



The Houston General Plan

Proposal to Mayor Lee P. Brown
for a Comprehensive Planning Process

Contents

Executive Summary

Why Plan?

Benefits of a General Plan

Organization of the Process

Outline of the Plan

Background & Examples

Let's begin to plan together

**INCOMPLETE DRAFT
CONFIDENTIAL**

“We must emphasize the need for broad planning if enduring values are to be achieved, planning that not only provides for the present need, but for future expansion. An element of daring along with sound study is as important in city building as in successful business.”

– J. M. West, Chairman, the Houston City Planning Commission, January 2, 1941

Presented by 1000 Friends of Houston, March 2002

Executive Summary

In brief:

The City of Houston will begin a public process to produce “The Houston General Plan,” an official document adopted by City Council that coordinates all plans and city functions related to the social, economic, and physical environments. It is guided by a vision for the city and a set of values and priorities determined by the citizens. The beginning basis is the many existing plans and visions, as documented over the last two decades.

The Houston General Plan will evolve in several phases, the first of which will be the determination of the vision, values, and priorities to form a General Plan Framework. Phase 1 will be completed and approved by November, 2003. Phase 1 outcome should be approved, in order, by the Planning Commission, the City Council, and the voters.

Why Plan?

A comprehensive plan is the most effective mechanism available to cities to coherently address critical 21st century urban issues – namely congestion, air pollution, sprawl, flooding, and visual blight, as well as enhancing the quality of life and promoting economic progress.

Planning will allow Houston to grow in a way that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

The lack of planning can have a negative impact on the city’s image, global competitiveness in terms of attracting and keeping knowledge industry talent, and our bond rating. Experts around the country recognize that effective comprehensive planning is essential to a high quality of life.

In order to attract the intellectual capital to compete in the global marketplace, Houston needs to be a city of vision, innovation and planning for the future. Planning is a business-like roadmap for quality growth and development, leading to a rich and vibrant metropolis with diverse environments for living, working and recreation.

Benefits

The benefits to the City and region are both short-term and long-term. Planning will allow us to accommodate, manage and predict future growth patterns, and to effectively chan-

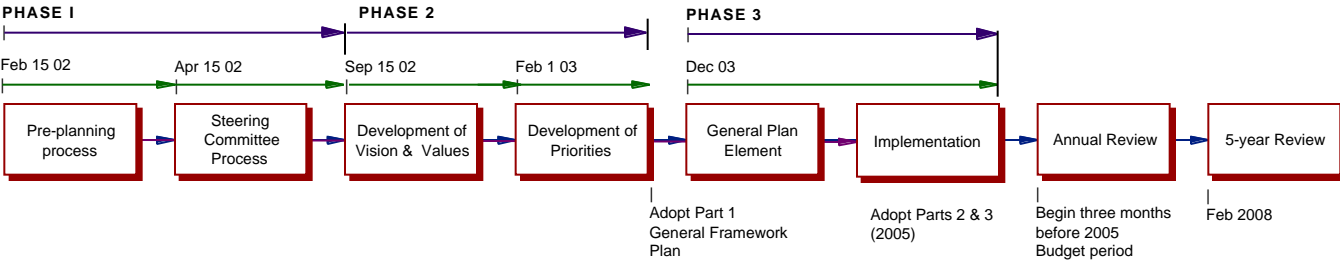
nel public resources based of community values, goals, and priorities. This will ensure our competitiveness in the global economy, by making Houston a more interesting, functional and attractive city in which to live, work and play.

Specific benefits of The Houston General Plan include:

- Improved mobility and public transit.
- Neighborhood revitalization and enhancement.
- Flood control.
- Improved air quality and community health.
- Intergovernmental coordination and efficiency.
- A more orderly and efficient pattern of growth.
- Improved community character and Quality of Life.
- Greater competitiveness in the 21st century global economy.
- Improved conservation of our historical and cultural resources, and of the natural environment.

What is a General Plan?

