

connect
community

A Revitalization Plan for Gulfton- Sharpstown



Prepared by:
**asakura
robinson**
December 2018

KIPP TEXAS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LEGACY
COMMUNITY HEALTH




St. Luke's
United Methodist Church

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the following partners in this process:

SPONSOR	STAKEHOLDERS	
Purpose Built Communities	8 Million Stories	Houston Endowment: The Center for School Behavioral Health
CONNECT COMMUNITY FOUNDERS	ABC Dental	Houston Parks Board
Legacy Community Health	Alliance Drivers Education Office	Houston Public Library
St. Lukes United Methodist Church	Alliance for Multicultural Community Services	Indus Management Group
KIPP: Texas Public Schools	Alora Apartments	Kinder Institute for Urban Research
YMCA	Azalea Apartments	La Unidad Once
ELECTED OFFICIALS	BikeHouston	Las Madres del Parque
City of Houston Council Member Mike Laster	BOUNCE	LINK Houston
Texas State Representative Gene Wu	Breakthrough	Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
CO-FACILITATORS	Christian Community Service Center (CCSC)	Maximus
Legacy Community Health	City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department	Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees
Collaborative for Children	City of Houston Office of New Americans	Prestige Learning Institute
Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO)	City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department	ProSalud
GSM Architects	City of Houston Planning and Development Department	San Miguel Apartments
CONSULTANT TEAM	City of Houston Public Health Department	Seeds of Sharpstown
Asakura Robinson	Community Health Choice	SER Niños
1902 Washington Ave., Suite A	Etoile Academy	Sharpstown Baptist Church
Houston, TX 77007	Families Empowered	Southwest Management District
www.asakurarobinson.net	Gulfton Superneighborhood Council	Sutton Elementary School
	Healthy Living Matters	Triumph Equity
	Houston-Galveston Area Council	Uber
	Houston Center for Literacy	University of Texas School of Public Health
	Houston Community College	Wesley Community Center
		Wisdom High School
		YES Prep Gulfton
		YMCA International
		Young Audiences of Houston

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Executive Summary

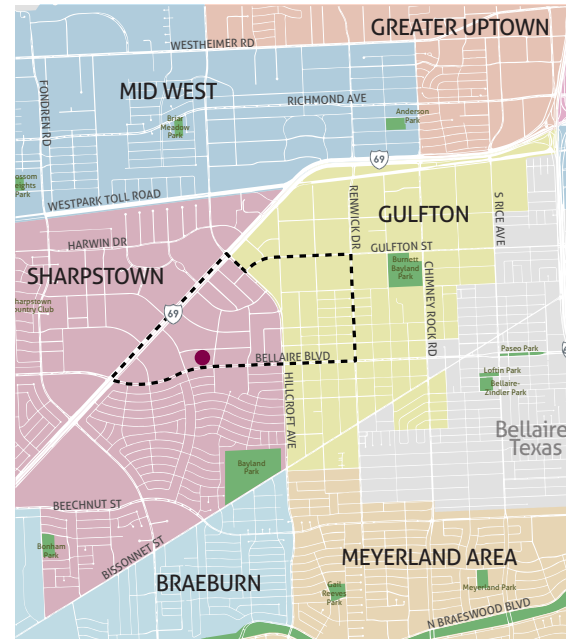


Who is Connect Community?

Connect Community is a non-profit collaboration between community leaders and organizations in Gulfton-Sharpstown focused on advancing holistic revitalization and breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. This is forged by bringing together the vital components necessary for holistic transformation based on the nationally-recognized Purpose Built model -- high quality mixed-income housing, an effective cradle-to-college education pipeline, and comprehensive community wellness resources, organized and driven by a single purpose non-profit community quarterback. The four founding partners, KIPP: Texas Public Schools, Legacy Community Health, St. Luke's United Methodist Church, and the YMCA of Greater Houston, have been supporting the community for years and formed a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, Connect Community, to serve as that 'community quarterback' to engage community members, build partnerships, secure funding, and ensure implementation of the housing, education, and wellness components of the model as part of the community's vision.

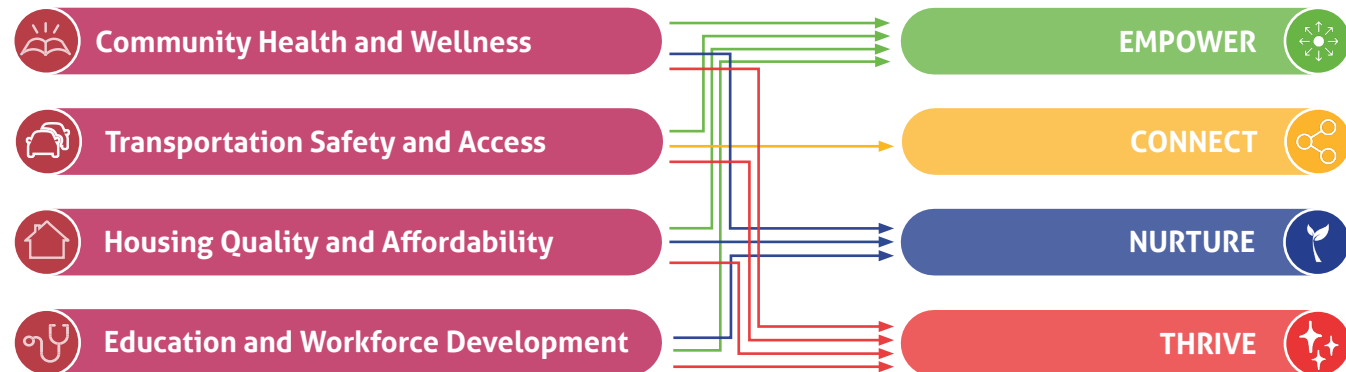
What was the Connect Community Revitalization Plan process?

From October 2017 through January 2018, Connect Community and partners brought together over 70 organizations, neighborhood groups, and public agencies to strategize an action plan for Gulfton-Sharpstown. Four workgroups of stakeholders worked collaboratively to create visions for housing affordability and quality, transportation access and safety, community health and wellness, and education and workforce development. The planning team grouped the workgroups' input into four themes – Empower, Connect, Nurture, and Thrive – and worked to elaborate on key implementation steps and Connect Community's role as the "community quarterback" in each of these areas.



Impact Zone Boundary and Surrounding Neighborhood

In order to measure the impact of proposed strategies and actions, Connect Community defined an "Impact Zone" comprised of three census tracts that span the boundary of the Gulfton and Sharpstown neighborhoods. The Impact Zone is shown as a dotted line in the map above. While many of the strategies and actions proposed in the full report will benefit community members throughout Gulfton, Sharpstown, and other adjacent neighborhoods, Connect Community will focus on its investments and measure outcomes within the Impact Zone.



Key Themes and Strategies



Theme 1: Empower

Ensure community residents are empowered to take leadership roles in changing the Impact Zone and neighborhood.

Strategies

- Develop a multilingual community connector program with community coaches and technology that will assist newcomers in connecting to resources.
- Foster civic engagement and community solutions by empowering and developing youth and adult leaders



Theme 2: Connect

Connect residents to local destinations, jobs, and services with safe and comfortable transportation choices.

Strategies

- Establish a network of walkable streets that connect to the area's major destinations, streets, schools, transit stops and parks
- Add new transit options and infrastructure to benefit Gulfton residents and businesses
- Examine how Gulfton residents travel, including their use of technology, in order to better serve their transportation needs



Theme 3: Nurture

Create a spiritually-rich, active, healthy, and nurturing community.

Strategies

- Celebrate Gulfton's diverse cultures
- Support residents to live long and healthy lives
- Offer all residents access to high-quality education
- Improve the quality and mix of existing housing stock



Theme 4: Thrive

Enable residents to thrive in the metropolis with assets like job training, entrepreneurship support, and quality housing choices.

Strategies

- Support living-wage jobs and entrepreneurship
- Develop public amenities that bring people together as a community
- Build an intentionally diverse and mixed-income community

Moving the Vision Forward

Moving this vision forward requires a collaborative group of stakeholders working together. Connect Community and the Superneighborhood Council will serve in the community quarterback role, providing needed support to ensure the vision advances. Many of these strategies are already in motion with the help of stakeholders and partner organizations from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. See the Implementation Chapter (p. 96 - 113) for a list of recommended public financing mechanisms, stakeholders, grants, and partnership opportunities, including the recent Opportunity Zone designation.



Example Opportunity for Collaborative Improvement:
Hillcroft Avenue at High Star Drive and Westward Street

This conceptual image shows Hillcroft Avenue at High Star Drive. The concept includes bikeways identified as short-term priorities in the Houston Bike Plan and Complete Communities Gulfton Action Plan. In order to take advantage of the collaborative momentum established by these plans and the Connect Community planning process, there is a strong opportunity for Connect Community and its transportation stakeholders to work with the City of Houston to achieve this placemaking and connectivity vision.

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Background and Planning Process



Connect Community's Mission:

"EVERY CHILD AND ADULT WILL LEAD A HEALTHY, PROSPEROUS LIFE IN A SAFE AND VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOOD IN WHICH RESIDENTS CHOOSE TO LIVE, LEARN, WORK, WORSHIP, AND PLAY!"

Background

Connect Community is a collaboration between community leaders seeking to drive positive change in Gulfton-Sharpstown, helping to shape the area into a healthy, complete neighborhood. The four founding partners, KIPP: Texas Public Schools, Legacy Community Health, St. Luke's United Methodist Church, and the YMCA of Greater Houston, formed the 501(c)3 non-profit organization Connect Community to address their community's needs in housing, workforce development, education, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

The Gulfton-Sharpstown area is a densely populated neighborhood, which has grown into one of Houston's main gateway neighborhoods for immigrant families. Culturally diverse businesses and families are readily apparent when visiting the two neighborhoods. Many refugees and immigrants have recently moved to the area and many local organizations focus on providing resources to these communities.

Connect Community serves this diverse population by applying the Purpose Built Communities model, which serves to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty through holistic community revitalization. In this model, a "community quarterback" leads the revitalization initiative by building partnerships, engaging the neighborhood, and identifying attainable goals and action plans.

Through their role as the "community quarterback," Connect Community is working with partners on several parallel efforts to define goals and advance community revitalization. They have led the planning process that generated this document, with extensive input from residents and stakeholders. Simultaneously, Connect Community and the YMCA have invested \$2.5 million in KIPP's Cafegymatorium to offer community programs as phase 1 of their two-phase community hub vision. Phase 2 will offer a full-sized YMCA with a health clinic, teen zone, immigration services, and more.

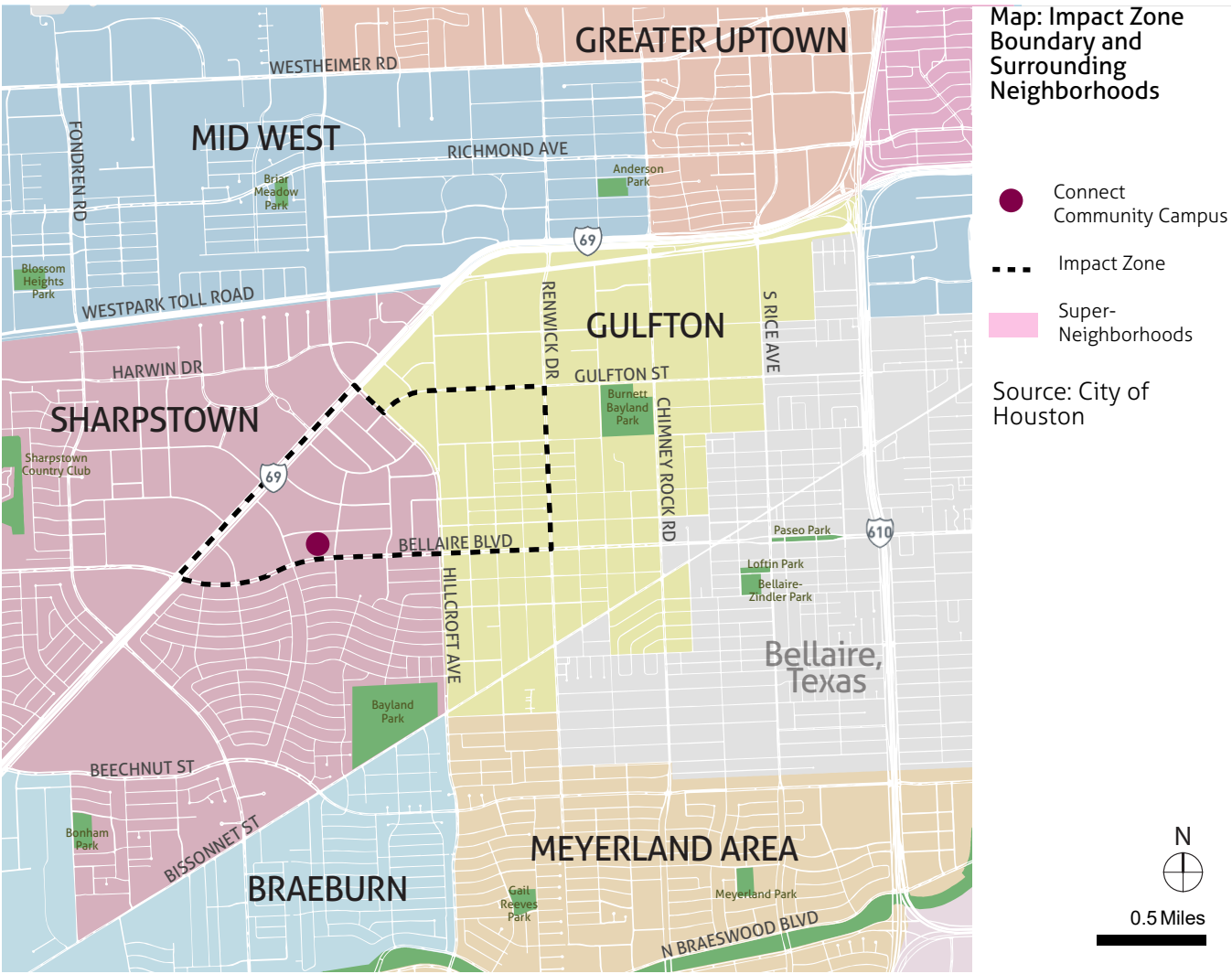


Impact Zone Study Area

Connect Community has defined an "Impact Zone" within the Gulfton-Sharpstown area in order to focus their efforts and create clear boundaries for measuring the future impact of this collaborative effort. The Impact Zone is a clearly delineated geographic area, based on census tracts, that extends approximately one mile around the Connect Community Campus at 6700 Bellaire Boulevard. The Impact Zone is bounded by Bellaire Boulevard to the south, US 59/IH 69 to the west, Gulfton Street to the north, and Renwick Drive to the east, and

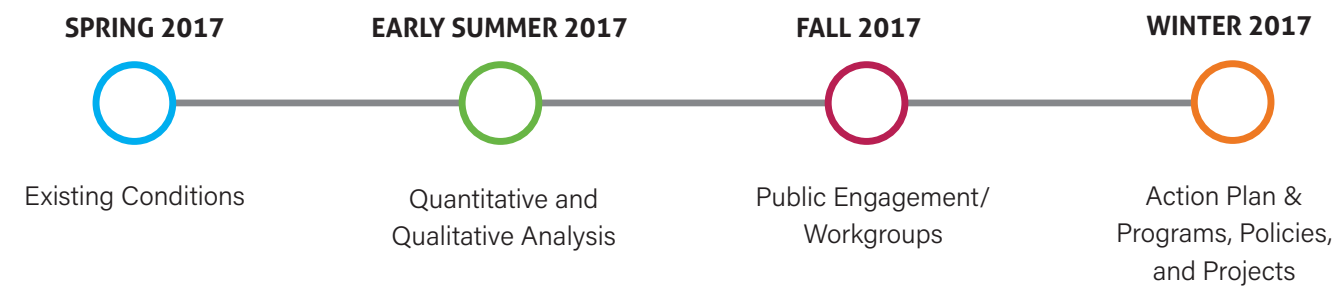
incorporates US Census Tracts 4213, 4214.01, 4214.02, and 4214.03. The Impact Zone includes parts of both the Gulfton and Sharpstown super neighborhoods.

The strategies and actions defined in this collaborative community plan are all designed to create significant impact for residents who live, work, and learn in the Impact Zone, and primary measurement of results will occur within the Impact Zone. However, many of the strategies will also benefit areas adjacent to the Impact Zone in the Gulfton-Sharpstown neighborhoods.



Action Plan Process

The Action Plan is informed by a combination of three major milestones in the project -- a conditions assessment to analyze socioeconomic trends and performance measures; focus groups and interviews to better understand residents' needs; and, workgroup sessions to develop implementation strategies with stakeholders and community leaders. The timeline below demonstrates these activities and how they unfolded over the last 18 months.



Conditions Assessment

Asakura Robinson developed an existing conditions assessment titled "Briefing Book Connect Community Impact Zone" in Spring of 2018 that detailed demographic, land use, economic, and mobility conditions in the Impact Zone. This information, collected from U.S. Census data, regional sources, and local governments was developed as a resource to the workgroups who would later be developing goals and action steps during the public engagement process.

Multilingual Focus Groups

Connect Community and All Kids Alliance embarked on focus groups and interviews between November 2016 and April 2017 with support from Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Culture of Advancing Health Together (CHAT), and Avenue CDC. Findings were summarized in a report titled, Community Needs Assessment: A Preliminary Report on the Qualitative Data Study. Twelve focus groups were held with over eighty Impact Zone residents in over six different languages (Spanish, Pashto, Arabic, Swahili, Urdu, and English) and fourteen interviews were conducted with

key stakeholders that included church, school, civic, and business leaders. Results provide a more nuanced understanding for people's experiences on topics of quality of life, housing, transportation, education, workforce, services for newcomers, and more. For example, results demonstrated a difference between focus group participants and stakeholders, in particular, general confusion by focus group participants on the American educational system where stakeholders were unsatisfied by the quality and funding provided to local schools. Please see Appendix A for the full report.

Conceptual Rendering, Hornwood Drive at Rookin Street.
Image Source: AIA Houston Complete the Community Urban Design Competition, Asakura Robinson and R.G. Miller Engineers Award Winning Submittal. August 2018.



Workgroups with Stakeholders

Four workgroups were established along topic areas (Health, Transportation, Housing, and Education) to develop vision statements through the Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG) method. Participants were also responsible for identifying goals, objectives and strategies that partner organizations and neighbors could work toward in implementation of the BHAGs. Each workgroup included neighborhood leaders and subject matter experts, meeting during three rounds of sessions that started October 2017 and ended January 2018 and totaling twelve workshops during that timespan. A co-facilitator (i.e. lead stakeholder) was selected for each group to assist the consultant team in facilitating sessions and guiding dialogue with participants.

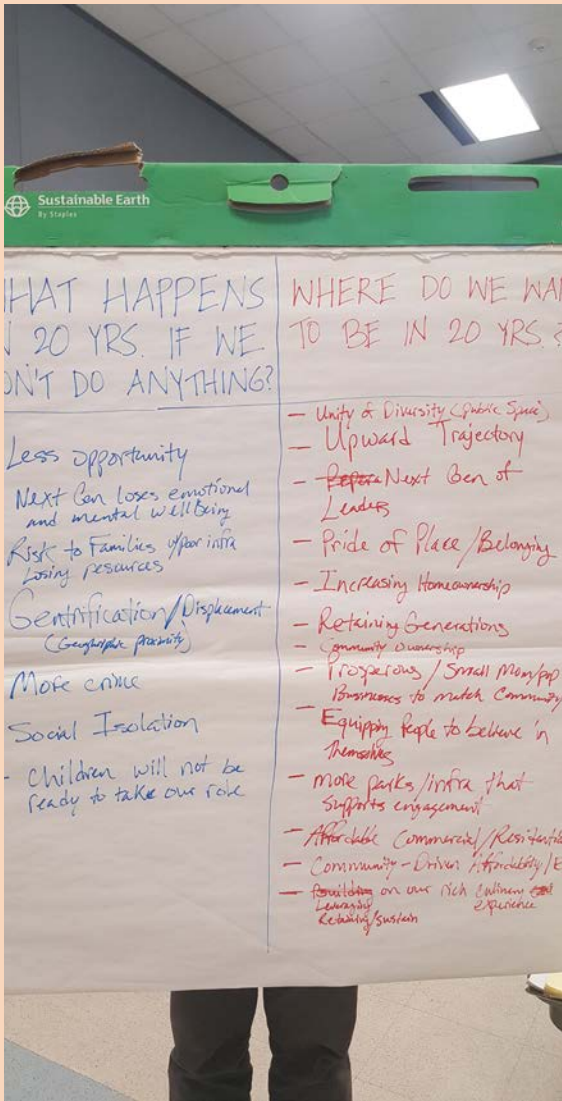
The four workgroups included:

- * Community Health and Wellness
- * Transportation Safety and Access
- * Housing Quality and Affordability
- * Education and Workforce Development

WORKGROUP #1

The first round of workgroups kicked off October 2017. Participants were engaged on a set of questions. The intent of the questions was to begin generating content, particularly toward goal statements and high-level objectives. Each workgroup spent the session answering the following questions:

- What do we value?
- What happens in 20 years if we do nothing?
- What do we want to be in 20 years?
- Goals and themes?



WORKGROUP #2

Workgroups met in late November and early December to review draft goal statements for their workgroup and provide input on the other three workgroup goal statements. The exercise provided an opportunity to refine the vision and cross-examine each other’s goal statements that would help identify blind-spots and potential synergies between workgroups. This exercise invigorated participants’ understanding of their workgroup in relation to the others and motivated more ambitious goal-setting.

