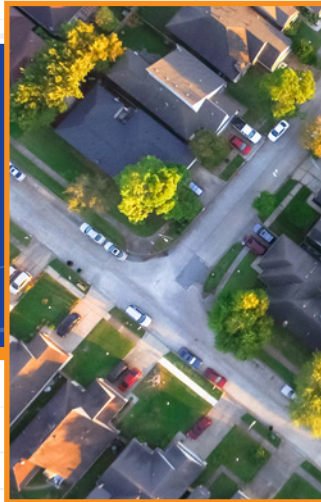
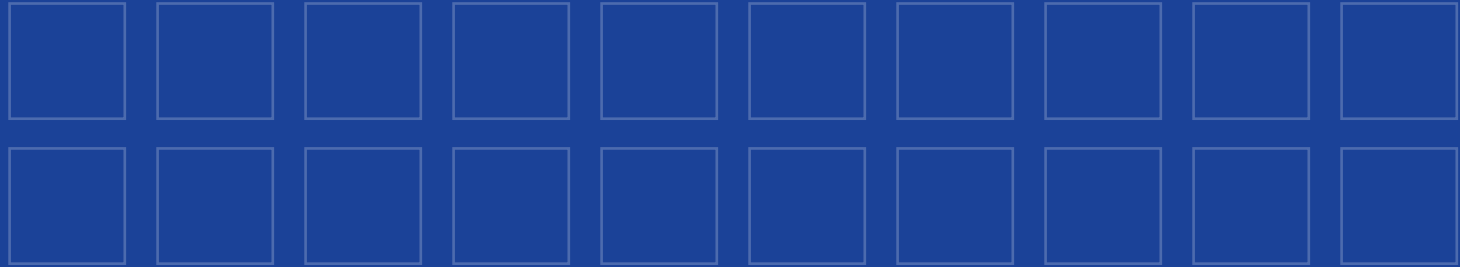


# 2020

## ANNUAL REPORT



PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT



DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
10/01/19	10/01/19	1000.00
10/02/19	10/02/19	2000.00
10/03/19	10/03/19	3000.00
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10/29/19	10/29/19	29000.00
10/30/19	10/30/19	30000.00
10/31/19	10/31/19	31000.00



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# Director's Letter

## Our challenges and triumphs



**Margaret Wallace Brown, AICP, CNU-A**

The Planning and Development Department reached a milestone anniversary in 2020, our 80th year. The Department was created by city ordinance on Feb. 14, 1940, and the Planning Commission was reformed. We are proud to continue the important work of planning that helps Houston continue moving forward.

In 2020, the operations of the Planning and Development Department changed drastically. Despite the pandemic and evolving meeting protocols, PD upheld the Chapter 42 requirements without missing a beat or delaying opportunities for developing property in our communities.

The Planning Department also launched a new public engagement platform, [letstalkhouston.org/](https://letstalkhouston.org/) where participants can

ask questions, leave comments for a specific program or project, pin an interactive map, watch a meeting broadcast, and upload photos. Work from home, virtual meetings and telecommuting became the standard almost overnight. I am unapologetically proud of how we managed the transition.

Unlike far too many businesses in Houston, we did not suffer the crushing blow of the sudden disappearance of customers and sales. Our workload has continued, unabated. We continue to review record high numbers of building permit site plans, conduct virtual meetings with members of our Complete Communities support teams, coordinate with our partners on public services ranging from transportation planning to housing and

maintain the overall city wide GIS system. And, our administrative functions, such as keeping our personnel organization filled with smart, energetic and creative staff. Surprisingly, more than 20% of our team joined us since work-from-home began.

This is an amazing team and I am proud to lead it.

**Margaret Wallace Brown, AICP, CNU-A**  
Department Director

**2020**  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**5** NEW  
COMPLETE  
COMMUNITIES  
ACTION PLANS  
DRAFTED

**11%**  
INCREASE IN  
DEVELOPMENT  
PLAN REVIEWS

SUCCESSFUL  
TRANSITION TO  
**100%**  
REMOTE  
OPERATIONS  
AT FULL EFFICIENCY

**47%**  
INCREASE IN  
SUBDIVISION  
PLATTING  
FROM 2019 TO 2020

**WALKABLE PLACES  
ORDINANCE APPROVED**

**TRANSIT-ORIENTED  
DEVELOPMENT  
ORDINANCE APPROVED**

**VISION  
ZERO  
LAUNCHED  
& ACTION PLAN  
ENACTED**

**SILVER  
AWARD  
WINNER**  
from the Texas Chapter of the  
American Planning Association  
**User's Guide for Walkable  
Places & Transit-Oriented  
Development**

**KICKED OFF THE  
LIVABLE PLACES  
ACTION COMMITTEE**

# Our Communities

Engaging with our neighborhoods and people

## Strong 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 challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've continued to facilitate community engagement and host virtual events to advance civic discussions and receive input.