The general plan is a short and long-term mechanism to build community consensus on a variety of issues and challenges facing the city, from congestion, to air pollution and flooding, to improving community aesthetics, in both the public and private realm. It is the best means to deal with the combined economic, social, physical and environmental impacts of existing and future development. Although the primary focus is physical development and growth, in terms



Executive Summary (continued)

of streets, highways and other infrastructure elements; patterns of land utilization, housing and neighborhoods, the location of public facilities and parks, and goals for the quality of both public improvements and private development, the General Plan also deals with social, economic, and environmental issues. It is, after adoption, the official policy document guiding planning, capital improvements, and development in the city.

The General Plan, to be completed over a two-year period, is an ongoing, flexible document, intended to be updated annually, with a major revision every five years.

As outlined in this proposal, the Plan would be completed in three parts; I The General Plan Framework; II The Elements of the General Plan; and III Implementation.

Organization

This is a proposal for the Mayor and City of Houston to take a leadership role in initiating a comprehensive planning process in Houston, to be known as "The Houston General Plan". The Plan would be completed over a two year period, in three parts: Part I, The General Framework Plan, to be adopted in July 2003. Part II, The General Plan Elements, and Part III, Implementation Plan, would be adopted in 2004. The cost of preparing the Plan is approximately \$1.5 – 2.0 million, a combination of foundation funds to be matched by the City, County, and Federal funds. The process begins by the Mayor officially appointing a representative General Plan Steering Committee, led by an Executive Committee, and instructing the Planning Department to initiate the process. The Mayor's General Plan Coordinator, together with the Planning Director, are responsible for organization and coordination. The initial phases of the work will be supported by the "1000 Friends of Houston", in terms of fundraising, GIS and staff/consultant support, and the HoustonPlan.org Website

Phases:

1. Organizational
2. Part 1, Plan Framework
3. Parts 2 and 3, Implementation Plan Elements

Why Plan?

Summary

In order to attract and keep the intellectual capital required to compete in a global knowledge economy, Houston must be a city of vision, planning, and innovation.

Planning is critical to assist the City in defining and prioritizing capital expenditures, as well as to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its residents.

The creation of a rich, vibrant metropolis with diverse environments for living, working, and playing requires a statement of vision, a general “road map” for growth.

A general plan that coordinates all other plans is necessary to make the most efficient use of public assets and resources to create and maintain the complex infrastructure that enables quality private development.

Economic benefits - lack of planning can have a negative impact on bond raings; bond rating analysts are becoming more aware of the imporance of long-term planning to quality of life.

A “comprehensive plan” is required under Chapter 33 of the City of Houston’s ordinances.

Human Capital and Economic Health

The key to future success is to attract and keep the diverse web of talented people who create and sustain metropolitan economies.

People who are able to work anywhere look for quality places with thriving, diverse neighborhoods with efficient mobility choices. We need to protect and create more of those.

To enrich and leverage our existing human capital requires understanding our roots and cultivating our own growth.

Planning is good business

No prudent business or major institution would consider operating without a plan. Municipal bond rating analysts expect a general plan and score negatively when there is none. This costs the City millions of dollars.

A general plan provides a framework for coordinating and realizing all other plans.

A comprehensive planning process is required by the City Code of Ordinances. (Ch. 33, sec 33-22)

People are ready for a plan

Everyone working and living in Houston wants a high quality of life with a broad array of choices for living, working, and playing. Parents want that for their children, and their grandchildren.

A broad cross-section of Houstonians believes the time has come for a public planning process to improve future development of the City.

Eighty percent of Harris County residents believe planning for growth is more important than letting people and industry develop wherever they want, according to Dr. Stephen Klineberg’s Texas Survey.

Efficiency requires a General Plan

A comprehensive plan is necessary to make the most efficient use of public assets to create and maintain the complex infrastructure that enables quality private development.

We need to protect and leverage our assets to create the kind of community character desired by many people.

Competitors do more planning

Increasingly, American cities like San Diego, Phoenix, Dallas, Austin, and many others maintain ongoing general planning processes.

Why Plan? (continued)

Why plan: why a General Plan?

