

Background

In July 2012, H-GAC and its Coordinating Committee released a call for proposals in which eligible entities could apply for funding of a sustainability case study. The purpose of the case studies is to demonstrate ways that the sustainability goals developed in the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) can be applied to issues at the local level and in a variety of geographic contexts. The case studies are intended to focus on implementation, moving beyond the planning level of the broader RPSD. It is expected that a broad range of communities will be able to utilize the recommendations and outcome(s) of the case study(s) if they share a similar geographic context or issues.

Each applicant had to demonstrate how their proposal met those criteria. The criteria included demonstration of how the proposal aligned with the 15 RPSD goals and the six HUD Livability Principles. In addition, applicants had to describe how their project would serve a transferable model for other entities. A panel of reviewers made up of the Coordinating Committee and H-GAC evaluated and scored the proposals. The proposals with the highest scores were chosen. Out of 18 applications, six were chosen. Five of the case studies were approved by the H-GAC Board of Directors on September 19, 2012 and the Bayou Greenway Initiative Case Study was approved on November 20, 2012. All of the case studies are to be completed by April 30, 2013, whereas the Bayou Greenway Initiative Case Study will be completed in June 2013.

1. Bay City North Downtown Plan:

Bay City is a rural community of about 17,500 people two hours southwest of Houston. The study focuses on the creation of a revitalization plan for an area filled with vacant lots and brownfields north of its historic downtown. The plan focuses on the creation of quality mixed use development with a variety of available housing types to attract young professionals and needed jobs in the area, as well connections from the study area to its downtown.

Current Status: An advisory committee was established at the beginning of the project. Input has been gathered from more than 100 current and prospective residents, business leaders, and City staff members via interviews, focus groups, open houses, and advisory committee meetings. In January, the advisory committee approved the general approach, market analysis, and overall master plan. Currently, the consultant team is refining the design details and strategic planning concepts in anticipation of an elected and appointed official meeting in March. In addition implementation plan development is in its preliminary stages, which will include multiple development phases, financial and regulatory mechanisms, and strategic recommendations.

2. Bayou Greenway Initiative

The Bayou Greenway Initiative (BGI) Case Study will develop a mechanism to implement the segments of the BGI that are outside the limits of the City of Houston. The scope of the project will be limited to Cypress Creek from its confluence with Spring Creek to US 290 in Northwest Harris County. A major component of the case study will be developing the mechanisms for coordinating with the various jurisdictions along the corridors to help ensure continuity of the BGI. The mechanisms may include guidelines, funding recommendations, and development of Memorandum of Understanding or Memorandum of Agreements (MOU/MOA).

Current Status:

The project has currently kicked-off, the stakeholder advisory group has been formed, a public engagement plan has been finalized, the existing conditions of the study area have been completed, and the sustainability gap analysis is now underway. The stakeholder advisory group reviews the draft materials and deliverables and has been instrumental in identifying the appropriate mechanisms for reaching and engaging the jurisdictions and special districts within the study area.

The case study has a stakeholder advisory group that has been meeting at regular intervals in the project. The group has met on the following dates: Friday, December 14, Friday, January 18, and Friday, February 22. Two additional meetings of this group are currently scheduled, one each for March and April. The group is composed of civic leaders, commercial property owners, the president of the local community college, and other active and interested community leaders. The Public Involvement Plan has been completed and the draft report for Tasks 1 and 2 (Existing Conditions and Sustainability Gap Analysis) is being reviewed for comments.

3. Brazoria County

The study examines the entire coastal ecosystem of Brazoria County which includes several bays and estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico as well as the areas 20 miles of land inland from shore. The county seeks to develop a coastal master plan that includes a new set of Best Management Practices to handle and protect the coastal natural resources. The master plan will also include specific policy and planning recommendations to mitigate short and long-term impacts of future development in the coastal community.

Current Status: The consultant has begun the development of the sections and subsections that will serve as the core of the report. They are working on reviewing existing plans and studies that are related to habitat and the environmental aspects of the study area, reviewing the influence of storm surge inundation, salinity intrusion, hydrology of the Brazos River and the Brazoria County aquifers, and working on a natural resource inventory including the built environment and climate conditions. A needs assessment survey was sent out on November 28 received over 100 responses. It has been sent to over 800 people through various email lists and posted on many websites. Public meetings were held on January 29 in Angleton (hosted by TAMU Extension Service) and January 30 in Alvin, TX (hosted by Brazoria County Precinct 3). These meetings were attended by the County Commissioner's representative and Parks Board members. The consultant plans to meet with the Advisory Committee in mid-March once they have sent out sections of the report for review.

