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Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (West Gray) Project Statement

In March 2025, the City of Houston launched a comprehensive community engagement process to reimagine the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC). This facility has served the disability community for over four decades. What started as stakeholder conversations to gather insights about community needs and establish redevelopment guidelines evolved into an extensive five-month initiative. This initiative captured the voices of hundreds of community members through individual meetings, focus groups, open-door sessions, online surveys, and large-scale community events.

This report presents the findings from a robust engagement process that generated over 900 individual comments. It highlights the significant value that the MMSC provides to Houston's disability community and outlines critical improvements needed to ensure its continued success. The comprehensive feedback documented here forms the basis for both immediate operational enhancements and long-term strategic planning. These efforts aim to position the MMSC as a national model for inclusive community facilities while preserving the unique character and mission that have made it a lifeline for thousands of residents.



Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Community Engagement Report

Comprehensive Analysis of Community Feedback and Strategic Recommendations

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City of Houston Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
Office of City Council Member Abbie Kamin, District C
City of Houston General Services Department
City of Houston Parks and Recreation

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Executive Summary

The City of Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC) stands at a pivotal moment in its four-decade history of serving Houston's disability community. This comprehensive community engagement initiative has highlighted the profound value this facility brings to its users, identified critical improvements needed to address immediate physical and operational challenges, and imagined longer-term opportunities to increase its relevance and effectiveness. The extensive community feedback compiled in this document provides a solid foundation of user and stakeholder input upon which to base immediate operational and attainable improvements while effectively setting the facility on a path towards long-term transformational investment.

While the MMSC serves as a cherished and vital resource, significant challenges in facility condition, operations, and user experience must be addressed to maintain its role as Houston's premier recreational facility dedicated to serving people with disabilities.

Council Member Kamin, leadership from the Mayor's Office, and the Parks and Recreation and General Services Departments are working together to leverage the current convergence of substantial funding opportunities, operational improvements already in progress at the MMSC, and tremendous community energy. This team is committed to achieving revitalization of this essential community asset as quickly as possible while amplifying its potential to serve the disability community in Houston for this and future generations.

Introduction and Objectives

For over 40 years, the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center has served as Houston's primary dedicated facility for individuals with disabilities, providing recreational, social, and community services that are often unavailable elsewhere in the region. This has brought tremendous value to this vulnerable community while creating a significant responsibility to maintain and enhance services that so directly impact basic quality of life for thousands of residents. Multiple community members describe the facility as literally saving their lives.

The facility also serves as one of the largest and most heavily used warming and cooling centers in the City, providing support for residents during natural disasters, and is the largest polling location in Harris County. The multi-use and heavy demand for this facility indicates how critical this facility is, with civic life revolving heavily around this campus.

Building momentum from several years of exploration, discussion, and funding pursuits, the community engagement captured here sought input into immediate operational enhancements, medium-term facility improvements, and long-term strategic positioning.

At this critical time the facility faces mounting maintenance needs, changing community demographics, and evolving accessibility standards. Simultaneously, significant funding opportunities and growing community awareness of disability rights create favorable conditions for transformational improvements that can establish the MMSC as a national model for inclusive community facilities.

Engagement Events and Methodologies

Community feedback information was gathered across a comprehensive variety of engagement activities designed to capture diverse perspectives and ensure broad participation from all stakeholder groups. The engagement process included:

- March 25 to March 26, and April 1: Individual Pre-Meetings with key stakeholders
- March 26: Open door session focused specifically on Adaptive Sports programming
- April 23: Large-scale Community Event open to all facility users
- June 12: Dedicated Focus Group with Visually Impaired Advocates
- June 17 to July 14: Comprehensive Online Survey available to the broader community
- June 21: Open door session welcoming all community members
- June 26: Targeted meeting with Houston Commission on Disabilities Chair and Vice Chair
- July 10: Final Community Event to present preliminary findings

This multi-faceted approach ensured that feedback was collected from users with varying disabilities, family members, caregivers, community partners, and advocacy organizations, creating a comprehensive understanding of community needs and priorities.

In total more than 100 separate participants contributed to the feedback summarized here with more than 900 individual comments compiled.

This comprehensive engagement process was preceded by other community engagement events, including surveys and community meetings in prior years.

Community Engagement Feedback Summary

Stakeholders, users, and event participants responded to these open-ended questions:

- What works well at the MMSC today?
- What frustrates you about the conditions in the current facility?
- How would you like to use the facility in the future?
What would you want to do there that you can't do now?
- If we rebuild or renovate, what worries you?
What important things about the current center should we keep?