Important purposes of the plan are:

- Quality of life: To promote the highest possible quality of life, represented by a vibrant downtown and inner city, stable and attractive neighborhoods, thriving regional sub-centers, and efficient patterns of suburban expansion.
- Promote quality growth: To efficiently provide the necessary infrastructure for quality growth and development, in both the city and suburbs.
- Coordinate and integrate existing plans: To consolidate current and recent planning efforts in the City and region.
- Intergovernmental coordination: To foster cooperation and coordination between the City, County, Metro, and other governmental entities.
- More effective use of taxpayer dollars: To enable greater efficiency in coordinating quality public improvements and private development.
- A more attractive and economically competitive city: To create the working and living environment which attracts and keeps the 21st century intellectual capital, necessary to compete in the global economy.

What is a General Plan?

In brief:

A General Plan is the result of a public process that reflects citizen vision, values, and priorities that are adopted as official policies for guiding public improvements of the city..

The specific provisions of a General Plan are:

It is a citizen-based, long-term statement of our civic vision, community goals, policies, priorities, and programs, necessary to deal effectively with the economic, social, and physical impact of existing and future development. It's primary focus is physical development and growth; through a coordinated approach to streets and highways, public and institutional facilities, parks and open space, utilities and drainage, downtown enhancements, and neighborhood quality. The Plan establishes priorities and strategies for balancing economic progress and the quality of city life, and is the official policy document guiding planning, public improvements, and development in the city.

and community facilities, housing and neighborhoods, the environment and public health, education and safety.

It is the result of a public process that reflects citizen values and wisdom about principles and goals to make our city a more attractive place to live, work, play, and visit.

It is the basic tool available to municipalities to turn our vision into reality of the next 15-20 years.

The plan encompasses all geographic parts of the community and addresses all interdependent quality of life issues simultaneously, such as land use, environment, transportation, and public facilities.

It is the official public document adopted as a policy guide for decisions about the physical development of the community.

It is both a process and a document that records ...

The General Plan is defined by the City Charter (**no it's not**) and related ordinances. It includes...

It is the primary decision-making tool for the city's Capital Improvements Program.

It has a time span generally of 15-20 years with major updates at 5-year intervals.

It is a flexible, constantly evolving document.

It deals comprehensively with transportation, land development patterns, streets and infrastructure, parks, recreation

Benefits of a General Plan

In brief:

A more attractive, function(?), and successful city that reflects citizen vision, values, priorities, and guiding principles, with clear objectives to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Benefits

The benefits of a plan for Houston are both short-term and long-term:

Short-term benefits:

- A creative, consensus-building civic dialogue.
- Coordination of current and prior plans, programs and vision statements.
- Definition of core needs and priorities.
- Value-driven direction for the Capital Improvements Program (CIP).
- Intergovernmental/interdepartmental coordination.
- More effective public decision-making, particularly transit, infrastructure, community facilities, and redevelopment.

Long-term benefits:

- A comprehensive approach to solving interrelated problems of congestion, air pollution, flooding, and visual blight.
- Greater efficiency in the use of public resources.
- A more orderly, predictable, and efficient pattern of growth.
- Revitalization and enhancement of neighborhoods.
- Increased vitality of Downtown and the inner city.
- A more efficient, balanced, transportation system.
- Improved public health and safety.
- Conservation of the natural environment.
- A strategic balance between quality of life and economic progress.

(didn't know how to incorporate the following into the above)

The greatest benefit is the process itself - bringing citizens together to define a shared vision for our collective future.

Other benefits:

- Better use and management of public resources
- Better protection of public health, safety, and welfare

- A more orderly pattern of growth and efficient land use
- Revitalization and protection of neighborhoods
- Greater stability for communities
- Capital improvements program tied to preferred patterns of growth
- Control of visual blight
- Protection of the natural environment
- Clarity and predictability regarding private development

