff representatives.

Adoption

A Draft General Plan will be presented to the City Council in February, 2015. The Houston Planning Commission will provide its recommendation to the Houston City Council with an anticipated adoption of the Plan in 2015.

Future updates

Future monitoring and update of the General Plan will make it a relevant and reliable resource of information on Houston's future. The processes and timelines for updating the Plan (e.g., 5, 10, or 20 years) and preparation of a regular assessment of implementation progress and trends affecting Houston (e.g., every 1 or 2 years) will be clearly defined in the Plan. These efforts will be led by the Planning and Development Department with contributions from all City departments.

Part 4: Next Steps

For City of Houston Staff

The Planning and Development Department staff should initiate the following activities immediately.

- Prepare a detailed workplan/schedule/budget (based on in-house capacities)
- Create PR and Messaging Strategy
- Prepare "ask" Proposal for Partners
- Detail Budget request
- Prepare RFQ(s) and procure consultant services
- Convene Technical Working Group and host Charter session
- Establish and convene the Planning Commission subcommittee, establish meeting schedule, and schedule the kick-off event.

All City of Houston Departments involved

The preparation of the first General Plan for Houston will require all City department heads to assign specific staff and commit a significant amount of their time to the effort. The Planning and Development Department will lead the process; however, the Plan's success will depend on the quality of participation and contributions from all City departments and agencies. Clear points of contact from each department must be identified

Funding sources

Dedicated funding for the General Plan must be allocated. The City should engage supportive partners that can provide financial and in-kind contributions. A variety of government and foundation grants should be explored. Such partnerships would be beneficial in the preparation of the Plan as well as its future on-going implementation and maintenance.

Additional resources

While required resources will vary depending on scope depth and complexity, all three approaches require additional resources beyond current in-house capacities. Due to the nature of the work and given timeframe, all three approaches require outside support to assist the Planning and Development Department in the overall management and production of

the General Plan. Also, all three approaches may require additional resources specifically in the areas of communication, technology, branding, and public outreach.

For Plan Advisory Group

The Plan Advisory Group (PAG) will evolve into Planning Commission Subcommittee with representation from the original organizations (in the PAG) further augmented by others from the business community, neighborhoods and other thought leaders.

The ongoing task for PAG members is to assist in identifying and securing potential partners for the Plan's preparation and funding and continue to be champions for Houston's first General Plan.