

HOUSTON

# ACTIVE LIVING PLAN



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# INTRODUCTION

The Go Healthy Houston (GHH) Task Force aims to improve the health of all Houstonians by increasing access to healthy foods, physical activity, and tobacco-free places. Established by an Executive Order in 2012 to focus on obesity prevention, the GHH Task Force is an organized way for the City of Houston to solicit community feedback and involvement in policies and programs that improve the health of the community. GHH's vision is to make Houston known for its collaborative health community, creative solutions to urban health issues, and positive health outcomes.

The multi-sector Task Force is comprised of public and private partners whose purpose is to:

- Be advocates for healthy living
- Seek opportunities to collaborate with existing organizations in the city to leverage resources
- Communicate information and serve as a resource for health and wellness in the Houston area
- Make "the healthy choice the easy choice" in Houston

To that end, Go Healthy Houston (GHH) is working to spur "active living" in Houston. Active living is about people working together to create places where physical activities such as walking, biking, and playing are integral parts of everyday life. Active Living is not solely defined as fitness exercise during leisure time such as going to the gym. It also includes activity integrated into our daily routine such as walking to the store or bus stop or taking the stairs.

Active living is critical to our physical and mental wellbeing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), physical benefits include weight control and a reduction of risks for cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers. Regular physical activity may also improve mental health and mood and increase the chances of having a longer life. In addition, sedentary behavior is linked with a significant increase in the risk of type 2 diabetes as well as obesity.<sup>1</sup>

The benefits of physical activity are especially important in Houston where residents suffer from high rates of chronic health conditions. It is estimated that 32% of Houston adults are challenged with obesity



and 30% have high blood pressure.<sup>2</sup> However, policies affecting the built environment and the way we live have made it harder to be physically active on a regular basis. According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, and adults need 150 minutes per week. The CDC estimates nationally only 20% of adults are meeting those requirements and even fewer children.

The Houston Active Living Plan is rooted in a “Health in All Policies” approach, which recognizes that policy decisions and environmental changes made within multiple sectors impact public health. “Health in All Policies” therefore requires collaboration and support from many city and county departments including Planning, Public Works, METRO, Parks, and Health along with an array of community partner organizations in health care, education, media, business, sports, land use/community design, and nonprofit sectors.

Though separate and autonomous, the Houston Active Living Plan complements and builds upon strategies within Plan Houston that focus on nurturing safe and healthy neighborhoods and connecting people and places.

## VISION

**Houston is a place where active living is easy. All residents live, work, play and age in safe, attractive and connected environments where physical activity is an integral part of their everyday life.**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Promote active living as a means to improving health and educate the community on how to practice an active lifestyle.
2. Explore policy, planning, environmental and cultural strategies to facilitate healthier choices.
3. Develop strategies to address the social determinants of health embracing the Health in All Policies approach.
4. Align public and private resources to develop strong partnerships, identify gaps in resources and maximize health impact.
5. Center strategies that celebrate Houston’s cultural diversity.

6. Engage community stakeholders, businesses, private institutions, governmental agencies and decision makers to maximize their role in improving public health.
7. Promote strategies that are based in evidence-based practices.
8. Advance health equity, so that everyone has the opportunity to reach their best health.

As a “living document”, the Houston Active Living Plan should be built upon and revised as conditions change and other opportunities arise.

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## PROCESS

Go Healthy Houston hosted two workshops in 2016 to develop the Active Living Plan: a Visioning Workshop in May and a Plan Development Workshop in June. Attendees included Task Force members and partners that represented numerous sectors including: government, private business, and non-profit organizations.

In May 2016, representatives from thirty-two organizations attended the Visioning Workshop. They engaged in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis in which they were asked to consider how to achieve a Houston in which everyone has the opportunity to lead healthy, active lives. The results were categorized into six themes ranging from transportation, food and policy, funding, and implementation, which provided the structure to this plan.

The groups then worked to brainstorm strategies based on the opportunities and challenges that were shared amongst the group, ranging from messaging and improving infrastructure, to changing policy and funding priorities.

Twenty GHH members and partners attended the Plan Development Workshop held in June 2016. Attendees reviewed the strategies considered at the Visioning Workshop and organized by the plan themes. They worked to brainstorm implementation steps, potential partners, and potential metrics for success. The results of this exercise informed the Action Plan in the following chapter.

Additionally, individual interviews were held with GHH members, City departments and partner organizations, some of whom participated in the workshops. These interviews sought further details on existing initiatives to leverage suggested implementation steps. Through the remainder of 2016 to Spring 2017, details for the Plan were gathered, reviewed and finalized.

Moving forward, Go Healthy Houston will continue to engage input from both formal and informal community leaders on ideas for making the Plan a useful tool for the public. The task force will also seek to define processes for the Active Living Plan's introduction and dissemination to the community.



The Visioning Workshop began with a short presentation on the goals of the project.



Participants sorted the opportunities and challenges to understand where comments created overlaps.



Opportunities and challenges identified by participants were organized into themes as they emerged.



Participants then worked to create strategies within each theme to respond to the opportunities and challenges.



Between the meetings, the consultants refined the developed strategies for the participants.



Finally, participants worked to put details to the strategies, identifying implementation steps, partners and metrics.

# ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan is broken into the following six themes and goals:

- **Public Health:** Promote widespread knowledge of the social determinants of health and the correlation between public health and decision making.
- **Culture:** Offer active living initiatives that respond to Houston's diverse cultures.
- **Transportation:** Promote the expansion of a multi-modal transportation network that offers safe and comfortable active transportation options with access to high-quality transit.
- **Built Environment:** Design and build communities that are safe, convenient and attractive for people of all abilities to walk, bike and play.
- **Parks & Recreation:** Improve the accessibility of the parks and recreation spaces so that they are integrated into Houstonians' everyday lives.
- **Sports & Fitness:** Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allow the community to engage in sports and fitness activities.

Across these themes, the Active Living Plan describes several strategies developed and agreed upon by stakeholders. The strategies aim to benefit the general public across all populations, regardless of age or ability. Each strategy identifies potential sectors to assist with implementation as well as potential outcome indicators and data sources the user can use to measure the strategies' success.

## **Partnerships for implementing strategies fall within many sectors including:**

**Employers and Private Business:** Business and industry should interact with all sectors to identify opportunities to promote physical activity within the workplace and throughout the community.

**Public Offices and Government Leaders:** Public officers and government leaders should interact with all sectors to collectively make Houston a place where active living is easy.

**Health Care:** Hospitals and societies of health care professionals should interact with all sectors to expand their efforts to support physical activity policies and programs at local, state, and federal levels.

**Media:** Media organizations should employ the use of value-added strategies in support of active living campaigns. All sectors should use mass media campaigns in conjunction with policy and community-based activities promoting physical activity.