Organization of the Process

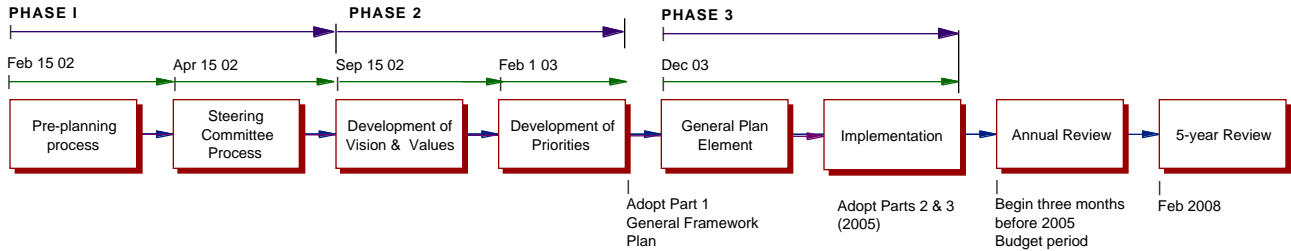
Summary

Comprehensive planning is a complex endeavor requiring resources, time, and the involvement of many people. Phase 1 will require a concerted, efficient effort over approximately a year and a half.

A modern planning process alternates between citizen input and professional design work. A team of innovative, skilled professionals and managers facilitates the process, compiles the input, and drafts a plan that is derived from the visions of the participants. The plan will pass through many filters, including the City Planning Commission and the City Council. Ultimately, the plan will go to the voters. It is critical, therefore, that everyone involved at all stages of the process be committed to work toward broad consensus, then work to communicate the plan to the Planning Commission, City Council, and the voters.

The participation of the broadest possible cross-section of Houston citizens will build consensus for an authentic vision, values, and guiding principles to guide the City’s evolution in the coming decades. A Steering Committee of 30-40, appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council, will guide the entire process through the General Election of 2003. An Executive Council of not more than 7 people will assisted by the Mayor’s Plan Coordinator and the Director of Planning and Development.

(Suggestion: A simple set of pro-planning, pro-participation principles should be devised and Steering Committee members should sign them as the price for representation)



Phase One

Pre-planning Process

Prepare process proposal for Mayor Lee P. Brown.

Elements:

- Executive Summary
- Why Plan?
- Benefits of a General Plan
- Organization of the Process
- Outline of the Plan
- Background & Examples
- Let’s begin to plan together

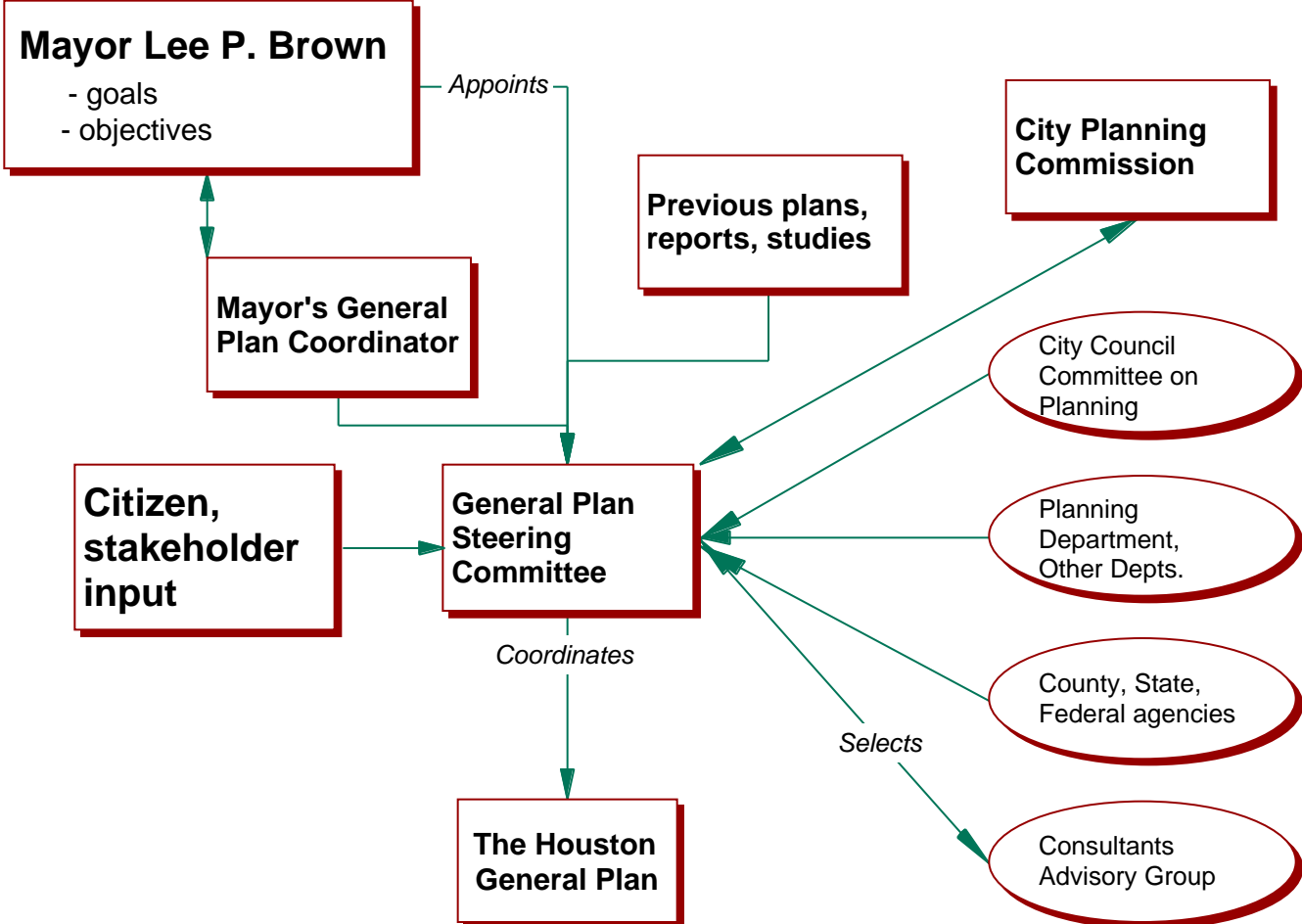
(The present document is the result of this part of the process.)

