



2021

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

ANNUAL REPORT



PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT

Growing and preserving Houston's diverse communities to create a resilient city.





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Director's Letter

Our challenges and triumphs



Margaret Wallace Brown, AICP, CNU-A

Looking back on 2021, I am proud of our Planning team's accomplishments: record-setting platting, permit and historic preservation reviews; continued support to our Complete Communities; kicking off three neighborhood resilience plans; a project to help guide and measure increased equity in Houston; implementation of Vision Zero goals and a life-saving Lake Houston mapping project from our GIS team.

What will next year bring? Even though the past two years have taught me that predicting the future is folly, I can assure you that the Planning and Development Department will continue to provide you with the best service possible. We will update development standards that will provide opportunities for a wider variety of housing options for neighborhoods to protect their character while still encouraging appropriate

development. We have a lot going on. We continually strive to live out our mission: Growing and preserving Houston's diverse communities to create a resilient city.

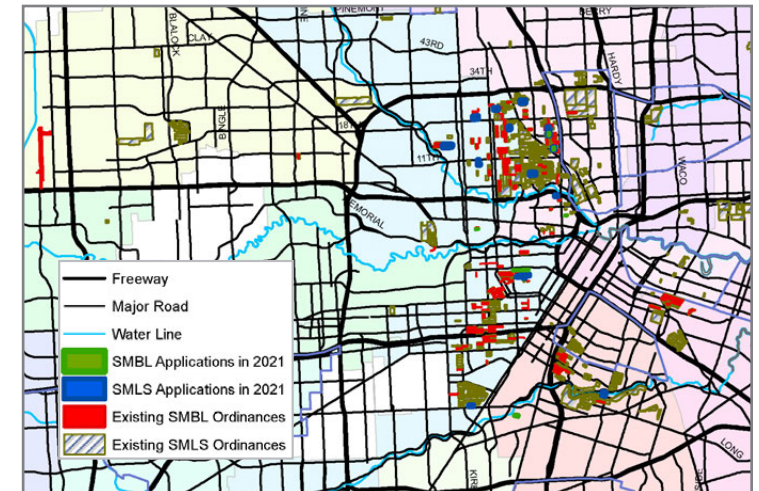
Margaret Wallace Brown, AICP, CNU-A
Department Director

Our Communities

Engaging with Houston neighborhoods

Empowering Our Neighborhoods

The Planning and Development Department (PD) plays a significant role in supporting and preserving Houston's neighborhoods, and strengthening the community through civic engagement and plan development. We help maintain the character of Houston communities through various neighborhood tools and programs. PD works with the community to evaluate feedback and create action plans and draft ordinances. This effort helps promote equity for underserved neighborhoods across Houston. Despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've continued to facilitate community engagement hosting both in-person and virtual events to advance civic discussions and receive input.



Special Minimum Lot Size & Building Line Approvals

- 235 total lots protected
- 12 SMLS* applications protecting 184 lots
- 2 SMBL* applications protecting 51 lots



Houston Complete Communities

The Planning and Development Department offers enhanced support to the 10 historically underserved communities that are identified in the Mayor's Complete Communities initiative - Acres Home, Second Ward, Third Ward, Gulfton and Near Northside, Alief-Westwood, Fort Bend Houston, Kashmere Gardens, Magnolia Park-Manchester and Sunnyside. Engagement efforts continue to address issues such as civic engagement, economy and jobs, education, health, housing, mobility and infrastructure, neighborhood character, parks and community amenities, and safety.

In 2021, PD staff led initiatives such as the Neighborhood Character Preservation Tools workshop, Lights On Houston community events, Building Food Security workshop, and working with CenterPoint Energy's Agencies in Action Program. We fostered engagement with tree planting, food pantry and movie night events and we forge community connections by producing a monthly e-newsletter, event marketing and social media support.



PD continues to expand the online engagement platform LetsTalkHouston.org. Each community has a dedicated page where visitors can share upcoming events, ask questions, take surveys and more.