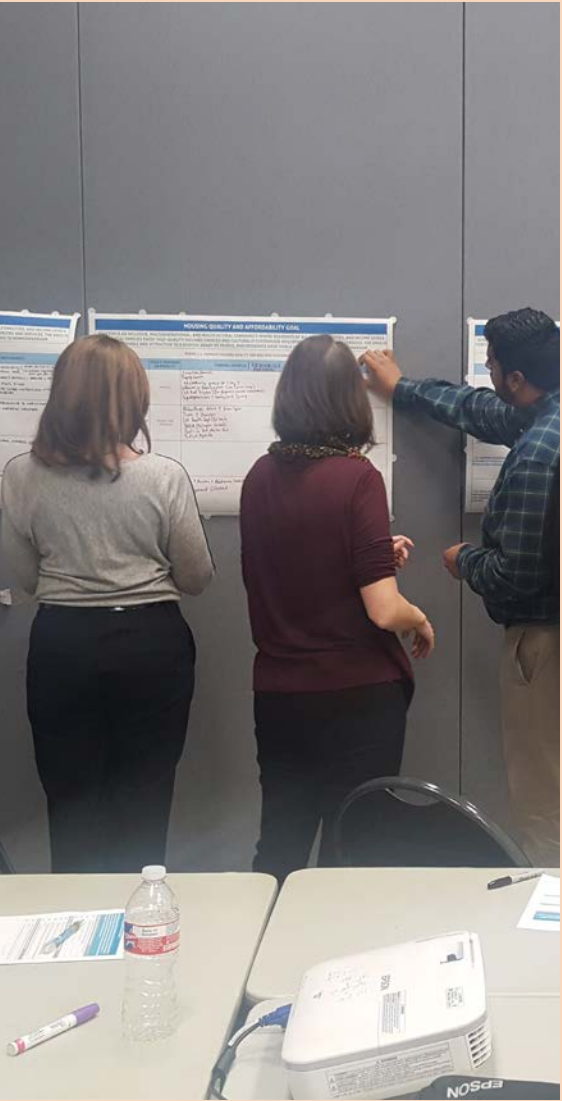


WORKGROUP #3

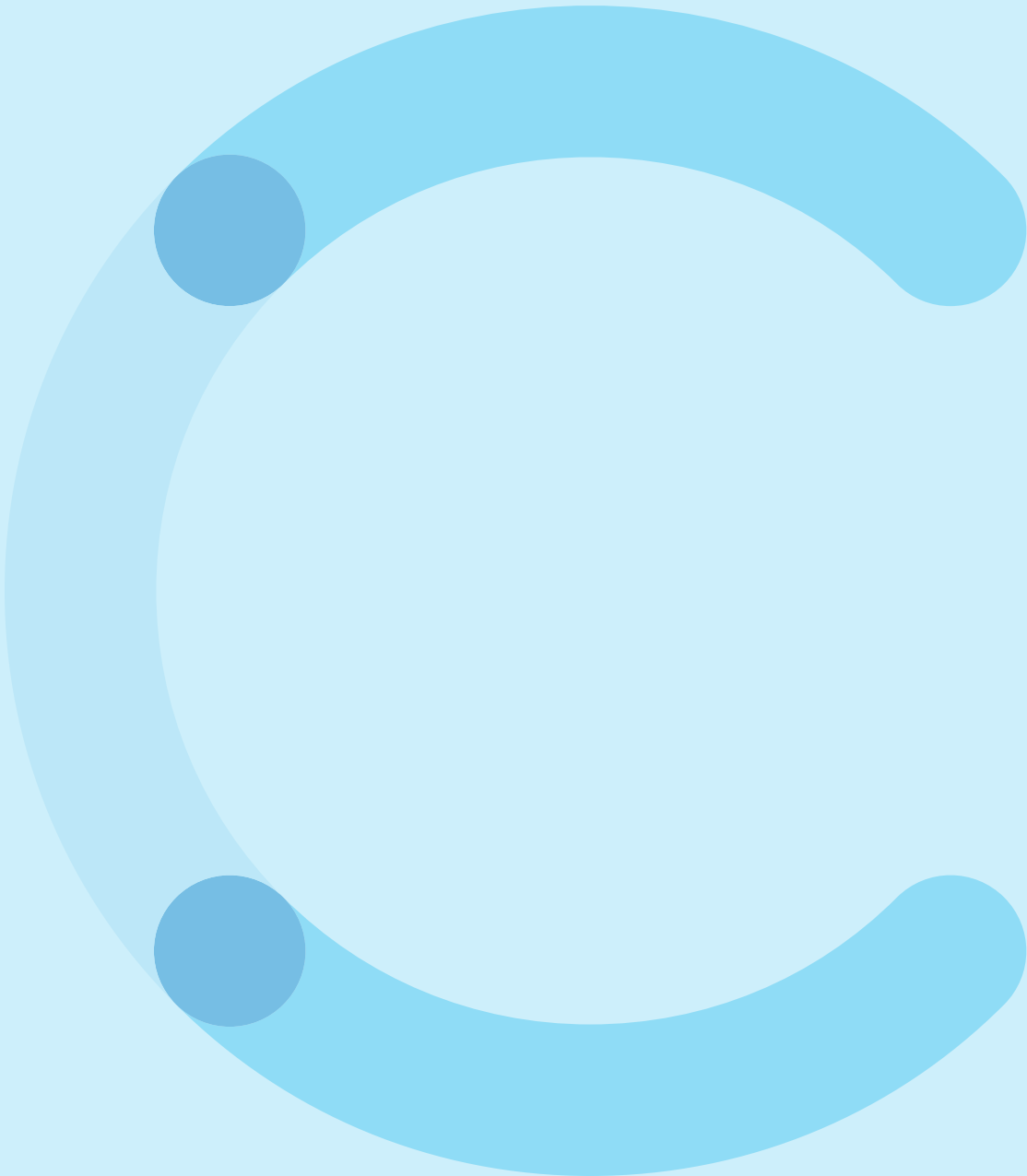
Participants in each workgroup were divided into two factions to discuss strategies under each BHAG and evaluate the following recommendations:

- Policy, Program, or Project
- Phasing -- Short, Medium or Long Term
- Metrics -- Sources and Benchmarks
- Resources -- Funding Sources, Partners

Finally, a total of six green dots were given to each participant to vote on the most impactful strategies and six red dots to select the strategies that should be a first step in implementation.



Needs Assessment



The existing conditions chapter seeks to gain a better understanding of the residents that Connect Community serves. The analysis was performed October 2016 before the public engagement phases of this project and the latest data sources were used at that time. The analysis provides demographic information, education and income levels, land use, housing, and

transportation use. A review of economic indicators describes the type of employment residents hold and where jobs are located, and local health statistics were also gathered to analyze healthy-living assets such as open space, recreation, and fresh food stores.

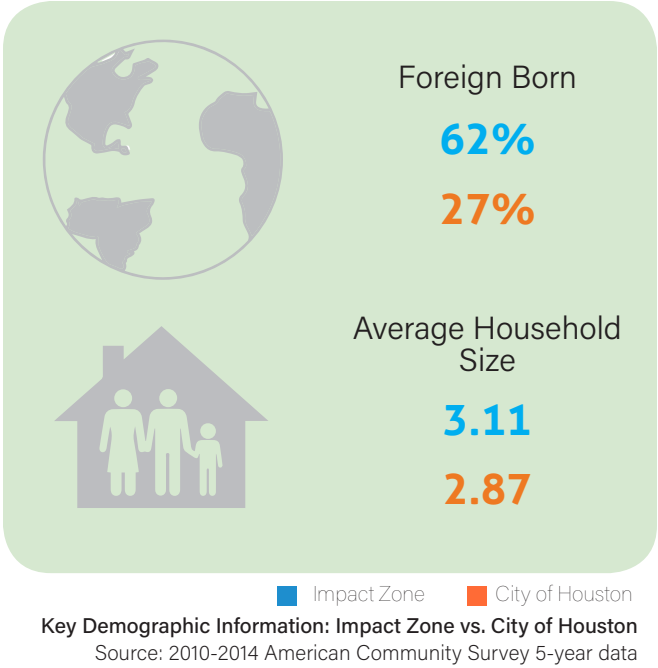


Demographics

Impact Zone Residents

The Impact Zone has 18,447 total residents, with a population that skews younger than the City of Houston as a whole - 85% of Impact Zone residents are under 50 (versus 75% of Houston residents), and the total percentage of children 19 and under is 37% (versus 30% in Houston as a whole). The average household size within the Impact Zone is slightly higher than that of the City.

Population density varies throughout the Impact Zone, with lower-density residential developments on the western Sharpstown side of the zone, and higher density in the multi-family housing developments east of Hillcroft Avenue in the Gulfton neighborhood. These housing typologies, and the condition of housing in the Impact Zone, will be discussed further on page 29. The housing chapter will also elaborate on the relative affordability of housing in the Impact Zone versus the City of Houston, which may explain why the area is so attractive to recent immigrants and refugees.

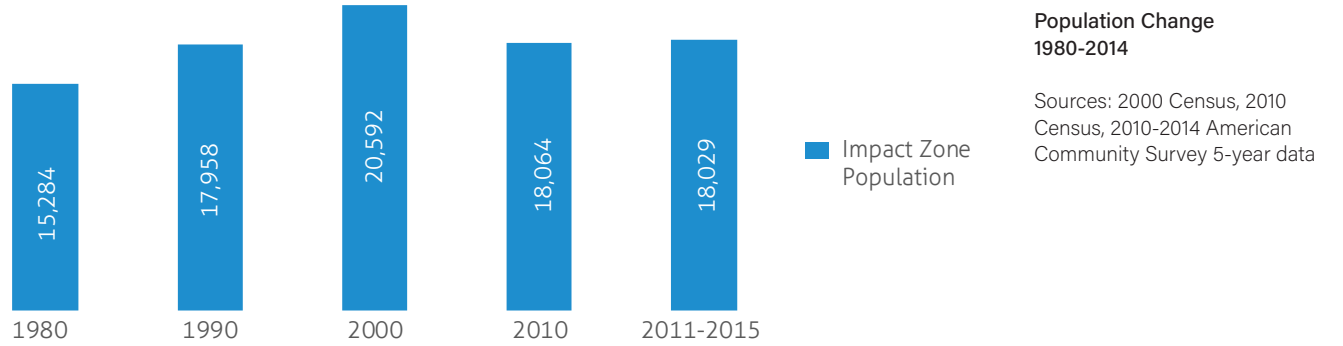
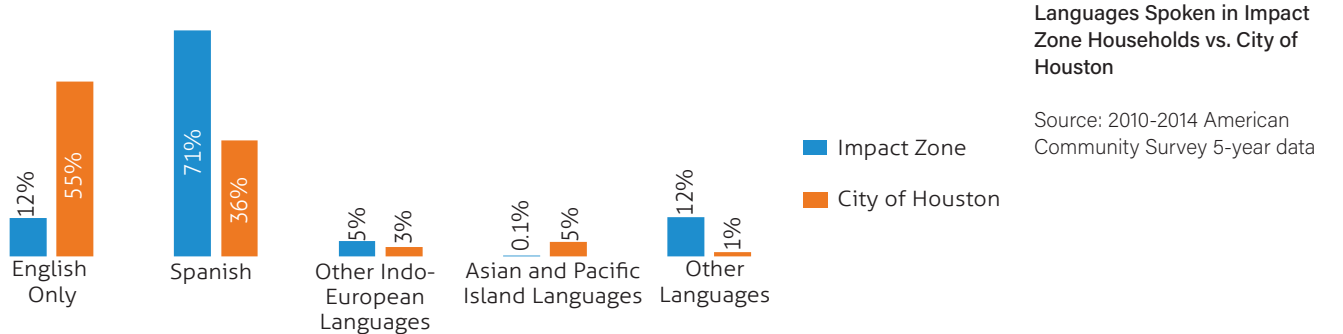
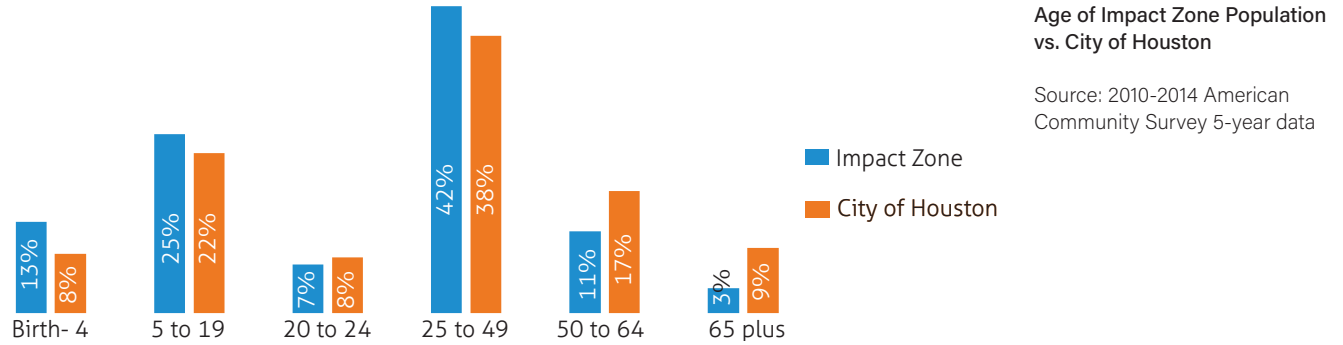
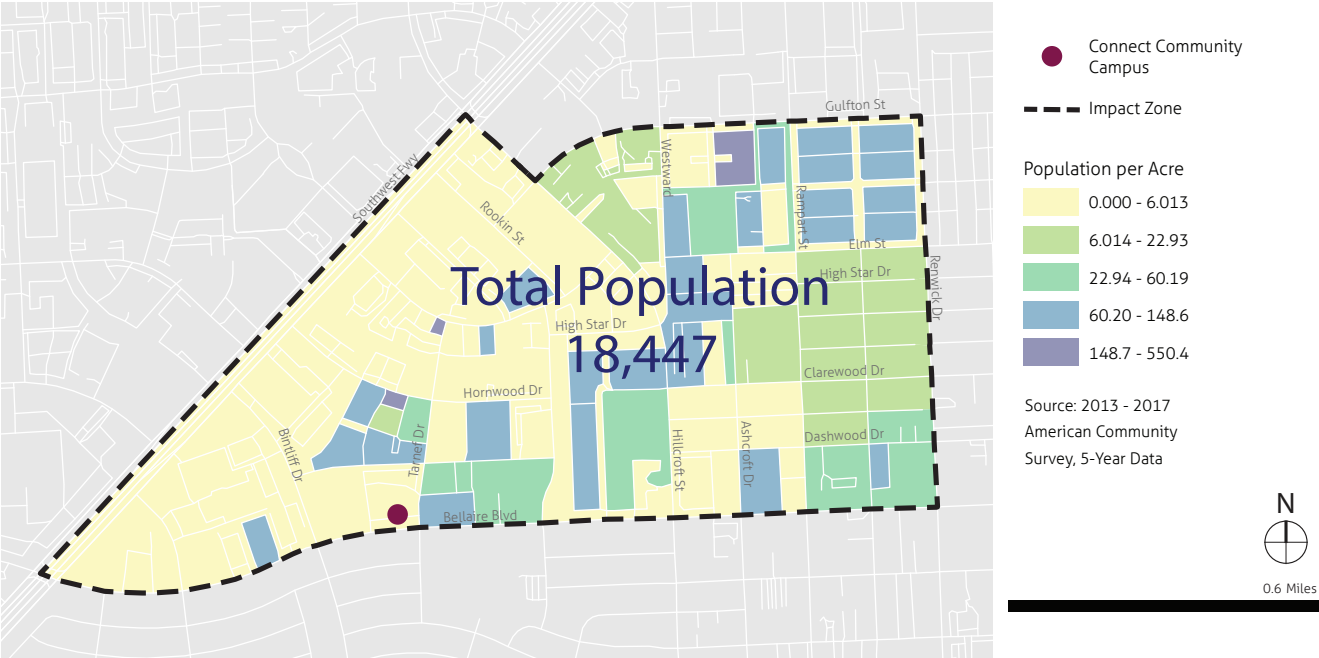


Residents of the Impact Zone are far more likely to be foreign-born than residents of Houston as a whole (62%, vs. 27% in Houston) and are also more likely to speak Spanish as a primary language within their household, which speaks to the importance of emphasizing social and educational services that have a proven impact in assisting immigrants, Latino communities, and communities of color. The Impact Zone also contains strong concentrations of communities from the Middle East and South Asia. The following page looks more closely at race and ethnicity within the Impact Zone.

The Impact Zone’s population has decreased slightly since 2000, from 20,592 to 18,447 residents; this decrease occurred almost entirely between 2000 and 2010, with a very slight uptick in population recorded by the 2010-2014 5-year American Community Survey

average. However, within a range of a few thousand, the population of the community has remained remarkably stable for several decades, as there have been few changes to the housing stock in that time. It is worth noting that population under-counting is suspected for Gulfton-Sharpstown through the U.S. Census and previously labeled as a “hard to enumerate” tract by the Census Bureau, though the order of magnitude remains unknown.

Key Conclusions: Given the concentrations of youth, families with larger household sizes, and foreign-born populations in the Impact Zone, there is a clear need to examine the landscape of services that support families, children, and immigrant populations, and fill service gaps as necessary.

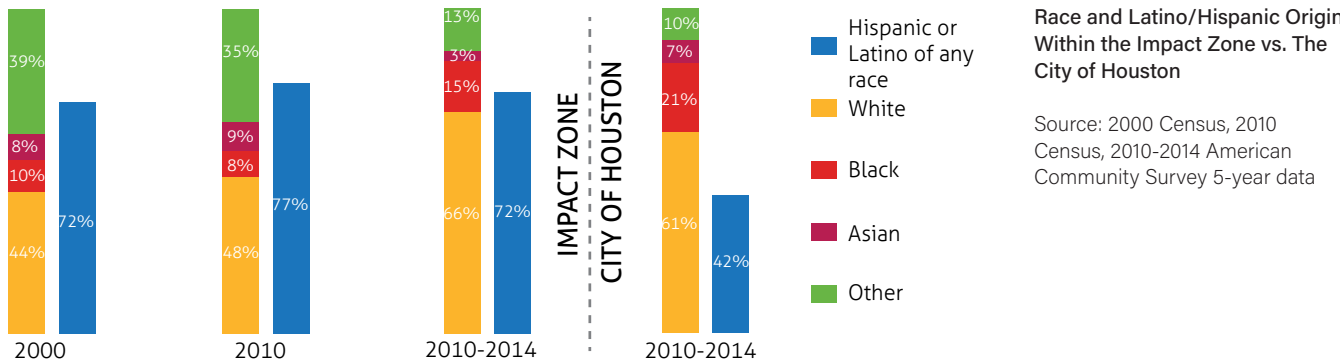


A Diverse Community

While the Impact Zone has more non-white residents than the City of Houston, those identifying as white has increased since 2000. The census follows a two-question format to gauge ethno-racial identification since 2010, so more individuals have begun identifying as white because they now have the option to identify their multiracial or Hispanic ethnicity in other areas of the census - thus the reduction in "other." The total percentage of Hispanic / Latino residents has remained relatively steady, however, the area continues to have a higher concentration of Hispanic / Latino residents than the City as a whole. As the map below shows, the two census tracts in the Impact Zone's northeast quadrant have particularly high concentrations of population overall and high numbers of Hispanic / Latino residents.

Based on local observation, the area features many diverse ethnic and cultural food shops, advertisements, and restaurants. Many mothers walk to and from stores in traditional cultural dress. There are numerous services, such as health clinics and schools, advertised as bilingual. The Impact Zone has been culturally diverse since before 2000, and local businesses reflect that character.

Key Conclusions: Given the strength of existing bilingual services and businesses in the neighborhood, it will be important to develop complementary assets that support and leverage the strength of the area's diverse population.



Geographic Mobility: New Arrivals

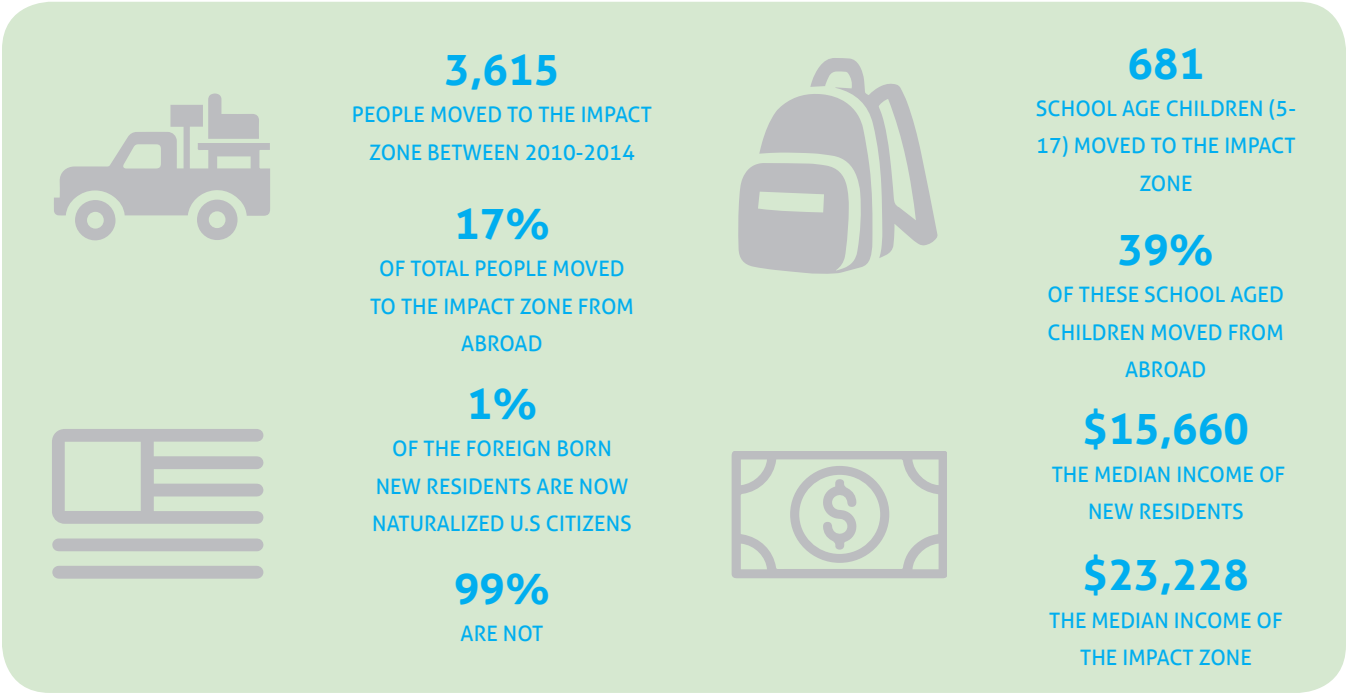
3,615 people moved into the Impact Zone between 2010-2014, meaning that roughly 723 people move in each year. 604 (17%) of the new residents moved from abroad, and 2,788 (77%) new residents noted that they are foreign-born. The majority of the new residents relocated from within Harris County, and the remainder moved from other parts of Texas or another state.

53% of all the 2010-2014 new arrivals to the Impact Zone, including those moving from abroad, are below the poverty line. The median income for the new residents is \$15,660, whereas the median income for all population in the Impact Zone is \$23,228. These new residents face additional challenges finding affordable housing, especially because of their barriers to livable wages.

During the same 2010-2014 period, 681 school age children (5-17 years old) moved to the Impact Zone, 263 of which moved from abroad. According to Connect Community partners, educational standards often vary between students moving within Texas, other states, and abroad, which can put a strain on the local public school system and family members who need to deal with new standards and educational systems.

Connect Community outreach efforts suggest that the population of foreign-born and refugee individuals in the area may be larger than the available data reflects. Refugees and immigrants are often underrepresented in Census data because families under-report family members. There also is the fear of coming into contact with local officials which leads to underreporting crime and housing issues.

Key Conclusions: Residents relocating from abroad, who are often lower-income and more vulnerable than existing residents, will need essential services to help their families adjust and acclimate to their new surroundings. Identifying service gaps for local residents, and ensuring that services are adequately advertised and accessible to the entirety of the Impact Zone, are areas for investigation and potential action.



Geographic Mobility within and to the Impact Zone
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data

Education

Educational Opportunities

There are four charter schools located within the Impact Zone boundary, with additional HISD, charter, and private school options in the surrounding area. These schools are important community assets that already serve as loci of after-school programming, community-based health clinics, and SPARK playground opportunities. Connect Community is well-positioned to strategically maximize these schools' value to local residents by acting in its "community quarterback" role.