**Academic Institutions:** Faculty, coaches and administrators should interact with all sectors to identify opportunities for increasing the physical activity levels of their students.

**Non-Government Organizations/ Non-Profit Community Organizations:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteer groups should interact with all sectors to limit barriers and increase physical activity in vulnerable populations.

The target audience for the action plan includes policy and decision makers on all levels and across community sectors. Regardless of the sector you represent a role exist for everyone interested in implementing active living friendly changes towards a healthier and livable community. Solutions for better health outcomes are the responsibility of all in Houston.

## PUBLIC HEALTH

**GOAL** Promote widespread knowledge of the social determinants of health and the correlation between public health and decision making.

**STRATEGY 1:** Educate the public, including youth, community leaders and public officials on the role of active living to transform public health issues.

**STRATEGY 2:** Ensure a “Health in All Policies” approach to decision making in Houston.

**STRATEGY 3:** Explore funding sources to build capacity and develop programs that will sustain active living efforts.

## CULTURE

**GOAL** Offer active living initiatives that respond to Houston's diverse cultures.

**STRATEGY 1:** Promote the inclusion of culture and Houston's cultural barriers in active living messaging.

**STRATEGY 2:** Encourage a shift in office culture that establishes comprehensive wellness policies supporting active living.

**STRATEGY 3:** Promote social norms and positive practices around cultural affinities that encourage active living.

## TRANSPORTATION

**GOAL** Promote the expansion of a multi-modal transportation network that offers safe, convenient and comfortable active transportation options with access to high-quality transit.

**STRATEGY 1:** Develop a cross media-marketing campaign promoting walking, biking and transit as safe, convenient and comfortable options for commuting to work, school and other trips.

**STRATEGY 2:** Continue to promote equity in the development of a high-capacity transit network and enhance the first and last mile connections to transit for walkers, rollers and cyclists.

**STRATEGY 3:** Assess walking conditions throughout the city and develop a pedestrian plan to improve barriers to walkability.

**STRATEGY 4:** Expand awareness of Travel Demand Management (TDM) initiatives with employers, education institutions and special purpose districts in Houston's employment centers.

## BUILT ENVIRONMENT

**GOAL** Design and build communities that are safe, convenient and attractive for people of all abilities to walk, bike and play.

**STRATEGY 1:** Promote mixed land uses and infill development to increase density and the potential for equitable transit-oriented development.

**STRATEGY 2:** Operationalize universal design and complete streets criteria into streetscape design standards for new development and roadway reconstruction.

**STRATEGY 3:** Promote Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach to improve neighborhood safety and security.

## PARKS & RECREATION

**GOAL** Improve the accessibility of the parks and recreation spaces so that they are integrated into Houstonians' everyday lives.

**STRATEGY 1:** Develop shared-use policies with schools and other public properties to increase neighborhood access to playgrounds and other recreation facilities across Houston.

**STRATEGY 2:** Develop a comprehensive communication plan to educate the community on the available services, amenities and resources available in parks and their benefits for active living.

**STRATEGY 3:** Coordinate and leverage resources across departments and agencies to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to parks.

## SPORTS & FITNESS

**GOAL** Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allows the community to engage in sports and fitness activities to improve physical health.

**STRATEGY 1:** Promote sports and fitness through public facilities, schools, parks, worksites and non-traditional spaces.

**STRATEGY 2:** Launch broad partnership efforts to team with school districts, churches, parent groups, fitness professionals, athletic businesses (e.g. gyms), and adventure sports groups (e.g. skateboarding).

**STRATEGY 3:** Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allow the community to engage in sports and fitness activities.

# PUBLIC HEALTH



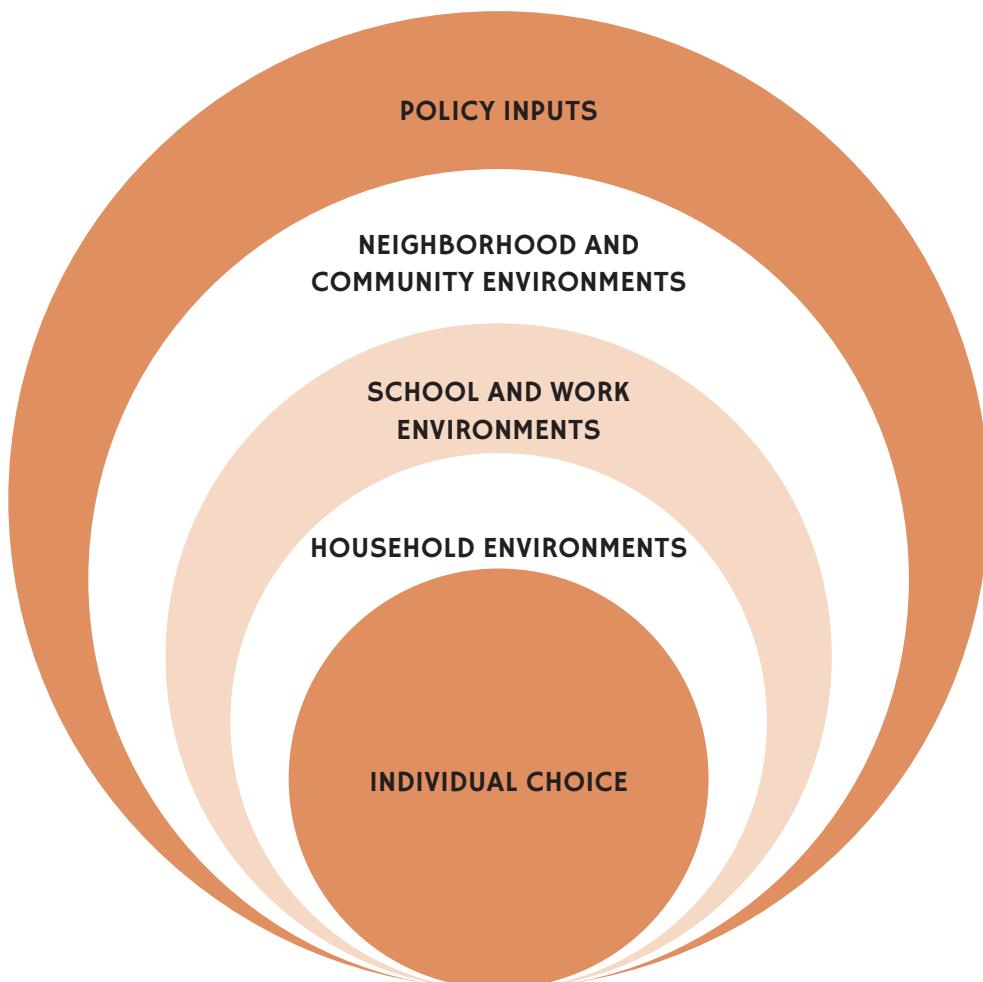
**Goal: Promote widespread knowledge of the social determinants of health and the correlation between public health and decision making.**

## LOCAL ASSESSMENT: PUBLIC HEALTH

*"Public health refers to all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to provide conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on entire populations, not on individual patients or diseases. Thus, public health is concerned with the total system and not only the eradication of a particular disease."* - World Health Organization

City leaders and public health professionals understand the relationship between public health and our culture, built environment, transportation system and amenities.