Livable Places Houston

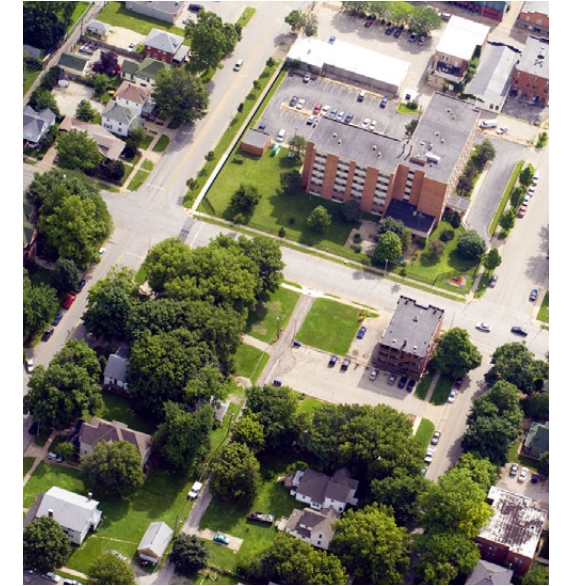
Livable Places

Livable Places is a collaborative effort between the Planning and Development Department, local experts and Houston communities to update portions of the city's development rules to encourage walkability, affordability and equity.

The Livable Places Action Committee aims to:

- expand housing options beyond single-family homes and large apartment complexes
- provide more housing variety and more cost-effective housing options
- encourage development that is less car-centric

In 2021, the Livable Places Action Committee reached its one-year milestone. Over the last year, the Committee reached a consensus on Chapter 42 technical amendments and discussed topics ranging from residential buffering standards to Conservation Districts. Discussions also explored



ways to encourage more affordable housing options such as accessory dwelling units, triplexes, and fourplexes to cater for a greater variety of Houstonians needs.

To garner public feedback, PD conducted a single-family residential survey which received more than 1,200 responses. This public input helped to inform staff recommendations and the ongoing committee discussions.

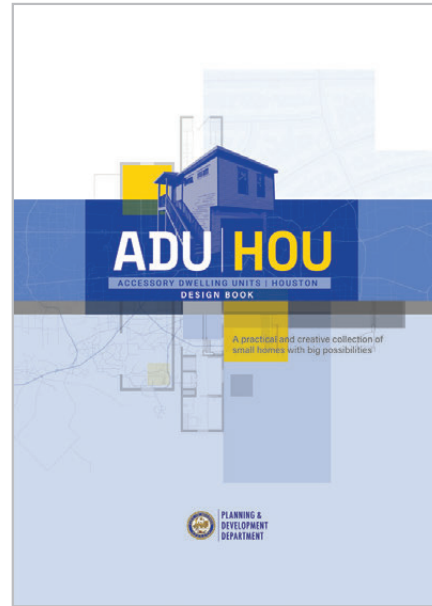


ADU | HOU

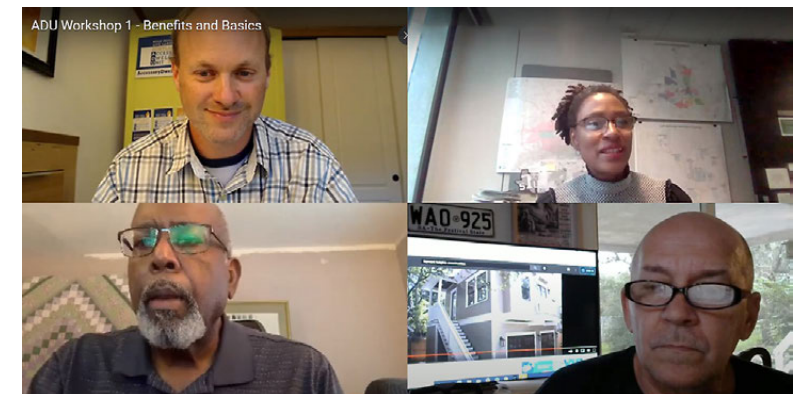
The Department earned an AARP grant to launch the ADU | HOU initiative, which is related to the ongoing Livable Places Action Committee discussions. The grant funded a series of Accessory Dwelling Unit workshops, an ADU Design Contest, and an online design book. Two students from Rice Architecture – Siobhan Finlay and Adam Berman - submitted the winning ADU design. The design competition will ultimately provide a set of plans that homeowners can use to build an ADU on a single-family residential lot where deed restrictions allow. The plans will go through preliminary plan review and will comply with the City's current building code and development standards.



ADU | HOU Competition Winners: Adam Berman and Siobhan Finlay



The ADU | HOU Design Book, cover design and spreads



The ADU | HOU Virtual Workshop Series



Walkable Places

Since the Walkable Places and Transit-Oriented Development Ordinance went to effect in late 2020, PD received subdivision plat applications for about 80 projects along the designated Walkable Places Streets and TOD Streets. Projects were submitted in all the designated Walkable Places Pilot Areas - Emancipation Avenue in Third Ward, Midtown and Hogan/ Lorraine Streets in Near Northside. Most of the projects are for mixed-use developments and single-family residential development with shared driveway design.