Steering Committee process

The steering committee is responsible for creating and managing Phase 1 of the General Plan process. It will begin its work on April 15, 2002.

During this period, the committee will assemble and analyze existing plans and visions as a basis for beginning the Phase 1. It will identify the professional team that will facilitate the planning, and oversee a budget and expenditures. The Steering Committee will work with public agencies and professional planners to outline a vision, values, and strategies that conform to citizen input, both previous to this exercise and developed during it. The Committee will devise a means for regular checkpoints at which time citizen affirmation will be sought.

Organization of the Process (continued)

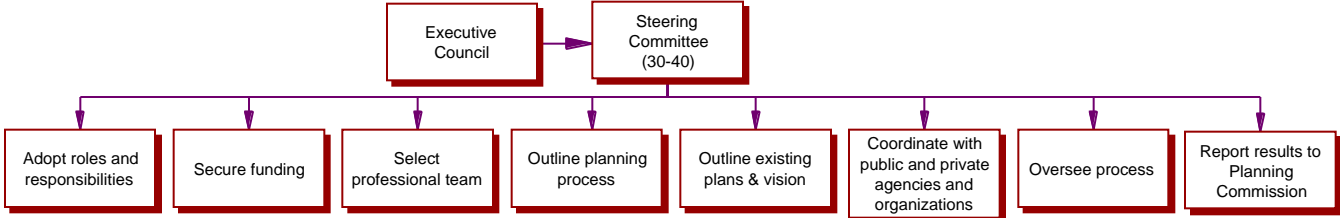


Approval Process

The complete set of Vision, Values, and Priorities will be submitted for approval to the Planning Commission, and then to the City Council. Both bodies will conduct extensive public hearings. Other cities have effectively used a website and newspaper supplements to elicit citizen response. Council will devise language for an item to appear on the ballot for citizen approval in the General Election of November, 2003.