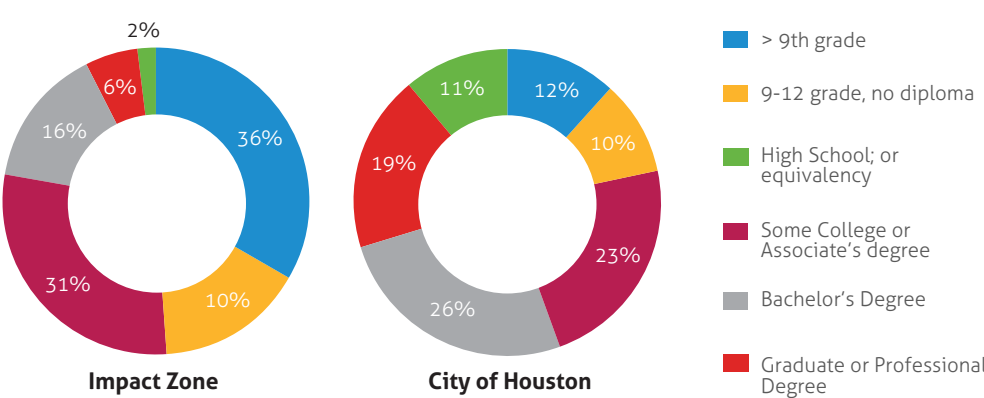
Educational attainment in the Impact Zone remains highly challenging; just 54% of Impact Zone residents over 18 have graduated from high school (compared to Houston's 77% graduation rate).

There are 17 licensed child care centers within the Impact Zone with capacities ranging from 15 to 240 children. The ages also vary from infant to pre-kindergarten to school age children. Many of these programs offer discounted enrollment fees, but often times can be out of range for many families in poverty and their quality is not at a nationally accredited level.

The Impact Zone offers various educational opportunities, including:

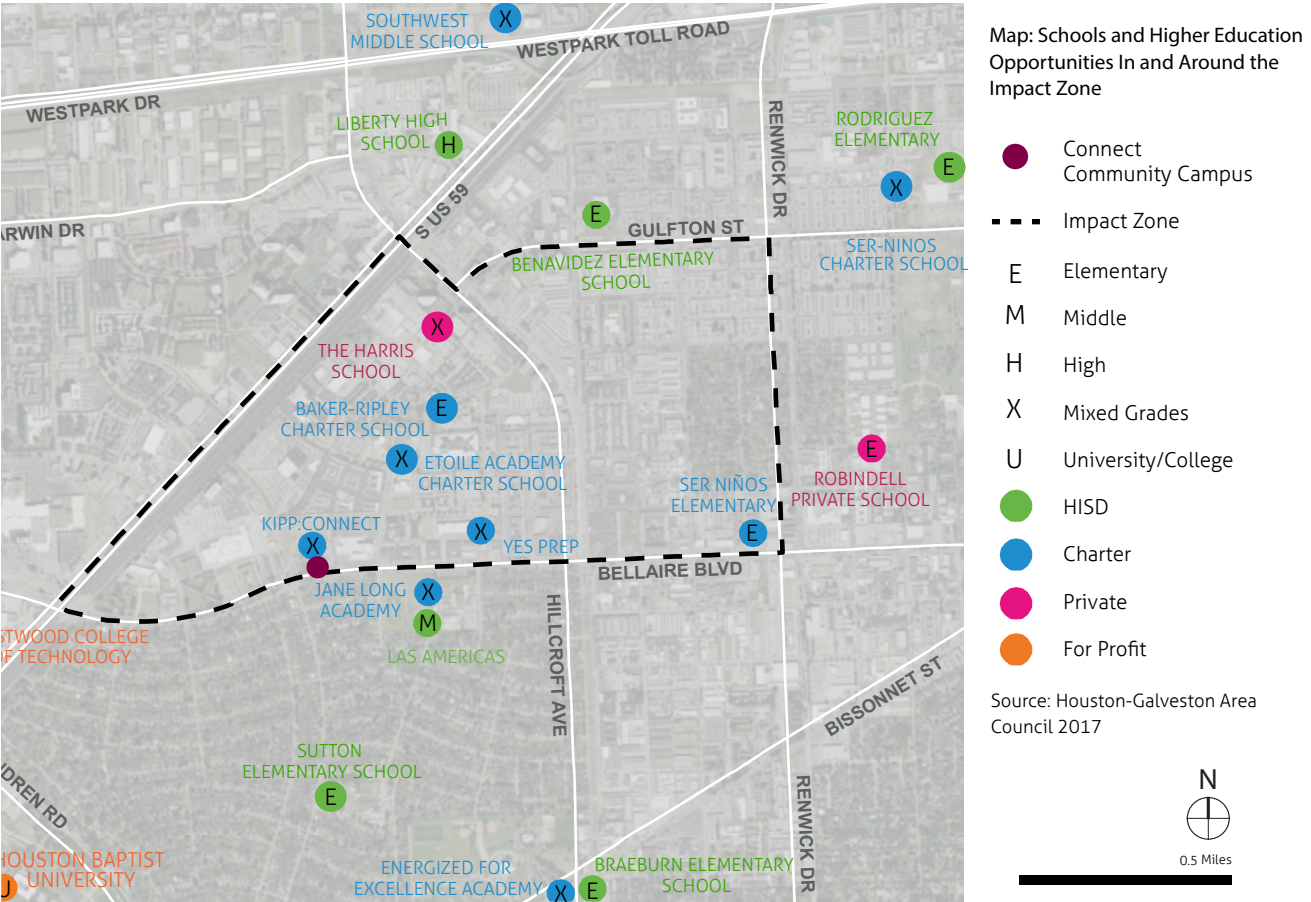
- » STEM Magnet program at the Energized for Excellence Academy
- » STEM Magnet program at the Jane Long Academy
- » Therapeutic program for children with social, emotional, or mental challenges at the Harris Private School

Key Conclusions: Ensuring that support is provided for parents to receive continuing education with job certification classes and employers, and that adequate resources are available for the zero-to-three population, will be critical to improve educational attainment and increase future opportunity for the local population.



Educational Attainment Within the Impact Zone vs. City of Houston

Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data



Preschools within the Impact Zone. *Within 0.25 miles of the Impact Zone.

Name	Capacity	Ages
Faith Angels Academy/Learning Center*	119	0 - 12 Years
Benavidez Elementary Head Start and Pre-K*	134+132	4 - 5 Years
San Francisco Nativity Academy*	40	4 - 5 Years
Baker Ripley Neighborhood Centers and Head Start	238+38	0 - 8 Years
Gulfton Promise Head Start	136	3 - 5 Years
New Horizon Head Start	239	0 - 5 Years
Attitude Respect N Manners Learning Center	95	0 - 13 Years
KinderCare Learning Center	145	0 - 12 Years
Robindell Private School*	99	3 - 5 Years
Nathan J & Amelia Klein Head Start & Early Head Start*	121	0 - 4 Years
KIPP Connect Primary/Middle School	N/A	0 - 11 Years
Harris School	N/A	3 - 14 Years
SER Niños Charter School II	N/A	3 - 14 Years

Source: Collaborative for Children, www.findchildcarenow.com. Accessed December 2018.

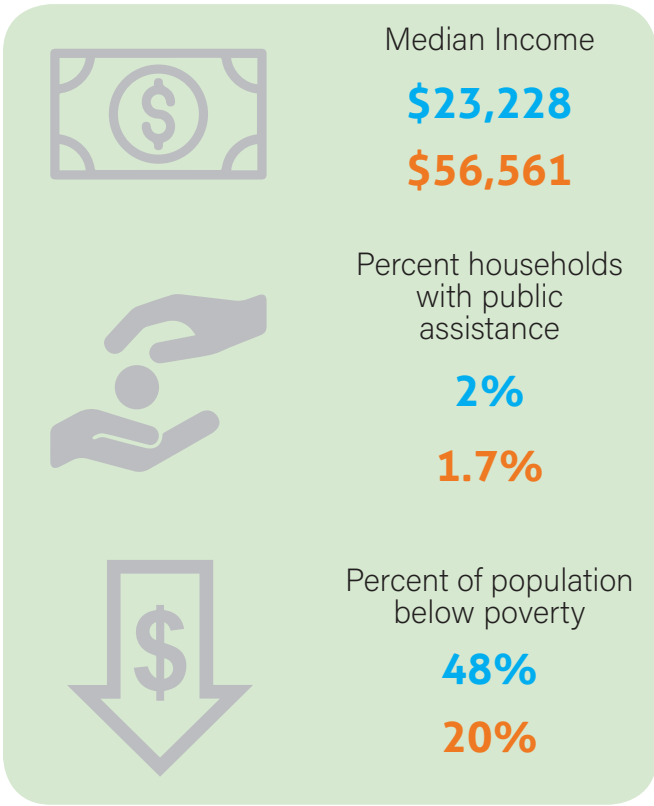
Income

Income, Poverty, and Public Assistance

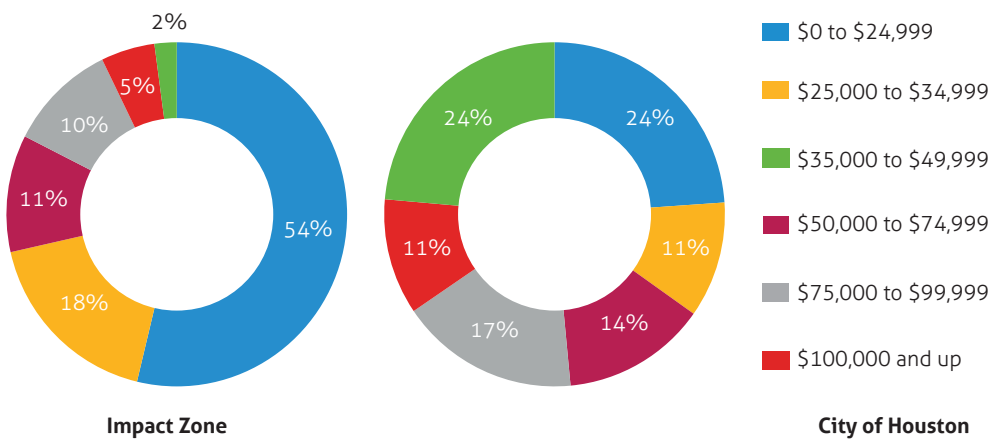
The median income within the Impact Zone is half of the median income in the City of Houston as a whole, while the Impact Zone poverty rate is 48% compared to a total poverty rate of 20% in Houston overall. A look at the income distribution in the area compared to Houston as a whole shows far fewer upper-income families and more lower-income families. One reason for this concentration of lower-income residents may be the widespread availability of affordable rental housing in large, multi-family complexes (for more details on housing availability and quality, see page 29).

Key Conclusions: These data reflect a strong need to increase economic opportunity for families, and to provide services that help children deal with the known effects of concentrated poverty, including increased physical and mental health risks, decreased academic achievement, and increased risk of emotional and behavioral problems¹.

¹ Brooks-Gunn, J. and Duncan, G. (1997) The Effects of Poverty on Children. The Future of Children. 7 (3): 55-71. Retrieved January 20, 2017, from https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/07_02_03.pdf



Income and Poverty within the Impact Zone vs. City of Houston
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data



Household Income Within the Impact Zone vs. City of Houston
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data

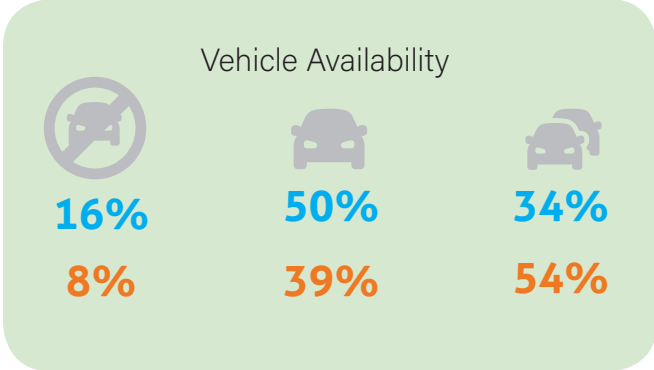
Transportation

Regional Accessibility

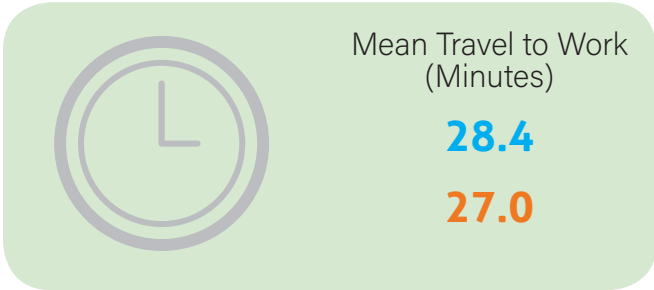
The Impact Zone is centrally located and accessible to Houston job centers and resources. With access to US 59/IH 69 and major thoroughfares like Bellaire Boulevard, Hillcroft Avenue, and Bissonet Street, residents have vehicular access to reach regional destinations. In less than a 30-minute drive, residents can reach major employment centers such as downtown Houston, the Texas Medical Center, Uptown/ Galleria, Sugar Land Town Center, and Greenway Plaza. The Economy chapter will discuss the number of Impact Zone residents who currently work within those major employment centers.

However, many Impact Zone residents do not own cars to reap the benefits of regional accessibility: 16% of households do not have access to a car, and 50% only have one household vehicle, which can be difficult for dual working households. Although the Impact Zone is within close proximity to job centers, the Zone's mean travel-to-work commute time is slightly longer than Houston's (28.4 minutes versus 27 minutes, respectively).

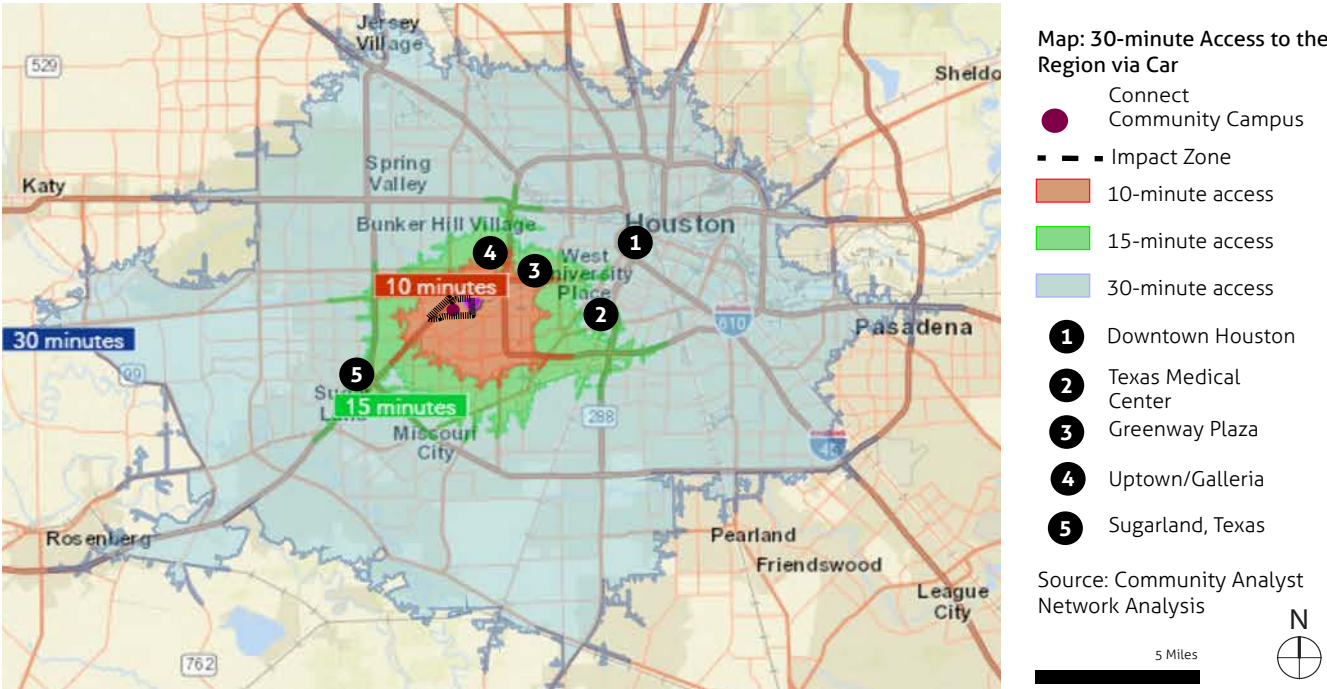
Key Conclusions: While the Impact Zone is well-located for residents with cars to access jobs and regional destinations, there may be opportunities to better serve families without access to personal vehicles.



Vehicle Availability for Households
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data



Mean Travel Time to Work
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data



Transportation Options

The Impact Zone’s residents use other modes of transportation rather than driving alone. They use public transit (14%) and carpooling (20%) more than the City of Houston (3% and 11% respectively); these alternative transportation modes likely help families compensate for lack of reliable access to personal vehicles. Major local bus routes arriving every 15 minutes (route numbers 2 and 402) and 30 minutes (route numbers 32, 47, and 9) are accessible for the Impact Zone’s residents, and recent boarding numbers indicate the local bus routes are used heavily by the residents. Two major transit centers (Hillcroft Transit Center and Bellaire Transit Center) are also in close proximity to the Impact Zone and provide express access to the Texas Medical Center and Downtown Houston. Neither of these Transit Centers are accessible and safe to reach by foot; there are major roadway barriers for pedestrians.

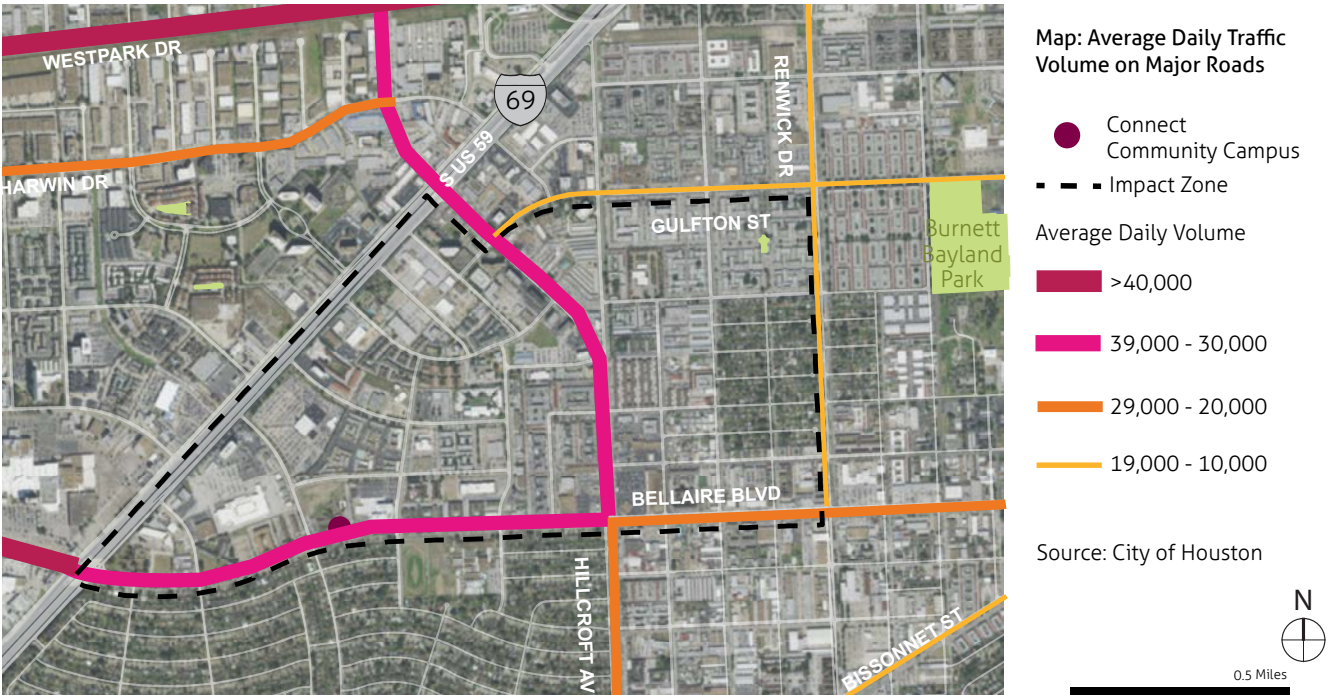
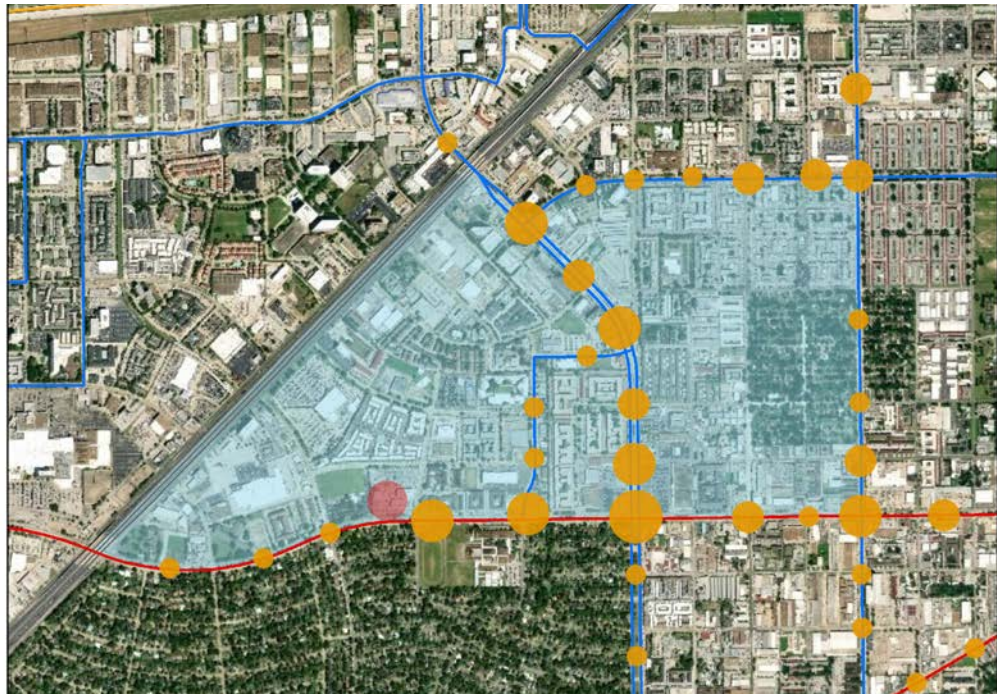
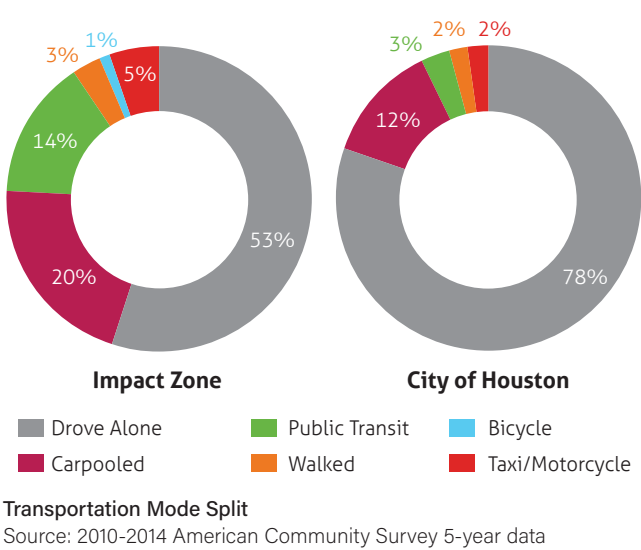
Some active transportation opportunities, like walking and bicycling, are available in the study area, but these mainly are “shared roadway” bike facilities which are not considered “high-comfort,” desirable facilities for most bicycle riders. Signed bicycle routes in the area also tend not to be direct; instead, riders must take winding routes through the area in order to access their destinations. This likely discourages active transportation options for many local residents with other options. The Houston Bike Plan has suggested numerous improvements for the Impact Zone. Some short-term improvements can be expected in the next five years.