Sidewalk Review

The approval of Walkable Places Transit-Oriented Development ordinances also initiated changes to the city's sidewalk standards to enhance walkability of our city and improve safety and accessibility in the pedestrian environment. With safety and accessibility as guiding principles, the sidewalk regulations provide greater access for those who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs and walkers.

Previously under the direction of the Office of the City Engineer, the Planning Department now reviews all applications for new sidewalks and parking lots as well as certain sidewalk and parking repairs or expansions. The process includes a framework of exceptions and gives applicants the flexibility to file an application to modify sidewalks or safety buffer standards. PD reviews applications in collaboration with the Office of City Engineer and the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities.



“We are building a framework for the future and moving away from the auto-centric development standards that prioritized parking over people.”

— Mayor Sylvester Turner

Historic Preservation

Protecting our significant places and structures



Houston's history is kept alive through its historical structures and neighborhoods. The Planning Department and the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) are stewards to Houston's historical heritage through the Historic Office of Preservation. Local designation of sites is the best way to preserve the places that matter to Houstonians, and the office of preservation is responsible for assuring compliance with Houston's preservation ordinances. The Department also reviews requests for any new construction, demolition, or alterations to structures in historic districts and historic landmarks.

Historic Commission & Appeals Board

The Preservation team serves the Houston Archeological and Historic Commission and the Houston Preservation Appeals Board (HPAB), to help protect our physical and cultural history.

- 156 Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) applications submitted; 62% approved; 11% approved with conditions.
- 9 demolition requests were submitted; 8 were approved.
- 18 properties were recommended to City Council for landmark designation; 12 were Protected Landmarks and 6 were Landmarks. City Council approved 4 Protected Landmarks and 4 Landmarks.

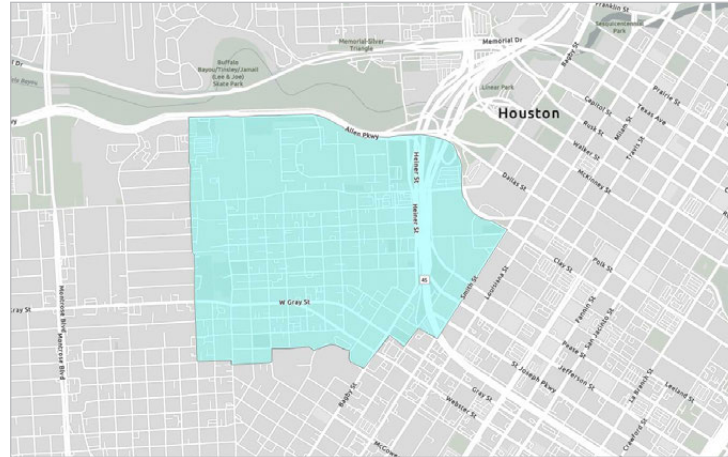
As a recognized Council of Local Governments, we report preservation activity to the Texas Historic Commission.



Heritage Districts

In 2021, City Council approved the creation of the Heritage District designation and selected Freedmen's Town as the first of its kind. Organizations that are approved for a Heritage District will be permitted to protect, restore or install elements such as brick paved streets, curbs, driveways, sidewalks and walkways, signage and markers, public art, vegetation, and trees in the city's public right-of-way. The designation does not provide city funding and does not apply to private property.

The City was also awarded a \$20,000 Certified Local Government Grant from the Texas Historical Commission to assist with the creation of a historic preservation incentive plan for Freedmen's Town. Historic preservation staff also enhanced public engagement in Glenbrook Valley, and initiated a project to update design guidelines in Old Sixth Ward, Woodland Heights and Norhill.