During pre-meetings, large-scale engagements and smaller events, participants shared their thoughts on sticky notes or facilitators wrote down specific feedback provided. The web-based survey allowed stakeholders to contribute remotely and at their own pace.

All responses were compiled into a comprehensive database, and common themes were identified. Detailed themes were then summarized into the five major categories listed below.

1. Recreational Facilities

Recreational Facilities	Sports facilities, equipment, recreational spaces
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2. Additional and Special Facility Uses

Programs & Services	Classes, activities, educational offerings
Community Partnerships	External organizations, partnerships, sponsorships
Arts & Performance	Theater, performances, stage usage, arts programs
Environmental Sustainability	Clean energy, heat mitigation, green initiatives
Special Events & Voting Accommodations	Voting disruptions, event hosting

3. User Experience

Community & Inclusion	Social aspects, inclusivity, belonging
Dignified User Experience	Feeling respected, avoiding embarrassment
Amenities & Comfort Features	Microwaves, food areas, water stations, seating, restrooms
Accessibility Features	Accommodations for disabilities, assistive technology
Wayfinding & Navigation	Signage, maps, guidance systems

4. Facility Condition

Physical Infrastructure	Building elements, facilities, maintenance, space issues
Transportation & Access	Parking, transit, physical access to facility
Landscaping & Outdoor Environment	Trees, grass, shade, gardens, outdoor aesthetics
Technology & Digital Access	Wi-Fi, electrical outlets, website, online resources

5. Facility Operation

Administration & Operations	Hours, staffing, management issues
Safety & Security	Safety concerns, security measures
Cleanliness & Maintenance	Cleaning protocols, trash removal

A final review coded responses for tone: successes, challenges, or neutral. Summary of the feedback by category follows. Response detail provided in the appendix.

Recreational Facilities



12% of all comments specifically mentioned recreational facilities .

	Challenges	Neutral	Successes
Pool	20	8	9
Playground	14	1	7
Gym	19	2	
Court	11	2	2
Equipment	9	2	3
Track	9	5	
Storage	8		
Fields	6		
Softball	1	3	
Tennis	3	1	

Figure 1. Count of comments about recreational facilities; top ten themes with comments categorized by tone: challenges, neutral, or successes.

The **Pool** receives the most comments for challenges, followed by the **Gym** and the **Playground**. The **Pool**, despite its challenges, also has the most comments about successes.

Pool Facilities

The pool emerges as both the primary source of frustration and the most valued facility feature, underscoring its central importance to community well-being. Users consistently cite periods of unavailability and accessibility issues as major concerns, with specific emphasis on temperature control and reliability.

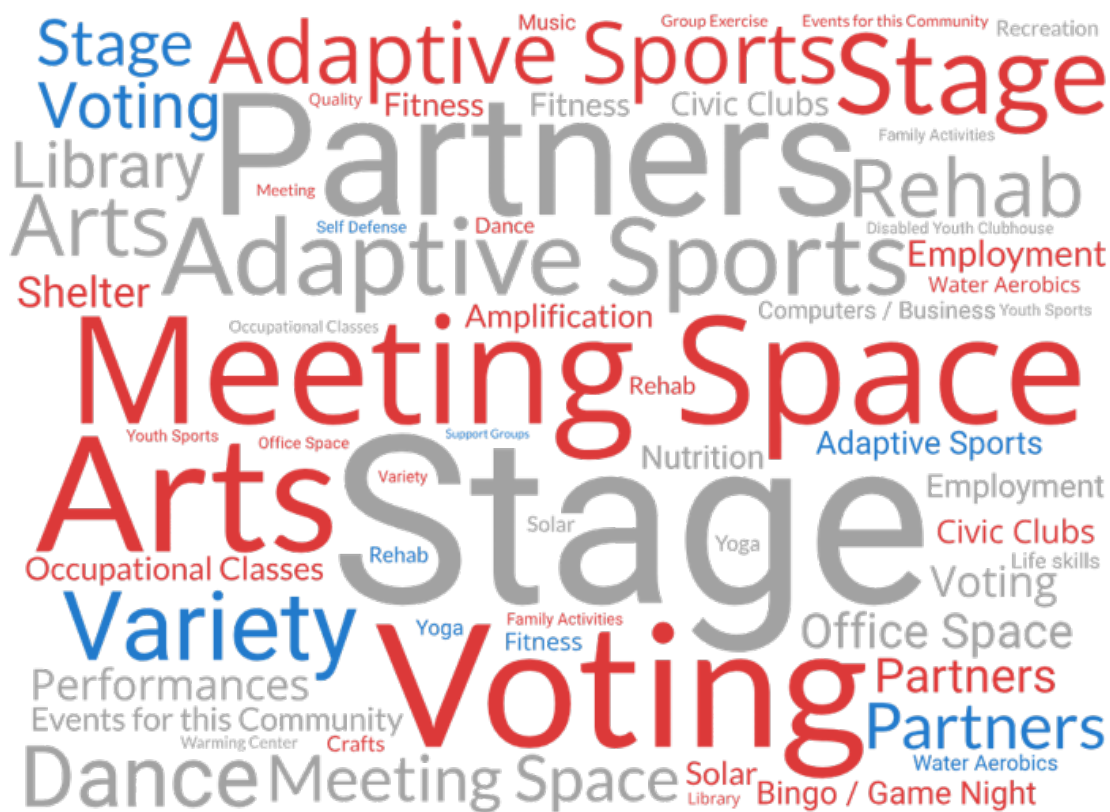
Community members with medical conditions requiring warm water therapy express particular frustration with temperature inconsistencies. As one user noted, "The pool temperature needs to be back to the 90s – 96°F. People who have had strokes or have cerebral palsy need warm water to relax their muscles." The frequent plea to "Keep the pool heater fixed!" appears throughout the feedback, indicating that mechanical reliability remains a persistent challenge.

