

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, the Harris County Housing Authority 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, rehabilitation programs, and new construction projects.

Harris County will promote the transition of low-income families to self-sufficiency through funding support of homeownership programs. In addition, through the Harris County Housing Authority's Independence Homeownership Program, families participating in the Housing Choice Voucher Program with steady incomes and good credit to build equity and establish roots in their communities by purchasing a home.

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, especially in areas where such opportunities are not present.
- (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 and Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity requirements.

Outreach

Through the Housing Resource Center, Harris County has created partnerships with the Harris County Housing Authority and the real estate community to make available a resource of affordable housing and community resources. The HRC offers recorded information for housing and emergency assistance in English and Spanish, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling (713) 578-2055. Additionally, Harris County promotes housing resources to the community through housing fairs and segments on radio talk shows. As part of HCCSD's DAP, Harris County has also partnered with 153 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.

While public housing does not exist in the Harris County service area, there are approximately 4,656 multi-family, renter-occupied affordable housing units available that are supported through federal and state programs. These units are supported by HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly known as Section 8). In addition to these units the Harris County Housing Choice Voucher Program has expanded and assists approximately 3,883 families (this number includes 128 DVP- Disaster Vouchers Program and 80 Moderate Rehab Section 8 tenants including SRO formerly homeless participants) with housing vouchers for housing units located throughout Harris County. As part of the Ike Disaster Housing Assistance Program, the Harris County Housing Authority currently services an additional 1,986 vouchers for the Harris County service area.

Evaluating/Reducing Lead-Based Paint Hazards

The Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services Department (PHES) administer the Harris County Lead Hazard Control Program. In 2008, PHES received a \$1,740,375 grant to execute the Lead Hazard Reduction Demonstration Program for a period of 3 years. This program tested for the presence of lead-based paint and provided abatement services to 76 low-income households since the award. Additionally, PHES has applied for and receives CDBG funds as match to their 3 year grant.

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.

Addressing Homelessness

In 2005, an estimated 12,000 persons were identified as homeless within Houston and Harris County. Of the identified homeless population, 35 percent require long-term care, 55 percent require on-going periodic care, and 10 percent require temporary care in order to reach self-sufficiency. In addition, a 2006 inventory of permanent housing beds showed an unmet need of 7,289 housing units.

Harris County collaborates with the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, the City of Houston and service providers to develop and implement strategies to address homelessness, including:

- (1) Participation in the Continuum of Care Collaborative to coordinate the community-based process of identifying needs, building a system to meet those needs and facilitating individual agency applications to HUD.
- (2) Support for the renovation and rehabilitation of emergency and transitional shelters to provide decent housing to homeless persons.
- (3) Outreach and homeless prevention services to persons and families at risk of homelessness.
- (4) The provision of supportive services, including but not limited to child care, employment assistance, outpatient health services, case management, and assistance in locating and accessing permanent housing.

Funded programs provide housing and supportive services that will assist the homeless in becoming economically independent.

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 the 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 the 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.

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.

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.

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, TIRZ and HCHFC funds.

Harris County Home Repair Program - Health and Safety

The Health and Safety Program will provide grants (\$40,000 or less) 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. An easy-to-use search tool helps individuals locate affordable housing and view property features (including accessibility), amenities, pictures, and maps. Properties included are updated bi-weekly and a housing specialist is available to provide assistance. During the fall of 2008, following Hurricane Ike, the Disaster Assistance Recovery Center website was created to assist County residents to provide information and resources following major disasters.

Housing Choice Voucher Program

The Harris County Housing Authority administers the 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 throughout the jurisdiction's service area.

Economic Development Programs

HCCSD 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 Housing & 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 HCCSD'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.

Limited English Proficiency

Harris County has taken several efforts this year in accordance with the Final Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons.

In order to provide written language services, all brochures dedicated to HUD funded programs have been translated into both Spanish and Vietnamese. Brochures are utilized and distributed at all outreach events within the community. Written translations are also available on the CSD website which is accessible to anyone with a computer.