The General Plan Process and Schedule:

The planning process can be completed in three phases. The first is an organizational period, of 3-4 months, during which the Planning Director, the Mayor's Planning Coordinator, and specialized consultants, work under the direction of the Steering Committee to organize the public participation process, establish budgets and time schedules, and assemble the initial background data to begin the work. The Houston General Plan document, following recent precedents from other cities, could be organized in three Parts. Part I, The General Plan Framework, containing back-



Organization of the Process (continued)

ground data and plans, restatement of the community visions and goals, a set of core planning principles for balancing quality of life and economic progress, and alternatives for urban/regional form, would be adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council in the latter part of the Mayor's term in 2003. The General Plan Framework would contain a specific commitment to fund and complete the Plan in 2004.

- A. Adoption of Part I, The General Plan Framework (July 2003).
- B. Adoption of Part II, The General Plan Elements, and Part III, Implementation (2004).

Pre-Planning Process

Core team

Peter Brown, Peter Brown Civic Design
David Crossley, Gulf Coast Institute
Claudia Williamson, Williamson & Associates

Pre-Planning Advisory panel

Robert Eury
Executive Director, Central Houston
John Michael Gonzalez
Chair, Midtown Management District(?) Barry Goodman
Goodman Company
Stephen Klineberg, Ph.D.
Rice University
Patricia Knudson-Joiner
Knudson & Associates
Carol Lewis, Ph.D.
TSU Center for Transportation Research
Kevin Shanley
SWA Landscape Architects
Louis Sklar
Hines
Jonathan Smulian
WRT Planners
Ed Wulfe
Chair, Main Street Coalition

Plan Sponsors (suggested)

City of Houston
Center for Houston's Future (Greater Houston Partnership?)
Houston Endowment
Greater Houston Community Foundation
United Way
Gulf Coast Institute

Steering Committee Process

Roles and Responsibilities

The steering committee will be charged with overseeing all aspects of Phase I of the process, which terminates in November 2003. Its product shall be submitted to the City Planning Commission by May 15, 2003.

Structure

The committee shall have 40 members and each member shall have an alternate. The chair and vice-chair shall be elected by the committee. The committee itself shall be divided into three major subcommittees: Economy, Community, Environment. Each shall have a chair and a vice-chair, named by the Steering Committee chair and confirmed by each subcommittee.

Recommended committee representation

United Way
Houston Endowment
Urban Land Institute
Greater Houston Homebuilders Assn
Houston Homeowners Association
Houston Apartment Association
Citizens' Environmental Coalition
Center for Houston's Future (Greater Houston Partnership?)
Greater Houston Historic Preservation Alliance
Gulf Coast Institute
1000 Friends of Houston
American Institute of Architects
American Planning Association
Main Street Coalition
Central Houston (or Downtown Management District)
Harris County

Community Planning Advisory Groups

Super Neighborhoods
Community Development Corporations
Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones

Public Agencies

City of Houston and Departments
City Planning Commission
Houston Historical & Archeological Commission
Harris County and Departments
Metro
Houston-Galveston Area Council
Harris County Flood Control District
(Water?) Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission
Texas Department of Transportation
Texas Department of Housing
Texas Parks & Wildlife
Federal (HUD, EPA, etc)

Educational Institutions

Independent School District(s)
University of Houston
Rice University
Texas Southern University
Houston Community College

Other Civic & Community Orgs, Churches

Outline of the Plan

The suggested content of the three-part plan is as follows:

Part I: The Plan Framework

- A. Existing Conditions and Future Growth Projections.
- B. Compendium of Current Plans.
- C. Restatement of the Community Vision - Goals, Objectives, Priorities.
- D. The Super Neighborhood Planning Process
- E. Core City-building Principles and Public Policies; balancing quality of life and economic progress.
- F. Intergovernmental coordination
- G. Competing in the 21st century global economy.
- H. Urban/Regional Form Alternatives – recommended policies and strategies for desirable patterns of growth. (Centers, Districts, Corridors and Neighborhoods).

Part II: Elements of the Houston General Plan.

- A. Mobility, Transit and Circulation
- B. Urban Form and General Development Patterns – Centers, Districts, Corridors, and Neighborhoods.
- C. Neighborhoods and Housing.
- D. Downtown and Regional Centers.
- E. Parks and Open Space.
- F. Flooding and Storm water Management.
- G. Stewardship of the Environment
- H. Community and Cultural Life.
- I. Livability - Public Health and Safety.