Map of the Freedmen's Town Heritage District



Historic Street Bricks in Freedmen's Town



Growth & Development

Managing our growing population and economy



Development in Houston

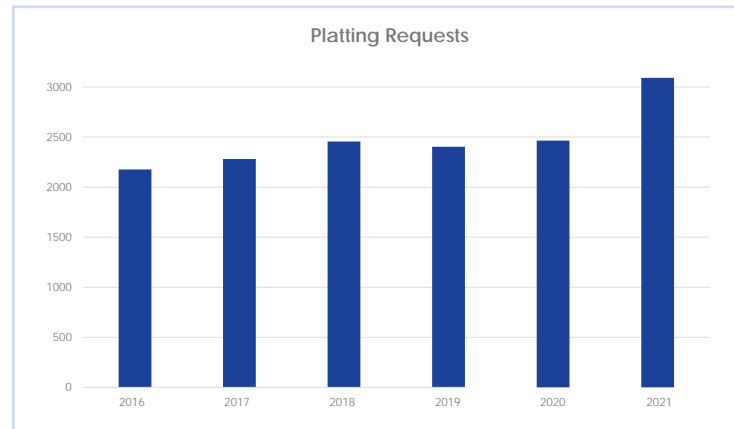
The city's growth and redevelopment are supported by the approval of subdivision plats and permits. PD staff reviews development submittals inside the 671 square miles of the city and the 1,171 square mile extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) for compliance. Chapter 42 is the City's land development ordinance by which staff regulates development by applying other ordinances such as off-street parking (Chapter 26) and trees and shrubs (Chapter 33). Development regulations with unique considerations such as hotels, hazardous material enterprises, Certificates of Compliance, and cellular towers are a part of the Department's responsibilities. The Department makes recommendations on many of these applications to the Planning Commission and Tower Commission.

Applications & Variances

- 51 Certificates of Compliance
- 44 Development plat variances granted
- 10 Hazardous enterprise applications
- 6 Hotel/Motel applications
- 4 Parking variances
- 4 Street name changes
- 3 Tower applications

Site Plan Reviews

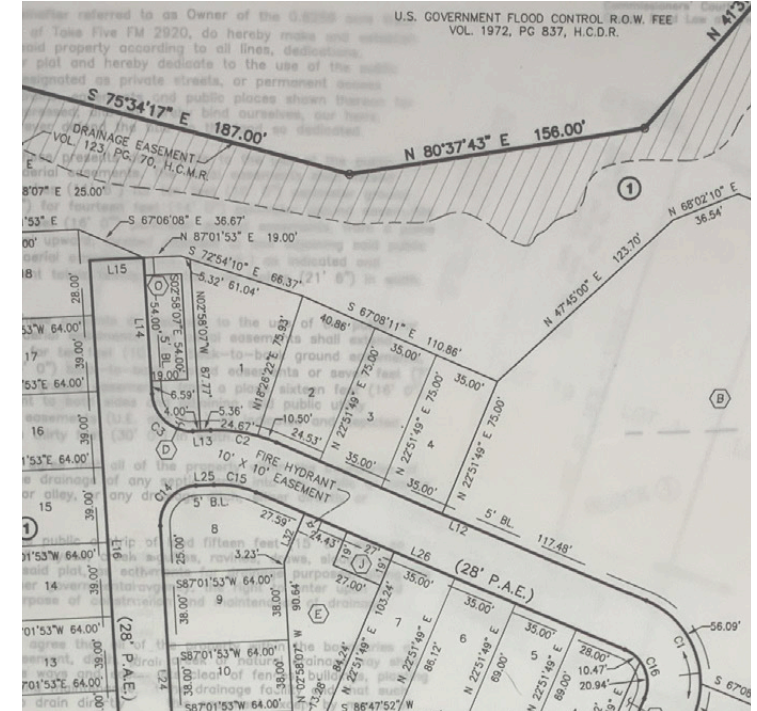
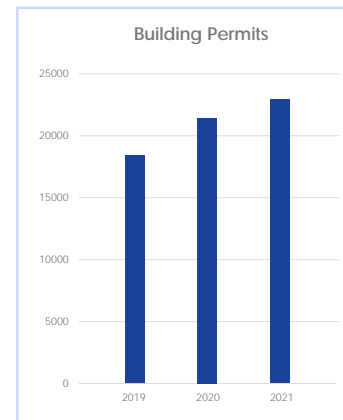
The Development Services team administers the platting and related land preparation processes, reviewing plats and providing guidance during the process. The team set a new bar for the number of plats reviewed in a calendar year with over 3,000 reviews in 2021.



Permitting Center

Permits issued by the Houston Permitting Center help to ensure construction work complies with local ordinances established by the City of Houston to protect public health and welfare. A permit is required before beginning most construction, demolition, and repair work.

The Planning and Development team at the Permitting Center saw a steady increase in building permits, with 22,300 building permits. Planners reviewed about 1,200 plans per month prompting a redesigned expedited review system.