Additionally, oral language services are available for our transit programs and some of our housing programs, including the Downpayment Assistance Program, H.O.M.E. Program and both Minor Home Repair and Health & Safety Home Repair Programs. The Department utilizes Language Line® Over-the-phone Interpretation Services whereby an interpreter is available to provide individuals calling into the office with assistance in their preferred language.

Benefits of Neighborhood Planning for HCCSD Target Communities

Communities that are a part of HCCSD'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 HCCSD, 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 HCCSD's Planning Section as well as Public Infrastructure Department.

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 2008-2012 Consolidated Plan. The Consolidated Plan has a description of the Harris County target areas, goals, strategies, and an application for a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy for the Airline Community. Within the Consolidated Plan, Harris County will seek to complete one target area community plan per year. No community plans were developed in PY2009.

Developing Institutional Structure/Enhancing Coordination

Coordination of Efforts, Institutional Change

Harris County Commissioners Court focuses on the mission of community development, strengthening the administrative and financial oversight and resolving all outstanding issues. In complying with the Court's goals and administering the County's HUD Entitlement Program, HCCSD 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. The Community Services Department will continue working with the Public Infrastructure, Public Health and Environmental Services (PHES) and Library Departments, as well as the County Commissioners' Precincts. Efforts with the Public Infrastructure Departments will continue in order to develop and implement strategies to address the capital improvement efforts in the County's target areas. Coordination with PHES will continue to provide much-needed health care services to low-income residents of Harris County. Funding is also provided to PHES to improve and/or expand current health clinics that are located within the County's target areas. Coordination with the Public Library Department works to ensure improvements to current libraries and to assist in the building of libraries in the County's target areas. The Community Services and Public Library Department will continue to meet with residents, especially in the communities participating in neighborhood revitalization programs, to ascertain the needs and desires for libraries within those communities. Community Services will also continue to work with the 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.

Harris County's Affirmative Marketing Policy and Procedures

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. Advertising and marketing must be conducted in a manner that ensures equal access to housing opportunities generated through the use of HOME Program funds. In addition to the nondiscriminatory advertising guidelines that are imposed by the Fair Housing Act for all housing providers, public and private, the HOME Program imposes specific affirmative marketing requirements, designed to ensure that all HOME funded developments are accessible to members of the protected classes. Effective affirmative marketing procedures specifically describe the steps that must be taken to advertise to those tenants who are not likely to apply for the housing without special outreach. Affirmative marketing may be a part of a larger, more general marketing strategy focused on reaching all potential tenants. 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 following outlines the approaches being taken by HCCSD to address these two concerns.

Harris County Affirmative marketing Procedures

HCCSD shall inform the public, potential tenants/homebuyers and owners about its policy and fair housing laws through the following, but not limited to:

- a. Placement of public notice in the Houston Chronicle and other forms of local community press, dissemination of Fair Housing brochures;
- b. Providing written information about the Fair Housing Laws to sponsors/supporters of affordable housing projects;
- c. Use of the Equal Housing Opportunity logotype and/or slogan in all press releases or notices to the public or solicitations pertaining to housing;
- d. Notify the local Houston Community Housing Resource Board on an annual basis of its commitment to an affirmative marketing program; and
- e. Specify the media source(s) to be used to advertise for targeted audiences.

Affordable Housing Affirmative Marketing Procedures

HCCSD will require project sponsors of affordable housing projects with five (5) or more units that are requesting /or are in receipt of federal funds, to use affirmative fair housing marketing practices in soliciting potential tenants/homebuyers, determining their eligibility, and concluding all transactions. Project sponsors must comply with the following procedures for the duration of the compliance/affordability period.

a. Advertising

Project sponsors must display The Equal Opportunity logo or slogan in all ads, brochures, and all written communications must be published in multiple languages to reach non-English-speaking audiences. Advertising media may include, but is not limited to the Houston Chronicle (or other local wide circulation newspapers), other forms of local media, such as radio/television, community newsletters, brochures, or an on-site sign.