Gym and Playground Facilities

Secondary recreational concerns include gym facilities and playgrounds, with users citing equipment modernization needs, maintenance challenges, and safety issues. The gym faces particular challenges with equipment age and availability, as activities have historically been displaced by voting and other special events. Suggested playground improvements focus on accessibility enhancements, including additional ramps and design modifications that allow for better navigation by users with various mobility needs.

The pool's dual status as both the top frustration and most positively discussed amenity points to improved pool reliability as the highest priority for enhancing overall community satisfaction. Addressing mechanical issues, temperature control, and scheduling reliability could dramatically improve the user experience while preserving the facility's most valued feature.

Additional and Special Facility Uses



Community feedback revealed significant interest in expanding programs and services, community partnerships, arts and performance opportunities, environmental sustainability initiatives, and special events accommodations. The facility's stage emerged as the most discussed topic in this category, with users expressing frustration about its limited availability and poor conditions for live performances while noting affiliation with specific theater groups.

	Challenges	Neutral	Successes
Stage	<div><div></div></div>	7	12
Partners	<div><div></div></div>	3	8
Arts	<div><div></div></div>	10	4
Voting	<div><div></div></div>	8	2
Meeting Space	<div><div></div></div>	7	4
Adaptive Sports	<div><div></div></div>	4	5
Rehab	<div><div></div></div>	2	5
Variety	<div><div></div></div>	1	
Fitness	<div><div></div></div>	2	2
Employment	<div><div></div></div>	3	2

Figure 2. Count of comments about additional and special facility uses; top ten themes with comments categorized by tone: challenges, neutral, or successes.

The **Arts** receives the most comments for challenges, followed by **Voting**, the **Stage**, and the **Meeting Space**. The **Variety** has the most comments about successes.

Arts Programming Concerns

The general lack of arts programs represents a primary community frustration, with multiple users noting that the facility is "geared to sports - No Arts." This concern is particularly significant given Houston's lack of dedicated arts facilities for people with disabilities. Community members express interest in expressive arts therapy and other creative programming to meet both recreational and therapeutic needs.

Theater Program Partnerships

There is a strong history of theater program partnerships at the MMSC including River (now run by TUTS) and Second Act. Respondents noted opportunities to leverage these existing relationships while developing new collaborative arrangements. The community wants to increase access to these opportunities, viewing arts programming as essential to the facility's comprehensive service model.

Special Events Challenges

Conflicting special events create operational challenges, with voting activities specifically problematic as they have a history of displacing regular programming and limiting facility access during critical periods. Many users mentioned loss of access to gym facilities and other amenities during election periods in the past, creating frustration with the dual-use arrangement. City officials note that this facility is the most popular polling place in Houston and critical to election operations. Significant efforts have been made to streamline voting operations and limit facility impact. Recent elections were noted as having been conducted more smoothly due to these changes.

User Experience



User experience concerns made up 19% of all community comments, making this the largest category of feedback.