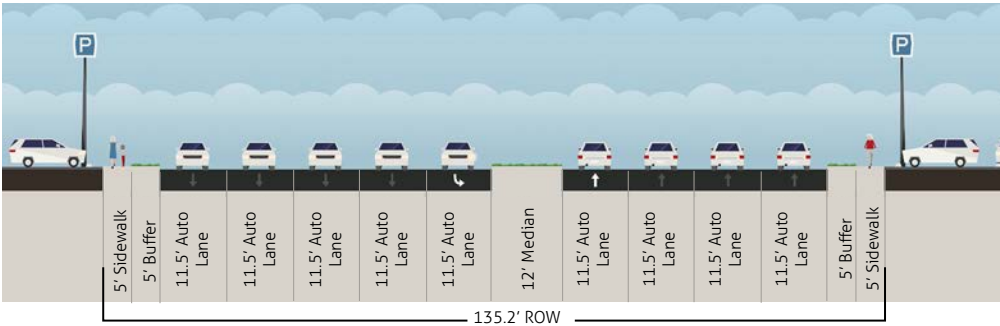
Key Conclusions: Potential improvements to local bicycle, transit, and pedestrian infrastructure may help increase employment and the accessibility of services for households and residents without reliable access to personal vehicles. While the Impact Zone has strong access to frequent transit, improving conditions for pedestrians and focusing on safety issues will likely help to encourage greater transit use by individuals and families with children.

Safety: Traffic Volumes and Barriers

The Impact Zone’s major roads experience significant traffic volumes on a daily basis; the portions of Hillcroft Avenue and Bellaire Blvd that bound the southeast corner of the Impact Zone each see over 30,000 vehicles per day, while the remaining portion of Bellaire receives over 20,000 vehicles per day. Due to their high traffic volumes, Hillcroft and Bellaire pose safety challenges for pedestrians and bicyclists. Crash data on Hillcroft in particular shows significant safety challenges that need to be addressed. The high traffic volume and number of crashes within and around the Impact Zone do not indicate a safe environment for families new to an auto-dominated city, especially for those who must walk, bike, or take public transport to their final destinations.

Schools are especially worried of the high auto and pedestrian mixed traffic surrounding their campuses. Many of the Impact Zone’s interior roadways experience high traffic fluctuation during peak hours, especially around school hours.



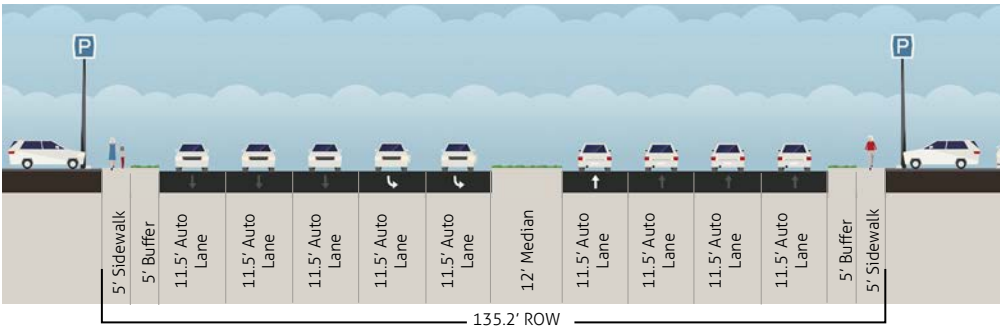


Hillcroft and Gulfton- Facing North

Average Daily Volume:
30,000-39,000

Medium-High Crash Density

Source: Google Maps

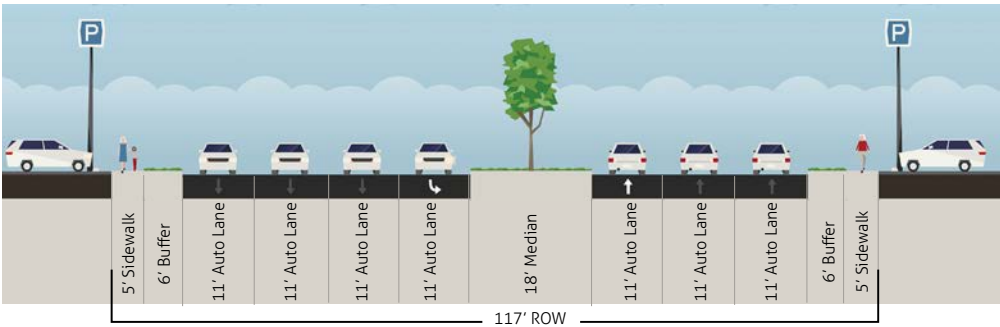


Hillcroft and Bellaire- Facing North

Average Daily Volume:
30,000-39,000

High Crash Density

Source: Google Maps



Redwick and Bellaire- Facing East

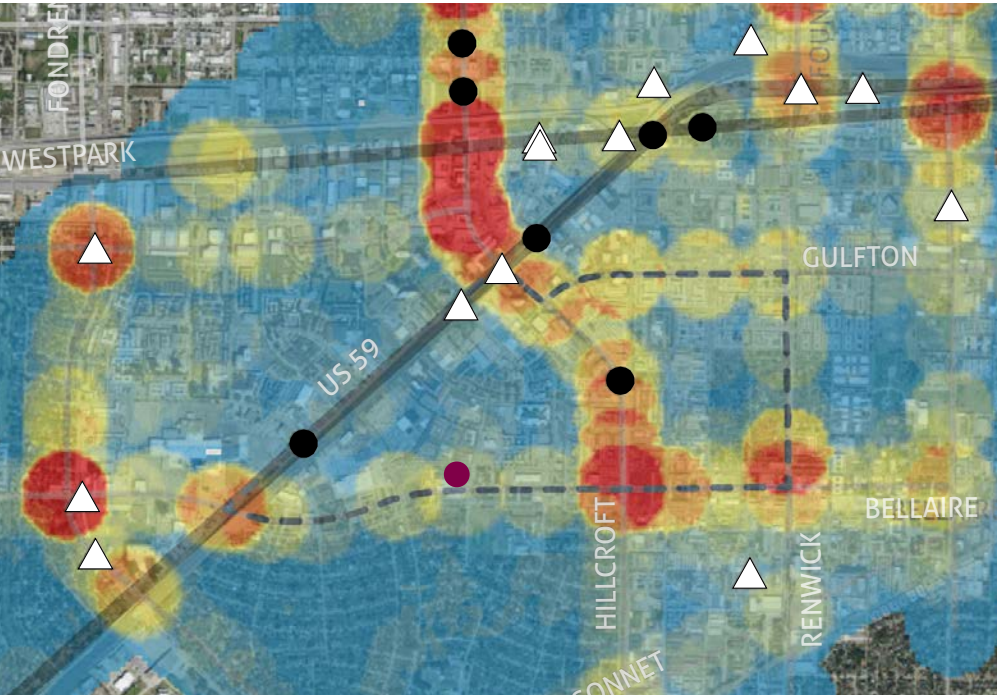
Average Daily Volume:
20,000-29,000

Medium Crash Density

Source: Google Maps

The heavily trafficked roadways of Bellaire, Hillcroft, and IH 69 access roads create barriers for the Impact Zone residents, keeping residents without vehicles from traveling safely across these boundaries. This decreases accessibility to local parks, schools, and services within walking distance.

Key Conclusions: Improvements to local roadways and streetscapes will help increase safety and improve accessibility of resources for Impact Zone residents. The images on the next page show existing conditions of various amenities that can either improve or hinder public safety along the Impact Zone's roadways. ADA accessible sidewalks help direct pedestrian traffic, speed bumps reduce speeds, and signaled mid-block pedestrian crosswalks facilitate safe walking environments. Incomplete sidewalks, limited space around bus shelters, and non-signalized pedestrian crosswalks create unsafe environments.



Map: Fatal Crashes and Crash Density on Local Roadways

- Connect Community Campus
- - - Impact Zone
- Fatal Bicyclist Crash
- Fatal Pedestrian Crash
- △ Fatal Vehicle Crash

Crash Density
Low
High

Source: HGAC and TxDOT Crash Data 2011-2015

Public Safety Amenities

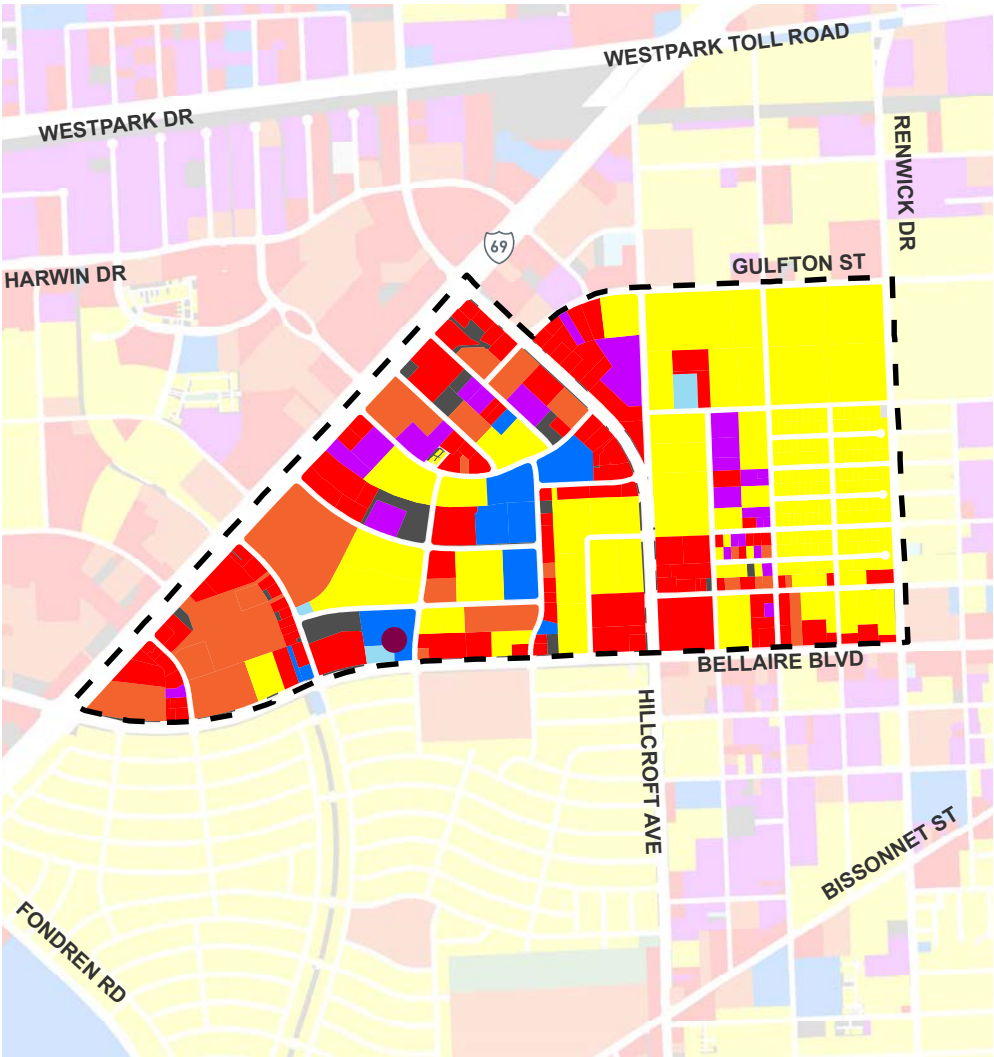


Land Use and Housing

A Mixed Use Community

The Impact Zone is predominantly residential and mixed-use, with commercial uses located on major roadways such as the Southwest Freeway and portions of Hillcroft and Bellaire. Many residents are within walking distance to retail like grocery stores and shopping centers.

The community has varying levels of density and character within its boundaries. Large lots with 1960s and 1970s garden style apartment complexes and big-box retail are often impenetrable and pedestrian-unfriendly. Smaller housing complexes, neighborhood stores and restaurants are more pedestrian-friendly and line smaller streets like Dashwood Drive and Rookin Street.



Map: Land Use

- Connect Community Campus
- Impact Zone
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Mixed Use
- Other
- Parks/Open Spaces
- Residential
- Medical, Education, Government
- Undevelopable
- Unknown
- Vacant Developable
- Water

Source: HCAD



Map: Community Character Typologies

- Connect Community Campus
- Impact Zone
- Big Box Commercial
- Community Commercial
- Dense Residential and Residential Services



0.25 Miles



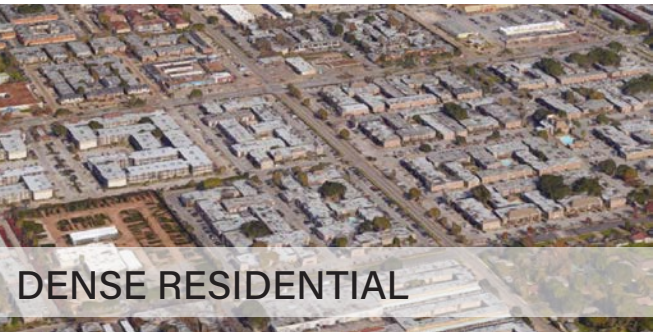
BIG BOX COMMERCIAL

Big-box commercial development requires large parcels and large areas for parking. These developments are auto-dependent and are difficult to reach for transit users or pedestrians. They serve beyond the local community and attract users from the region. Big-box commercial developments typically border a large corridor or highway.



COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL

Community commercial developments do not need large parcels like the big-box commercial, and typically support a more local community clientele. Within the Impact Zone, these businesses often take the form of strip centers and include services like dry cleaners, restaurants, shops, and retail. While more pedestrian friendly than the big box stores that line the US 59/ IH 69 frontage roads, these commercial developments also usually have significant parking lots in front of the storefronts, and can lead to a pedestrian barrier as well.



DENSE RESIDENTIAL

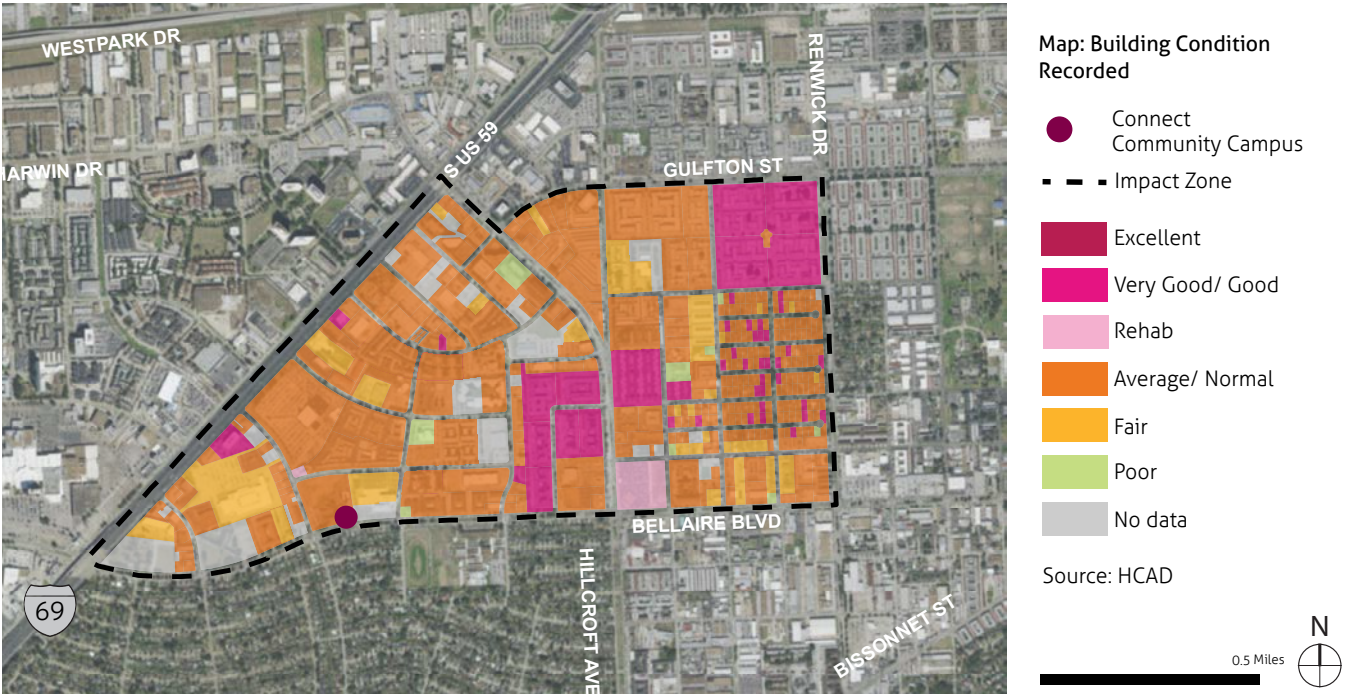
The Impact Zone has some of the densest residential typologies in Houston. These development patterns increase the need for nearby residential amenities, such as food vendors, park space, and public transportation.

Building Quality

The Harris County Appraisal District records building condition data as “overall physical condition of the dwelling relative to its age and considers the level of maintenance that you would normally expect to find in a dwelling of a given age.”

In the maps below, many structures have been rated “excellent,” “very good,” or “average,” but many of the structures in the area are still aging. Residents of this area have noted deferred maintenance and have expressed this lack of upkeep is negatively affecting them. It’s important to note all of the multi-family within the Impact Zone are market rate and not affordable

housing. If they were within the affordable housing program, frequent city inspections would be mandated. On the ground research may more accurately reflect some of the building typologies that could benefit from renovation and upgrades (see page 29).



Tax Delinquency and Value

The City of Houston has tools it can use to intervene in and potentially purchase properties that are experiencing tax delinquency, including Houston Land Bank previously known as LARA (the Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority). Tax delinquent properties are also more likely to experience overall deferred maintenance due to lack of resources. 42 out of the 48 tax-delinquent properties

identified in this map are multi-family residential. These properties have fallen within tax delinquency ranging between 2-28 years. These properties may warrant further investigation to determine the local conditions within the buildings and reasons for delinquency.



Decreasing property values and low improvement-to-land value ratios are two more clues that properties may be experiencing poor maintenance or may be aging to the point where they need renovation or rehabilitation. The lower the improvement value to land value ratio, the more ripe the property is for redevelopment.

The Property Value Changes map illustrates residential properties' values are increasing, commercial is decreasing or stagnant, and location doesn't seem to help or hurt the property values. It is interesting to note the residential properties that are deferring maintenance and negatively affecting residents are increasing in property value. These properties are fully occupied, indicating the properties are cash-flowing and doing well from an investment stand point, but are not using the cash flow to improve the living situation. This will make any efforts to change the quality of housing difficult, so creative solutions will need to be reached.

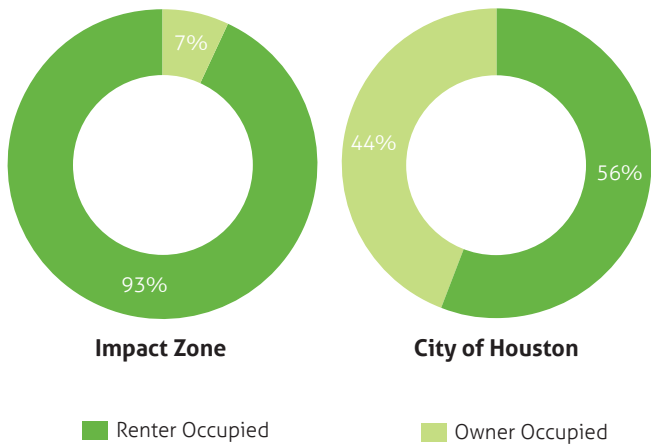
Key Conclusions: The maps in this section can be a resource for targeting properties for further physical examination; upon examination, Connect Community can determine whether the buildings' owners or property managers should be engaged in the study moving forward to promote renovation and upgrades to their buildings.

Residential Building Condition

Much of the residential development in the Impact Zone are multi-family structures built between the 1960s and 1970s that now are aging and need renovation in order to provide a high-quality environment for residents and families. However, these older buildings allow cheaper rents that are affordable to the Impact Zone's predominantly low-income population: rents in the Zone are lower than in Houston as a whole, though they have risen significantly from their 2010 median of \$527 to a median of \$755 in the seven-year period between 2010 and 2017. Anecdotal evidence suggested rents were much higher than the 2014 figures previously included here (\$564) leading the project team to update with 2017 ACS data. A 2018-only study would likely show even higher monthly rents. The spike in rents also outpaces the City of Houston's rise in median rents (43% vs. 29%) and poses a significant threat to the stability of the community.

	Study Area	City of Houston
2006-2010 Median Rent	\$526.75	\$726.00
2013-2017 Median Rent	\$755.70	\$940.00
Percent Increase in Rent	43%	29%

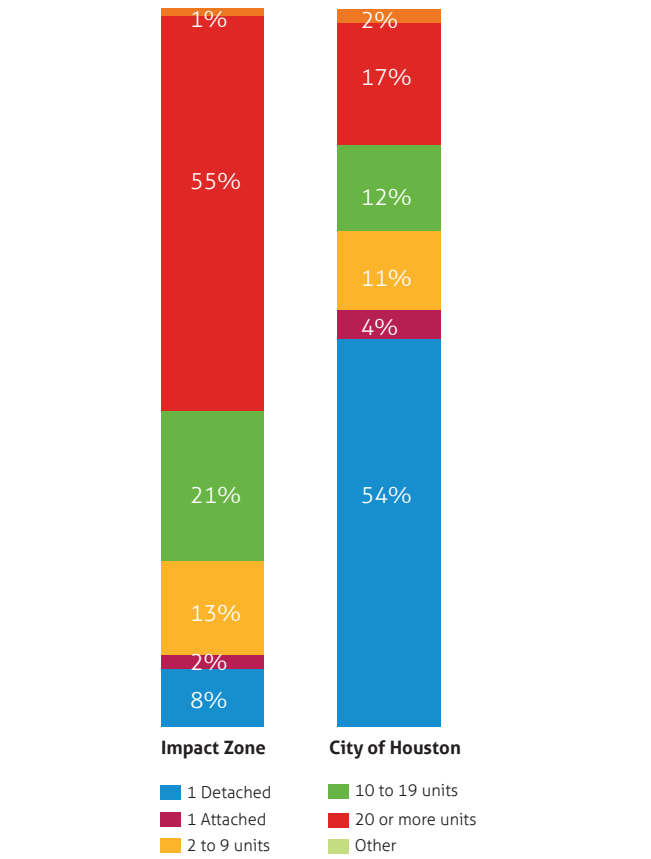
Median Rent
Source: 2006-2010 and 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year data, Median Gross Rent for Renter-Occupied Housing Units.



Housing Tenure
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data

The Impact Zone also has more multi-family units than single-family homes compared to the city as a whole. The majority of the Zone's units are renter-occupied (93%), compared to 44% renter-occupied units in Houston. Renters typically move every couple of years, and as a community in high demand, the turnover between tenants is relatively quick. Low vacancy rates also show that building owners have little trouble finding renters for their properties, lowering the impetus to improve their properties.

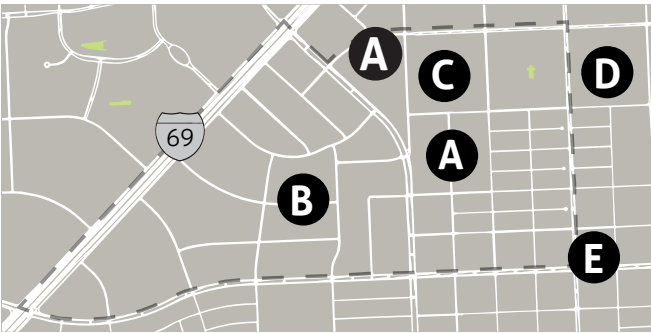
Key Conclusions: Housing quality has deteriorated over time; property owners most likely rely on affordability rather than quality as an attractor for low-income tenants, and have little incentive to update and rehab their properties as long as their apartments continue to be in demand. Determining key areas for physical improvement, and finding financing sources and development partners that could support upgrades to the local housing stock without sacrificing affordability will be important objectives.



