

Houston's general plan, Plan Houston, is a tool for more effective governance. Plan Houston will enable the City to enhance services to current residents and help the City prepare for anticipated growth. This effort will improve coordination between City departments and government agencies and ensure efforts of the City and its partners are as effective as possible. Plan Houston makes the City's operations more pro-active, efficient and transparent.

What is Plan Houston?

At its core, Plan Houston is a framework for sound planning and policy making. It provides consensus on broad principles that can guide City efforts. This document provides the foundation, a starting point, necessary to assist the City's decision-makers.

- **Plan Houston begins with a Vision and Goals for the entire community.** These statements – generated by Houstonians themselves – describe Houston's preferred future. This definition of the community's success lays a foundation for actions needed to achieve the vision.
- **Plan Houston includes 12 Core Strategies, each with its own set of more specific actions.** These actions are the starting point for implementing the plan. They will inform future initiatives to be taken by the City to improve coordination and effectiveness.
- **The Plan also includes supplemental information in the form of performance indicators and an online planning coordination tool.** The indicators will track the community's progress towards achieving the vision and goals and will inform future policy making. The planning coordination tool identifies the planning efforts of many Houston-area agencies on a map. The tool allows the public to better understand and benefit from planning activities in their area. These components indicators can be found at www.planhouston.org.

Why develop Plan Houston?

A general plan is something that the Houston community has requested for nearly 15 years. As early as 2000, Blueprint Houston worked with the City to convene their first of three "Citizens Congresses" to develop a vision and goals for the community.

Chapter 33 of the City's Code of Ordinances requires it. Section 33-51 states that "The city shall adopt and maintain a general plan that describes an overall vision for the city that incorporates plans, policies, regulations, and coordinates strategies for the betterment of public health, safety, and welfare of the city and its extraterritorial jurisdiction."

Why didn't the Mayor create Plan Houston by Executive Order?

Section 33-55 of the Code of Ordinances specifically identifies that City Council has the authority to adopt a general plan. Further, having City Council adopt Plan Houston ensures that City Council is engaged at the highest level of City policy making, provides consistency across changes in leadership, and provides a solid foundation for the plan's implementation.

Is Plan Houston too broad? Why doesn't it list specific projects?

Attaching a specific list of projects to Plan Houston would be impractical because any such list would soon be obsolete. As an example, the City's annually-updated capital improvement plan (CIP) process provides a useful illustration of the need for an ongoing process. Imagine that, instead of using an annually-updated CIP, the City were instead to develop a static one-time list of CIP projects. One year after adoption, the static CIP list would have significant discrepancies; at two years old, the list would require major revisions; and once 3 or 4 years old, the plan would be highly unreliable.

For this reason, the City needs an on-going, annual process, rather than a one-time static list, for developing policy and planning projects. This process would have some similarities to the annual process used to develop the CIP. Plan Houston's goals and strategies would inform this annual process.

Another reason for using ongoing process, rather than a one-time list, is that successful project implementation requires the support of the Mayor and Council that will be in office during implementation. If the City were to adopt a list of FY17 planning and policy projects now, in advance of seating the next Mayor and Council, the priorities reflected in the list may differ significantly from those of the next Mayor and City Council. These differences would hamper implementation.

Plan Houston provides flexible, rather than proscriptive, guidance around goals and strategies. This structure provides consistency across changes in leadership while maintaining flexibility for City leaders to make decisions on near-term priorities.

Is there anything institutionalizing Plan Houston's implementation?

Yes. The Code of Ordinances also requires implementation of Plan Houston. For example, section 33-52 states that "the director shall coordinate with other city departments, government agencies, and related stakeholder organizations on the implementation and maintenance of the general plan." Section 33-53 states that "each director of a city department or office shall consult and coordinate with the general plan, including with the digital interactive planning tool described in section 33-51(b)(3) of this Code, when formulating plans, policies, and regulations."

What happens next?

Following adoption of Plan Houston, the Planning and Development Department (P&D) will begin facilitating a process to develop the FY17 annual work plan. The annual work plan is a list of policy and planning projects for all departments of the City to pursue in upcoming fiscal years. As required in Chapter 33 of the Code, P&D will use Plan Houston as a guide in developing the work plan. P&D will solicit input from the Mayor and Council, department directors and the public on the annual work plan. Once developed, the draft work plan will be fed into the budget process.

Developing an annual work plan will allow Council to weigh in earlier and with better information than current practice. City Council will have the opportunity to become engaged months before a project shows up on the budget for their approval.

Another important activity is integrating Plan Houston into the City organization. This integration is necessary to ensure the Plan is used as a basis for future planning and decision-making. Implementing Plan Houston will require participation of many City departments and partner agencies.

How will the annual work plan be developed?

The following is one approach at an annual timeline for developing an work plan of policy and planning projects:

September – November	Departments work with Planning and Development Department (P&D) to submit major planning and policy initiatives in accordance with Plan Houston
December	P&D compiles submissions and prepares initial draft Work Plan
January	P&D presents initial draft Work Plan to Mayor for consideration
January & February	P&D updates Work Plan according to Mayor’s feedback
February & March	P&D presents Public Input Draft Work Plan to City Council and public for comment at Plan Houston/CIP meetings
April /May	Mayor presents revised Draft Work Plan to City Council in advance of budget
June	Work Plan project feasibility confirmed via budget decisions
July	Final Annual Work Plan is posted online after budget approval
July – August	P&D updates performance indicators and analyzes progress on core strategies for input into next FY Work Plan
Quarterly	Departments update Work Plan with status of each initiative

Will the annual work plan supplant or alter the CIP process?

No. Development of the annual work plan will be a separate effort to the annual development of the CIP. While it is not expected to change the existing projects listed on the CIP, it could inform the policy decisions and may improve how the City develops and prioritizes CIP projects in the long-term future.

Who participated in Plan Houston’s development?

Many Houstonians participated at a variety of levels. Three committees of more than 250 people, representing broad interests from Houston’s diverse neighborhood, business and public arenas, led the process. The project team attended 65 meetings in the community and conducted over 100 interviews with individuals who have expertise in planning and policy in Houston. The project team made presentations on Plan Houston at CIP meetings in all 11 districts, and the Planning Commission conducted four meetings on Plan Houston in the four quadrants of the City. Over 1,000 people attended Plan Houston-specific meetings. In addition, outreach efforts included an on-line survey and multiple Citizensnet and Constant Contact informational emails.

Why is Plan Houston a good idea for the City of Houston?

Plan Houston is a vehicle for better governance. When implemented, Plan Houston will provide the following benefits:

- encourage coordination and collaboration among city departments and other agencies,
- improve effectiveness by enabling a proactive approach to solving problems,
- accelerate quality policy making,
- enhance transparency and citizen engagement, and
- foster consistency across changes in city leadership.