# Houston Complete Communities

The Planning and Development Department (PD) offers enhanced support to 10 Houston communities that are historically underserved.

In 2017, Mayor Turner announced the first phase of the Complete Communities initiative, calling for collaboration across 23 City departments to provide support and work side-by-side with the pilot communities: Acres Homes, Second Ward, Third Ward, Gulfton and Near Northside. In December 2020, Houston City Council passed a motion of support for action plans for the Phase 2 Complete Communities – Alief-Westwood, Fort Bend Houston, Kashmere Gardens, Magnolia Park-Manchester and Sunnyside. The City continues to work in all neighborhoods regardless of development patterns, demographics, socio-economic conditions or the strength of civic organizations.

A Neighborhood Support Team, comprised of local leaders, residents and allies, guided each Complete Community effort. Topic areas include civic engagement, economy and jobs, education, health, housing, mobility and infrastructure, neighborhood character, parks and community amenities, and safety. During the development of the action plans, the Planning Department



provided professional planning, coordination, and advocacy services that generated 23 community-wide meetings and drew participation from 2,400 stakeholders. An additional 1,515 people participated in the extended engagement online.

The Complete Communities planning process was interrupted by COVID-19, but community engagement was converted to a virtual format to protect the health and safety of residents and stakeholders. The Planning and Development Department also introduced an online engagement platform LetsTalkHouston.org, where visitors could leave comments, ask questions, take surveys and review draft action plans.

Find upcoming meeting information on [LetsTalkHouston.org](https://lets.talk.houston.org). To make philanthropic donations to the Complete Communities Improvement Fund, contact Shannon Buggs in the Mayor’s Office of Complete Communities at [shannon.buggs@houstontx.gov](mailto:shannon.buggs@houstontx.gov).



COMMUNITY INPUT GATHERED FROM ROUGHLY **2,400** STAKEHOLDERS

**1,515** PEOPLE ENGAGED THROUGH SURVEYS, VIRTUAL MEETINGS, AND WEB ACTIVITY

**23** COMMUNITY MEETINGS ORGANIZED



## Walkable Places

City Council approved the Walkable Places and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) rules on August 5, 2020 to enhance the pedestrian experience throughout Houston’s neighborhoods. Walkable Places is an effort to establish more pedestrian friendly neighborhoods, business centers and environments. These programs are the result of three years of planning, research and public engagement by the Walkable Places Committee and help to achieve the goals of Plan Houston,

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**“This is an exciting and meaningful moment for our city, a paradigm shift, where we are building a framework for the future and moving away from the auto-centric development standards that prioritized parking over people. We are changing the way people think about moving about in our city and making it easier for developers and property owners to join this forward momentum.”** – MAYOR SYLVESTER TURNER

Resilient Houston, Houston Climate Action Plan and Complete Streets. The ordinances assist the City to design, build, and maintain a vibrant pedestrian environment for Houston to grow responsibly and sustainably. The standards apply to new developments or redevelopments in three pilot communities: Emancipation Avenue in Third Ward, Midtown and Hogan/ Lorraine Streets in Near Northside.

The Walkable Places Initiative benefits property owners by allowing more buildable area on properties and by adjusting parking requirements to be more flexible. It benefits pedestrians by creating safer and more walkable streetscapes and public spaces, and benefits neighborhoods by creating an activated area with more eyes on the street.

For more information on development requirements, visit the Walkable Places web page at [houstontx.gov/planning/wp-committee.html](https://houstontx.gov/planning/wp-committee.html).





## Livable Places

Livable Places is a community-led initiative to create opportunities within our land-development standards that encourage housing variety and affordability. This is a continuation of the Planning and Development Department's effort to update portions of the city's development code to enhance walkability, affordability and equity.

