

Other Harris County Actions

Fostering Decent Housing

To foster decent, safe, and affordable housing, Harris County will continue to collaborate and partner with local non-profit housing developers, for-profit builders and the residents of Harris County to measure the needs, discuss the issues and find solutions to problems of the Harris County housing market. Through these programs, Harris County will work to foster and maintain decent and affordable housing for low-income residents of Harris County through homeownership and rehabilitation programs.

Harris County will promote the transition of low-income families to self-sufficiency through funding support of homeownership programs. In addition, through the creation of the Harris County Housing Authority's homeownership program, Section 8 families and individuals are able to move toward becoming self-sufficient, thereby increasing the availability of rental assistance opportunities for at-risk families.

In an effort to remove barriers to affordable housing, Harris County will use the following strategies:

- (1) Promote and support affordable housing opportunities, including downpayment assistance programs, new construction, minor home repair, and rehabilitation of affordable housing units for the purpose of increasing the availability of housing for low-income persons.
- (2) Continue administering a Housing Resource Center that will be an information clearinghouse for persons in search of affordable housing in the Harris County service area.
- (3) Promote the development of collaborations and partnerships of both non-profit and for-profit builders, developers, and other interested parties for the purpose of increasing the capacity for the development of affordable housing in the Harris County service area.
- (4) Promote and assist in the development of applications for additional funds for the use in development of affordable housing in the Harris County service area, including LIHTC.
- (5) Promote and provide technical assistance for the review and revision of land-use regulations in cooperative cities that may present an obstacle in the development of affordable housing.
- (6) Ensure that the department will monitor both single- and multi-family contracts and construction for compliance with HOME, the Fair Housing Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Outreach

Harris County has created a partnership with the Harris County Housing Authority to provide information regarding its Downpayment Assistance Program (DAP) to individuals participating in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. Additionally, Harris County promotes DAP to other low-income individuals through housing fairs and segments on radio talk shows. HCCEDD has partnered with 170 mortgage brokers/lenders to ensure DAP has representation throughout Harris County.

Assessing Low Income Housing Availability

The ability to which the housing market is responding to household income needs is another factor affecting housing availability. To adequately meet the housing needs of all households, housing products must be available at a wide variety of prices. Due to current market conditions and strong higher-end housing demands, housing development in Harris County primarily meets the needs of higher income households. For reasons such as perception and low profit margins, the development and availability of low-income/affordable housing is not adequate to meet the needs of the low-income population.

There are approximately 4,656 multi-family, renter-occupied low-income housing units available in Harris County supported through federal and state programs. These units are supported by HUD's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs LIHTC Program. In addition to these units the Harris County Section 8 Program assists approximately 7,000 individuals monthly and 2,712 families (this number includes 864 disaster vouchers) with housing vouchers for housing units located throughout Harris County. In total, approximately eight percent of the multi-family housing stock is available specifically for low-income persons in the service area. The total number of affordable housing units available to low-income persons is not expected to decrease over the next 5 years. Five out of six low-income families who qualify for government housing assistance do not receive it because of the shortage of subsidized housing.

Evaluating/Reducing Lead-Based Paint Hazards

The Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services Department administers the Harris County Lead Hazard Control Program. This program tests for the presence of lead-based paint and provides abatement services to low-income households.

In accordance to HUD's lead-based paint reduction regulations, Harris County began implementing its Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction strategy in the fall of 2000. As a result, subrecipient training includes information regarding implementation, documentation and reporting on all housing activities that are affected by changes in regulations.

Anti-Poverty

According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, 14.9 percent of Harris County residents' incomes were below the poverty level within the previous 12 months. The largest household group below poverty level consisted of married-couples at 42 percent. However, the most severely impacted population was that of female head-of-household families with no spouse at 32 percent of households below poverty level. Of those female householders, 88 percent had related children under the age of 18.

This population must overcome significant barriers, such as the need for affordable housing, childcare, and increased employment opportunities, to reach a greater socio-economic status. The following programs and initiatives address the barriers that low-income individuals and families must overcome to rise above the poverty line.

Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)

The CDBG program provides funds to non-profit and governmental agencies to develop viable communities, provide decent housing and a suitable living environment, and expand economic opportunities, principally to low-income persons. This program is directed toward neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and the provision of community facilities and services.

Emergency Shelter Grants Program (ESG)

This program provides funds to local non-profit agencies that assist the homeless. These funds are used to expand and improve the availability of emergency shelters and transitional housing, provide social services essential to attaining self-sufficiency, and assist those at risk of becoming homeless.

HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME)

HOME is a partnership program between states, local governments, non-profit and for-profit organizations. It is designed to increase homeownership and affordable housing opportunities for low- and very low-income individuals through tenant-based rental assistance, housing rehabilitation, rental housing development, downpayment and mortgage assistance, new construction of multi- and single-family housing, property acquisition for permanent housing, and relocation expenses for temporary and permanent displacement.

American Dream Downpayment Initiative (ADDI)

ADDI is a component of the HOME Program and HCCEDD will incorporate these funds into its Downpayment Assistance Program. ADDI funds will be utilized in conjunction with HOME, CDBG or local TIRZ funds to increase the amount available to eligible first-time homebuyers.

ADDI funds have a limit of \$10,000 or 6% of the purchase price of the home (whichever is greater). HCCEDD's DAP Program will combine ADDI funds with either HOME, CDBG or TIRZ funds to award a total of \$14,200 for new homes and \$9,500 for resale homes. The department is continuing to add new Mortgage Lenders to DAP in order to ensure that the Harris County service area is covered for all potential low-income homebuyers who are eligible for this program.

Harris County Neighborhood Revitalization Strategies

Due to its unique nature, the urban county, which is largely the result of the sprawl of a large metropolitan city, suffers the ills of urban decline but benefits from the least federal programs offered to urban areas. This unique problem emphasizes the need for the urban county to be creative in solving problems for low-income areas, which, in Harris County's case, are many in number but far between in distance. Harris County's response to assisting its low-income communities is the development of the Harris County 2000 program. The main purpose of Harris County 2000, a neighborhood level planning process, is to stimulate the depressed HUD target areas in the county through a grassroots, community-oriented planning process. The ultimate goal of the planning process is the creation of an action plan specifically tailored to the community which identifies other resources available to assist in meeting the needs of the community.

Harris County 2000 has three phases: 1) awareness and preparation, 2) actual development of the plan, which consists of meetings to garner community input, and 3) implementation of the plan. Through the planning process, community residents guide direction and address problems critical to improving the quality of life.

Downpayment Assistance Program (DAP)

The department's Downpayment Assistance Program serves as the County's primary downpayment, closing cost, and mortgage assistance program. This program provides opportunities for homeownership to low-income persons. This program is funded with CDBG, HOME, ADDI, and TIRZ funds.

Harris County Home Repair Program - Minor

The Minor Repair program will provide grants for minor repairs (\$10,000 or less) of housing owned by eligible individuals. This program is funded with CDBG funds.

Harris County Home Repair Program - Health and Safety

The Health and Safety Program will provide grants to repair/replace water wells and septic systems that are no longer functioning as intended or that pose a health and safety hazard. This program is funded with CDBG funds.

Housing Resource Center

The Housing Resource Center provides referrals to Harris County Residents on housing related information and community resources available in Harris County. Referrals include information about emergency utility and financial supportive services and emergency, transitional and long-term housing.

Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program

The Harris County Housing Authority administers the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. This program provides rent subsidies for very low- and low-income individuals and families. The program offers participants the freedom of choice in finding units suitable to their needs and desires.

Economic Development Programs

HCCEDD houses the County's Economic Development division. This division is responsible for developing and implementing strategies that will stimulate Harris County's economy. The Economic Development division works with other taxing entities and economic development consortiums to implement programs that will convince businesses to build or expand within Harris County in order to revitalize communities. The Community Development and Economic Development divisions work together to ensure that TIRZ affordable housing set-aside funds are dedicated to the development of affordable housing throughout CEDD's service area. In addition to participating in the development of TIRZs, the county participates in the development of tax abatements. If the request is approved by Commissioners Court, the county will abate property taxes for up to ten years for owners of businesses that make new capital investments and commitments to job creation.

Benefits of Neighborhood Planning for HCCEDD target communities

Communities that are a part of HCCEDD's target neighborhoods slated for redevelopment gain a number of benefits from the planning process. Once a plan is developed, the community will receive priority consideration for Federal funding from HCCEDD, given that the project is consistent with goals and objectives identified during the neighborhood planning process. The process pulls together various forces in the community that promote positive community development.

The plan can be used as a basis for obtaining funding from federal, state and local governments, as well as private foundations, since it represents a well-defined strategy for redeveloping the area with a comprehensive focus. Organizations can partner with precincts to enhance local infrastructure development projects given that the precinct will coordinate capital improvement plans with HCCEDD's planning.

Typical Planning Process

The typical process for neighborhood planning is as follows:

- 1) Collect data and factual information on target area.
- 2) Identify issues and obstacles to neighborhood development.
- 3) Formulate goals, objectives and strategies to arrest negative patterns in these areas.
- 4) Develop final plan document.
- 5) Create neighborhood based Community Development Corporation (CDC) to implement revitalization activities.