In recent years, public health professionals have turned to social-ecological models to understand the interrelationship between personal and environmental factors and between physical and social environments.



# Goal: Promote widespread knowledge of the social determinants of health and the correlation between public health and decision making.



## STRATEGY

Educate the public, including youth, community leaders and public officials on the role of active living to transform public health issues.



## IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Business and Industry | Volunteer and Non-Profit                      |
| Health Care           | Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports         |
| Education             | Transportation, Land use and Community Design |
| Mass Media            | Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports         |
|                       | Public officials & government                 |



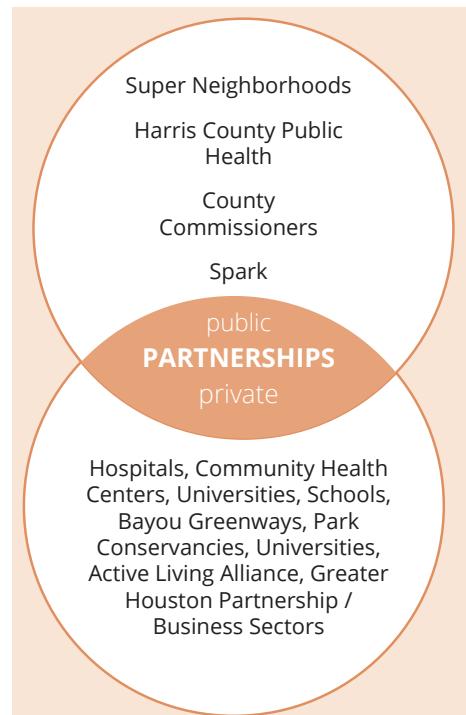
## POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

- Number of Sticky Solutions Workshops held in the community
- Number of open forums/meeting where a public health advocate spoke
- Number of written articles, bylines, op-eds
- Number of media outlets publishing public health and community health transformation
- Public Health representation in non-public health meetings, discussions or events.
- Number of youth mentorship/ internships opportunities developed in public health



## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

- Outreach to officials by community groups
- FQHCs
- Community Health Commons
- Houston Area Survey (SHEA)
- Health of Houston
- Greater Houston Health Connect
- HCAD, tax assessor
- FitnessGram
- YRBS
- BRFSS



## 2 STRATEGY

Ensure a “Health in All Policies” approach to decision making in Houston.

The City of Houston and all public and private entities in Houston should review their existing policies for its impact on health and make recommendations as needed.

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

Business and Industry  
Health Care  
Education  
Mass Media  
Volunteer and non-profit  
Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports  
Transportation, Land Use and Community Design  
Public officials & government

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Health impact assessments for all policies  
Decision making tool

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

City of Houston policy documents



# 3

STRATEGY

Explore funding sources for capacity building and developing programs that will sustain active living efforts.

Many existing and potential new funding sources may support the strategies identified in this plan. Houston organizations should identify these opportunities and partner with organizations to pursue available funding sources that are otherwise not being fully utilized.

**IDENTIFIED SECTORS:**

Employers & Businesses  
Public officials & government  
Community organizations

**POTENTIAL INDICATORS:**

Funds identified and raised from:  

- Management districts' safety and beautification programs
- Foundation grants
- Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority (LARA) lots sales tax
- Community benefit/Affordable Care Act
- Health and life insurers
- ARTS funding - hospitality tax

**SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:**

Management districts  
Foundations  
County Commissioners  
LARA



# CULTURE



**Goal: Offer active initiatives that respond to  
Houston's diverse cultures.**

## LOCAL ASSESSMENT: CULTURE

Culture is a group of people's way of life: its behaviors, beliefs and values that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that generations share through communication and imitation. Culture influences people's social norms and behavior: how they spend their time, what they eat and how they spend their money. Active living can become widely adopted in Houston by becoming part of its culture.

Office culture may hinder active living in several ways. Many of Houston's professional workers who spend 1/3 of their day at work are sedentary throughout the day. While business attire is conducive for the air conditioned environments, it adds one more barrier to being active.



Food is a big part of Houston's culture. Several national publications recently praised some of the city's finer dining experiences, shaping its reputation as a growing "foodie town." As people gravitate towards the more convenient options in a market environment that appeals to our taste buds over our health, it can lead to a cultural concern regarding our relationship with food. Encouraging healthy eating in the workplace, schools, events and restaurants may help change people's eating habits.

Dogs – our lovable, walkable pets – are helping shape active lifestyles. In the Active Living Visioning Workshop, stakeholders frequently cited their "dogs walk them everyday." This cultural affinity towards dogs is evident in the market for downtown residential developments: for every 100 apartments units, an expected 30 dogs will join the neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> As a result, dog parks are being constructed, providing an attractive amenity for dog-owning residents who will have an enjoyable, social place to walk their dogs.

# Goal: Offer active living initiatives that respond to Houston's diverse cultures.

## STRATEGY

Promote the inclusion of culture and Houston cultural barriers in active living messaging.

Among the physically inactive, those within health disparate populations may benefit from targeted messaging and interventions to impact behavior change. Because non-profit organizations and volunteer groups often have the capacity and willingness to work with targeted populations, they can help ensure that physically inactive people within their organizational scope are reached.

## IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

Public officials & government  
Media  
Community organizations

## POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Number of non-profit/volunteer organizations engaged in active living messaging to target communities  
Individuals reached and demographics  
Geographic distribution across all council districts  
Culturally sensitive markers for active living campaign  
Tested messaging with focus groups

## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Social media  
Annual reports  
Surveys



## 2 STRATEGY

Encourage a shift in office culture that establishes comprehensive wellness policies supporting active living.

Employers should be encouraged to provide “end of trip facilities” for workers who commute via walking, cycling or riding transit, such as showers, changing rooms, and bicycle parking. Alternatively, discounts could be offered to nearby gyms. Employers should offer bike buddies or transit ambassadors to educate employees in alternative means of transportation to work. This could also serve as a team building initiative. HGAC should be consulted to educate employers and employees on federal incentives for commuting via alternative transportation. Incentives may include b-cycle memberships. Workplace policies such as casual dress codes and flexible schedules to allow time for mid-day workouts or minimized travel time should also be considered.