The Livable Places Action Committee focuses on encouraging the development and preservation of affordable, quality housing for all Houstonians.

The committee aims to create opportunities to:

- build housing on vacant lots within existing neighborhoods
- improve safety



- increase housing options with access to alternative transportation, such as bicycling and mass transit
- preserve great neighborhoods

This effort draws from community preferences identified through several previous planning initiatives, including Plan Houston, Resilient Houston, Climate Action Plan, and others and will involve robust community engagement using our new interactive platform at <https://www.letstalkhouston.org/livable-places>.



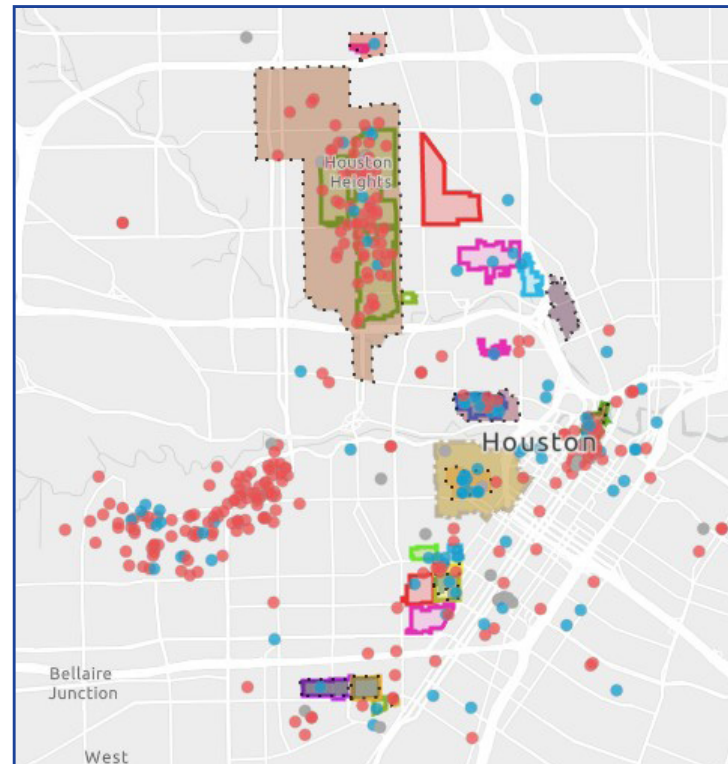
# Historic Preservation

## Protecting our significant structures

Houston's history is kept alive through its historical structures and neighborhoods. The Department and the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission are stewards to Houston's historical heritage through the City's Historic Preservation Office. The Department also reviews requests for any new construction, demolition, or alterations to structures in historic districts and historic landmarks.

Local designation of sites is the best way to preserve the places that matter to Houstonians. The preservation office, which was rebuilt as a team in 2020, is responsible for assuring compliance with Houston's preservation ordinances. The city has 22 historic districts of varying size and over five hundred landmarks.

The Houston Office of Preservation and Geographic Information Systems teams developed an interactive map to better help the public navigate the city's 22 historic districts and over 500 landmark buildings. This online resource features a searchable map to search specific addresses or place names to determine if a building is designated protected landmark, landmark or if it is located in a historic district.



## Historic Commission & Appeals Board

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

- 11 HAHC Meetings held (9 were virtual).
- 130 Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) applications submitted; 73% approved; 12% approved with conditions.
- 7 demolition requests were submitted; 5 were approved.
- 13 properties were recommended to City Council for landmark designation; 9 were Protected Landmarks. City Council approved 4 Protected Landmarks and 2 Landmarks.

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

## City Success

The Department also played a significant role in an important City success in 2020. The Livable Places Action Committee was launched in September of 2020 to brainstorm ways to make residential development more equitable, sustainable, and accessible. The related Conservation Districts Focus group is exploring better ways to preserve the history and livability of our older areas. Our Preservation Officer, Roman McAllen, leads the this effort. You can find details at <https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/>.



# Growth & Development

Managing our growing population and economy



## Developing Our Growing City

**PLANNING  
COMMISSION  
ACTED ON  
2,403**  
SUBDIVISION PLATS

**832**  
SUBDIVISION PLATS  
RECORDED

The city's growth and redevelopment are supported by the approval of subdivision plats and permits. PD staff reviews development submittals inside the 669 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 hotel/motels, 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.