Mobility & Transportation

Making the city safer and more accessible

Transportation Planning

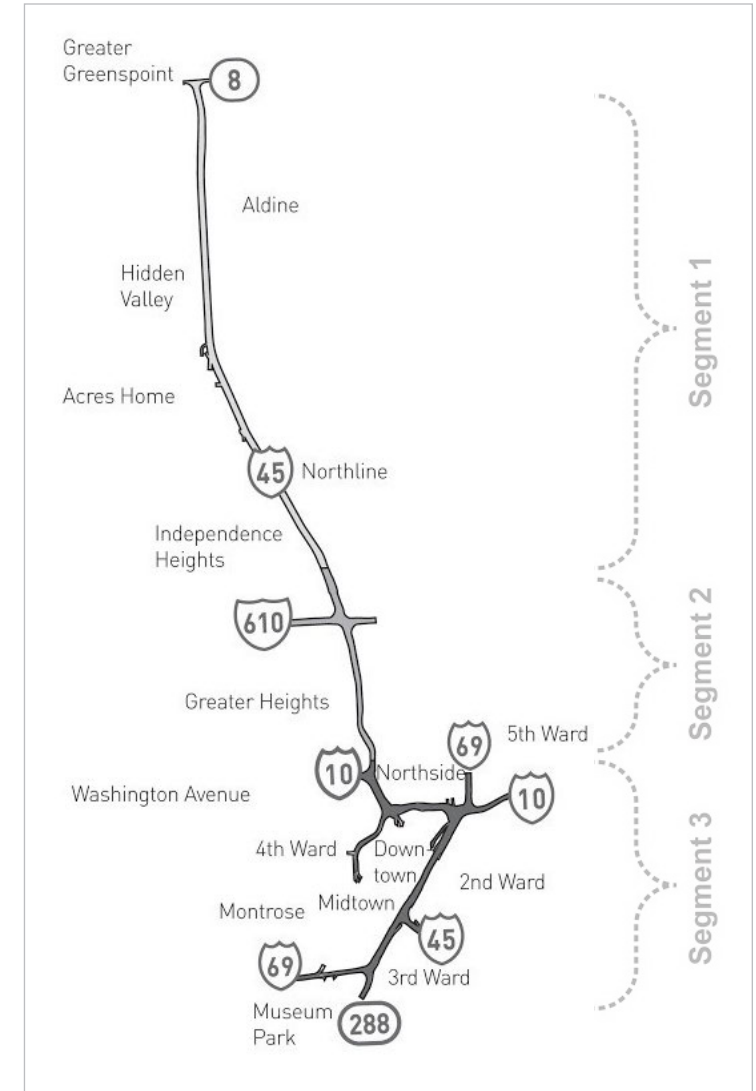
Houston's transportation system is critical to making the City a great place, with economic opportunities and high quality of life for all. Transportation planning is the first step to achieving that goal: seeing the big picture of walking, biking, transit, and driving networks, while tailoring individual projects to local contexts, balancing data-driven analysis with guidance from each neighborhood.

North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP)

TxDOT's NHHIP can be transformational, supporting the City's paradigm shift in transportation, addressing historic flooding issues, and supporting Houston's neighborhoods. PD continues to lead the City's efforts to coordinate with TxDOT, including engaging the public on the project's Record of Decision, leading design efforts for the Main/Wheeler intersection, and serving as liaison to the Federal Highway Administration in their Title VI investigation.

Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan (MTFP)

The MTFP is the key to Houston's existing and proposed road network, guiding development in the City and its extra-territorial jurisdictions. PD leads and administers the annual public review process for amending the MTFP, which includes multiple opportunities for soliciting and incorporating public comments. In 2021, the Planning Commission and City Council approved all three proposed amendments to the plan, as submitted by both private and public-sector applicants.