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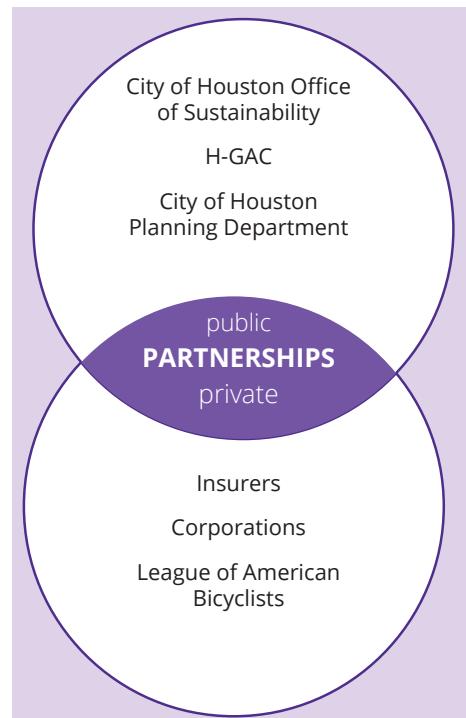
Employers & Businesses  
Public officials & government  
Health care  
Academic institutions  
Community organizations

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Number of bike friendly businesses  
Number of employers establishing comprehensive wellness policies and physical activity incentives (large, medium, small businesses)  
Number of end of trip facilities available at worksites (bike racks, work lockers, work showers)  
Number of employers adopting relaxed corporate attire

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Businesses  
American Community Survey  
HGAC  
B-cycle  
METRO



# 3

## STRATEGY

Promote social norms and positive practices around cultural affinities that encourage active living.

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

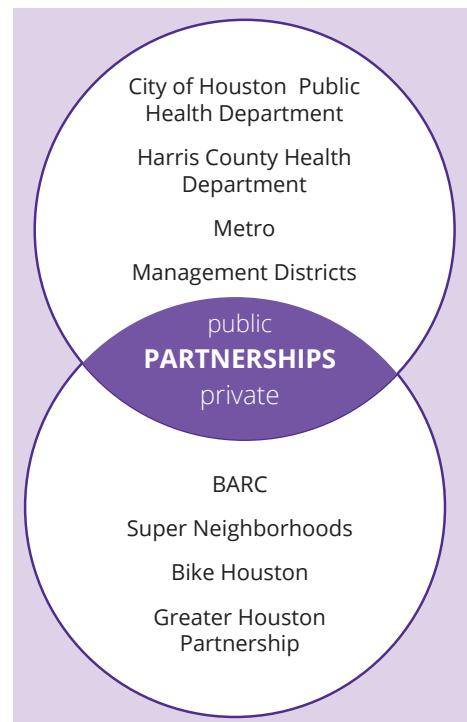
Employers & Businesses  
Public officials & government  
Health Care  
Academic institutions  
Community organizations

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Number of dog owners walking their dog  
Number of dog parks  
Number of bikes on light rail  
Number of worksites that incentivize biking or taking transit to work and disincentives parking/driving

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

BARC  
Super Neighborhoods  
Metro



# TRANSPORTATION

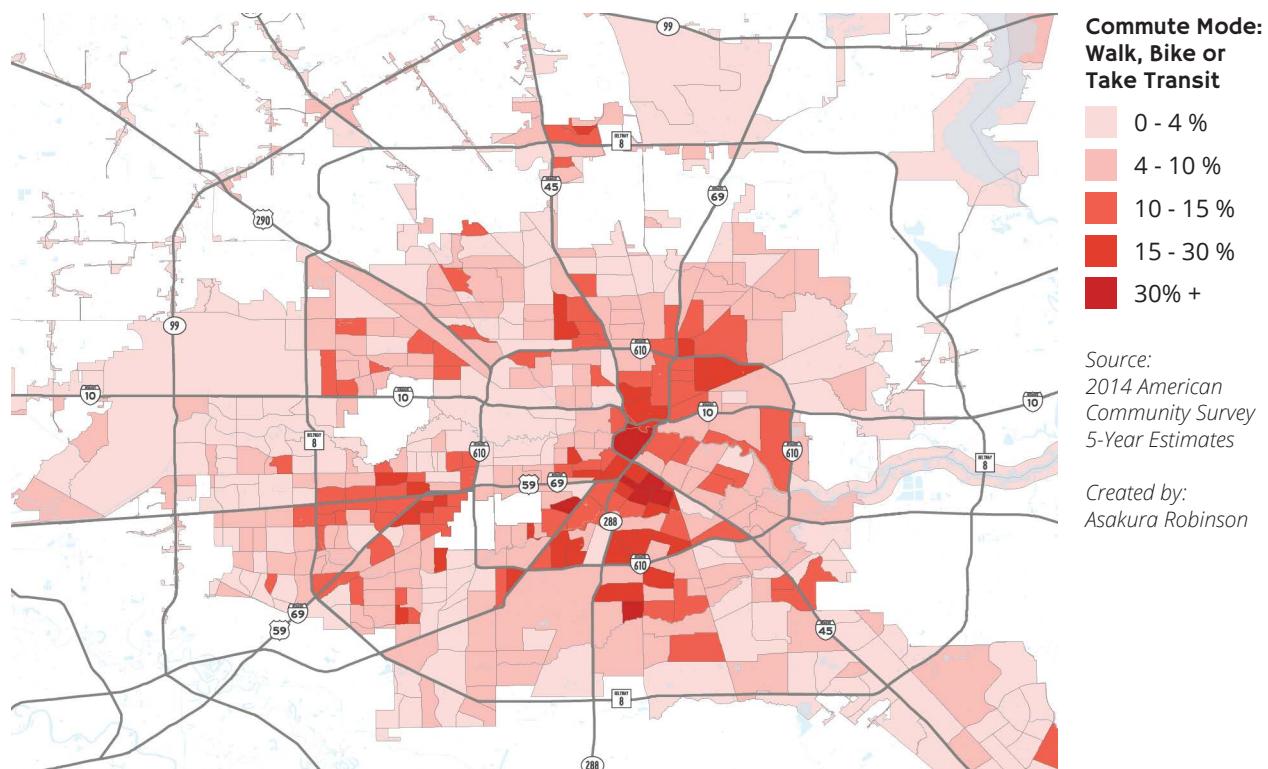


**Goal: Promote the expansion of a multi-modal transportation network that offers safe, convenient and comfortable active transportation options with access to high-quality transit for all users.**

## LOCAL ASSESSMENT: TRANSPORTATION

Active Transportation plays an important role in helping people lead healthy, active lifestyles by allowing them to safely and conveniently incorporate walking, biking and transit for work, errands, and other everyday trips. Walking and biking are the most intuitive modes for increasing physical activity, but research shows that people who use public transportation take 30% more steps than those who rely on a car.<sup>4</sup> Because of Houston's size, efficiently serving all areas of the city through these active modes can be challenging, particularly for commute trips that require long trips to job centers across the region. According to the U.S. Census 2014 American Community Survey, 78% of Houstonians drive alone to get to work, 2% walk, 0.5% bike and 4.3% take public transit. Commuting is just one round trip in our everyday lives and there are opportunities for people to use active transportation modes for travel such as shopping trips, library visits, and other neighborhood travel from work and home. Nationwide, 27% of most daily trips are within an easy walking distance (<1 mile) and 48% are within an easy biking distance (<3 miles).<sup>5</sup>

Automobiles will undoubtedly continue to be an important transportation mode for decades to come; but the reduction of our dependence can be achieved through the creation of a strong multi-modal network that builds flexibility into people's everyday lives and resiliency in our future. The completion of the 2017 Houston Bike Plan is one step toward achieving this network.