## Site Plan Reviews

The Development Services team administers the platting and related land preparation processes. In 2020, platting activity inside the corporate limits of Houston outpaced that in the Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). The Plat Tracker system used for submitting plat applications, received significant upgrades including a new payment portal, revamped recordation appointment scheduling and other technical options.

## Permitting Center

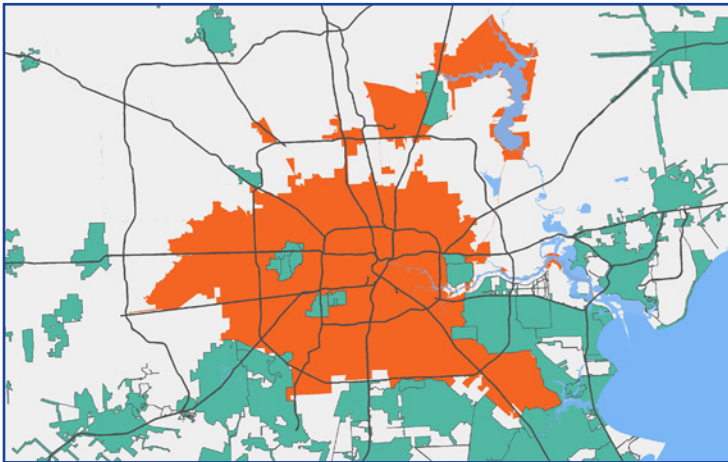
The Houston Permitting Center combines the majority of the City of Houston's permitting and licensing into one convenient location.

Houston City Council voted to strengthen safety measures to protect Houston neighborhoods and improve enforcement of the city's hazardous enterprises ordinances. A hazardous enterprise permit is required when the following criteria are met in accordance with Sec 28-222 of the City of Houston

Code of Ordinances. The changes increased the regulation of hazardous operations and materials by strengthening enforcement language. The changes also expand definitions, create a review process for appeals and modifications, and establish related fees to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of Houstonians.

## Annexation

The Department helps manage boundary changes within the city limits and in the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). These boundary changes are necessary because of a growing and changing region. The trend in recent years has been to be very judicious in terms of annexations. There were no new annexations in 2020.



## Resilient Houston

Resilient Houston is a framework for collective action strategies led by the Mayor's Office. The Resilient Houston plan proactively provides strategies that address chronic stressors that make recovery from emergency impacts extremely challenging. This plan will help to strengthen the capabilities of neighborhoods, communities, and the region to not only withstand, but also to quickly recover from acute physical and socio-economic stressors that unexpectedly impact the Houston area.

PD's actions that support Resilient Houston include:

- Drafting Vision Zero Action Plan
- Expanding Houston BCycle Bike Share Program
- Adding bike lanes to the City's infrastructure
- Establishing Livable Places Action Committee
- Approving the Walkable Places and TOD Ordinance
- Implementing sidewalk construction in Complete Communities
- Utilizing an AARP Grant for tactical urbanism in Gulfton area
- Supporting H-GAC funding for Shepherd and Durham Drives reconstruction

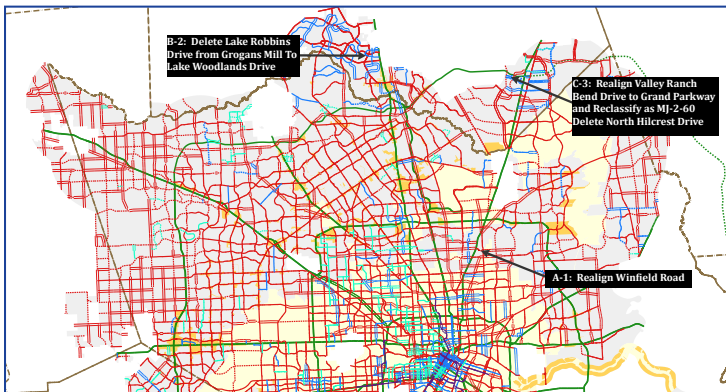
Each year the American Planning Association (APA) Texas Chapter honors and awards the state's best planning projects, advocates, and communities. The [Resilient Houston](#) strategy earned gold in the resilience category and the Planning and Development Department earned silver in the implementation category for its [User's Guide for Walkable Places and Transit-Oriented Development](#).