Harris County has proposed to complete community plans for at least five target areas in the five-year planning period, as outlined in the 2003-2007 Consolidated Plan. During PY2004, CEDD submitted to HUD a Community Revitalization Strategy for the east Harris County communities of Barrett Station and Cloverleaf. During PY2002, the McNair community, located in East Harris County, was selected to participate in the neighborhood revitalization program. The plan was completed and submitted to the

community in August 2003. During PY2005 and PY2006, the Airline Community, located in north Harris County, also participated in the neighborhood revitalization program. The plan was completed and submitted to the community in April 2006. HCCEDD will select another target area for community planning activities in late 2006/early 2007 and expects to have the plan completed by October 2007.

Developing Institutional Structure/Enhancing Coordination

Coordination of Efforts, Institutional Change

Over the course of the past year the Harris County Commissioners Court has concentrated on the mission of community development, strengthening the administrative and financial oversight, and resolving all outstanding issues. As a result of Harris County's success in meeting the Court's goals, it continues to administer the County's HUD Entitlement Program.

Harris County will continue to maintain and improve the coordination of its internal divisions, as well as communication and coordination with other service providers, local governments and other county departments. Examples of how Harris County will continue its community development efforts are outlined below:

1. Harris County will continue working with the County's Public Infrastructure, Public Health and Environmental Services and Library Departments, as well as the County Commissioners' precincts. This department and the Public Infrastructure Department will continue to develop and implement strategies to address the County's capital improvement efforts in HCCEDD's target areas. Harris County works with the Public Health and Environmental Services Department (PHES) to provide much-needed health care services to low-income residents of Harris County. This department has also provided PHES funds to improve and/or expand current health clinics that are located within HCCEDD's target areas. Further, Harris County has established a partnership with the Library Department to improve current libraries and to assist in the building of libraries in HCCEDD's target areas. Harris County and the Library Department will continue to meet with residents, especially in the communities participating in HCCEDD's neighborhood revitalization programs, to ascertain the needs and desires for libraries within those communities. Harris County will also continue to work with the County Commissioners precincts to provide funding to implement the precincts' community development projects.
2. Harris County will continue to support non-profit organizations, Community Development Corporations (CDCs), Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO) and Community-Based Development Organizations (CBDO). The department will actively recruit eligible organizations to become CHDOs and CBDOs. In addition, the department will continue to offer regulatory training to these organizations in order to ensure a better understanding of CDBG, ESG and HOME rules. To further assist current CHDOs address operational issues, the department will encourage the organizations to

participate in HOME training programs, organizational development seminars and capacity-building workshops. CHDOs that do not agree to participate in training or meet other HUD regulatory requirements will not be eligible to apply for HOME CHDO set-aside funds or operational funds.

3. Harris County will continue to support the Harris County Housing Authority's efforts to expand the availability of affordable housing units.
4. Harris County and the City of Houston will continue to address common housing and community development issues and programs. Current marketing efforts for the DAP Program are being coordinated with the City of Houston and Southeast Texas Housing Finance Corporation. The goal is to improve community revitalization and the delivery of services within Harris County, and to better coordinate community development activities so that programs and services do not overlap and are absent from any specific population or geographic location.

Affirmative Marketing, Minority/Women's Business Outreach

All subrecipients of Harris County are contractually obligated to follow affirmative marketing procedures and requirements in accordance with 24 C.F.R. § 92.351 of the HOME Program, for HOME-assisted housing containing 5 or more housing units. The affirmative marketing steps consist of actions to provide information and otherwise attract eligible persons from all racial, ethnic, and gender groups in the housing market area to the available housing. Harris County will annually assess the affirmative marketing program to determine the success of affirmative marketing actions and any necessary corrective actions.

Affirmative Action

1. Approved Plan
The Harris County Subrecipient agrees that it shall be committed to carry out, pursuant to the Grantee's specifications, an Affirmative Action Program in keeping with the principles as provided in President's Executive Order 11246 of September 24, 1965. The Grantee shall provide Affirmative Action guidelines to the Subrecipient to assist in the formulation of such program. The Subrecipient shall submit a plan for an Affirmative Action Program for approval prior to the award of funds.
2. M/WBE - Minority/Women's Business Enterprises
The Harris County Subrecipient will use its best efforts to afford minority- and women-owned business enterprises the maximum practicable opportunity to participate in the performance of this contract. The term "minority and women business enterprise" means a business at least fifty-one (51) percent owned and controlled by minority group members or

women. For the purpose of this definition, "minority group members" are Afro-Americans, Spanish-speaking, Spanish surnamed or Spanish-heritage Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians. The Harris County subrecipient may rely on written representations by businesses regarding their status as minority and women business enterprises in lieu of an independent investigation.