NHHIP Map

Houston Bike Plan

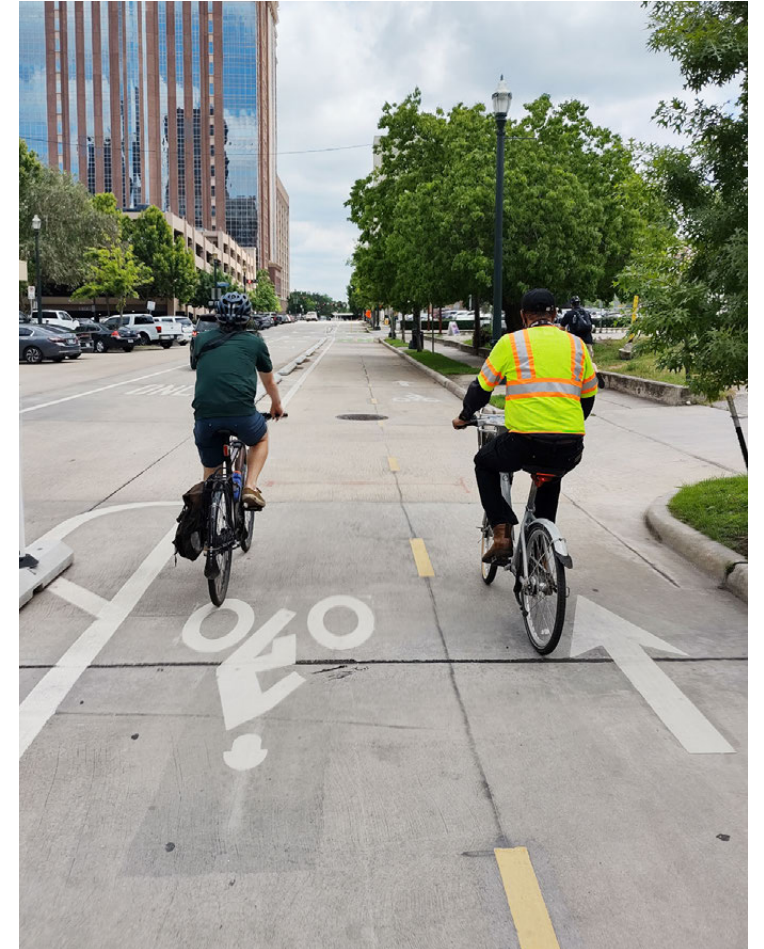
The Houston Bike Network now includes over 460 miles of bikeways citywide with another 150 miles in planning/design/construction, including the completion of:

- Austin Street
- Polk Street
- East Fwy/Federal Road/Maxey Road
- Clear Lakes Trails Extension
- Westchase Trails Extension.

Bike lane stats

- 29 dedicated on street miles built
- 33 shared on-street miles built
- 324 off-street miles built, 386 total

Building out the planned 1,800-mile network is a continuing partnership between the City, Harris County, METRO, TxDOT, and more. The next round of priority projects for initiation in 2022 were identified as Irvington Boulevard Corridor, extension of the Gulfton/Hillcroft network, and the Washington Avenue Corridor, which will be supported by a \$550,000 planning grant from the Houston-Galveston Area Council.



More Space: Main Street

To support downtown during COVID-19 restrictions, the More Space: Main Street Program allowed restaurants and bars to set up tables in certain blocks of Main Street from Commerce to Rusk to serve customers. Little Dipper, Shay McElroy's, Flying Saucer, Finn Hall and Cherry Bar each built outdoor spaces. Project participants and downtown stakeholders reported More Space: Main Street a success. All participants reported seeing an increase in:

- Revenue
- Customer and employee retention
- Safety due the partial closing of Main St.

The program was approved for an extension to keep it going through at least 2023. This effort is a partnership between the City of Houston, Downtown District, and METRO.



Pop-Up Events

To show the potential of new street designs, PD hosts pop-up events which last for a day. Using paint, moveable barriers, and other low-cost equipment, staff and community members create safer routes to cross intersections, more room for walking, and whole bike lanes. This year's events included Commerce Street in the East End, Heights Boulevard in The Heights, and Fulton/Quitman intersection in Near Northside.

PARK(ing) Day is a free global event that repurposes street parking into parklets — showing the possibilities of a world with fewer cars on the road. Houston's Park(ing) day transformed Prairie Street between Main Street and Fannin Street into a promenade filled with activities for all to enjoy.