## STRATEGY

Develop a cross media-marketing campaign promoting walking, biking and transit as safe, convenient and comfortable options for commuting to work, school, and other trips.

Transportation stakeholders should continue to offer a combination of events, programs and media messaging to further the campaign. In addition to the Sunday Streets events (see inset next page), these may include a bike to work day, transit to work promotions ("Dump the Pump"), social bike rides, encouraging health promotion messages on billboards, subsidized health club memberships for bicycle friendly businesses, pop-up bike lanes, wayfinding signage, bicycle valet programs, and neighborhood-based encouragement program.

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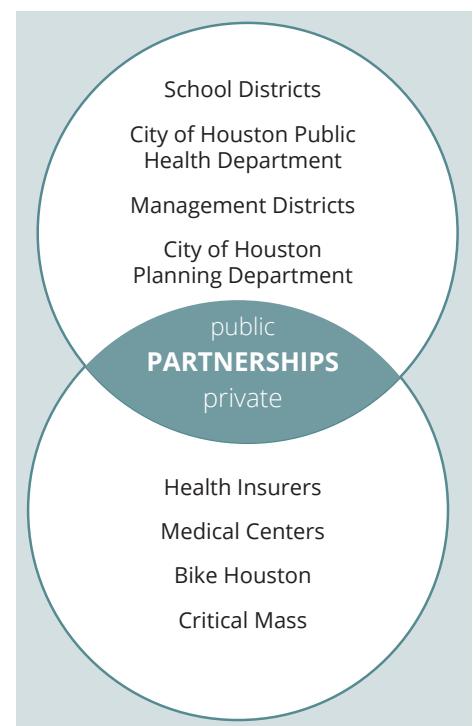
Employers & Businesses  
Public officials & government  
Media  
Community organizations

## POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Number of active living events or programs hosted  
Number of neighborhoods impacted by programs  
Number of organizations that participate in programs  
Number of participants in encouragement events

## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Sign-in sheets  
Surveys



## SUNDAY STREETS HOUSTON, TX

Sunday Streets gives Houstonians the opportunity to walk, bike, dance, play and be physically active in many other ways in a segment of the city's largest public space: its streets. This program is Houston's response to the "Open Streets" movement, in which cities temporarily close streets to automobile traffic, allowing people of all ages to be physically active.

Since 2014, the Houston Mayor's Office has held these events on Sunday afternoons throughout the city. They are funded through a combination of public resources and private sponsorships from groups such as Cigna, the Rice Design Alliance, BikeHouston, Houston Tomorrow and Houston BCycle.

Sunday Streets shows that increasing physical activity does not always require new infrastructure but rather changing the way we use the assets we already have. Moreover, Sunday Streets demonstrates the power of public/private partnerships to spur physical activity in Houston neighborhoods.

More information is available at  
<http://gohealthyhouston.org/sundaystreetshtx/>

## CASE STUDY



# 2

## STRATEGY

Continue to promote equity in the development of a high-capacity transit network and enhance the first and last mile connections to transit for walkers, rollers and cyclists.

In coordination with METRO, the City of Houston should make access to the transit system as seamless as possible, whether riders are walking, biking or driving to the transit route. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, along with amenities such as wayfinding signage, crosswalks and bicycle parking, should be installed near popular stops to enable transit riders to safely and conveniently connect to their destinations. The 2017 Houston Bike Plan provides guidance on priority locations and facility types and should be funded and implemented to advance this strategy.

In cases where transit stops serve very large, auto-oriented suburban areas, such as bus rapid transit and light rail terminals, park-and-ride lots should be built or shared-parking agreements should be made with local providers to attract commuters to job centers who would otherwise choose to drive to their destinations.

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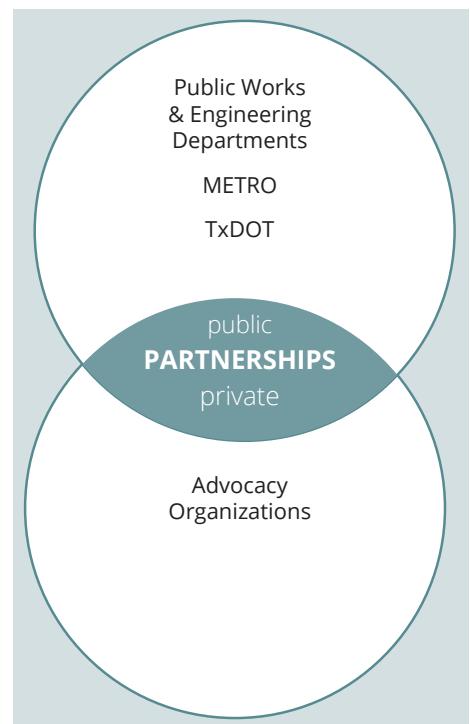
Public officials & government  
Community organizations

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Number of bicycle parking facilities near transit  
Number of public destinations with bicycle racks  
Number of schools that apply or implement Safe Routes to School  
Monthly and annual METRO ridership  
Walking, bicycling and transit mode share  
Miles of sidewalks and bikeways constructed near transit stops

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

American Community Survey  
H-GAC  
Department of Public Works and Engineering  
METRO



# 3

## STRATEGY

Assess walking conditions throughout the city and develop a pedestrian plan to improve barriers to walkability.

A pedestrian plan would identify the specific problems, such as locations of dangerous walking conditions and gaps in the sidewalk network. The plan would recommend changes to the City's Infrastructure Design Manual to improve pedestrian facility design and construction and recommend changes to the City's traffic impact analyses to include pedestrians, cyclists and transit users along with motor vehicles. The plan would also identify funding tools such as Parking Benefit Districts to support the construction of sidewalks and other infrastructure. The public should be involved in selecting the array of engineering strategies to implement. This effort should closely involve the City of Houston Department of Public Works and Engineering and also draw on the findings of previous plans and studies that have surveyed sidewalk conditions including Livable Centers studies supported by HGAC and METRO to create a database of pedestrian conditions across the city. The plan should also reference and tie into ongoing pedestrian safety initiatives, such as the Vision Zero campaign to eliminate pedestrian fatalities.