4. Galveston: Sustainable Return of Investment (SROI) Calculator:

The purpose of the study is to develop a Sustainable Return on Investment (SROI) framework that would act as a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis methodology for proposed city investments and initiatives. The SROI framework would provide a more accurate assessment of the costs and benefits of proposed investments by integrating their social and environmental impacts into the traditional financial analysis methodology. The SROI will be performed on three projects: curb-side recycling by either the city or a private entity; water conservation and grey water re-use; and implementing complete streets principals on a roadway segment. In addition to the SROI analysis will be completed on these projects, an excel-based model will be developed so that other communities may complete SROI on their own projects.

Current Status: A stakeholder advisory committee (SAC) has been formed made up of city appointees and staff. The SAC met in November to identify the projects to be analyzed and develop a public engagement strategy. The projects were chosen from a list of projects that have been identified from various city plans and initiatives. In December 2012, a survey instrument was released to the public to get feedback on the community values in their relation to sustainability. The results from the survey will be used to quantify the social, environmental, and economic benefits as part of the analysis.

5. Houston: Framework for Urban Development

The scope for this case study encompasses the City of Houston which includes both urban and suburban areas. The city faces several issues including urban sprawl, low density, and lack of pedestrian safety. The purpose of the study is to develop a comprehensive framework of policy tools and regulatory incentives the city can use to selectively encourage dense, sustainable neighborhoods in appropriate locations, while maintaining the character of existing neighborhoods. The case study will help integrate land use and transportation planning by

coordinating land development standards with new transit investments, and by providing affordable housing in dense areas around new transit lines.

Current Status: A stakeholder advisory committee (SAC) was formed in October of 2012 made up of city staff from various departments, developers, the local transit authority, housing interest, management district representatives, and H-GAC. The SAC meets on a monthly basis. To date, two series of focus groups, workshops and public meetings have been held and include the Vision and Values workshops held in early December (Dec. 4-5) and mid February (Feb 13-14), respectively. A vision, goals, and objectives have been developed, as well as an online survey instrument in which over 2,000 citizens have taken. Three pilot project areas will serve as test-cases for framework recommendations have been selected, the first is Westchase, a large suburban jobs and residential center; the second is in Montrose (near the intersection of Montrose and Westheimer), a popular thriving urban community; and the third area is in Third Ward (near the intersection of Old Spanish Trail, Griggs, and Cullen), in a underutilized commercial area near two large universities, the medical center, light rail, and residential areas. The pilot projects were toured on February 12.

6. Huntsville: Harnessing Huntsville's Potential

Huntsville is a rural city of roughly 30,000 people that has a jobs and housing imbalance and is seeking to comprehensively address the ability to create and maintain quality, affordability, and a range of housing options while subsequently attracting economic development. Currently the city contains a large renter population as well as a large amount of public land that is owned by the federal and state governments. The long term benefits of the study include positive branding, improvement of the housing stock, the increasing and diversification of the labor pool market, and the increasing and promotion of business expansion and development for the city.

Current Status: The City of Huntsville appointed a stakeholder advisory committee (SAC) made up of the school district, realtors, city planning and public works department representatives, Walker County, H-GAC, a hospital and a public university. The SAC meets monthly. To date, a round of focus groups and one public meeting have been held. Ten goals were developed based on community feedback from those meetings. Currently, recommendations and techniques to implement goals are being developed and will be presented to the public in the spring.

Recommended Action: Information only, no action needed.

Fair Housing Equity Assessment

Background

The Fair Housing Equity Assessment (FHEA) identifies baseline conditions for fair housing, social equity and areas of opportunity across the region, informs deliberations of the Coordinating Committee and informs the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. H-GAC will draw upon the expertise of three groups throughout the FHEA process: BBC Research & Consulting, the local Fair Housing and Equity Workgroup (FHEW), and the Kirwan Institute. The FHEW covers the regional transect and includes several local governments with housing programs, non-profits and fair housing and equity advocacy groups. While the work is regional in nature, specific analyses will be conducted at the county-level and for the 13 counties and 29 cities that are distributed across the urban, suburban, and rural typologies.

Responsibilities of FHEA contributors:

- H-GAC: Coordinator of other three parties, government liaison, writing of final FHEA
 - BBC: Data analysis, best practices, indices, capacity building
 - FHEW: local input, local context
 - Kirwan: opportunity mapping

The FHEA is comprised of 5 basic components. H-GAC will focus on a sample of local governments, representing the urban, suburban, rural and coastal areas of the region:

- Assessment of Primary Demographic Concerns
- Disparities in Access to Opportunity
- Fair Housing Activities
- Fair Housing Infrastructure/Systems
- Physical Infrastructure/Economic Investments

The final product will be a document that identifies potential issues, provides thoughts on overcoming potential issues, and presents best practices that could be useful to communities within the region. H-GAC will present findings in context with geographic settings (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural) and community size (i.e., town, small city, large city). Best practices and strategies will be based on proven successful efforts in peer areas from within Texas and across the nation.