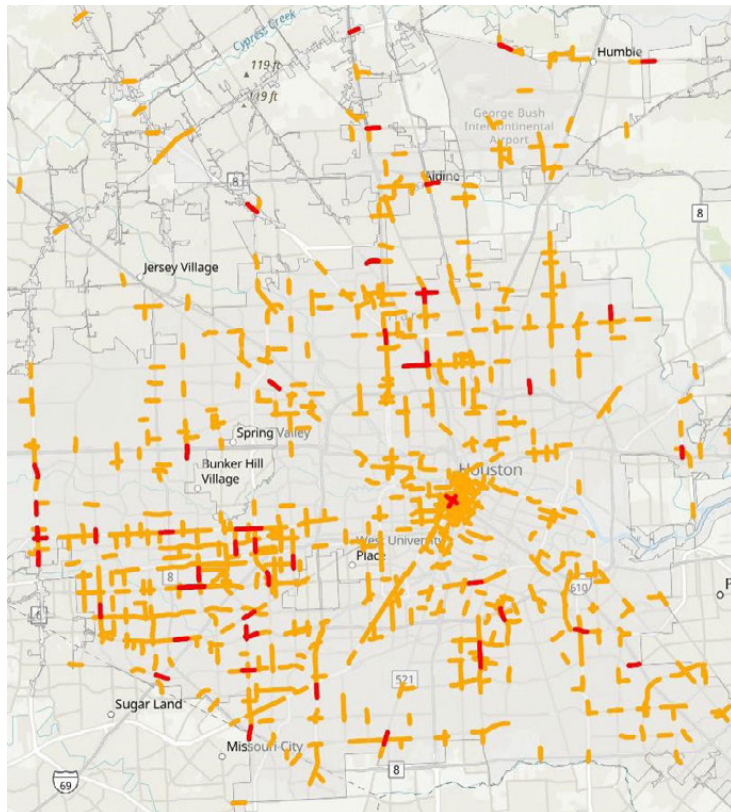
Sidewalks

- 29 miles of new/reconstructed sidewalks by the City
- 819 new/reconstructed curb ramps by the City
- Nearly 6,000 private projects included sidewalk construction since the sidewalk ordinance became effective in Oct. 2020

Sidewalk Summit 2021

- Review sidewalk rules, policies, and investments
- Amplify the role of the pedestrian
- Outline how sidewalks are critical transportation networks
- Discuss ways we can improve

HOUSTON VISION ZERO

High Injury Network Map

Vision Zero

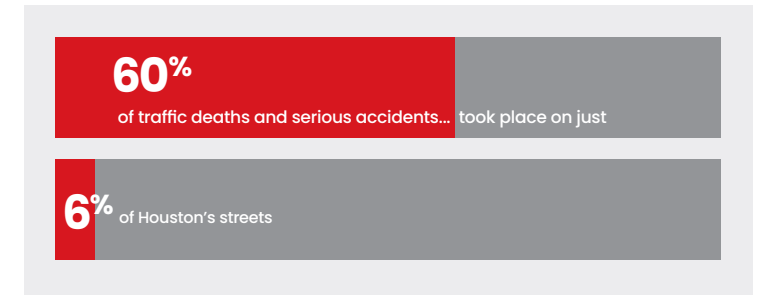
Eliminating more than 200 fatalities and 1,000 serious injuries that occur in Houston every year by 2030 is the core mission of the Transportation Planning Division. After releasing the Houston Vision Zero Action Plan (VZAP) in 2020, the focus in 2021 shifted to implementation.

Highlights included:

- 13 Priority Actions were initiated, including redesigning High Injury Network locations, constructing sidewalks and bicycle facilities to make Houston safer.
- 13 Additional Actions were initiated, including piloting Houston’s first Safe Routes to School project, creating a “quick planning” program for low-cost, quick-build safety projects, and creating a Safe Fleet Management Program.
- Identified the priority streets of concern and redesigned 10 High Injury Network locations.
- Vision Zero Houston was awarded \$4 million Highway Safety Improvement Program funding from TxDOT, plus \$40k TxDOT Safety Grant.
- Received American Planning Association Texas Chapter Implementation Award.

Based on five years of crash data, the VZAP focuses safety improvements on streets that have the highest density of traffic deaths and serious injuries, known as the High Injury Network, and in communities who are more vulnerable to both natural and man-made crises. Research shows that:

- Nearly 60% of traffic deaths and serious injuries occur on only 6% of our streets.
- In the 6% of streets, 52% are in vulnerable communities.
- One-third of traffic deaths involve a pedestrian even though less than 2% of residents walk to work.



Geographic Information

Making complex data visible and accessible

The Geographic Information System (GIS) team oversees data pertaining to streets, public facilities and services, special districts, population demographics and housing. It also provides street maps, aerial imagery, demographic and other tabulated data for all aspects of the City.