Part III. Implementation.

- A. Public Policies, Programs and Projects.
- B. Public Policies and Strategies
- C. Intergovernmental Coordination
- D. Urban Growth Principles and Development Guidelines – Public and Private.
- E. Public funding priorities – the Capital Improvements Program (CIP).
- F. Sources of Funding by category; local, State, Federal, other.
- G. Private-Public Partnerships – a Houston tradition.

Let's Begin to Plan Together...

The Houston General Plan is a flexible, evolving document, which sets forth community goals, objectives and policies, and acts as the mechanism for achieving our civic vision and improvement of our quality of life. The emphasis of the Plan generally addresses a thriving economy, improved quality of life, and improved governmental efficiency and coordination, building upon current plans and programs. The Plan will address directly, in a synergistic manner, the interrelated problems of congestion, air pollution, flooding, blight, and overall community character. The purpose is to achieve, in the long-term, more efficient growth patterns, continued revitalization of Downtown and the inner-city, healthy neighborhoods and people-friendly regional "Town Centers", as the focal point of community life, the enhancement of community character and aesthetics, and improved stewardship of the environment.

Over the past three years, there has been a ground swell of support in Houston for "quality of life" issues and series of "Smart Growth" initiatives. Much of the background work and certain plan elements such as the regional park system have already been completed (**Not at all, and even the City's parks master plan is based on the 1999 population.**) There is widespread citizen interest in planning.

We all recognize the connection between quality of life and economic progress in the 21st century global economy.

The year 2002 is clearly the propitious moment to bring all of these diverse energies together in The Houston General Plan.

Law & History

State of Texas

The right to develop Comprehensive Plans is expressly granted to municipalities in XXSXXx. One difficulty for rational regional planning is that counties are not granted this power, and therefore counties are generally going in somewhat different directions from the municipalities within them. (Also address MUDs)

City of Houston

A comprehensive plan is mandated in Chapter 33 of the City's Code of Ordinances.
Etc., citing language as necessary

History

The City of Houston has not had a valid comprehensive plan since 1929. that plan was championed by Mayor Oscar Holcombe.

Examples of Recent General Plans Completed in Other Cities.

Most cities have a general, or comprehensive, plan, and in recent years several cities have gone back to the people to develop or update new plans in accordance with changed planning principles. Today, plans for growth are based on values, and the examples listed here are from cities that have recently used the contemporary process, or are still developing those plans.

Recent metropolitan planning exercises

San Diego

The City of San Diego has recently completed a Strategic Framework Element of its new general plan. This first phase was completed in just over a year after an extensive public outreach that defined how San Diegans would like to see growth addressed over the next 20 years. The Planning Department worked with a 40-member Citizens Committee, the city Council, and a Smart Growth Implementation Committee – a new body formed by the Mayor and consisting of the heads of public agencies, the transit board, the school board, the council of governments, the Port District and other key agencies.

The first phase states a vision and values for growth, then proposes a City of Villages strategy, with “village” defined as a place where residential, commercial, employment and civic/education uses are connected to create a cohesive whole. The key policy recommendations of the strategy include Urban Form and Environment, Neighborhood Quality, Economic Prosperity, Infrastructure/Public Facilities, and Mobility.

For more, go to www.sannet.gov/cityofvillages

Phoenix

Phoenix is updating its general plan based on a set of 2,044 citizen telephone interviews in December 1999 and January 2000. The new growth plan is based on an urban form called the “urban village” and designates 14 urban villages. There are five components to each village: Core, neighborhoods, community services, regional services, and open space. Several “key concepts” guide the character of development, including open space and desert preservation, infill housing, targeted growth areas, integrated land use/transportation planning, and financial management of infrastructure.

Elements included in the plan include Land Use; Cost of Development; Circulation (mobility); Bicycling, Housing; Neighborhood; Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Redevelopment; Environmental Planning; Natural Resources Conservation; Open Space; Recreation, Water

Resources; Public Buildings; Public Services & Facilities; and Safety.

San Francisco

Sacramento

Nashville

Louisville

Etc. (half a dozen)