Units in Structure
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data

Residential Building Quality

The following images display the varying level of multi-family housing conditions within the Impact Zone. Some buildings show evidence of improvements and maintenance while others do not. Many buildings have outdated or poor-quality features such as window A/C units, overgrown landscaping, badly sited utility lines, overuse of concrete without adequate drainage and landscaping, aging building materials, poor street presence, and limited access to open space. Some properties, however, do offer assets like community open space, clean landscaping, good building materials, and a street presence. The interior quality of the properties identified on this page have not been assessed. An additional internal analysis would be required to fully determine the quality and maintenance needs of these properties.



Key Conclusions: Many of these sites' building condition were rated "Very Good" and "Average" by the Harris County Appraisal District (HCAD) system; despite these rankings, which compare these properties against others of similar age in the Houston area, it is clear that many properties do not incorporate current best practices such as incorporation of open space, resident amenities, and strong connections to the pedestrian realm. Many properties should be considered for rehab, renovations, or redevelopment.



Economy

Employment and Job Locations

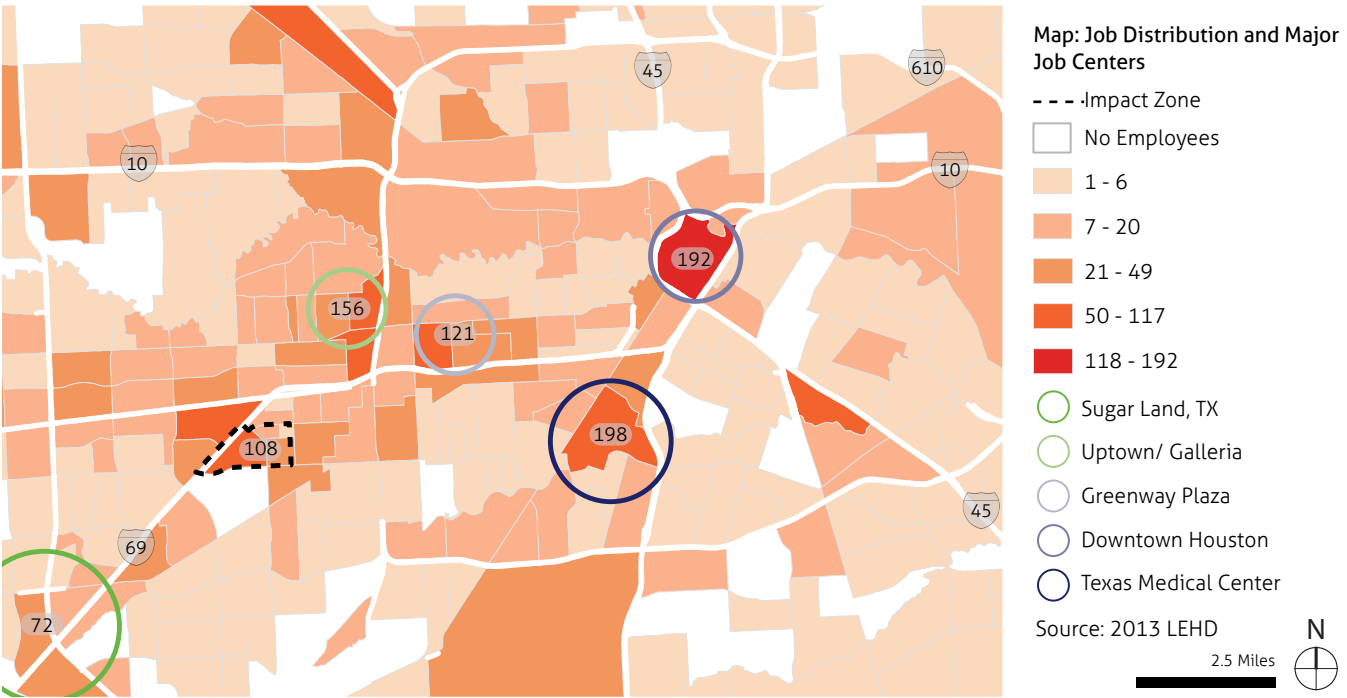
Impact Zone residents have access to many of Houston’s major regional job centers for work, as they live within 10-30 minutes commute to many of these locations. The largest concentration of Impact Zone’s residents work in Downtown Houston and the Texas Medical Center (5% of the working population in each), followed by Uptown/ Galleria (4%), Greenway Plaza (3%), the Impact Zone (3%), and Sugar Land (2%). While these job centers employ a substantial portion (22%) of the working

Impact Zone population, 78% of the Zone’s residents find work in other widely distributed locations across the region. Overall, it appears that most Impact Zone residents are able to find employment: the area has a lower unemployment rate than the City of Houston (7% and 8%² respectively).

2 The American Community Survey census block data was used for both the City and Impact Zone unemployment rate.

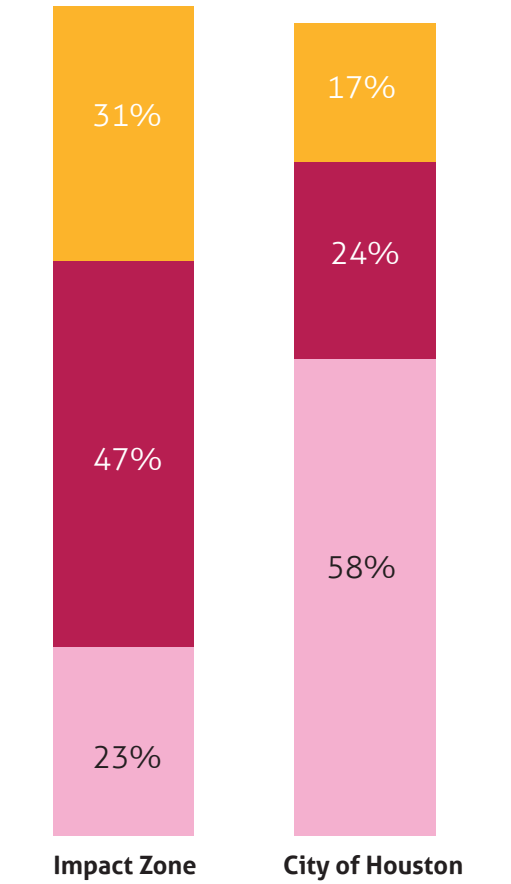


Percentage of Impact Zone Residents Commuting to Major Regional Job Centers
Source: Census LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics 2013

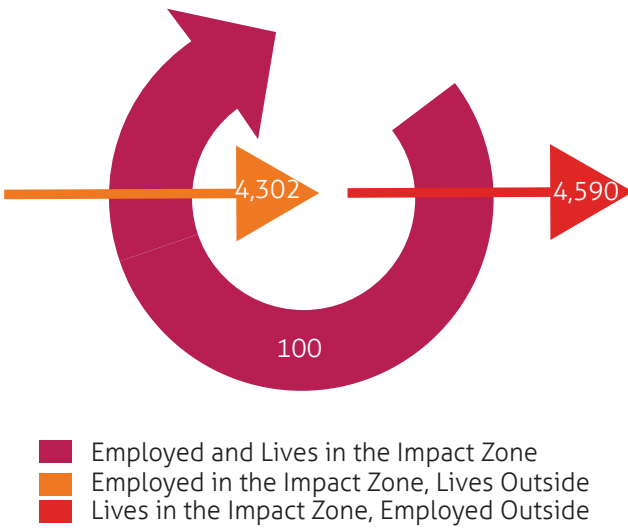


Generally, residents tend to work in service job sectors (31%) that are likely to pay lower wages, compared to 17% of the City of Houston’s employees working in the service sector.

Key Conclusions: Impact Zone residents are clearly driven to find and maintain employment: they travel to widely distributed workplaces across the Houston region, and have an overall low rate of unemployment. However, most work in low-paying industries, likely due to educational attainment and English proficiency challenges: workforce development and educational opportunities could enable residents to access higher-paying jobs and improve their families’ well-being.



Impact Zone Residents’ Sectors of Employment
Source: Community Analyst 2016



Employee and Resident Working and Housing Location
Source: On the Map 2014



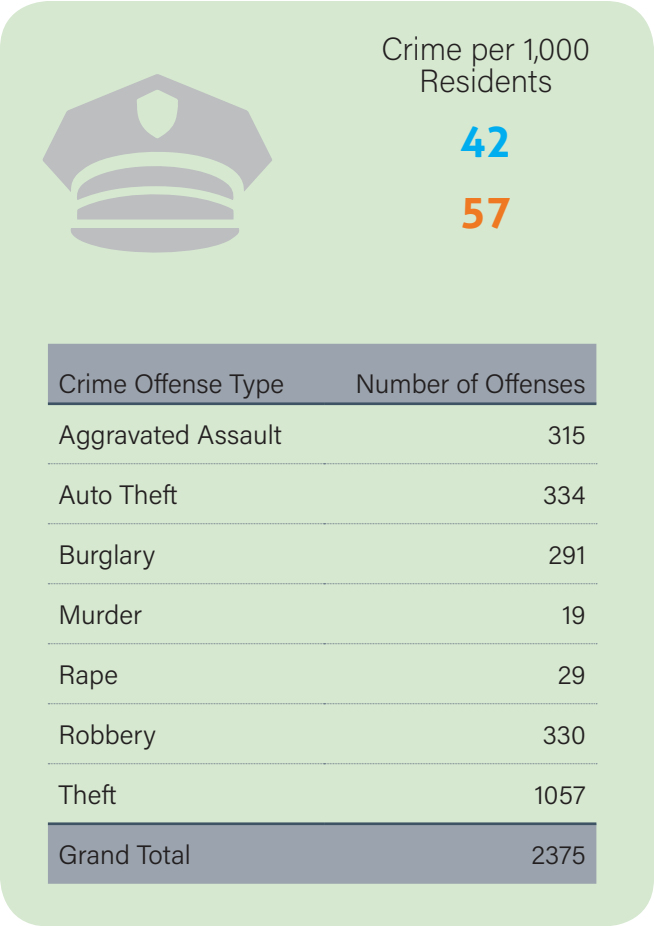
Employment Within Impact Zone vs. City of Houston
Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year data; Community Analyst 2016

Crime and Safety

Many members of the community have expressed concerns on the level of crime in the Gulfton/Sharpstown area. The Houston Police Department collects crime data within a Police Beat, which in this circumstance is larger than the Impact Zone. The police beat encompassing the Impact Zone is Beat 17E10, which covers an area bounded in the north by the Southwest Freeway, and to the south by Bellaire Street in the west, then extending down Hillcroft Street to Pine Street, then up Alder Drive to Evergreen Street, up Ferris Drive to Elm Street, up Rice Street to Glenmont St, and then bounded to the east by the I-610 Loop. The following average crimes per 1,000 residents were calculated for a 12-month period between August 2015 and August 2016.

This data indicates that the Police Beat has a lower crime rate than the City of Houston, even though many residents of the Impact Zone have expressed serious concerns about crime during the qualitative interviews for this research project. One potential reason for lower crime reporting in this area could be the high population of refugees and immigrants, who often avoid reporting crime so they will not have to come into contact with law enforcement. Also, the Police Beat extends beyond the Impact Zone, and the reported crime rate may be influenced by the rates of surrounding neighborhoods in addition to the Zone itself.

Key Conclusions: Crime is a serious concern for residents of the Impact Zone, but traditionally-collected data does not reflect the Zone as a high-crime location. More qualitative research may be necessary to understand instances where crime may be underreported, especially by the immigrant community, and areas where community-based policing strategies could potentially be enhanced.



■ Impact Zone ■ City of Houston
Crime Rates based on Police Beat Data within Impact Zone vs. City of Houston
Source: Houston Police Department, August 2015- August 2016

Health
Open Space and Recreational Needs

The Impact Zone has no parkland within its boundaries, meaning it has 0 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents; in contrast, the City of Houston has 21.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Because the Impact Zone is a relatively compact area, surrounding parkland and open space was also investigated to determine residents’ ability to access nearby recreational assets. The map below indicates 0.5-mile walking radii from regional parks and community centers, and 0.25-mile radii from neighborhood parks. Burnett Bayland Park and Bayland Park are theoretically within these walking distances from portions of the Impact Zone; however, Hillcroft and Bellaire present major safety challenges due to their high traffic volumes and vehicle speeds. Therefore, residents of the Impact Zone may have significant trouble accessing facilities that require them to cross these major roadways with children and/or elderly residents in their group.



Amenities of Area Parks and Public Spaces

In addition to the access challenges, it is also important to understand the amenities that local parks offer and the gaps that may exist to meet Impact Zone residents’ needs. Some nearby parks emphasize programmed playing fields, while others are oriented toward passive recreation, and others have more elaborate play equipment for children and adults. Many of the parks just beyond the Impact Zone’s reach (see the barriers

discussed on the previous page) offer sports amenities, playgrounds, and picnic areas.

Key Conclusions: Any proposed new park space for the Impact Zone will need to take these nearby amenity options into consideration before the park design is determined, and should account for the Impact Zone population’s favored activities and patterns of park usage as well.



Distance from Connect Community Center: 0.6 mile
Major Barriers of Access: None
Entity: City of Houston Health Department
Hours: Not Available
Amenities:



Distance from Connect Community Center: 0.8 mile
Major Barriers of Access: Bellaire Boulevard
Entity: Harris County
Hours: 7 AM - 10 PM
Amenities:



Distance from Connect Community Center: 0.5 mile
Major Barriers of Access: None
Entity: Baker-Ripley
Hours: Not Available
Amenities:



Distance from Connect Community Center: 1.5 miles
Major Barriers of Access: Hillcroft Avenue
Entity: City of Houston
Hours: 8 AM - 10 PM
Amenities:



Community Health & Wellness: Education and Incentives

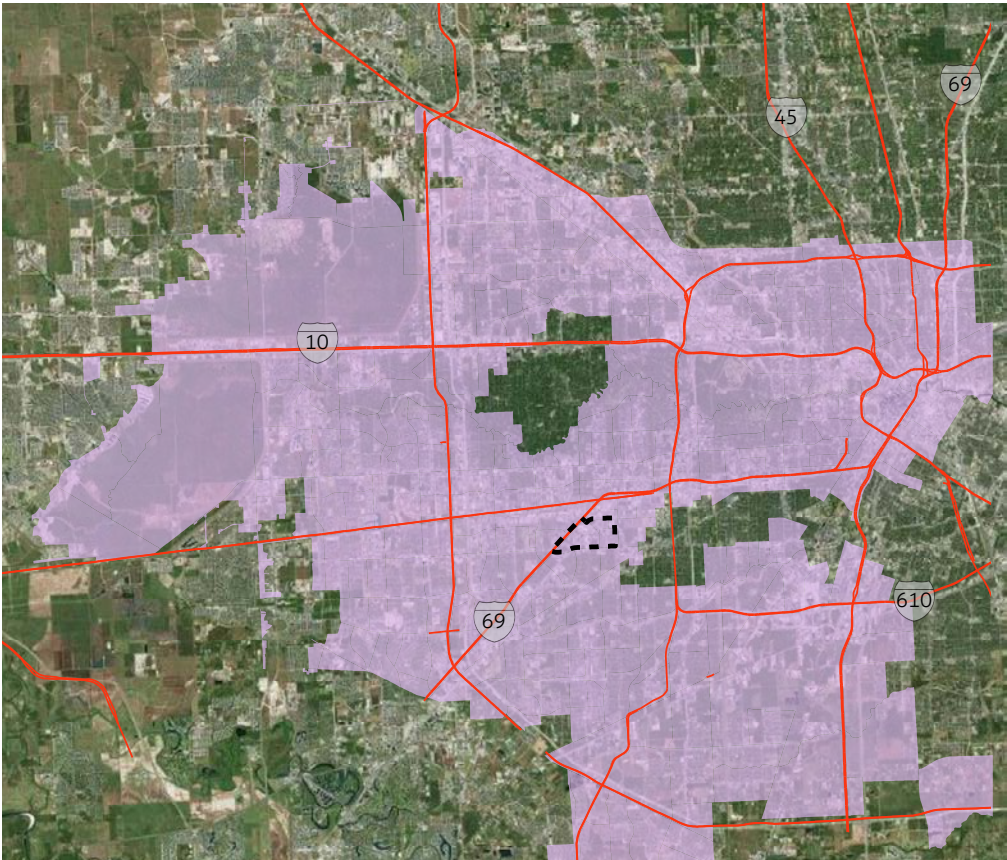
Health data was collected at a high-level analysis from the Houston Department of Health and Human Services Community Health Profile. The health profile describes Service Area C, which includes the region from West of Beltway 6 to Downtown, North of I-10 to Missouri City. The Impact Zone falls within Area C and is significantly smaller, but there is limited health data on a smaller scale. Area C combines lower and higher income neighborhoods. The data comes from American Community Survey five-year estimates (2007-2011), and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

Data was also compiled through the Legacy Community Health Clinic located within the Impact Zone. Their patient database system collected health indicators for the Legacy patients living within the Impact Zone as well as a nearby census tract, Census Tract 4215. The Legacy patient population for the Impact Zone skews to a younger population than other Houston clinic areas because pediatrics and obstetrics services are concentrated nearby.

The following health indicators attempt to compare the Legacy patients to Area C and then the City of Houston at large.

High Blood Pressure: 94% of high blood pressure Legacy patients are taking high blood pressure medication. High blood pressure can be detected and controlled. A lower percentage of the population with high blood pressure of Area C (69%) takes medication for high blood pressure than the City of Houston (71%). This may be because many are not treating their high blood pressure, or may be using other measures to reduce their high blood pressure.

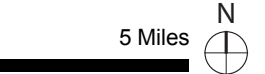
Overweight and Obese Population: Area C has a higher percentage of overweight residents between ages 18 and 44 (46%) compared to the City of Houston (36%), and a higher percentage of obese elderly (65+) residents (27%) compared to the City of Houston (23%). The Legacy patients are similarly overweight or obese; 37% of patients between the ages of 18 and 44 are overweight, and 32% of elderly patients are obese. Many variables affect the prevalence of overweight and obese populations, including access to healthy foods, access to indoor or outdoor fitness facilities or recreation space, and health education.



Map: Houston DHHS Service Area C

- Impact Zone
- Area C
- Major Highways

Source: COH Department of Health and Human Services



Diabetes: The prevalence of diabetes within Area C is similar to that of the City of Houston. A slightly higher proportion of Hispanics (12%) and Asians (7%) in Area C were diagnosed with diabetes compared to the City of Houston (11% and 6% respectively). Legacy patients have a slightly lower prevalence of diabetes than Area C and the City of Houston, with only 8% of Hispanics and 4% of Asians diagnosed with diabetes. Diabetes can lead to health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and kidney failure.

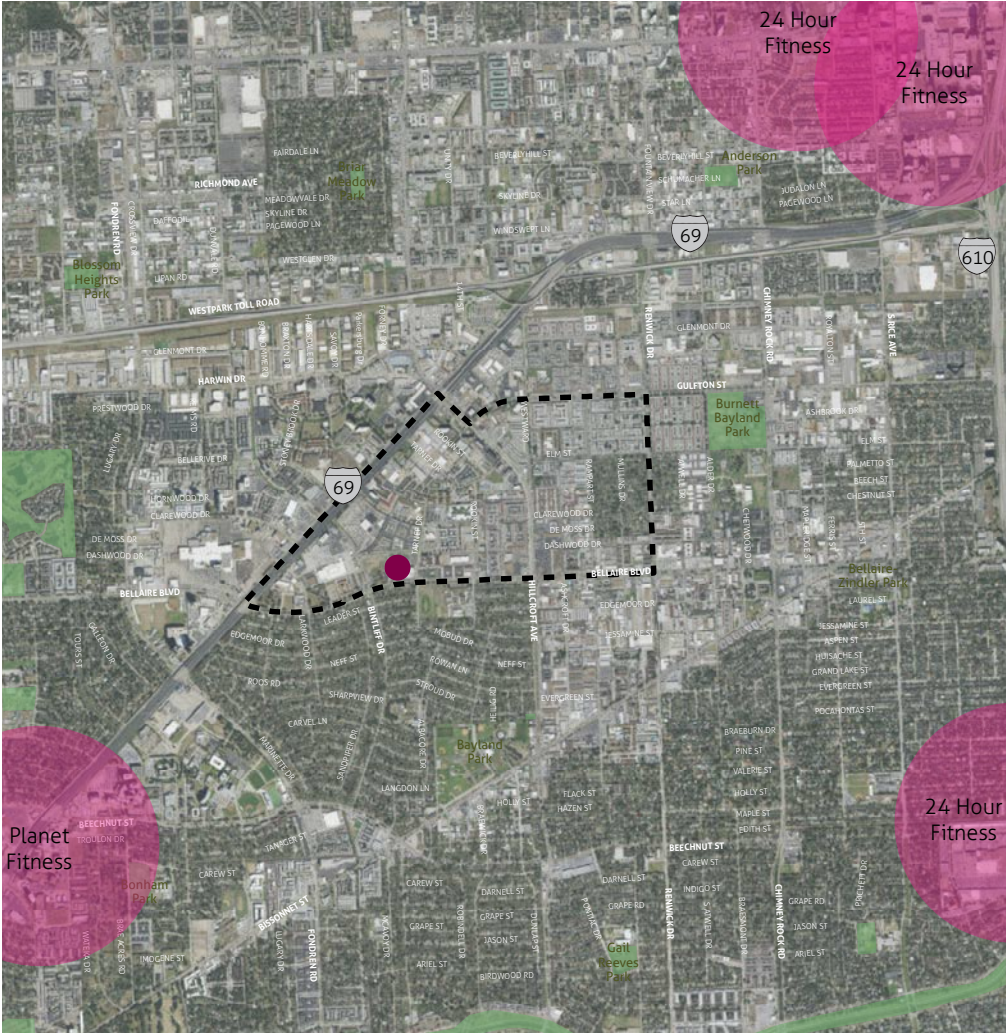
Received Early or No Prenatal Care or Prenatal Care in the 2nd or 3rd Trimester: A slightly higher percentage of women in Area C (44%) do not receive prenatal care in early and late phases of their pregnancies compared to Harris County (42%). 31% of Legacy Community Health's patients did not enter prenatal care with Legacy until their second trimester of pregnancy, based on cases where the trimester of entry to care was documented. According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, one Healthy People 2020 goal is that at least

80% of females delivering a live birth receive prenatal care beginning in the first trimester³.

No Health Insurance: 42% of the impact zone lacks health insurance, compared to the City of Houston's 24% figure (U.S. Census, 2013 - 2017 5 Year Data). This is a significant figure that limits people's access to preventative healthcare and could lead to more severe healthcare conditions being diagnosed in later or irreversible stages.

Key conclusions: Health education programs and health incentives can be organized through Connect Community's partnerships. Funding and programming can be increased within the Impact Zone to increase residents' access to health providers, healthy food, and indoor and outdoor fitness facilities. Lack of health insurance can be a key barrier to getting access to care. Having families insured should be a key goal.