# Mobility & Transportation

Making the city safer and more accessible

## Transportation planning

System-level transportation planning includes management of the City's Complete Streets and Transportation Plan, Major Thoroughfare & Freeway Plan, Bicycle Master Plan, local area studies, and external transportation funding efforts. PD also supports other departments, including Houston Public Works, as projects are developed at the corridor level for capital improvements. In this way, the City sustains a seamless process for mobility improvements from planning through implementation.



## MTFP/North Houston Highway Improvement Project

At 24 miles and over 7 billion dollars, the North Houston Highway Improvement Project for portions of Interstate 45 is the largest infrastructure investment our region will make in a generation. The TxDOT project has inspired a robust debate and garnered considerable public engagement. Over the past year, the Planning and Development Department has hosted nine public meetings and the City and TxDOT received a combined 1,130 written public comments. Mayor Turner asked the Planning and Development Department to lead a facilitation group to elevate the community's concerns and recommend ways to improve the project. The Planning Department continues to provide support for the City's ongoing NHHIP project efforts.

## Houston Bike Plan

The Houston Bike Network added 13 miles of high-comfort bicycle lanes, with nearly 50 additional miles in design or in construction. This is a continuing partnership between PD, HPW, Harris County Precinct 1, BikeHouston, and other partners to complete the bicycle lanes started by the Build 50 Challenge.



City Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting vehicles from stopping, standing, or parking in bike lanes, which will help ensure bike lanes remain safe and accessible to bicyclists of all ages and abilities. The ordinance supports the Houston Bike Plan, protects the City's investment in the bikeway infrastructure and supports the City's Vision Zero goal to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries by 2030. Warnings and educational flyers were given for the first 90 days, after which a citation with a \$100 fine will be issued on first offense. Drivers have the option to take an online Bicycle-Friendly Driver Training Class in lieu of paying the fine on first offense. For more information, please visit [houstonbikeplan.org](https://houstonbikeplan.org).

## Bike Share Expansion

In 2020, Houston BCycle expanded their bicycle facilities and fleet to 125 stations with over 1,000 bicycles, including the addition of 100 electric bikes. In addition to the City's contribution of over \$50,000, Harris County Precinct 1 funded the 100 electric bikes.

## Bike to Wherever Day

The Planning Department and partners implement the first virtual Bike to Wherever Day. This continuing partnership is led by PD and supported by Houston Public Works (HPW), Harris County, BikeHouston, Houston BCycle, and the Mayor's Office of Special Events (MOSE).

## Sidewalks

PD supported the construction of 50 miles of new and reconstructed sidewalks in fiscal year 2020, to help make Houston more pedestrian friendly. HPW lead the implementation and was supported by PD's systems-level planning efforts.

## Slow Streets Pilot Project

The Slow Streets Project provided more space for walking and biking by limiting selected streets to local vehicle traffic. PD led this effort with support from Houston Public Works.

## Southeast Mobility Plan Silver Award

The Southeast Mobility Plan is a 2018 City of Houston multi-modal mobility study (inclusive of vehicular, transit, pedestrian, bicycle and freight) in the area bounded by Interstate 610 to the



north, State Highway 288 to the west, Sam Houston Toll Road to the south, and Interstate 45 and Galveston Road to the east.

The Plan was completed in June 2019, and in 2020 PD received a Silver Medal from the American Council of Texas Engineering Excellence.

## More Space Program

The More Space and More Space: Main Street programs were launched in 2020 to address the current needs of local restaurants struggling with the pandemic economy. The original More Space program applies to restaurants across the city, whereas the More Space: Main Street program applies to the unique needs of restaurants located along the rail line on Main Street in Downtown Houston. Both programs offer creative solutions for providing more dining spaces to serve customers while maintaining social distancing during the pandemic. The Phoenix on Westheimer was the first Houston restaurant to apply for the More Space program.





# HOUSTON VISION ZERO

## Vision Zero

In August 2019, the City of Houston committed to Vision Zero, a global network of cities with goals to end traffic deaths and serious injuries. After extensive data analysis, community engagement and multiagency collaboration, the City of Houston created the Vision Zero Action Plan (VZAP).