Harris County's Affirmative Marketing Policy and Procedures

Harris County has adopted policies and procedures regarding affirmative marketing for housing containing five or more HOME-assisted units.

This affirmative marketing policy pertains to all Harris County subrecipients, internal homeownership programs, and all CHDOs receiving HOME program funds for HUD-assisted housing containing five or more units. Harris County will annually assess the affirmative marketing program to determine its success and will take any necessary corrective actions.

The affirmative marketing requirements and procedures include the following:

1. Harris County will use the Equal Housing Opportunity logo and/or slogan in all press releases or notices to the public or solicitations pertaining to housing of more than five units.
2. Harris County will require owners of HUD-assisted housing of five or more units to adhere to the following:
 - a) When advertising or listing vacancies, owners must use major and community newspapers, community contacts and the Equal Housing Opportunity logo or slogan. Owners must also display the Fair Housing poster in high traffic areas on the premises of the assisted housing.
 - b) Owners must perform special outreach to persons in the housing market area who are not likely to apply for the housing without special outreach. Targets of special outreach could include community centers, places of worship, employment centers, housing counseling agencies, etc.
 - c) Harris County will assess the results of efforts taken by the owners to affirmatively market the housing units. Copies of all materials used to affirmatively market the housing and records describing actions taken by the owner to affirmatively market the housing must be submitted to the Harris County on a quarterly basis. The quarterly report must also include information on families residing within the property. The family information must include the following: the number of units and monthly rent (utilities included) by bedroom size; number of tenants remaining in

place; size of household and for each head of household, age, race, sex, and gender.

Harris County will assess the success of the affirmative marketing efforts. If the affirmative marketing efforts do not result in attracting eligible persons from all racial, ethnic and gender-groups in the housing market area, Harris County will determine the necessary corrective actions. Owners that fail to comply with affirmative marketing requirements will face the possibility that reimbursement payments will be abated until corrective action is taken. If the owner fails to take corrective action in a timely manner, the remainder of the grant funds will be due and payable upon demand.

The following table details the number of households estimated to be assisted with downpayment assistance in PY2007. This information is based upon data collected during the previous program year.

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Asian	4	4%
Black	39	38%
Hispanic	45	44%
White	14	14%
Totals	102	100%

Geographic Distribution

When selecting projects to receive funding, HCCEDD considers geographic location to ensure equitable distribution of resources throughout Harris County. Factors considered include concentration of low-income persons, concentration of minorities, proximity to other similar projects, proximity to amenities and consistency with community needs.

Concentration of Low-Income Persons

Harris County defines a concentration of low-income persons as a block group in which at least 51 percent or more of the total population is low-income according to HUD guidelines. Forty-two areas within the county meet this criterion, and HUD has designated these areas as Target Areas for community development in Harris County. Priority consideration is given to projects that impact these target areas, particularly those that provide local impact, such as infrastructure projects and community centers.

For PY2007, 12 projects were selected to specifically meet infrastructure and public facility needs in 9 of the 42 target areas, including Barrett Station, Channelview, Cloverleaf, Galena Park, Greenwood, Humble, LaPorte, Linus, and McNair. Additionally, two of the 15 cooperative cities are to be assisted with meeting priority needs for low-income persons. Cooperative city projects include infrastructure improvement and public services.

Appendix D contains a map illustrating all proposed projects in relation to the low-income areas of the county.

Concentration of Minorities

Harris County defines a concentration of racial minorities as a census tract in which 30 percent or more of the total population is non-white. Minority concentration and low-income areas coincide within Harris County. Primarily, minorities are concentrated within the incorporated areas.

Sixteen of the proposed projects are located within areas of 51 percent or greater minority concentration. Appendix D contains a map illustrating locations of proposed projects in relation to areas of minority concentration.

Note: Five of the 44 proposed projects are not included on the maps because they are housed in Harris County administrative offices. Services occur throughout the Harris County Service Area. These five projects are:

- 1) Harris County Home Repair Program - Health and Safety
- 2) Harris County Home Repair Program - Minor
- 3) Harris County Downpayment Assistance Program
- 4) Harris County ADDI Downpayment Assistance Program
- 5) Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services Nuisance Abatement Program

The full listing of the remaining 44 projects is included in Appendix D.