3 Healthy People 2020 (2013). Objectives. Retrieved January 24, 2017, from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/>



Map: Access to Family Gyms

- Connect Community Campus
- Impact Zone
- Family Gyms .5-mile Walking Radius

Sources: Google

Action Planning: Setting a Vision

After finalizing the existing conditions analysis, Connect Community moved on to begin collaborative action planning with a wide array of community partners who work in the Impact Zone and the broader Gulfton/Sharpstown neighborhoods. The Action Planning process incorporated four workgroups focused on different topic areas: Community Health and Wellness; Transportation Safety and Access; Housing Quality and Affordability; and Education and Workforce Development. Each of these workgroups incorporated

partners who have a stake in these issues in the Impact Zone, including public-sector, private-sector, and non-profit partners.

The first stage in the Action Planning process was for each workgroup to develop a vision statement, or “Big Hairy Audacious Goal,” to express their hopes for the future of the Impact Zone and the neighborhood. The text of these BHAGs is included in this section.



“Big Hairy Audacious Goals”



Community Health and Wellness

Gulfton-Sharpstown is a spiritually-rich, active and nurturing community where residents and newcomers are equipped to thrive in the metropolis, live long and healthy lives, and feel an integral part of the community.



Education and Workforce Development

Gulfton-Sharpstown provides a nurturing yet rigorous learning environment that transforms futures for residents of all ages. Children achieve academic and civic engagement through premiere schools, highly-skilled and culturally-competent educators, and enhanced early childhood education opportunities. Residents are empowered to build small businesses; obtain fulfilling, well-paying work; and become civic and community leaders.



Transportation Safety and Access

Gulfton-Sharpstown residents, visitors, and commuters can walk and bike safely throughout the neighborhood, and can use transit to comfortably and conveniently access jobs, services, and leisure.



Housing Quality and Affordability

Gulfton-Sharpstown is an inclusive, multigenerational, and multicultural community where residents of all ages, ethnicities, and income levels thrive. Local families enjoy high-quality housing choices and culturally customized neighborhood amenities and services. The area is affordable and attractive to a diverse array of people, and residents have viable local pathways to homeownership.

Action Planning: Strategies and Actions

Stakeholders, community members, and the project team established over forty-five action steps pertaining to twelve strategies that emanated from the BHAG vision statements. After each workgroup developed their BHAG statement and proposed strategies and actions, the consultant team worked to find common themes between all four workgroups and to organize the strategies and actions in a way that promotes

collaborative action between community stakeholders. The four themes that emerged -- Empower, Connect, Nurture, and Thrive -- are described on the following page. The remainder of this section details each of the strategies and actions identified by the community participants, and includes local and national case studies that illustrate how these recommended actions can work in practice.





EMPOWER

Ensure community residents are empowered to take leadership roles in transforming their neighborhood.



CONNECT

Connect residents to local destinations, jobs, and services with safe and comfortable mobility choices.



NURTURE

Create a spiritually-rich, active, healthy, and nurturing community.



THRIVE

Enable residents to thrive in the metropolis with assets like job training, entrepreneurship support, and quality housing choices.

1

Empower



Gulfton-Sharpstown is one of the most diverse communities in Houston. Many new residents hail from other countries, and all residents contribute to the area's dynamic mix of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage. This chapter focuses on strategies and actions that empower these residents to shape the future of their family and their community at large. Empowering residents starts with welcoming new arrivals to ensure that they are prepared to navigate the complex systems and institutions of their new home. It also includes identifying neighborhood leaders of all ages and preparing them to transform their community through leadership of civic associations, boards, commissions and creating new alliances and governance structures that will democratize local decision-making and empower residents.



Expand Shared-Mobility Options, Enhance Walkability, and Tailor Advertising Efforts

Type: Project
Role: Coordinate

PRIORITY PROJECT #1

Gulfton-Sharpstown is served by numerous high-frequency bus routes with connections to the area's major employment centers, such as, Downtown, Uptown, and the Texas Medical Center. However, residents and workgroup participants noted these transit options were difficult to access from residential areas and the public realm was not walkable for safe travel within the neighborhoods of the Impact Zone. Therefore, Connect Community will coordinate with neighborhood stakeholders, METRO, and the City of Houston's Public Works Department to enhance safe access through a comprehensive set of strategies that include additional services, infrastructure, and shared-mobility programs for the area.

Sidewalks, ramps, and signalized crossings are vital infrastructure to ensuring people can safely navigate to their destination. This infrastructure should be upgraded throughout the Gulfton-Sharpstown area if the risk of deadly crashes is to subside. Connect Community will seek to partner with the area's adjacent management district, TIRZ, and METRO to pursue Transportation Alternatives funding at H-GAC for much needed sidewalks, ramps, and enhanced crossings.

In addition, disruptive technologies and shared-mobility programs could also have a transformative impact on expanding mobility choices and improving the first and last mile connection, such as, bikeshare and scooters. The benefit lies in expanding transportation options without the necessity of ownership which reduces household expenses.

Services may include community connector bus services or a partnership could be pursued with microtransit companies such as Chariot, Bridj, or Via that can move people between the first and last mile of their trip and

to better access neighborhood services and amenities. This could take the form of an autonomous vehicle (AV) circulator by METRO similar to the AV technology piloted at Texas Southern University in partnership with UT Austin's Center for Transportation Research, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, and TSU's Southwest Research Center as a part of the Texas AV Proving Grounds Partnership.

METRO's community connector service also is an option that currently operates in the Acres Homes area. Community connector service provides curbside to destination bus service within an established zone of service. Riders can reserve a trip in advance and transfer for free within METRO's 3-hour limit to other bus routes at predetermined transit facilities, bus stops, or commercial centers. This can improve access to residents dealing with physical barriers throughout the Impact Zone such as the Hillcroft Transit Center or children and elderly crossing Hillcroft Avenue or the Southwest Freeway to schools and social service destinations.

Success of these offerings will require a concerted effort to get the word out with the community. Advertising should be focused toward limited-English proficiency users and distributed in languages such as, Spanish, Pashto, Arabic, Swahili, and Urdu, in addition to English. METRO and neighborhood leaders can approach apartment complexes, neighborhood schools, shopping centers, area non-profits, and cultural bearers in the community. METRO's New Bus Network advertising campaign - as illustrated on the right - proved effective in spreading multilingual information throughout Houston. In particular, the agency's "street team" could be adapted with local neighbors that speak the necessary languages to conduct direct outreach in Gulfton-Sharpstown.



METRO's NEW BUS NETWORK IS COMING SOON

METRO's bus service has been "reimagined" – what does this mean for our customers?

More Service

- **Linking you to more destinations.** METRO's new bus network improves trips to key activity centers throughout the region and offers the flexibility for growth.
- **We're ready for the weekend.** High-frequency weekend service gives you more freedom to go where you want, when you want – 7 days a week.

Better Service

- **Simpler routes.** We're simplifying our routes with improved connections and fewer branches.
- **Better connections.** With routes that work together, the system gives you more connections to destinations in our region.

Your Service

- **A sustainable system.** We've created a network that not only serves our community today, but anticipates the possibility of expansion into tomorrow.
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1.1 Develop a Multilingual Community Connector program with community coaches and technology that will assist newcomers in connecting to resources.

Participants in all of the workgroups and the resident engagement process mentioned the need to better help new immigrants and refugees in the Impact Zone integrate into life in the U.S., access services, and find jobs and opportunity. The recommendations in this section include ensuring residents are aware of their housing rights; assisting residents to effectively utilize the transit system to access jobs and services; and helping residents to navigate our complex health care system.

1.1.1 Provide multilingual legal help to understand Fair Housing rights and leasing terms.

Type: Program

Role: Participate

The Fair Housing Act, enacted in 1968 as part of the Civil Rights Act, prohibits landlord discrimination against protected classes, which include race, religion, national origin, age, and sex among other classes. Local leasing terms provide guidelines for residents and tenants entering a legally-binding contract. Currently, many tensions exist between landlords and renters due to strained communication and unmet expectations on both sides. As we heard throughout focus groups and community meetings, renters are unhappy with the quality of housing and the amount of rent they pay. At the same time, landlords are unhappy with constant and unpredictable tenant turnover. Landlords also expressed a desire to improve property maintenance by making small repairs before they become big issues. This proactive maintenance, however, relies on tenants feeling empowered to request repairs through established channels. Knowing local and federal protections will encourage tenants to resolve housing issues before relocating.

A multilingual and culturally-competent program will help new and existing residents understand Fair Housing rights and leasing terms. The program should include in-person services, similar to the multilingual resettlement services at Alliance for Multicultural Community Services, in addition to pop-ups in the study area. While a brick-and-mortar office will provide a consistent and reliable space, many Impact Zone stakeholders witness and experience increased engagement when organizations set up tables in lobbies of apartment buildings and at community events.

Printed materials such as brochures, flyers, and posters will enhance outreach and supplement in-person services. Successful printed materials do more than translate language, they must connect familiar concepts of housing issues to the local context.

Local radio stations are often played in homes as well as gathering places such as restaurants, clothing stores, and salons. As Houston is home to one of the most diverse roster of multilingual and non-English speaking radio stations, radio ads are a unique opportunity to reach shared-language Houston residents in their everyday life.

1.1.2 Establish a regular schedule of METRO-attended meetings in Gulfton-Sharpstown to assist new immigrants and existing residents in using transit and publicize potential job opportunities.

Type: Program

Role: Participate

Compared to the Houston average, Gulfton-Sharpstown has a lower share of its population commuting to work driving alone – 53% compared to the city’s 78% (U.S. Census, 2010-2014 American Community Survey). Connect Community and its stakeholders will participate in METRO’s existing efforts to train residents in navigating the city’s transit system, as well as providing recruitment information for career opportunities. METRO has started a quarterly transportation fair and information session at the Southwest Multi-Service Center with culturally-competent staff that lead these engagement efforts. Connect Community and its stakeholders will begin participating in these activities as well as sharing information about other community meetings METRO can participate in to maximize engagement. METRO has committed to assign culturally-competent staff to lead these meetings, and to work to co-schedule these with

existing community meetings at the Southwest Multi-Service Center, to maximize participation. Stakeholders identified opportunities to enhance attendance through creative engagement methods, including:

- * Use resources that already exist at METRO to stimulate interest and vary the content of the meetings, such as the ‘Discover Bus’
- * Solicit residents’ opinion on how to integrate new travel modes, like bikeshare, with the bus system in order to provide community connectivity.
- * Use meetings as an avenue to recruit multilingual Gulfton residents to work as bus drivers and in other positions at METRO.

Case Study:

METRO’s “Discover Bus” is a mobile educational tool. The 40-ft. bus is parked at community events and high traffic pedestrian areas to educate people on transit services, fares, transit safety, commuter benefits and other METRO programs and services. METRO also has an online public comment system to collect, categorize and respond to public inquiries and service requests.

1.1.3 Provide a healthcare guide for residents that describes locations and types of local healthcare facilities, including Federally Qualified Health Clinics that provide sliding-scale fee options.

Type: Program

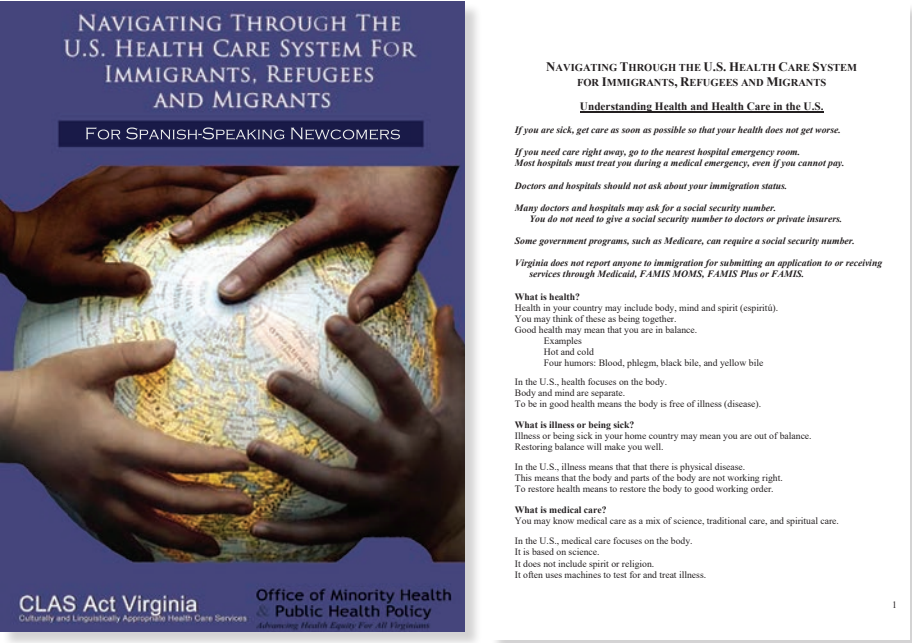
Role: Coordinate

Healthcare in the United States is notoriously challenging to navigate. Annual premium rates present financial barriers to comprehensive individual and family care. The State of Texas administers low-cost to free healthcare coverage in the form of Medicaid that is extremely difficult to qualify for and navigating the application process requires institutional knowledge. Focus groups conducted in 2017 as a part of the Community Needs Assessment suggest that administrators and public agency representatives serving the Impact Zone believe Gulfton-Sharpstown residents have trouble tapping into healthcare and resources. Residents, however, expressed a lack of trust in the system and need for guidance on basic elements of healthcare, such as identifying existing programs, managing applications, and the functions of different healthcare infrastructure.

As a short-term program, Connect Community can coordinate the production of a healthcare guide that

includes culturally-relevant examples to orient residents to their new local infrastructure. The Community Needs Assessment identifies Mexico, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Pakistan as countries of origins for most residents in the Impact Zone. To create a culturally-relevant guide for this population, Connect Community should identify how residents addressed healthcare needs in those countries and translate that concept into a local context that demystifies the differences between urgent care and the emergency room, between a hospital and a clinic, between a primary care physician and a specialist. What are co-pays and premiums? Which facilities accept payment based on your income? How do you find a provider who accepts your insurance?

As the guides are developed, they should be available at apartment complexes, the Express Library, and other places residents access resources.



The Virgina Department of Health has published a multilingual healthcare guide for immigrants, refugees, and migrants and serves community organizations and faith-based groups that want to reach these populations. The guide details where to get care, who gives care, and how to pay for it, with culturally-appropriate examples and explanations.

1.2 Foster civic engagement and community solutions by empowering and developing youth and adult leaders

The recommendations in this section focus on ways for youth and families to take on leadership and governance roles in shaping the future of the Impact Zone and the broader Gulfton / Sharpstown neighborhoods.

1.2.1 Create opportunities for youth to transform the area by establishing a youth council arm of the Super Neighborhood and securing resources to fund youth-led projects.

Type: Program

Role: Coordinate

The Super Neighborhood should form a youth council that actively organizes community improvement and outreach projects. Connect Community can support the Super Neighborhood in connecting with local schools and faith organizations to recruit interested youth. Several forms of youth councils can address different needs in the community. Youth Advisory Councils provide input and feedback regarding adult-driven decision-making. Youth research councils assess and evaluate programs relevant to youth and community, and action councils lead youth-focused programs and projects by their own. Gulfton-Sharpstown can introduce a combination of either that suits the community's needs. The young people will be responsible for selecting and managing the projects based on the community needs and available funds. This exercise will instill community pride in the youth, and invest in future leaders for community activities and collective decision-making.

There are a number of local youth initiatives in Houston that are available for youth engagement efforts in the

Impact Zone and can empower area youth. For example, the Mayor's Youth Council in Houston is an organization that allows Houston youth to discuss pertinent issues while promoting activism and community service through its role in civic engagement. Connect Community and partners can work to ensure area youth are consistently represented on the council and able to bring awareness to neighborhood issues. Another example is the Houston Police Department's Youth Policy Advisory Council that brings together thirty-six high school students from area schools each year. These students meet with the Chief of Police and high-ranking police officials, adult mentors, and parents to discuss current and relative issues of mutual interest to them and the Chief. And finally, United Minds is a youth leadership development program based on a service learning model in Gulfton-Sharpstown. This program is part of the Anti-Gang's Gulfton Community Youth Development Programs portfolio and operates in conjunction with the Gulfton Youth Mentoring Program and Campo del Sol Summer Day Camp.



Case Study:

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), a nonprofit community-based planning initiative was born out of the intent to reclaim the neighborhood of Roxbury, Massachusetts from rampant disinvestment, arson and dumping. Directing their energy to youth, the DSNI: Youth Development program has several initiatives for everyone aged between 0 and 24. Below are some examples:

DSNI Youth Committee meets monthly and provides oversight, direction, and strategies for educational and career opportunities for youth in the community.

Dudley Children Thrive supports families with children between 0-5 years to prepare them for school and life by making them feel smart, loved and confident. A team of residents, families and organizations support parents as First Teachers with focus on Early Literacy, Nutrition, and Wellness.

Dudley Youth Council meets weekly and welcomes all youth to help plan events and activities throughout the year such as game and theme nights, talent cyphers, sports tournaments, family fun nights and youth cafes. The youth have created several mini films on various important topics to youth, for example Teenage Fire and Live It Up or Give It Up: The Story of a Dropout. A Get Hype Campaign is another initiative for motivating high school youth to make positive choices about their life, education and future.

DSNI employs around 60 youth and young adults throughout the school year and summer to make positive changes in the neighborhood. The working model employs young adults aged 19-25 to supervise the youth between the ages of 15-18. Several projects by them include:

- * Develop documentary about the importance of early literacy.
- * Build raised bed gardens in collaboration with the Food Project and REEP for healthy food options.
- * Organize Pop-Up Museums, in collaboration with the Boston Children's Museum, at the weekly Farmers Markets to educate families about early literacy.
- * Plan community landscape projects, on land trust property, in collaboration with Youth Build, and organize annual Multicultural Festival to celebrate the vibrant cultural diversity in the community.

GOTCHA (Get Off the Corner Hanging Around), initially formed as a summer youth employment, evolved into a program to include school year employment, joint trainings, events and outreach efforts, and advocacy to increase the number and quality of jobs available for young people in the community.

College Bound program introduces post-secondary opportunities to neighborhood by organizing college trips and retreats, linking college students from the community and hosting workshops for families on application and financial aid process.

Young Alumni Network, primarily focused on 18-20 year olds, aims at providing resources, connections and supports to help young people succeed in college, career and life.

1.2.2 Integrate youth and parents in community activities and organizations.

Type: Project

Role: Support

Gulfton sees a high number of youth from different national origins, with a total of 62% of its residents as foreign-born. As we heard from focus groups and community workshops, a culture gap between youth and adults exists in Gulfton. There is a need for programs that bridge the generational difference that presents communication challenges for both youth and parents. Neighborhood schools and nonprofit organizations must explore creative ways to involve parents, students and community members in activities to mobilize residents for a positive change. With a high number of immigrants

and non-English-speaking parents in Gulfton, many of them experience difficulty in understanding and navigating the American educational system as well as social structure around them. With effective parent-teacher-youth organizations, parents can actively engage themselves in community activities and become strong role models for the youth in the neighborhood. Organize listening sessions, frequent meetings and checks ins among PTA, principals, and community organizations for partnership and accountability.

Case Study:

The Two Generation Approach creates opportunities to address needs of both children and adults in their lives together. This method tracks outcomes for both children and adults simultaneously and is based on five key components: (1) postsecondary education and employment pathways, (2) early childhood education and development, (3) economic assets, (4) health and well-being, and (5) social capital. (Source: Ascend, the Aspen Institute. What is Gen2? Accessed November 27, 2018)



Source: Connect Community

2

Connect



This concept, "Connect," focuses on enhancing access throughout the Impact Zone. Currently, the area is fragmented by major physical barriers, autocentric roadway design, and lackluster infrastructure that does not support residents' active transportation choices. Strategies in the Connect section aim to improve walkability and provide safe access to schools, transit, jobs, and community services.



Promote a High-Comfort Design and Implementation of the Westward, High Star Bikeway Project

Type: Project

Role: Participate

PRIORITY PROJECT #2

The City of Houston's Complete Communities Action Plan for Gulfton identified the Westward, High-Star bikeway project as a short-term priority project. This bikeway would connect area schools, such as KIPP Connect Prep, YES Prep, Jane Long Academy and Etoile, from Bellaire Boulevard up to the Hillcroft Transit Center, across US Highway 59 (also known as I-69), as part of a partnership project between METRO, TxDOT, and the City of Houston. This 2 mile bikeway would connect 5 area schools and 12 apartment complexes to the Southwest Multi-Service Center, the Hillcroft Transit Center, a future east-west shared-use path on a portion of METRO's Westpark Drive right-of-way, and various social service agencies and non-profits stationed on High Star Drive.

Connect Community will be an active participant in the design process and seek to promote the development of a high-comfort bikeway that accounts for the needs of people walking, biking, and riding transit in the community. This bikeway is proposed to cross many high-traffic areas and intersections and provides an opportunity to align existing infrastructure with the City of Houston's Complete Streets and Transportation Plan principles by retrofitting autocentric infrastructure

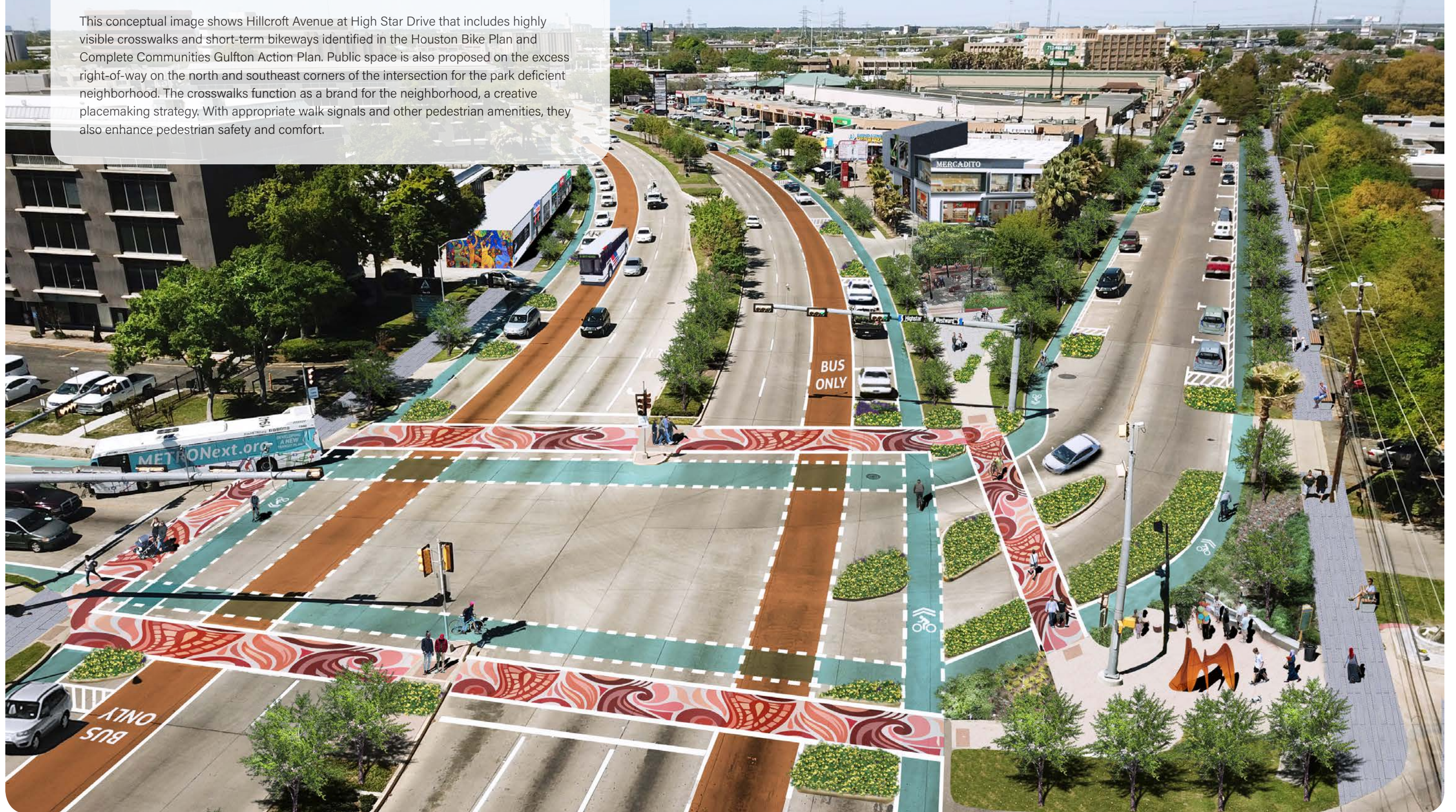
to meet the needs of neighborhood residents -- particularly people crossing at Hillcroft Avenue.