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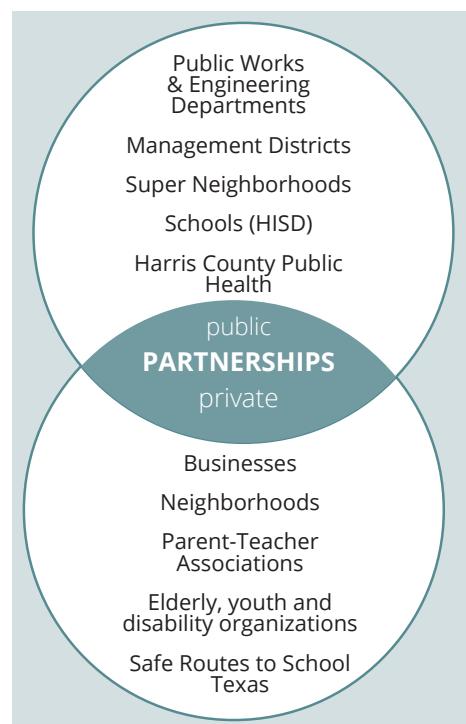
Public officials & government  
Community organizations

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Walk Scores by neighborhood  
Assessment of sidewalk conditions by neighborhood  
Miles of sidewalks by neighborhood  
Number of pedestrian crashes by neighborhood

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Department of Public Works and Engineering



# 4

## STRATEGY

Expand awareness of Travel Demand Management (TDM) initiatives with employers and special purpose districts in Houston's employment centers.

Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC) and a number of employers offer incentives and resources for alternatives to commuting via single occupancy vehicle. The City of Houston can expand awareness of these initiatives by helping to create a network of employee transportation coordinators among businesses. This network would share best practices, recognize businesses meeting standards, explore opportunities to charge fees for parking, promote the Bicycle Friendly Business program, and develop resource guides for businesses and individuals. These efforts ought to build off of the work already underway by HGAC Commute Solutions.

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

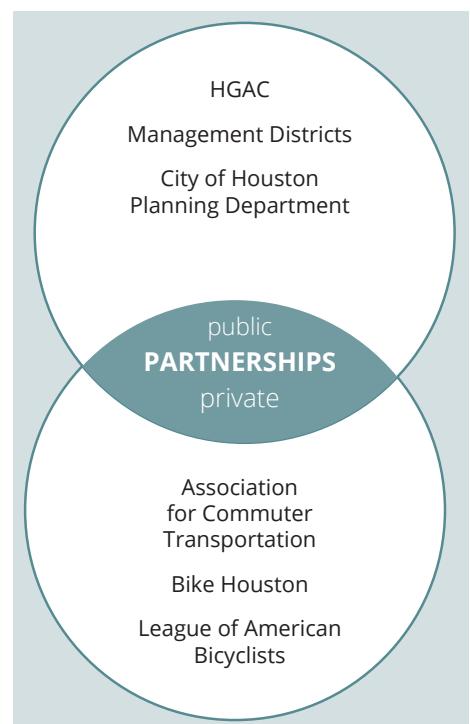
Employers & Businesses  
Public officials & government  
Academic Institutions

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Commute mode share  
Number of individual and organizational participants in Commute Solutions and other TDM initiatives

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Household travel surveys  
American Community Survey



# BUILT ENVIRONMENT



**Goal: Design and build communities that are safe, convenient and attractive for people of all abilities to walk, bike and play.**

## LOCAL ASSESSMENT: BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment consists of places and spaces that are constructed or modified by people — buildings, parks, roadways, pathways, etc. By designing with people in mind, the physical environment can influence how people move through space, interact with their surroundings, and can be impactful in the decisions people make for active living. There are policies that can be put in place to ensure the built environment encourages active transportation and provides public spaces and amenities for all users to enjoy.

The development of Houston suburbs has shaped the built environment and people's transportation patterns since the 1950s when construction first began on the highway system. Development patterns have predominantly accommodated automobile flow and parking, rather than creating walkable neighborhoods that are comfortable and attractive for people. One of the contributing factors of Houston's health crisis is the concept of "time poverty," in which people spend large amounts of time sitting in cars on long or frequent trips to work, school and other places. Not only do they miss out on a chance to walk places, but they may also resort to convenience options, such as relying on unhealthy fast foods rather than produce-rich, home-cooked meals.



*Significant parking restricts access to shopping*



*Sidewalks promote active living*

# Goal: Design and build communities that are safe, convenient and attractive for people of all abilities to walk, bike and play.

## STRATEGY

Promote mixed land uses and infill development to increase density and the potential for equitable transit-oriented development.

The proximity of people's homes to destinations such as shops, schools, workplaces and amenities impacts a community's walkability. The closer they are to one another, the more likely people are to walk between them rather than drive. Communities with a mix of land uses and greater density of development organized around transit service have been shown to encourage walking. A study in Seattle found that residents in these types of neighborhoods spent more time in physically active travel than in neighborhoods with low density and separated land uses.<sup>6</sup>

## IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

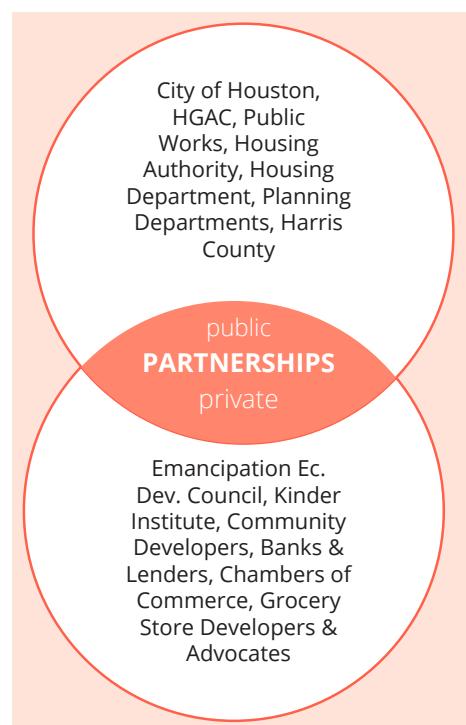
Public officials and government  
Employers and businesses

## POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Residential density by neighborhood  
Percentage of land area dedicated to mixed uses  
Proportion of affordable housing compared to the area's median household income by neighborhood  
Walk Score

## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Central Houston Commuter Survey  
American Community Survey



## 2 STRATEGY

Operationalize universal design and complete streets criteria into streetscape design standards for new development and roadway reconstruction.

The City of Houston should strengthen its policies and procedures relative to street design, construction, operations and maintenance. This may be first accomplished by translating the Complete Streets executive order, the existing public policy for the right-of-way, into the City Code of Ordinances, and by modifying and improving enforcement of the City's Infrastructure Design Manual. Policy reforms may include creating alternative street classifications; incorporating landscape design, such as street trees and shade structures, into design standards; connecting disjointed segments in complete streets networks; requiring any construction projects to provide pedestrian access/detours; and better maintaining crosswalks.

