

# Understanding Planning in Houston

Nycole C. Simpkins

Department of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy  
Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs  
Texas Southern University  
Project Mentor: Dr. Bradshaw Hovey

# Introduction

- ◆ Houston, Texas has a strong reputation as a city that refuses to plan for its future
- ◆ It has rejected conventional land use zoning
- ◆ Local law requires that Houston create a comprehensive plan

# Definition

- ◆ A comprehensive plan is an official public document that is adopted by a local government
- ◆ The contents of the plan are comprehensive, general, and long range
- ◆ A comprehensive plan is intended to “direct” development, rather than to “guide” it

Source: *The Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook, 2002.*

# A vision for Houston

How does the city prepare for  
comprehensive plan?

# Prototype Comprehensive Plan

## Work Plan

- ◆ Collect planning documents
- ◆ Review the assembled planning documents
- ◆ Analysis of planning documents
- ◆ Summarize the findings

# Collect planning documents

- ◆ Documents gathered from:
  - City of Houston Planning and Development Department
  - Websites
  - Civic Club meetings and public meetings
  - Private and public agencies

# Review of planning documents

- ◆ Thirty-eight plans were identified
- ◆ Plans ranged from 1995 to 2006
- ◆ Plans were categorized as:
  - Neighborhood plans
  - District plans
  - City-wide plans
  - Regional plans
  - Corridor plans

# Analysis of planning documents

## Levels Identified

- ◆ Neighborhood Plans- Ten
- ◆ District Plans- Nine
- ◆ City-wide Plans- Six
- ◆ Regional Plans- Eight
- ◆ Corridor Plans- Five

## Planning Documents Framework

- ◆ Title, Agency, Author
- ◆ Date
- ◆ Function
- ◆ Main vision, values, goals
- ◆ Key projects, programs,
- ◆ policies, recommendations

<F:\Summer2006\Corridor Plans Framework.doc>

# Summary of findings

## Commonalities

- ◆ Affordable Housing
- ◆ Air Quality
- ◆ Open Space Preservation
- ◆ Population Growth
- ◆ Job Growth
- ◆ Walkable Communities
- ◆ Flood Control
- ◆ Economic Development
- ◆ Urban Design
- ◆ Traffic congestion

<F:\Summer2006\Corridor Plans Commonalities.doc>

# Summary of findings

## Main Visions, Missions, and Goals

- ◆ Increase street and highway capacity
- ◆ Promote transit expansion
- ◆ Promote walking and bicycling
- ◆ Improve urban design
- ◆ Support affordable housing
- ◆ Protect historic resources
- ◆ Improve storm water management
- ◆ Invest in urban infrastructure
- ◆ Preserve and develop green space
- ◆ Improve Air Quality
- ◆ Improve public safety
- ◆ [Corridor Plans Analysis of visions.doc](#)

# Summary of findings

## Differences

- ◆ Geographical scope
- ◆ Agencies involved in the preparation
- ◆ Level of support
- ◆ Time frame
- ◆ Community participation

# Creating a comprehensive plan

- ◆ Demonstrate by developing a “prototype” comprehensive plan
  - Benefits
    - ◆ Show the common elements addressed in existing plans
    - ◆ Connect the visions of all existing plans
    - ◆ Simpler, cheaper, and less time consuming than the creation of an actual one
    - ◆ Give organizations a framework to follow while developing projects

# Conclusion

## Why plan?

- ◆ Growth projections of eight to eleven million people in the year 2040 metropolitan Houston
- ◆ The city cannot afford to allow continuation of challenges: traffic congestion, affordable housing, air quality, open space preservation, etc.
- ◆ Provide a better quality of live in preparation for future development projects
- ◆ Organize the city in becoming a livable community