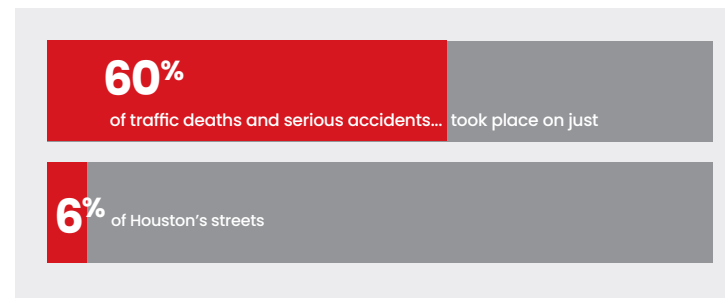
Led by the City’s Planning and Development Department, the VZAP establishes four goals to reach zero: 1) create a safe, equitable, and accessible network of streets, 2) make walking, rolling, and biking safe, 3) make connecting to transit safe, and 4) make driving safe. The City will achieve each of these goals through measurable actions focused on communication, safe road systems, safe speeds, and programming. The plan outlines how and where to make proactive investments, prioritizing resources and action in vulnerable communities that have been disproportionately impacted by traffic deaths and serious injuries.

“The work we do – planning for Houston’s future – improves the quality of life for residents, but the Vision Zero Action Plan does more. It saves lives,” said Planning and Development Department

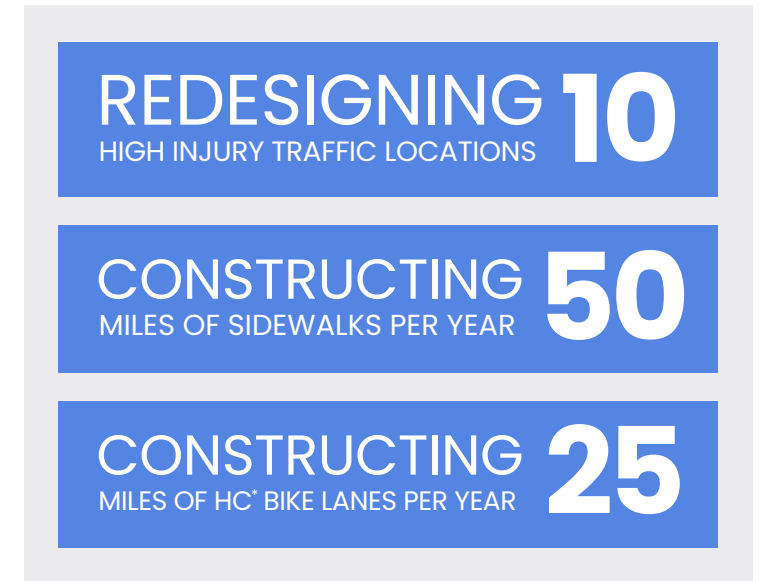
Director Margaret Wallace Brown, AICP. “The City has laid out this plan, and we have already begun work on implementation, but we all have a shared responsibility to improve traffic safety. We will continue to collaborate with our partners to achieve our goal of zero deaths.”

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.



The plan identifies 50 actions with 13 priority actions that will be the first for implementation. Among the 13 Vision Zero priority actions are redesigning 10 high injury traffic locations and implementing construction within the following fiscal year. PD also plans to construct at least 50 miles of sidewalks a year and at least 25 miles of high-comfort bicycle facilities each year.





# Geographic Information

Making complex data visible and accessible

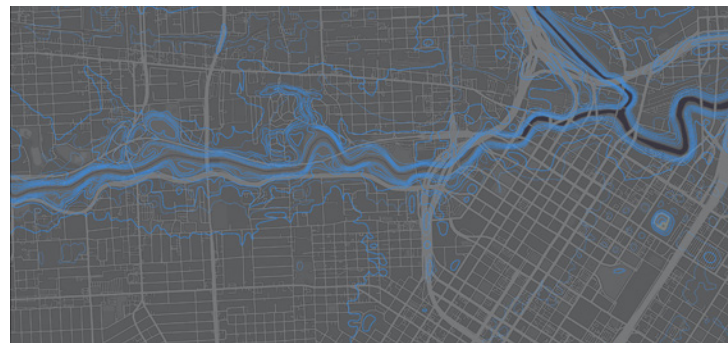
The Geographic Information System team oversees data pertaining to streets, public facilities and services, special districts, population demographics and housing. It also provides street maps, aerial imagery and tabulated data for all aspects of the City.