	Challenges	Neutral	Successes
Bathrooms	33	1	
Cooling	12	1	
Community	1	1	10
Storage	10	1	
Inclusion	2		9
Cost Efficient	5	3	1
Broader Use	3	3	1
Dedicated to Disabled	5		2
Locker Room	5	1	
Food Prep	4	2	

Figure 3. Count of comments about user experience; top ten themes with comments categorized by tone: challenges, neutral, or successes.

The **Bathrooms** receive the most comments for challenges across all themes. The **Community** and feeling of **Inclusion** are the most frequently noted successes.

Bathroom Accessibility Issues

Bathrooms are the primary source of frustration, with users citing limited space, accessibility issues, and general condition concerns. Specific problems include narrow doors that prevent wheelchair access, low and damaged fixtures, and inadequate accessible stall configurations. Several comments specifically cite the challenges that power wheelchair users face due to the expanded footprint and larger turning radius required for these devices.

HVAC and Storage Concerns

Secondary concerns include HVAC problems and storage limitations, both of which impact daily facility operations and user comfort. The cooling system was mentioned frequently, particularly during Houston's extended warm weather periods when the facility experiences peak usage.

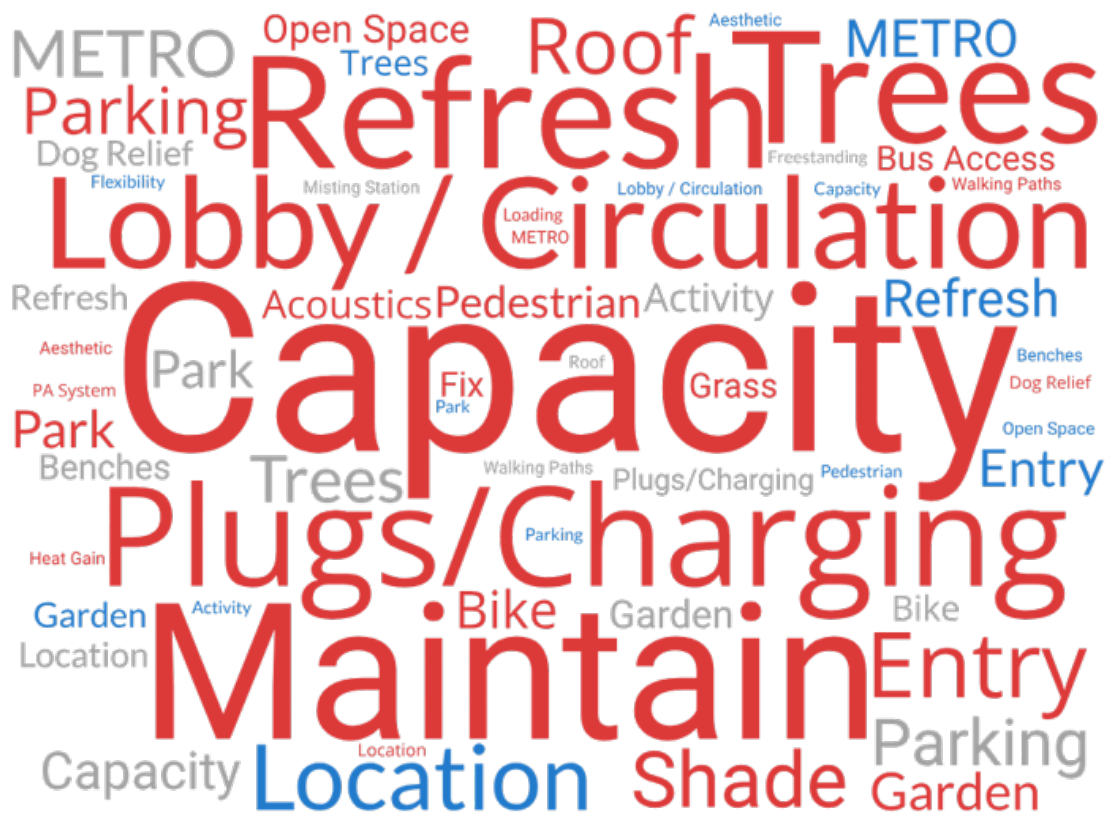
Community and Inclusion Strengths

Despite these operational concerns, community and inclusion are the most positively discussed elements of user experience. Users consistently praise the networking and social aspects of the facility, identifying the MMSC's unique role in bringing people together. As one long-time user noted, the facility "has been meeting a community need for people with disabilities for over 40 years – an important legacy and unique opportunity."