Intersection design treatments -- illustrated on the following page -- should consider the following during the design phase:

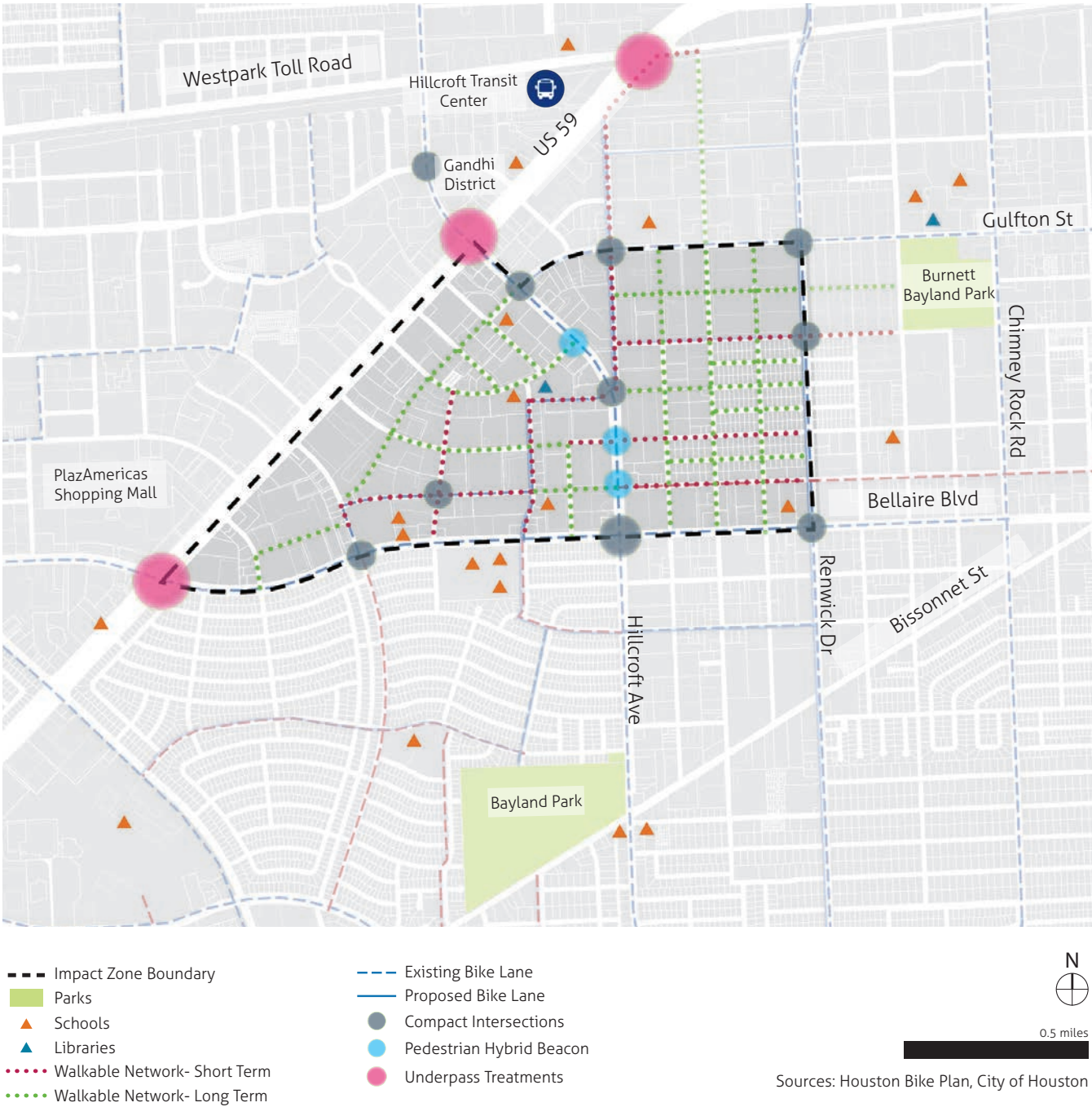
- * Curb extensions that shorten the crossing distance for cyclists and pedestrians
- * Universal design, tactile and braille features
- * Pedestrian refuge islands
- * Signage and wayfinding
- * Pedestrian leading intervals and bicycle crossing signals
- * Creative placemaking on crosswalk design
- * Activate excess right-of-way with public plazas or parklets to offset park space deficiencies

HILLCROFT AVENUE AT HIGH STAR DRIVE AND WESTWARD STREET

This conceptual image shows Hillcroft Avenue at High Star Drive that includes highly visible crosswalks and short-term bikeways identified in the Houston Bike Plan and Complete Communities Gulfport Action Plan. Public space is also proposed on the excess right-of-way on the north and southeast corners of the intersection for the park deficient neighborhood. The crosswalks function as a brand for the neighborhood, a creative placemaking strategy. With appropriate walk signals and other pedestrian amenities, they also enhance pedestrian safety and comfort.



Proposed Walkable Network



2.1 Establish a network of walkable streets that connect to the area’s major destinations, schools, transit stops and parks.

2.1.1 Pursue streetscape redesigns for major streets to promote street life, safe routes to school, and accessibility.

Type: Project

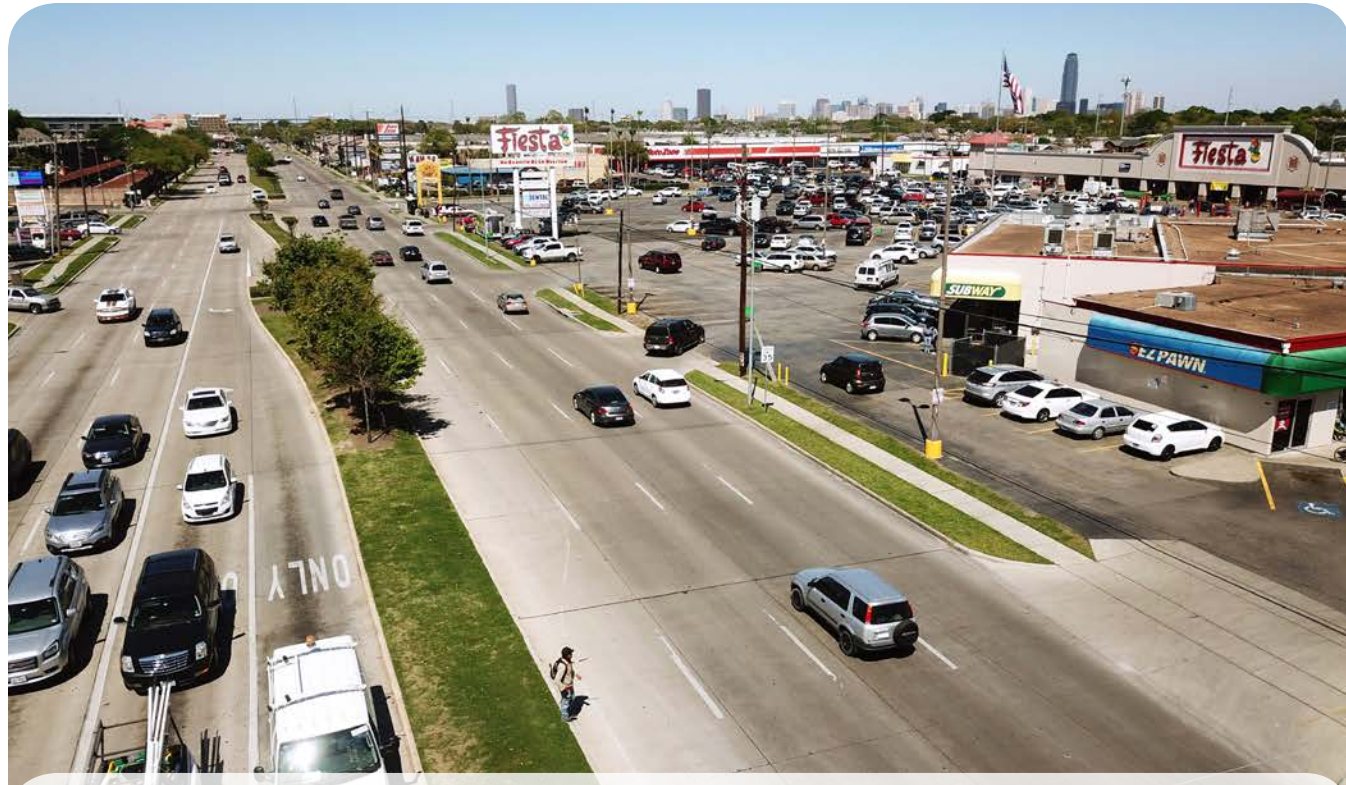
Role: Advocate

The Impact Zone is surrounded by major highways and wide arterials. These streets currently function as barriers for impact zone residents – creating dangerous conditions for families and children. A redesign of major streets is proposed to increase access along and across the Impact Zone and improve the neighborhoods’ edges, including creative placemaking opportunities within the public realm. Recommended streets to redesign within the Impact Zone include: Hillcroft Ave., Bellaire Blvd., Renwick Dr., and Gulfton Rd. Introducing walkable streetscapes in these streets will provide the spine on which to connect neighborhood streets and provide opportunities to better connect across major roadways to popular destinations. The following page illustrates an example for a redesign of Hillcroft Avenue into a Complete Street consistent with the approach outlined in the City of Houston’s Complete Streets and Transportation Plan (HCSTP) and identified as a short-term project in the Houston Bike Plan. The street redesign includes on-street parking to offset future losses in surface parking lots likely to occur under any redevelopment scenario that brings development closer to the street.

Improvements may include lane diets, planting areas and street trees buffering vehicle and pedestrian traffic, shade opportunities, pedestrian-scaled lighting, wayfinding, streetscape furnishings, accessible curb ramps and crossing amenities, and marked or lighted crosswalks

The walkable network map includes various east and west connections situated at streets with critical crossings and high volume of crashes with pedestrians and cyclists. In the short-term, Connect Community can advocate for a traffic impact study focused on evaluating the criteria for pedestrian hybrid beacons based on guidance from the Manual Uniform for Traffic Control Devices (i.e. MUTCD, Chapter 4C. Traffic Control Signal Needs Studies). The criteria requires more than 20 pedestrian crossings in an hour, with traffic volumes exceeding more than 350 motor vehicles in that time frame to justify a pedestrian hybrid beacon. The walkable network map identifies 3 minor intersections suitable to study the need for pedestrian hybrid beacons where various crashes have occurred with pedestrians.

Infrastructure investments can also correspond with additional safety programs in a neighborhood. Walking School Bus programs, for instance, can be coordinated with neighboring school leaders, apartment complexes, law enforcement, and parent groups to create a series of guided walking trails every morning and afternoon at set times. These walking trails also provide the foundation for future Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) investments. A program can start with a small group of adult volunteer crossing guards at minor intersections and police officers at major intersections such as Hillcroft Avenue. Connect Community and partners can coordinate discussions with school district officials, school leaders, parent groups and the Houston Police Department on developing a program and addressing liability, training, and funding opportunities.



HILLCROFT AVENUE AT BELLAIRE BOULEVARD

This conceptual image shows the potential to reimagine Hillcroft Avenue's 135 ft. of right of way into a signature Complete Street in Houston with a before and after example focused on balancing the needs of neighborhood residents with those of motorists passing through the Impact Zone. This redesign embodies the city's ambitious vision in the Houston Complete Streets and Transportation Plan (HCSTP) and showcases the Houston Bike Plan's short-term project recommendation on Hillcroft Avenue.



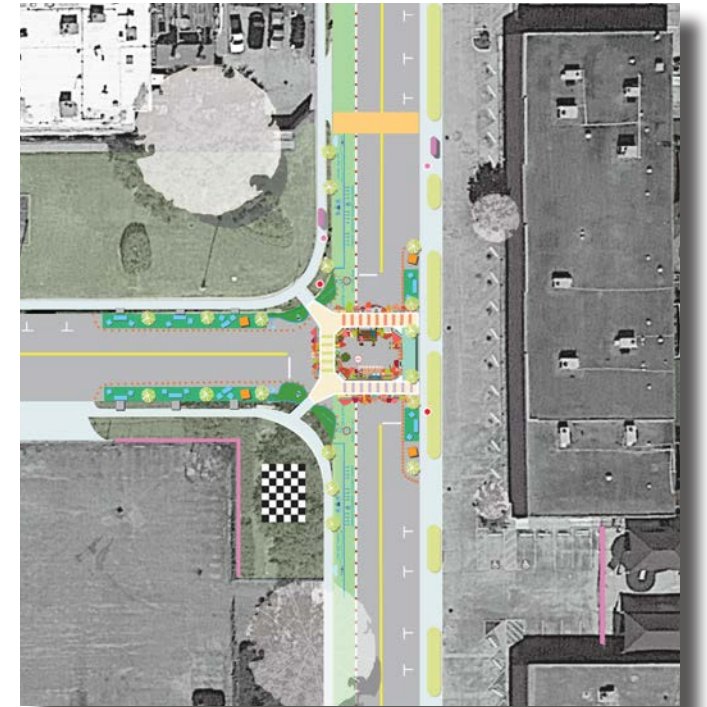
2.1.2 Develop a streetscape manual for safer street design, including creative placemaking at intersections and crosswalks.

Type: Project

Role: Advocate

A safer street substantially increases the residents' desirability for walking. The existing intersections in the Impact Zone, as identified, have potential to be redesigned as safer streets. Creating a tailored streetscape manual, including potential improvements listed under 2.1a, for the Impact Zone can help define urban design guidelines to provide a better walking experience for all.

Streetscapes should, where possible and appropriate, include a planting and furnishing zone, wide sidewalk, frontage zone, and safe crossings at reasonable intervals. Planting zone serves as a separation and buffer that protects pedestrians from moving and turning vehicles also offers shade. The width of the planting zone should be between 4 - 8 feet, depending on the right-of-way, to allow for root space for trees and ground cover. Periodically, the planting zone can be hardscaped with street furnishings such as trash and recycling bins, benches, bicycle racks, dockless geofencing areas, wayfinding signs, and lighting. Street lighting promotes safer user comfort throughout day and night. A wide



AIA COMPLETE THE COMMUNITY URBAN DESIGN COMPETITION

Asakura Robinson and R.G. Miller Engineers were recognized for a Special Distinction in Urban Design Award by the American Institute of Architects in 2018 that featured a small-scale 'tactical urbanism' demonstration project at Hornwood Drive at Rookin Street. The project intended to empower residents, area civic leaders, and property owners on how to make potential high-impact changes to the Gulfton urban streetscape utilizing low cost materials, either inexpensively obtained or donated.



Source: AIA Houston, August 2018. <https://aiahouston.org/v/site-page/Complete-the-Community/Competition-Winners/9a/>

sidewalk should offer sufficient space for pedestrian passing and walking side-by-side without impediment. Streets with the right-of-way limitations may include a minimum sidewalk width of 5 feet, which is the City standard. The frontage zone should be included on streets that have commercial frontage, to allow for seating or outdoor retail.

Intersections are also a crucial part of safe streets and should include at least three key elements in design: a crosswalk, ramps, and refuge island (where crossings are greater than two total travel lanes). All crosswalks should be well marked and visible so that they are clear to drivers. In major corridors, crosswalks can be marked in ways that highlight local artists or culture. In consideration of residents in all age and all physical condition, an accessible ramp with detection pavers is desirable at every intersection to ensure everyone is able to travel safely and freely in the Impact Zone, and crossings should have lighted and audible indicators where possible.

2.1.3 Promote pedestrian-oriented building facades that encourage walkability.

Type: Project

Role: Advocate

Generally speaking building facades should be scaled to the pedestrian per several key design elements: building height, facade width, fenestration, awning height, and building signage. Building height may vary but buildings in commercial or neighborhood centers should include a human-scaled first- or second-story delineation or cornice, with articulated decoration or other visual interest. If an awning is used it should cover at least the primary entry and be placed at a level that provides comfortable height. Fenestration should be incorporated to maintain the proportion of glass to solid wall on no less than 50% of the first floor. This allows pedestrians to look into the building and that promotes connections between building occupants and pedestrians. When new construction is proposed, building facades should maintain widths, or articulations, no greater than the building height to create a rhythm of visual interest and avoid the perception of long walks. Awning signs are recommended as a pedestrian-oriented type.



Buildings with reduced setbacks promote human-scale design and reduce sight distances for motorists

Source: Flickr, creative commons, Eric Fischer.

2.1.4 Identify properties likely to redevelop to promote walkable urban design guidelines.

Type: Project

Role: Advocate

One way to facilitate a more walkable environment is to collaborate with developers and property owners to improve the public realm. Existing garden-style apartments and single-use commercial strip centers are likely to change in urban form when redevelopment does occur. Connect Community should advocate for a market study through the management district or a future TIRZ or community development corporation to better understand susceptibility to change in commercial and residential uses within the Impact Zone. This study can inform how Connect Community and partners work with specific property owners and developers to ensure walkability is factored into site design for redeveloping parcels. Minor adjustments in site design can make sizable differences in how spaces shape people's activity, comfort, and use. In particular, siting parking in the rear of the property, shorter building setbacks from the public right of way, shading structures, outdoor furniture, or consolidating or redesigning curb cuts with level pedestrian crossings, can make for a more walkable urban environment.



The redesigned curb cut improves pedestrian's comfort and walkability.

Source: Asakura Robinson, April 2018



Streetscape standards can help existing and future property owners enhance pedestrian amenities and walkability.

Source: Asakura Robinson, April 2018

2.2 Add new transit options and infrastructure to benefit Gulfton residents and businesses.

2.2.1 Install benches and shelters at area bus stops.

Type: Project

Role: Participate

A well-placed and well-designed bus shelter is an essential part of any successful urban mass-transit system. Well-lit and ADA-compliant bus stops with unencumbered space near the sidewalk provide visibility and easy access. They also enhance safety and comfort in terms of waiting for the bus, boarding and alighting the bus, and crossing the street. Consider the following factors while installing seating and shelters at area bus stops:

- * Areas with infrequent bus routes, commercial areas with frequent service and high levels of ridership, areas with security issue, a higher number of older or disabled population, and areas with inclement weather.

- * Highly-visible locations near retail stores that are open late at night, near office building entrances, near amenities such as telephones, benches, etc.
- * Provide amenities with proper bus stop signs, easy-to-navigate bus schedule, real-time bus update, bicycle racks, information kiosk, lighting, landscaping etc.
- * Bus shelter design should reflect the community where it is located. Collaborate with local and young artists to design the shelters and install art pieces to create a sense of place.
- * Design seating and bus shelter that are durable, vandalism-resistant and require low-maintenance.

Case Study:

Better Bus Stops is a community engagement process, active from March 2016 to March 2017, based in underserved areas of St. Paul, MN. The program was a collaboration among Metro Transit, nonprofit organizations across the city, and the University of Minnesota. The engagement process focused on the input from local residents about their priorities for locating the shelters, desired features, shelter style and bus stop design. The participants also discussed about their priorities that go beyond the bus stops in terms of bus service and operations, fares, and safety.

2.2.2 Build on prior transit improvements to Bellaire Blvd. and advocate for high-capacity transit on the corridor.

Type: Policy

Role: Advocate

The Bellaire corridor has two high-frequency bus routes which connect the community to the world’s largest medical complex to the east at the Texas Medical Center (TMC) through the TMC station with connections to 17 bus routes and 1 light-rail transit line. One trip to TMC takes approximately 32 minutes from the Impact Zone. Gulfton-Sharpstown residents stand to benefit from improvements to existing services aimed at reducing travel times. A number of short and long term solutions can be phased into the corridor, with coordination and support from METRO, H-GAC, Connect Community,

and the City of Houston. Potential interventions include introducing: Traffic Signal Priority (TSP) for buses at intersections of preference; redesigning street-sections with queue jumps; dedicated bus lanes; off-board fare collection; platform-level boarding; an expanded walkable public realm; and, passing lanes at stations. Initial steps for listed actions should include performing a comprehensive corridor study that identifies solutions with appropriate stakeholders and establishes a phasing strategy for enhancing travel times.

2.2.3 Promote Service Enhancements to the Hillcroft Route 47.

Type: Project

Role: Advocate

The Hillcroft corridor is served by Route 47 which connects US Highway 90 to the Northwest Transit Center. The route traverses six high-frequency bus routes that run east and west. Route 47 currently has 30-minute headways and averages over 3,100 average daily boardings - more trips than almost half of METRO’s high-frequency bus routes that operate under 15 minutes or less during peak hours (METRO Ridership Summary, October 2018). Moreover, Route 47 is only surpassed by 4 of the 27 high-frequency routes when comparing boardings per revenue hour -- a reliable indicator for projecting ridership growth potential -- though half a dozen 30-minute routes outperform the Hillcroft 47. METRO’s Long-Range Plan (METRONext), currently in draft form for the general public as this publication

was being written, identified the Hillcroft corridor as a BOOST route in its vision network. METRO currently defines a BOOST route as a frequent route that improves speed and reliability through optimization features. The BOOST toolbox includes: Transit signal priority, stop optimization/relocation, access improvements, new bus shelters, queue jumps, bus-only lanes, and enhanced passenger information. As resources become available, it is imperative that Connect Community and partner organizations continue to advocate for increased frequencies and service enhancements for the Hillcroft corridor, to meet the demand for transit service in the area.

2.2.4 Improve Access to the Hillcroft Transit Center and Promote Multifunctional Greenspace Opportunities at the site.

Type: Project

Role: Participate

The Hillcroft Transit Center resides at the intersection of two major highways, making for hazardous access to surrounding communities that feature some of the highest transit dependency characteristics in Houston. METRO, TxDOT, and the City of Houston all own rights-of-way and are coordinating to leverage resources in making a safer walk to the transit center. Connect Community and partner entities identified access issues to the transit center a major concern. METRO’s scope of improvements being advanced to design at this time:

- * Curb extensions
- * Universal design, tactile and braille features
- * Signage and wayfinding
- * Pedestrian motion signals

This planning process also generated insight into the community’s desire to leverage available public land to achieve other community goals, such as expanding active greenspace, recreation, or other public uses that bring people together. This is particularly important in the impact zone where property vacancy is low and public properties are limited. The transit center’s detention area (owned by Harris County) and/or portions of the surface parking lot can be reprogrammed to accommodate recreational or park uses, similar to the MARTA example in the case study.

2.3 Examine how Gulfton residents travel, including their use of technology, in order to better serve their transportation needs.