## 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. Notable Addressing activities for 2020 include:

- 24,095 new address points
- 37,039 road edits
- 3,239 new road segments
- 994 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. Notable Mapping and Analysis activities for 2020 include:

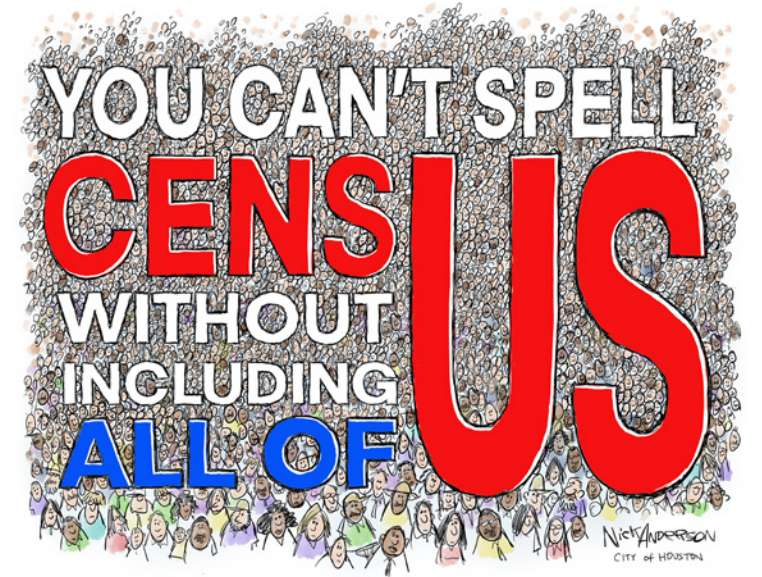
- 411 mapping and data projects
- 450 demographic requests
- Served 18 City departments
- Created Web Apps for Parks & Recreation, Planning & Development, HFD, and OEM.
- Offered GIS Training Classes:
  - o 7 GIS I Classes (2-day class)
  - 7 GIS II Classes (2-day class)
  - 5 ArcGIS Online Classes (half-day class)

## Census 2020

The new decade brought a new Census, and the Planning Department led the City of Houston's efforts to encourage every resident to say **Yes to the Census**. From February to October, PD provided community outreach, demographic and Council support for the Census. The sunshine yellow campaign signs, t-shirts, videos, advertisements, and billboards were highly visible online and seen in multiple languages across the city. Community engagement was adapted to pandemic protocols, redirecting door-to-door and block-walking to emphasize digital outreach and socially distanced events.

Mayor Turner, Council Districts and City departments joined the efforts hosting multiple caravan parades, supply drives and Census promotional events as well as filming promotional videos and unveiling five murals around town. A local barber even held a Census logo haircutting contest and Pulitzer Prize-winning and nationally syndicated cartoonist Nick Anderson contributed a cartoon series.





# Contact Us

Planning staff are ready to assist you

Thank you for your interest in the Planning & Development Department's Annual Report. Since its publication in 2021, content and location changes may mean that some links are no longer active.

You can contact us for more information at 832-393-6600

Visit our web site at [www.houstonplanning.com](http://www.houstonplanning.com)

E-mail us at [planningdepartment@houstontx.gov](mailto:planningdepartment@houstontx.gov).

## Key Contact Information

### Department General Assistance

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[planningdepartment@houstontx.gov](mailto:planningdepartment@houstontx.gov)

### Land Development – Planner of the Day

(832) 393-6624

[planningdepartment@houstontx.gov](mailto:planningdepartment@houstontx.gov)

### Historic Preservation

(832) 393-6556

[historicpreservation@houstontx.gov](mailto:historicpreservation@houstontx.gov)

### Special Minimum Lot Size/Building Line Program

(832) 393-6637

[planningdepartment@houstontx.gov](mailto:planningdepartment@houstontx.gov)

### GIS Information Mapping & Analysis

(832) 393-6555

[planningdepartment@houstontx.gov](mailto:planningdepartment@houstontx.gov)

### Public Information/Media Requests

(832) 393-6667

[planningdepartment@houstontx.gov](mailto:planningdepartment@houstontx.gov)



**PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT**

**THE CITY OF HOUSTON**

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