



Houston-Galveston Area Council

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NEWS RELEASE

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REGION RECEIVES GRANT TO PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region Awarded \$3.75 Million to Develop Sustainability Plan

A \$3.75 million grant award brings the Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region one step closer to creating a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Transportation, awarded the grant to support more livable and sustainable communities in the 13 counties in the Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region. The Houston-Galveston Council accepted the award for the region.

“I am delighted to learn that the Houston-Galveston region has been selected to receive funding for sustainable regional planning,” said Jack Steele, H-GAC Executive Director. “This work will build upon previous efforts by many leaders to make a more livable region.”

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities (HUD/EPA/USDA/DOT) promoted the competitive selection process, and more than 200 eligible applications were reviewed by federal agencies and philanthropic organizations. Only 45 applicants from 27 states were chosen for funding. The Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region was one of only two selected from Texas.

“Waller County is proud to be a part of such a regional success,” said Vince Yokom, Executive Director for Waller County Economic Development Partnership. “This grant will go a long way in supporting our planning efforts and future growth for the region.”

To apply for the grant, H-GAC partnered with the City of Houston, Harris County, the United Way of Greater Houston and more than 20 other consortium partners to work together with a common goal of building a sustainable future for generations to come.

“For Huntsville and Walker County, this chance to work on a regional plan with the other 25 consortium members is exciting and a tangible way to shape our collective future,” said Dr. Sherry McKibben, Community Development Specialist for the City of Huntsville.

The application consortium included governmental agencies, both policy-making and service; non-profit/advocacy groups; educational institutions; and research agencies. The diverse experience of the members was meant to serve as an example of the region’s capacity to begin a dialogue around issues that have not previously been discussed across geographic and political

boundaries. All cities and counties will have the opportunity to become involved during the sustainability planning process.

“This is an amazing opportunity for government agencies to come together; to listen to the residents of their communities; and in turn, to one another, with the goal of making life in the future as livable as possible. In this rapidly growing region, the people here deserve no less,” said David Turkel, Director of Harris County Community Services.

The grants were awarded in one of two categories: grants for regional planning for sustainable development where such plans do not currently exist (the Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region grant falls in this category), and grants that support the implementation of existing sustainability plans. An initiative in the Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region’s plan will include building economic competitiveness by connecting housing with good jobs, quality schools and transportation.

"Houston is an affordable place to do business, but this grant will help the region become even more attractive by investing in affordable housing, transportation and environmental protection,” said Houston Mayor Annise Parker. “I appreciate that this combined approach has been recognized as a vital need by our federal government."

The 13-county Gulf Coast Planning Region is home to 6 million people with an anticipated increase in growth to more than 9 million people by 2035. The region also offers a diverse range of development patterns, ecological habitats and economic diversity.

“Our region's remaining ecological capital is one of our most valuable economic assets,” said John A. Cronin, CEO of Houston Wilderness. “It provides the most cost-effective flood control, improves our water quality, and increases our ability to attract high paying jobs. Planning for growth in a way that protects this asset requires cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries. This grant sets the stage for us to do just that.”

The Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region has some of the building blocks in place for sustainability (Livable Centers, Economic Development plans) and has a track record of interlocal collaboration. The overarching Regional Plan for Sustainable Development will address the interaction of land use, transportation, housing, economic development, infrastructure, and environment – and the social equity issues related to each. The plan, which will be developed over the next three years, will also include implementation strategies for the region’s urban, suburban, rural and coastal communities.

"Regional planning to ensure availability of affordable housing, viable public transportation, and ongoing economic development are essential to ensuring families are financially stable," said Anna Babin, president and CEO of United Way of Greater Houston. "This grant has the potential to improve quality of life across the region, particularly for vulnerable and underserved individuals and groups, and we are honored to be part of this planning effort"

The Regional Plan for Sustainable Development for the Houston Gulf Coast Planning Region will be developed by a representative consortium, comprised of the original application consortium and driven by extensive public engagement, technical advisement and fact-based analysis.

Hands-on stakeholder advisory groups, including subject matter experts and regional representatives, will assess existing conditions to create a baseline of sustainability in the region. The stakeholder groups will meet independently as well as collectively to coordinate efforts, share ideas and review recommendations. Resulting recommendations will be forwarded to a Governmental Advisory Committee, made up of elected officials, for further action. Public

engagement will be critical to the entire planning process, beginning with a public visioning exercise to develop regional goals and gain consensus on a regional vision for sustainability.

“Finally, we have an opportunity to plan for our region holistically, said Joanne Callahan Ducharme, Ph.D., Director of Montgomery County Community Development. “As service providers, we all know that multiple issues interact to create problems, and multiple issues have to be addressed in a concerted way to create an effective solution. This planning grant is our start on breaking down funding silos.”

Members of the application consortium include Bay City Community Development Corporation, Blueprint Houston and Center for Houston's Future, Bolivar Blueprint/Peninsula Development Coalition, Inc. (PenDeCo.), Brazoria County, Chambers County, City of Galveston, City of Houston, City of Huntsville, Fort Bend County, Greater Houston Builders Association, Gulf Coast Economic Development District, Harris County, Houston Advanced Research Center, Houston Tomorrow, Houston Wilderness, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO), Montgomery County, Neighborhood Centers, Inc., Port of Houston Authority, Texas Southern University, United Way of Greater Houston, VN TeamWork, Inc. and Waller County Economic Development.

"I thank President Obama and HUD for developing this new program. The goal of combining regional housing with employment opportunities, quality schools and transportation systems has the potential to be the best formula to take us into the next generation of community development," said U.S. Representative Al Green. "More stable and prosperous neighborhoods will be possible thanks to these competitive grants."

The grants are part of the Obama Administration's Partnership for Sustainable Communities, which brings EPA, HUD, USDA and DOT together to ensure that the agencies' policies, programs and funding consider affordable housing, transportation, and environmental protection together because interagency collaborations achieve better results for communities and use taxpayer money more efficiently.

"This opportunity for many community groups and agencies to sit down together and talk about Houston's tomorrow is a significant step in moving toward sustainability that improves the quality of life for everyone in the region," said David Crossley, President of Houston Tomorrow. "We look forward to a time, in 2036, on Houston's 200th birthday, when the Houston region is home to the healthiest, happiest, most prosperous people in the United States, and believe this grant will move us in that direction."

For more information or to participate as a stakeholder, please visit www.h-gac.com/community/sustainability or e-mail sustainability@h-gac.com.

Houston-Galveston Area Council

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (www.h-gac.com) is a voluntary association of local governments in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning Region—an area of 12,500 square miles and more than 5.7 million people. H-GAC works to promote efficient and accountable use of local, state, and federal tax dollars and serves as a problem-solving and information forum for local government needs.