Balancing Openness and Dedicated Service

Specific comments made about openness and availability to surrounding neighbors were in direct contradiction to comments hoping that the facility will be maintained as a dedicated space for people with disabilities. This tension reflects broader questions about inclusive design and specialized services that warrant careful consideration in future planning efforts.

Facility Condition



Facility condition concerns represent 11% of community feedback, with capacity limitations identified as the primary frustration. Many users note insufficient space for programming, with summer camps and special events displacing regular activities. The demand for additional event space reflects both the facility's success in serving the community and the constraints of its current configuration.

	Challenges	Neutral	Successes
Capacity	24	4	1
Trees	9	5	2
Refresh	9	2	4
Lobby / Circulation	13		1
Parking	5	5	1
Plugs/Charging	8	3	
Maintain	11		
Garden	4	4	2
Location	1	2	7
Entry	7		3

Figure 4. Count of comments about facility condition; top ten themes with comments categorized by tone: challenges, neutral, or successes.

The lack of **Capacity** receives the most comments for challenges, followed by a focus on **Lobby / Circulation** spaces and general **Maintenance**. The **Location** has the most comments about successes.

Lobby and Circulation Issues

Secondary concerns include the lobby and circulation areas, as well as general maintenance and refreshing needs. These issues impact first impressions and daily navigation, critical considerations for users with various accessibility needs who may require additional time and space for movement through the facility.

Location and Transportation Access

Location and Metro access are the most positively discussed aspects of the MMSC. Users consistently praise the central location and public transportation connectivity, recognizing these features as essential to the facility's accessibility and community service mission. The strategic location ensures that users across the metropolitan area can access services regardless of their transportation options.

Facility Operations



operations made up 15% of community comments, with security identified as the primary concern. Users report feeling unsafe due to the presence of and specific incidents with unhoused individuals and mentally unstable persons who frequent the area, noting particular concerns for the vulnerability of the disability community. The lack of consistent security monitoring is a recurring theme, with users questioning why the facility does not maintain a constant security presence.

	Challenges	Neutral	Successes
Security	17		1
Staff	6	3	9
Communication	11	2	1
Continuity	10	4	
Safety	6	2	1
Clean	6		1
Scheduling	5		
Pool Hours	4		
Weekend Hours	3		1
Public	4		

Figure 5. Count of comments about facility operations; top ten themes with comments categorized by items that are seen as challenges, neutral, or successes.

Lack of **Security** receives the most comments for challenges. **Staff** have the most comments about successes.

Communication and Continuity Issues

Communication and continuity issues are secondary operational concerns. Numerous users cite outdated website information and inadequate advertising about available services. This communication gap means that some individuals with disabilities remain unaware of the facility's existence and available programming, limiting the MMSC's community impact.

Staff Performance

Staff are the most positively discussed operational element, yet also appear among the top five concerns, highlighting their critical role in community satisfaction. This mixed feedback suggests that while staff performance is generally appreciated, consistency and training may need attention to achieve more positive interactions and improve facility user experiences.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Short-Term Actions

To honor the feedback received, this report recommends immediate actions to addressing the most critical operational and safety concerns while building momentum for longer-term improvements.

Security Enhancements

Security enhancements are the highest priority, requiring immediate implementation of consistent monitoring protocols. Additional staff and training for managing complex situations involving both disability community members and other facility users may be beneficial.

Pool Reliability Improvements

Pool reliability improvements should receive immediate attention, given the facility's central role and the apparent community frustration with current conditions. Mechanical system repairs, temperature control upgrades, and preventive maintenance protocols can provide quick wins that demonstrate responsiveness to community concerns.

Communication System Improvements

Communication system improvements can be implemented rapidly and cost-effectively while providing immediate value to the community. Website updates, enhanced social media presence, and improved community outreach can increase facility utilization while addressing the information gaps identified in community feedback.

Bathroom Accessibility Upgrades

Bathroom accessibility upgrades should begin as soon as possible with a focus on door width modifications, fixture improvements, and general condition enhancements. These improvements directly impact daily user experience and demonstrate a commitment to enhanced inclusivity.

Long-Term Strategic Considerations

Long-term planning should address capacity constraints, program diversification, and strategic positioning as Houston's premier disability-focused community facility.

Facility Expansion and Reconfiguration

Facility expansion or reconfiguration is the most significant strategic consideration, requiring careful analysis of space utilization, program growth potential, and the evolution of community needs.