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

Employers & Businesses  
Public officials & government  
Health care sector  
Media  
Academic institutions  
Community organizations

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Changes to Infrastructure Design Manual  
Changes to City Code of Ordinances  
Gaps in sidewalk network filled  
Reduction in pedestrian crashes

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Crash data  
Park desert maps



# 3

## STRATEGY

Promote Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach to improve neighborhood safety and security.

The City should reform its building codes and Infrastructure Design Manual to require or encourage CPTED and begin by retrofitting city-owned facilities. For instance, it should install pedestrian lighting on park properties and its bayou trails while being mindful of “dark sky” principles to prevent light pollution. Funding and administrative support for code enforcement activities should be strengthened accordingly. Consistent with other strategies in this Plan, the City should make sure that curbs and sidewalks are included in road and other development projects. Finally, along with its partners, the City should raise awareness of CPTED principles and techniques through community outreach in coordination with the Police Department. Neighborhoods where high proportions of residents do not have access to a car should be prioritized for implementation of CPTED infrastructure and community outreach.

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

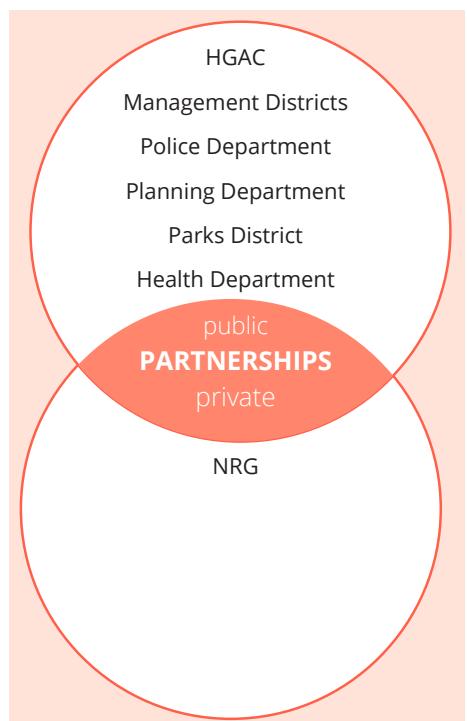
Media  
Public officials and government  
Community organizations  
Academic institutions

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Modifications to Infrastructure Design Manual and building codes  
Number of facilities retrofitted or built with CPTED principles  
Number of pedestrian lights repaired or installed  
Violent and property crimes per capita, by neighborhood

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Public Works and Engineering Department  
Planning Department  
Parks District  
Police Department



## PARKS & RECREATION



**Goal: Improve the accessibility of the parks and recreation spaces so that they are integrated into Houstonians' everyday lives.**

## LOCAL ASSESSMENT: PARKS & RECREATION

Having access to parks and open spaces for recreation, sports and fitness is one way to promote increased physical activity. As of 2017, the entire City of Houston parks system encompasses 375 parks and over 37,869 acres of park land, per the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. According to a 2014 study by the Trust for Public Land, Houston has 24.1 acres of park land per 1,000 residents within city limits (the national standard is 20 acres per 1,000 people).

The City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department has 56 free fitness facilities across the city, such as swimming pools, sports fields and courts, weight rooms and youth game areas. There are 37 public pools which are essential in the summer months. In addition to these facilities, the Houston Parks Board is connecting 150 miles of trails and greenspace along the bayous, which is expected to transform over 3,000 underutilized acres along the waterways into publicly accessible greenspace. When the trails are complete, over half of Houstonians will live within 1.5 miles of a bayou trail.



*Kayaking at Discovery Green*



*Splash Pad at a City of Houston Park*

# Improve the accessibility of the parks and recreation spaces so that they are integrated into Houstonians' everyday lives.

## STRATEGY

Develop shared-use policies with schools and other public properties to increase neighborhood access to playgrounds and other recreation facilities across Houston.

The City should facilitate meetings between decision makers at the Parks Department, cities, counties, Independent School Districts, and owners of public land and help craft policies between organizations. The city should create and approve inter-local agreements. Finally, along with its partners the City should evaluate usage of the shared facilities to measure the agreements' success.

## IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

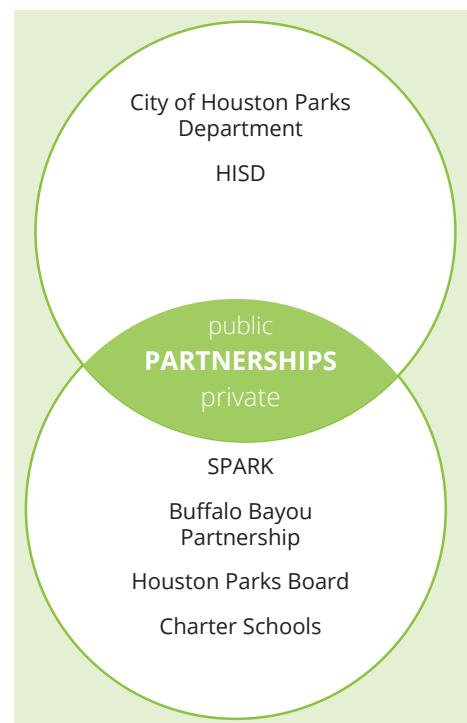
Public officials and government  
Health care  
Community organizations  
Academic institutions

## POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Number of finalized policies/agreements established or renewed  
Number of properties included  
The population residing within a half mile of public parks and recreation facilities with shared use agreements.

## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Meeting minutes  
Share use agreements  
Surveys



# 2

## STRATEGY

Develop a comprehensive communication plan to educate the community on the available services, amenities and resources available in parks and their benefits for active living.

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

Public Officials and Government  
Media  
Employers and businesses  
Health care  
Academic institutions  
Community organizations

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Completion of assessments  
Completion of plan  
Public knowledge and attitudes

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Parks Department  
Community surveys  
Headcounts at facilities



# 3

## STRATEGY

Coordinate and leverage resources across the public and private sectors to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to parks.

First, the City sectors should continue to collaborate and leverage resources across departments. Liaisons and agreements are strategies that could institutionalize communication between departments. The Mayor's Office can support this city collaboration by supporting the coordination of grant applications.