b. Special Outreach

Project sponsors must solicit applications for vacant units from persons in the housing market who are least likely to apply for affordable housing without the benefit of special outreach efforts. HCCSD recommends the following method for achieving outreach objectives:

- i. Positioning of Informational flyers in Minority Neighborhoods:
The targeting of specific neighborhoods or organizations, whose membership is composed primarily of protected class members, for the distribution of informational flyers may provide an acceptable level of information dissemination.

ii. Minority-Specific Media: Affordable housing opportunities may be advertised in minority-specific newspapers.

iii. Distribution of unit availability to community organizations, places of worship, fair housing groups, housing and social services centers.

c. Fair Housing Poster

Project sponsor must display the Fair Housing poster in high traffic areas on the premises of the assisted housing (rental offices or other appropriate locations).

d. Record Keeping

In accordance with HUD, HCCSD requires all affordable housing projects requesting/or in receipt of federal assistance from HCCSD are required to maintain a filing system containing documentation of all marketing efforts (copies of newspaper ads, memos of phone calls, copies of letters, flyers, etc.). In addition to documentation for all marketing efforts, owners of project should maintain a listing of all tenants residing in each unit. These records must be readily available for inspection by HCCSD.

Assessment & Corrective Actions

HCCSD shall complete a written assessment of Affirmative Marketing efforts in time to report results in the annual performance report to HUD. This assessment will cover marketing relative to units first made available for occupancy during the Program Year. The assessment will be made for projects with (5) or more units requesting/or in receipt of federal assistance from HCCSD.

a. Basis of Assessment

HCCSD will assess the results of efforts taken by the property owners and managers to affirmatively market the housing units. Copies of all materials used to affirmatively market the housing and records describing actions taken by them to affirmatively market the housing must be submitted to HCCSD on a quarterly basis.

b. Corrective Action

HCCSD will assess the success of the affirmative marketing efforts. If the affirmative marketing efforts do not result in attracting eligible persons from diverse populations in the housing market area, HCCSD will determine the necessary corrective actions. Project owners that fail to comply with affirmative marketing requirements will be found out of compliance and may be unable to receive future federal assistance until

corrective action is taken. If the project sponsor fails to take corrective action in a timely manner, one or all of the following actions may result:

- a. Expended funds will be due and payable upon demand
- b. The withholding of federal funds for current projects/funds for projects will be de-obligated.
- c. Compliance/affordability period extension.
- d. Exclusion from participation in future Requests for Proposal process.

The following table details the number of minority households estimated to be assisted with HCCSD's DAP in PY2010. This information is based upon data collected during the previous program year.

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Asian	5	4%
Black	43	38%
Hispanic	51	44%
White	16	14%
Totals	115	100%

Geographic Distribution

When selecting projects to receive funding, HCCSD 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 (42) areas within the County meet this criterion, and HUD has designated these areas as Target Areas for community development. 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 PY2010, eight projects were selected to specifically meet infrastructure and public facility needs in eight (8) of the 42 target areas, including Aldine, Crosby, Granada, Marwood-DeZavalla, McNair, Sherwood Place, Webster and Woodsdale.

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.

Eleven (11) of the proposed projects are located within areas of 30 percent or greater minority concentration. Appendix D contains a map illustrating locations of proposed projects in relation to areas of minority concentration.

Note: Six of the 45 proposed projects are not included on the maps because they are housed in Harris County Departments. Services occur throughout the Harris County Service Area. These five projects are:

- 1) Harris County Community Services Non-emergency Medical Transportation Program
- 2) Harris County Community Services Health and Safety Home Repair Program
- 3) Harris County Community Services Minor Home Repair Program
- 4) Harris County Community Services Downpayment Assistance Program
- 5) Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services Nuisance Abatement Program
- 6) Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services Lead Hazard Control

The full listing of the remaining 39 projects is included in Appendix A.