Current Situation:

H-GAC negotiated confidentiality agreements with 10 housing authorities to obtain location information on housing choice vouchers. In the last quarter of 2012, H-GAC provided the Kirwan Institute with local data to enhance the opportunity maps and overlay analysis. On February 20, 2013, the FHEW convened for its second meeting to review and provide input on the Kirwan Institute's draft opportunity maps and overlay analysis. Kirwan Institute also provided results from one on one interviews held in late 2012 with members of the FHEW. H-GAC garnered comments on urban, suburban and rural typologies and potential uses from the FHEW members for projects in their own areas. Staff also proposed a graphic representation of the opportunity index and received comments.

Next Steps:

FHEA data, maps and analyses, meeting agendas and the workgroup roster will be posted on the OurRegion website during March 2013. The FHEW will work with Kirwan Institute and the FHEW to complete the opportunity mapping. H-GAC will also receive preliminary analysis from BBC on themes related to concentrations of race/ethnicity and poverty to be able to begin writing sections of the FHEA document. The FHEW will also reconvene in early March to review data analysis items and serve as a strategies focus group.

Recommended Action: Information only, no action needed.

PolicyLink Equity Profile

Background:

PolicyLink is one of the technical assistance providers designated by HUD to assist grantees. PolicyLink, in conjunction with PERE (USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity), are creating “Equity Profiles” for grantee areas across the nation. They selected our region to be the first one to create a profile for. The document covers the following topics:

- Demographics: Who lives in the region and how is this changing?
- Economic Vitality: How is the region doing on measures of economic growth and well-being?
- Readiness: How prepared are the region’s residents for the 21st century economy?
- Connectedness: Are the region’s residents and neighborhoods connected to one another and to the region’s assets and opportunities?

PolicyLink has been working on the Equity Profile since last summer. They have provided a number of opportunities for the Coordinating Committee to provide input to the various drafts of the document. One important change that was made based on committee feedback was to change the geography to match the 13-county area covered in the Regional Plan.

Current Situation:

A conference call was held on February 13 with PolicyLink and the Coordinating Committee. Final comments will be compiled by Meredith Dang of H-GAC staff and transmitted to PolicyLink. If you have any final comments please provide them via email to meredith.dang@h-gac.com.

Next Steps:

PolicyLink is interested in how the Coordinating Committee envisions utilizing the Equity Profile when the final report is available. They expressed an interest in having formal publicity and events surrounding the Equity Profile. If any partners have an interest in pursuing such an event please let H-GAC know.

H-GAC will make the final profile available on the project website and will use the profile in forming draft strategies. Specifically it is envisioned that an equity focus group could utilize the profile to frame discussions about the equity implications of the draft strategies. The profile will also inform the Fair Housing Equity Assessment, particularly if technical adjustments to the profile are made by PolicyLink to line up the two documents in terms of data points.

Recommended Action: Information only, no action needed.

Public Engagement

OurRegion Video Production:

Six area focused videos have been completed. Each video shows sustainable projects happening in our region. These videos will be launched in the spring of 2013 to draw attention to OurRegion and some sustainable measures that are already happening in the community. A longer “documentary” piece is still in the production stage. There are still a few interviews to complete in order to make this a well rounded effort. Individual focused videos will be available March 2013. This task is set for completion by April 2013.

Next Steps: Coordinating Committee Members are being asked how they can use these videos within their realm to draw attention to the planning process.

Focus Groups:

The consultant team, AECOM, and its engagement team assisted with recommendations for participants in the focus groups. AECOM and the engagement team will not be participating in the meeting facilitation of the focus groups. This task, as it pertains to the consultant team, has been completed.

Community Resource Guide:

The consultant team is working to produce a Community Resource Guide to help community members better understand how to navigate participation in their communities. This document is in a conception phase and is set to be completed in the fall of 2013 to be released in conjunction of the draft regional plan.

Plan Approval/Adoption:

The consultant team AECOM and its engagement team have put forth a plan of action to get the draft Regional Plan For Sustainable Development out to the public. They will also be responsible for the planning and execution of public meetings upon the release of the draft plan. This team is actively working on a timeline and deliverable schedule for to execute this task. This will be an ongoing task.

Recommended Action: Information only, no action needed.