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

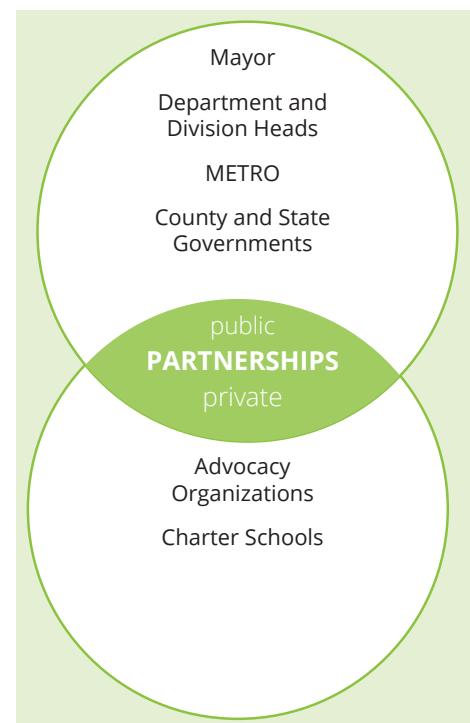
- Business and Industry
- Health Care
- Education
- Mass Media
- Volunteer and Non-Profit
- Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports
- Transportation, Land Use and Community Design
- Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports
- Public officials & government

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

- Number of sheltered transit stops at park locations
- Sidewalks within a half mile radius of parks
- Availability of bike parking/ bike racks at parks.
- Number of Parks & Recreation liaisons across departments

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES::

- City performance reports



## SPORTS & FITNESS



**Goal: Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allow the community to engage in sports and fitness activities.**

## **LOCAL ASSESSMENT: SPORTS & FITNESS**

Fitness activities, ranging from team sports to Zumba, can help Houstonians meet the 75 minutes of weekly vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity recommended by the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. In addition to the Parks and Recreation Department's free fitness facilities noted in the preceding chapter, the City of Houston is home to hundreds of privately operated gyms, yoga studios, dance studios, YMCAs, and amateur sports leagues. While many are not publicly owned or operated, these facilities nonetheless contribute significant opportunities for Houstonians to be physically active. Houston is also home to numerous major league sports teams: the Astros, Texans, Rockets, Dash and Dynamo put baseball, football, basketball, and women's and men's soccer in the spotlight, respectively, and bolster the city's reputation as a sports town.



*Physical activity at school*



*Youth baseball in a community*

# Goal: Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allow the community to engage in sports and fitness activities.

## STRATEGY

Promote sports and fitness through public facilities, schools, parks, worksites and non-traditional spaces.

The City and its partners should develop a comprehensive media campaign utilizing social media, telephone surveys, and print materials such as flyers and postcards.

## IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

Business and Industry  
Health Care  
Education  
Mass Media  
Volunteer and Non-Profit  
Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports  
Transportation, Land Use and Community Design  
Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports  
Public officials & government

## POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Percentage increase in public knowledge of sports and fitness campaigns  
Percentage increase in usage of sports facilities  
Percentage change in public attitudes toward sports and fitness activities

## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

Surveys  
Social media activity  
Usage reports from facilities  
Capital improvement requests



# 2

## STRATEGY

Launch broad partnership efforts to team with school districts, churches, parents groups, fitness professionals, athletic businesses (e.g. gyms), and adventure sports groups (e.g. skateboarding).

### IDENTIFIED SECTORS:

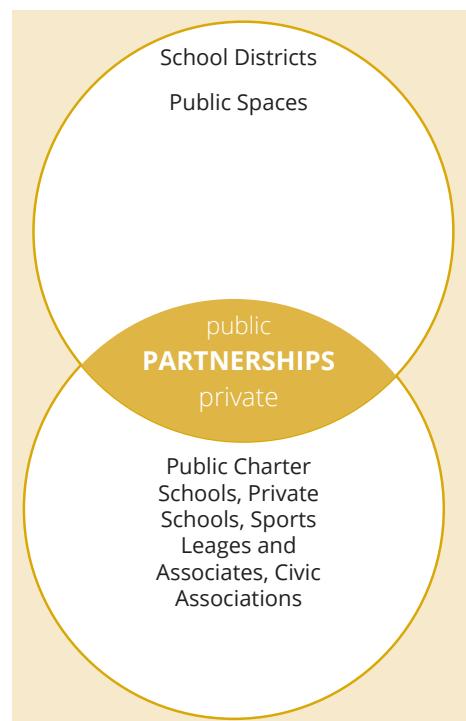
- Business and Industry
- Health Care
- Education
- Mass Media
- Volunteer and Non-Profit
- Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports
- Transportation, Land Use and Community Design
- Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports
- Public officials & government

### POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

- Number of formal partnerships
- Number of meetings
- Number of staff committed
- Existence of annual plan
- Number of new events
- Head counts
- Number of new subscribers to services

### SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:

- Budget reports
- Meeting sign-in sheets
- Annual communications plan
- Feedback surveys



# 3

STRATEGY

Promote the creation of wellness programs that incentivize physical activity in worksites.

Employers or worksites should provide wellness opportunities and incentivize employees to make healthy choices. Programs should include those tailored toward the adaptive services community, elderly and youth. The City should design incentives with information gathered at public forums such as discounts and bus passes to advertise through online communications and social networks.

**IDENTIFIED SECTORS:**

- Business and Industry
- Health Care
- Education
- Mass Media
- Volunteer and Non-Profit
- Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports
- Transportation, Land Use and Community Design
- Parks, Recreation, Fitness and Sports
- Public officials & government

**POTENTIAL INDICATORS:**

- Number of new gym memberships
- Number of insurance providers offering gym membership incentives
- Number of worksites adopting comprehensive wellness programs

**SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES:**

- American Heart Association
- Surveys
- Meeting sign-ins
- Reports from participating companies



## Citations:

<sup>1</sup> Hu FB. Sedentary lifestyle and risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes. PubMed. 2003;382): 103-8. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12733740>

<sup>2</sup> University of Texas, School of Public Health, Health of Houston Survey, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Beretto, Holly, "Life in the Big City: Downtown Residential Comes Into Its Own," Downtown Houston, 02, June 2014, Available at <<https://www.downtownhouston.org/news/article/life-big-city>>

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, R. "Public Transit, Obesity, and Medical Costs: Assessing the Magnitudes." Preventative Medicine, 46(1): 14-21, January 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Buehler, R, Götschi, T, Winters, M. Moving Toward Active Transportation: How Policies Can Encourage Walking and Bicycling. San Diego, CA: Active Living Research; 2016. Available at <[www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org)>.

<sup>6</sup> Frank LD, Sallis JF, Conway TL, Chapman JE, Saelens BE, Bachman W. Many pathways from land use to health: associations between neighborhood walkability and active transportation, body mass index, and air quality. J Am Plann Assoc. 2006;72:75-87.

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[gohealthyhouston.org](http://gohealthyhouston.org)



[houstontx.gov/health](http://houstontx.gov/health)  
832-393-5043

Prepared by Asakura Robinson

The logo for Asakura Robinson features the name "asakura robinson" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The "a" and "s" are in a light green color, while the rest of the letters are in a darker gray.