Arts and Performance Programming Development

Arts and performance programming development should receive strategic priority, given the clear community interest and Houston's lack of dedicated disability-focused arts facilities.

Partnership development with local arts organizations, educational institutions, and therapeutic providers can create unique programming opportunities while addressing identified community needs.

Operational Model Refinement

Operational model refinement should address tensions between serving as a dedicated disability facility while accommodating broader community needs as well as supporting competitive adaptive sports programs alongside more therapeutic recreational activity. This strategic consideration requires community input and careful analysis of service delivery models that maintain the facility's core mission while optimizing resource utilization.

Funding Sustainability Planning

Funding sustainability planning should leverage current federal partnerships while developing diverse revenue streams that support ongoing operations and continuous improvements. The success of current grant applications demonstrates the potential for continued federal support, while local partnerships and fee-for-service programming may provide additional operational stability.

The Metropolitan Multi-Service Center has the potential to serve as a national model for inclusive community facilities. The convergence of community engagement insights, funding opportunities, and operational improvements creates an unprecedented opportunity to enhance services while building on the cherished community, unique character and proven mission that have served Houston's disability community for over four decades.

Improvements in Process

Operational improvements are already underway across multiple service areas, reflecting the City leadership team's commitment to achieving as many immediate enhancements as possible while longer-term capital projects are developed.

METRO Police

METRO Police operations are being adjusted to extend coverage from 5:30-8:30 pm on Tuesdays during the summer program, addressing community safety concerns during high-usage evening hours. This expansion represents a direct response to security feedback while recognizing the facility's extended operational schedule.

Houston Police Department

Houston Police Department collaboration has been enhanced through dedicated mental health contacts and expanded service availability as needed. This partnership acknowledges the complex needs of the facility's user base while ensuring appropriate response capabilities for various situations that may arise.

Houston Parks and Recreation

Houston Parks and Recreation is implementing several operational improvements, including reviewing shower access timing to minimize conflicts and implementing an access control database for MMSC users. These changes address both operational efficiency and user experience concerns while maintaining the facility's open and welcoming atmosphere.

Urban Park Rangers

Urban Park Rangers continue their existing grounds patrol while evaluating the addition of static positioning during morning hours when activity levels are highest. This enhanced presence provides both security and assistance to facility users while maintaining the community-oriented approach that defines the MMSC experience.

Homeland Security

Homeland Security coordination focuses on reviewing alternative locations for adult unhoused shower access, recognizing the complex dynamics between serving the disability community and addressing broader community needs. This careful approach seeks solutions that serve all populations while maintaining the MMSC's primary mission.

METRO Lift

METRO Lift services are being enhanced to assist with transportation to alternative locations, ensuring that changes in service delivery do not create barriers for individuals who depend on accessible transportation options.

Initiatives Underway

The MMSC improvement strategy is anchored by several major funding initiatives that collectively represent over \$15 million in potential investments.

Metropolitan Multi-Service Center HUD Grant

The Metropolitan Multi-Service Center United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Grant, secured through the Fiscal Year 2024 Community Project Fund (Grant B-24-CP-TX-2101), provides \$1 million in federal funding designated explicitly for facility improvements. This foundational investment establishes the framework for broader enhancement efforts and demonstrates federal recognition of the facility's importance.

Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Improvement Projects

Building upon this federal support, the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Improvement Projects represent a substantial \$3.819 million investment in infrastructure and facility upgrades. These projects address critical maintenance needs while incorporating modern accessibility features and operational improvements that will enhance the user experience across all facility areas.

Community Engagement Plan

Community engagement remains central to the improvement strategy, with the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Revisioning/Community Engagement Plan receiving dedicated funding of \$100,000. This investment ensures that all stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the facility's future direction while building consensus around improvement priorities.

Future Projects

Looking toward the future, Future Projects represent potential investments exceeding \$10 million, indicating the scale of transformation being contemplated. These projects will likely address major infrastructure needs, expand capacity, and introduce new program areas that respond to evolving community needs. With the funding secured, Council Member Kamin worked with the Finance Department to utilize a targeted fund to protect these dollars for future master plan implementation, and an additional \$100,000 was provided by Council Member Kamin's Office directly.

Fiscal Year 2026 Community Project Grant Request

The Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Fiscal Year 2026 Community Project Grant Request seeks an additional \$4 million in federal funding, demonstrating continued federal partnership opportunities. This pending request would significantly accelerate improvement timelines while expanding the scope of possible enhancements.

Special thanks to our partners and those that contributed to this report.