Addressing

The GIS Addressing Team maintains the City's addressing database, street network, and the various GIS municipal boundaries. This group also verifies and assigns all new addresses for the City. Addressing numbers include:

- 28,862 new address points
- 4,546 new road segments
- 6,901 road segment edits
- 1,166 Plat Tracker applications

Mapping & Analysis

The GIS Mapping and Analysis Team creates the maps and graphics for the City to assist in making informed decisions. Additionally, this team provides GIS training classes for all City departments. Mapping activities for 2021 include:

- 538 mapping and data requests
- Over 300 demographic requests
- Served 16 City departments
- Created Web Apps for Mayor's Office, Human Resources and for the Planning Department
- PD map published in the ESRI Map Book 2021, Vol. 36



Houston Emergency Center (HEC)

The HEC is a common location for all emergency services communications and coordination between 9-1-1, Police, Fire, EMS, and Emergency Management. Activity includes:

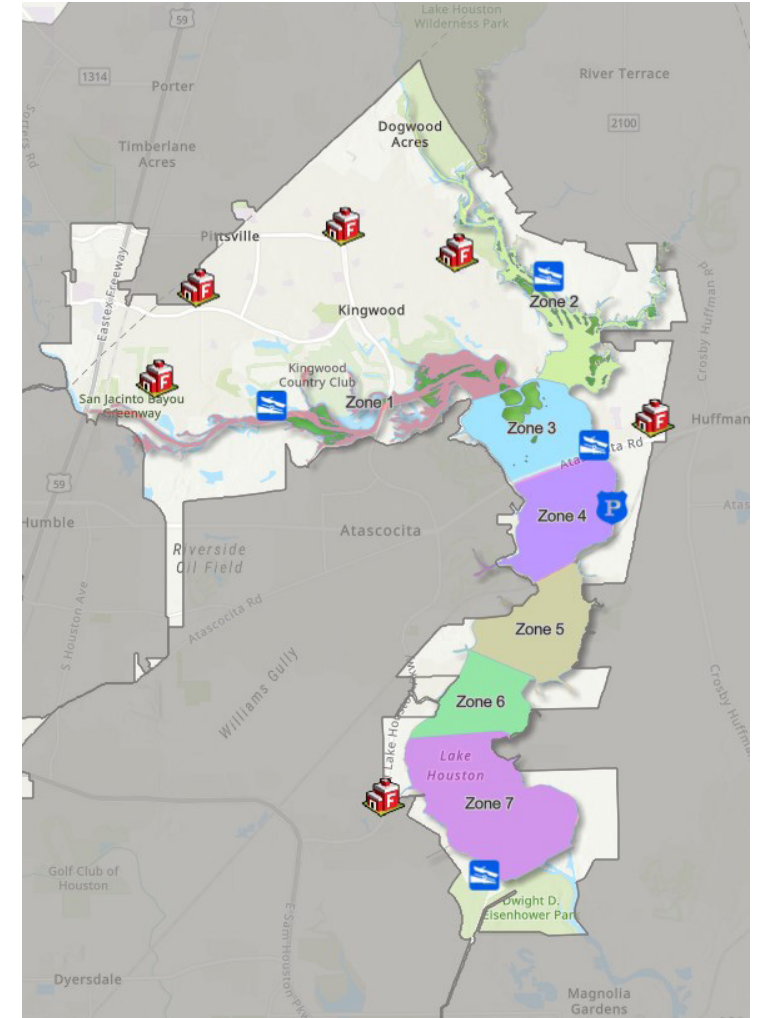
- 526 common place names edited; 348 were newly added
- 34,630 HEC road edits; 6,419 were newly added
- 4 CAD updates

GIS Team Develops Life-Saving Lake Houston Zone Map

The GIS team worked with District E Council Member Dave Martin, multiple city departments and safety agencies to create color-coded, zoned maps of Lake Houston. By knowing your zone, residents and recreational lake users can accurately report the location of boating safety incidents. The colored zones also help reduce response time by dispatching first responders to the boat ramp nearest to the incident. This map will be posted at all public docks/piers and offered to private communities for installation within their own private launch areas.

Bike Prioritization Mapping

The Houston Bike Plan's long-term vision creates a network of close to 1,800 miles of high-comfort bicycle facilities. To focus building and upgrading bike lanes in areas of the most need and highest demand, the PD Transportation and GIS teams collaborated with the Bicycle Advisory Committee to create and refine a prioritization methodology. BAC members were asked to give feedback. GIS staff refined the spatial and statistical analysis on weighted factors to create a priority list for future bicycle facilities. Click the map to for an expanded view. For more project details, read the [bike prioritization report](#).



Lake Houston Zone Map

Contact Us

Thank you for your interest in the Planning and Development Department's Annual Report. Since its publication in 2022, content and location changes may mean that some links are no longer active.

Contact us for more information at 832-393-6600

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