2.3.1 Conduct a household travel survey to understand trip making.

Type: Program

Role: Participate

As noted in the existing conditions chapter, 38% of residents from the Impact Zone commute to work by active transportation modes (i.e. walk, bike, transit, carpool) in comparison to 17% of Houston commuters. The objective here is to have a better understanding of residents’ unmet needs and generate substantive information that can be used by transportation planners in the decision-making process. In turn, municipal and regional transportation agencies share a responsibility to better understand the needs of underserved and underrepresented communities like Gulfton-Sharpstown -- particularly to make investments that help improve residents’ access to transportation networks, reduce harmful effects of pollution, and enhance economic opportunity -- rather than auto-dominant projects for motorists passing through communities.

A household travel survey with area residents can decipher more intricate trip-making patterns that are not readily available through U.S. Census figures. One shortcoming of the Census dataset is that it logs the most dominant mode in an entire commute and discards all others. For instance, evaluating the total amount of daily trips by household and how residents combine different transportation modes to reach their destinations provides a more nuanced understanding for people’s trip-making patterns that can inform infrastructure and service priorities. A survey of this type can support the Kinder Institute’s study on near-misses in the neighborhood that seeks to understand people’s experiences with dangerous roadway conditions and conflicts between modes.




Source: StationSoccer Atlanta. Accessed January 8, 2019. <https://www.soccerstreets.org/station-soccer-play/>

Case Study:

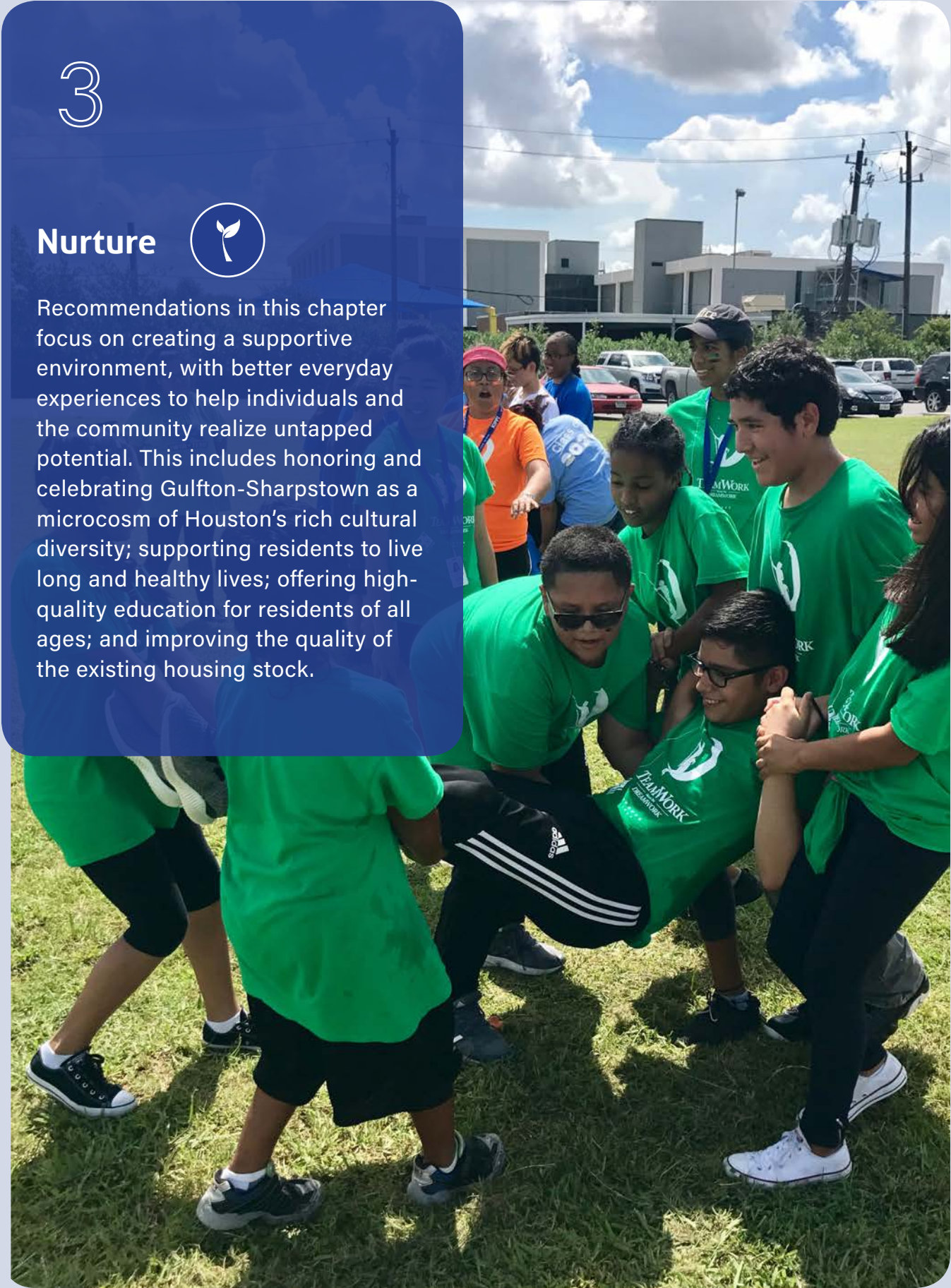
StationSoccer is a concept that started in Atlanta’s transit stations. The MARTA soccer league is the first transit soccer league in the country, driven by a non-profit focused on expanding competitive soccer opportunity for low-income youth not able to participate in the ‘pay-to-play’ system in the United States. Non-profit leaders were struggling to bus kids around, when one day, the idea of repurposing empty MARTA parking lots into soccer fields ignited an idea that would transform Atlanta’s soccer culture. Today, casual pick-up games, as well as competitive play has activated 2 MARTA stations, the plan is 10 stations, and relies on the transit system for access -- allowing the non-profit to dedicate its funding elsewhere.

3

Nurture



Recommendations in this chapter focus on creating a supportive environment, with better everyday experiences to help individuals and the community realize untapped potential. This includes honoring and celebrating Gulfton-Sharpstown as a microcosm of Houston’s rich cultural diversity; supporting residents to live long and healthy lives; offering high-quality education for residents of all ages; and improving the quality of the existing housing stock.



Strengthen Gulfton-Sharpstown as a Cultural Cuisine Destination by Bolstering Restaurateurs in the Area

Type: Program
Role: Participate

PRIORITY PROJECT #3

Awareness of Houston’s multicultural ethos is well documented though is on the rise due to the culinary ingenuity taking place in enclaves throughout the area. Bellaire Blvd. or Chinatown, for instance, is noted for its concentration of Hunan, Sichuan, and Cantonese -- all regional Chinese cuisines -- in addition to Vietnamese, Thai, and Korean specialties unmatched across the city. Houston’s Airline Blvd. is regarded as “la calle del taco” and Hillcroft Ave. as Little India or the Mahatma Gandhi District with Indo-Pakistani restaurants and bakeries immediately north of the Impact Zone that attract people across the region. These communities exemplify the role that cuisine plays in bringing communities together and reflecting the diversity of cultures that plays out in the city. Gulfton-Sharpstown features a variety of cultural cuisines (Afghani, Central American, regional Mexican niches, etc.) that fit seamlessly into the culinary currents taking place in Houston. In order to occupy a commanding presence within the area, Connect Community and partners can empower informal restaurateurs, including providing administrative and legal support to expand the pipeline into brick and mortar opportunities and expand capacity-building for existing businesses. This will provide economic opportunities for area entrepreneurs and set the foundation for hosting more cultural festivals and events.

A kitchen incubator can be pursued for the Impact Zone focused on promoting food-related entrepreneurs and continuing to build the area’s diverse ethnic food cultures into successful pathways to the middle class for residents. Kitchen incubators can help prospective businesses flourish in a number of ways. They can facilitate start-up brick and mortars, food trucks, or street vendors by providing safe, code-compliant facilities where new ventures can test and refine their recipes. Incubators can also support home-based food businesses -- which are known to be prevalent in Gulfton-Sharpstown -- reach new markets and transition to more sustainable models by providing business resources, legal advice, and increasing peer learning opportunities.

Connect Community can also coordinate the creation and retention of organized public art, cuisine and cultural events by establishing a merchants association. Unlike Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), which command a tax from business owners within a defined boundary, merchants associations may operate as a nonprofit. In addition to restaurant and shop owners, the association can include promoters who produce cultural events in the area. Creating a merchants association could also result in a website for consumers to plan multi stop visits and assist programming activities.



Connect Community - Newcomer Thanksgiving Dinner at St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, 2915.

Case Study

Cincinnati’s Minority Business Accelerator (MBA) at the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber supports businesses that are ready for growth by connecting them with contracting opportunities, networking, mentoring, and investment opportunities. Launched in 2004 in the wake of the 2001 riots to catalyze more employment among minorities in the city, the 32 African-American and Hispanic companies in the MBA have achieved about \$1 billion in aggregate revenues while employing 3,500. One of the programs, Mortar, enables non-traditional entrepreneurs in underserved and redeveloping communities in Cincinnati to launch businesses that benefit their communities.

3.1 Celebrate Gulfton’s diverse cultures.

The Gulfton / Sharpstown area that includes the Impact Zone is one of the most diverse places in the United States. This section focuses on opportunities to nurture this diverse group of residents by promoting interfaith interaction, celebrating culture through arts and food, and creating a pride-in-place campaign for the neighborhood.

3.1.1 Build on interfaith collaboration to advance community well-being.

Type: Program

Role: Support

Identify opportunities for cross-collaboration of faith groups with municipal departments and social services to build trust. Religious buildings and services usually offer food and clothing to families in need, but a more concrete partnership with community organizations

and schools could spur effective social change in the community. Given the diversity of faith groups in Gulfton, create an interfaith collaboration to pull in various resources to support residents from different backgrounds.

Case Study:

The National Church Adopt-A-School Initiative, established in 2006, started to train and equip churches to partner with local schools to promote community revitalization through church-based social services by reusing the existing structures and resources of both churches and schools. Taking this approach, a Dallas based pastor started The TurnAround Agenda, which later became a national model to train churches to expand their services to Technology and Education Institute, Family Care Pregnancy Center, Human Needs Assistance, and School-based, After-school and summer programs.

Interfaith Works, established in 1972 in Montgomery County, MD, a nonprofit non-sectarian interfaith coalition of more than 165 affiliated congregations of diverse faiths, equip individuals and families to lift themselves up from poverty and homelessness. Few of their programs among many are Carroll House Men’s Shelter, Clothing Center, Connections, Empowerment Center, Women’s Center. Vocational Services Program, etc.



Source: Wikimedia Creative Commons, JustinTran95 Little Tokyo



Source: Wikimedia Creative Commons, Cynthinee Little Tokyo

3.1.2 Celebrate Gulfton’s diversity through public art and cuisine to attract major ethnic and cultural events.

Type: Program

Role: Coordinate

Gulfton-Sharpstown features a variety of cultural cuisines (Afghani, Central American, regional Mexican niches, etc.) that can fit seamlessly into the culinary currents taking place in Houston. In order to occupy a commanding presence within the area, Gulfton-Sharpstown can empower informal restaurateurs, including providing administrative and legal support to expand the pipeline into brick and mortar opportunities and capacity-building for existing businesses. This will provide economic opportunities for area entrepreneurs and serve as a foundation to establish robust cultural programming, including festivals and events.

The City of Houston’s Art & Cultural Plan was completed in 2016, but has very few mentions of Gulfton’s cultural amenities other than the adjacent Mahatma Gandhi District on Hillcroft north of I-69. One of the top recommendations, however, speaks directly to the community desire to be included in Houston’s neighborhood-based cultural tourism. The merchants

association will be able to advocate to the City and the Houston Cultural Alliance for necessary neighborhood improvements that create more space for public art and increases visibility of local cuisine.

Connect Community can also coordinate the creation and retention of organized art, cuisine and cultural events by establishing a merchants association. Unlike Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), which command a tax from business owners within a defined boundary, merchants associations may operate as a nonprofit. In addition to restaurant and shop owners, the association should include promoters who produce cultural events in the area. Creating a merchants association should also result in a website for consumers to plan multi-stops visits. This organized group of business owners will also gain the attention of city agencies, who can support in strengthening the infrastructure and production of neighborhood events.

Case Study:

Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, CA is one of three Japantowns remaining in the country and continues to be a major cultural attraction to residents, locals, and visitors. The area first began to thrive in the 1920’s, but by the 1940’s Little Tokyo became a ghost town when approximately 120,000 west coast Japanese-American residents were forcibly removed from their homes and businesses and held in American concentration camps during World War II. After the war, many people returned to the area and began to formalize and merge organizations to revitalize the area. The Little Tokyo Merchants Association was established in 1957 and since 2003 has operated as a merchant-based Business Improvement District (BID). While most other Los Angeles BIDs are property-based, the State of California also allows for merchant-based BIDs, which creates special assessment districts. The Little Tokyo BID is also managed by the Little Tokyo Business Association (LTBA), “...a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization dedicated to the growth and development of Little Tokyo as a vibrant, diverse, and multi-faceted district of Downtown Los Angeles.” (Welcome to Little Tokyo. Visitlittletokyo.com. Accessed 2018.04.09) With over 400 merchants in the area, the LTBA and BID maintains a website with a business directory, works closely City and State officials, and articulates the needs and concerns of Little Tokyo stakeholders.

3.1.3 Create a pride-in-place campaign for Gulfton.

Type: Program

Role: Lead

Based on input collected by Connect Community from local residents, most residents feel proud of the diversity and the acceptance of diversity in their neighborhood. We also heard, however, that younger residents tend to relocate when they gain the opportunity. Connect Community has an opportunity to build upon the

positive local perception and share that with all of Houston. Connect Community or a potential merchants association should conduct an advocacy and media campaign to share positive community-led stories that proactively present a more accurate perception of the neighborhood.

3.1.4 Arrange neighborhood walking and culinary tours in partnership with local residents and organizations.

Type: Program

Role: Support

Neighborhood tours will give residents and visitors an opportunity to learn about the history and personal stories that make Gulfton-Sharpstown thrive. Walking and culinary tours will also help orient new residents to local amenities and familiar stories of immigration. The Merchants Association could advertise and administer

the culinary tours as many local businesses owners will be members. Culinary tours could be organized as a walking tour with multiple stops serving small samples or as a rotating monthly tour with a full meal at one location. Walking tours could be administered through the Community Center with multilingual guides.

3.2 Support residents to live long and healthy lives.

Creating a nurturing environment in the Impact Zone and surrounding neighborhoods also requires a focus on residents’ health and well-being. This objective focuses on wellness strategies from increasing health insurance access, to improving the availability of high-quality green spaces, to expanding fresh food access and community gardening.

3.2.1 Conduct multilingual health insurance, health literacy, and reproductive health workshops to improve health outcomes.

Type: Program

Role: Support

To combat the high rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and limited facility to prenatal care among Gulfton residents, the foremost step is to create awareness among them about currently available resources including various health insurance providers and options, and basic health information, especially food

nutrition and reproductive health. Organize independent monthly workshops or include in existing outreach programs to disseminate information about health. Determine health insurance eligibility and assist people to navigate the health insurance system.

3.2.2 Encourage the enjoyment of high-quality green spaces as a holistic wellness strategy.

Type: Program

Role: Advocate

Access to public parks has long been associated with healthier communities, and while there are a few parks in the area, Connect Community founding partners should encourage outdoor activity to promote holistic wellness. Gulfton-Sharpstown parks include walking trails, organized sport teams, and playgrounds, but they could all be better utilized. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the National Park Service currently lead initiatives to “prescribe” outdoor activity to improve individual and community health.

Park prescriptions give health practitioners and park administrators the research and resources they need to encourage outdoor activity as a path to improved mental and physical health.

Locally, Memorial Hermann Hospital provides a shining example of incorporating holistic wellness strategies. The hospital has brought together a series of stakeholders to encourage doctors in identifying appropriate outdoor activity for patients.



Source: Flickr Creative Commons, Oatsy 40

3.2.3 Expand the availability of culturally-competent mental health services in the neighborhood.

Type: Project

Role: Support

Many stakeholders and community members agree that existing mental health services could improve by diversifying practitioners and increasing the cultural competency of providers. When residents make the choice to seek mental health services, they are often making a choice to step out of their comfort zone. Encountering a mental health professional who lacks competence or awareness of cultural nuances may be more damaging than helpful.

As Connect Community increases healthcare guidance for residents, they should ensure that mental health providers represent the diversity of Gulfton-Sharpstown residents. Additionally, a brief screening conversation with providers will help ensure a base-level of cultural-competence, and that they have the professional and technical capacity to understand the impact of cultural taboos, cultural barriers, and access to specialty care challenges faced by the community.

3.2.4 Expand affordable fresh food access.

Type: Program

Role: Coordinate

While there are grocery stores in the study area, Gulfton residents could still benefit from additional fresh food options. According to American Community Survey five-year estimates (2007-2011), residents in the area have higher rates of diabetes and obesity, both of which are directly impacted by diet. Connect Community should identify the barriers to a healthy diet. Healthcare providers should screen patients for food insecurity to determine if residents are buying low quality food because of lack of local dietary education, economic conditions, or because of an over saturation of unhealthy food options by following the screening recommendations developed by the Adverse Childhood Experiences -- Food Insecurity Workgroup titled, "Food Insecurity Screening in Houston and Harris County: A Guide for Healthcare Professionals" (Correa, N. and the ACE Coalition Food Insecurity Workgroup, Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital, 2017).

Once barriers are identified, expanding fresh food options could look many ways. Potential policy strategies could incentivize urban farms in underutilized property, in future parks, or schools. Potential projects could include mobile produce trucks, kitchen incubators (strategy 4.1a), or open-kitchens to support cooking and nutrition classes.

Raising awareness about existing programs is also crucial. For example, Impact Zone residents have access to the City of Houston's Healthy Houston Bucks program which is a part of the Go Healthy Houston initiative. The program allows SNAP recipients to double their benefits up to \$20 for fruit and vegetable options at one of six Get Moving Houston Farmer's Markets -- with one farmer's

Case Study:

Plant-It-Forward, established in 2012, recognizes the significant challenges for job opportunities many refugees from agrarian backgrounds face while assimilating into America. On the other hand, the City of Houston imports almost all the food they consume from other cities, even though eight out of ten Houstonians place importance on having locally grown food. The program offers resources to economically disadvantaged refugees within the City to grow, harvest and sell produce from a sustainable urban farm. Currently, Plant-It-Forward farmers are earning a living by farming 6.5 acres at four locations in Houston.

market in the neighborhood at the Southwest Multi-Service Center.¹

Regardless of barriers, nutrition classes, cooking demonstrations, and existing programs should be widely promoted in the community. During focus groups, residents brought up cooking demonstrations as highly desired programming. Additionally, nutrition classes would address barriers to fresh food by demystifying existing resources and providing guidance in locally available healthy ingredient substitutes.

3.2.5 Promote community gardening opportunities.

Type: Program

Role: Coordinate

Cultivating fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers is a great addition to healthy lifestyle, and something that can be easily managed by Gulfton residents. There are a number of community gardening initiatives in the City of Houston as well as in Gulfton. Provide free access to residents who wish to get involved with short to medium term urban gardening opportunities by identifying properties or areas where this could be possible, including underutilized parcels, schools, or apartment complexes. In addition, arrange classes to teach when and how to plant, what tools and supplies are needed, how to prepare herbs and spices to use, and how to cook cultural dishes in healthier ways (i.e. oils, sodium, fats). Partner with a community organization to create a weekly farmers market to sell the produce.

1 <http://gohealthyhouston.org/farmersmarket/healthyhoustonbucks/>



Source: Pixnio Creative Commons, Working Community Garden

3.3 Offer all residents access to high-quality education options.

A third aspect of creating a nurturing community is ensuring that all residents, from toddlers to adults to seniors, can take advantage of high-quality educational opportunities. Increasing literacy rates, improving cultural competency among educators and counselors, and improving access to early childhood education are all key areas for improvement.

3.3.1 Increase quality early childhood development opportunities.

Type: Program

Role: Support

Quality early childhood programs that help children learn and grow in their earliest years leave a powerful impact on the trajectories of their lives. Research shows that quality pre-K programs improve children's age-appropriate behaviors, mental health, social skills, body mass indexes, test scores, and more. Warm and engaging interactions between the caregivers and children establish a nurturing environment for children as they develop a sense of self and cognitive abilities in their early days. By the age of five, children in disadvantaged families face challenges in catching up with their peers if they do not have access to high-quality early childhood development opportunities. However, these opportunities are limited and often too expensive in the Impact Zone even with the existing 11 licensed child care programs. Several publicly-funded programs such

as Head Start, Early Head Start, state pre-K programs are available for low-income families, but limited funding for these programs is often an obstacle. On the other hand, moderate-income families are typically ineligible for these programs and they struggle to afford the high cost of pre-K care in private sector.

Improvements to existing pre-K programs and introducing new programs should be explored in Gulfton to ensure a higher quality early childhood development environment in the neighborhood. Some actions may include: involving parents as caregivers in the programs, robust outreach efforts to attract more minority children in the programs, better support for the early care and education workforce, building partnerships to support quality, pursuing TX Rising Star accreditation, etc.

3.3.2 Develop cultural competency assistance for teachers and school administrators to build relationships with students and families.

Type: Program

Role: Coordinate

Schools who participated in focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and public meetings welcomed the idea of assistance in building relationships with students and families. Schoolwide art and cuisine events were identified as implementable programs to achieve that goal. Teachers also identified language and culture as barriers which complicate parental and classroom discussions. School leaders would like to diminish those barriers through their professional development requirements. Connect Community founding partners should work with the school district to ensure language and cultural competent courses are on the approved list of Continuing Professional Education providers and teachers are afforded plentiful opportunities in neighborhood schools to undertake such courses.

3.3.3 Provide at-risk students with access to culturally-competent counseling and social services.

Type: Project

Role: Coordinate

Schools in Gulfton must serve a highly multicultural group of students with widely varying nationalities, native languages, English skills, and religious backgrounds. Students such as new immigrants and English language learners may be particularly at risk for dropping out of school, and students may also not know how to express when something is wrong at school or at home. Learning about these students’ realities will allow counselors to create culturally-sensitive interventions. Research has shown that culturally-competent teachers and school support staff including counselors, nurses and social workers can help increase student achievement and reduce rates of disciplinary action. Special support may be needed for issues such as immigration stress, gang violence, and culture gaps with parents. Regular teacher and social worker trainings should be adapted to include understanding of these issues.

3.3.4 Incorporate additional programs to close grade deficiency gaps at the K-12 levels.

Type: Program

Role: Lead

The education attainment in the Impact Zone is highly challenging compared to the City of Houston. As a long-term strategy, Gulfton schools should provide tutoring, supplemental instruction, and mentoring students whose performance does not meet the standard in both reading and math. Partnering with parents, community volunteers and high school mentors could help boost the students’ performance. The programs should include newcomers and older children as well.

Case Study:

Out 2 Learn, a public-private partnership started in 2017, offers access to out-of-school programming for all Houston-area youth. The programs are categorized by age group, depending on the child’s level of development, and by interest, that range from academics, arts, sports, and recreation. Programs include academic enrichment, college and career readiness, community service, cultural awareness, international studies and travel, languages and linguistics, mentoring, STEM, etc. Several programs are offered in various languages in Gulfton area.

3.3.5 Increase the overall literacy rate of families and students.

Type: Program

Role: Lead

Literacy rates are often a challenge in communities that have large numbers of immigrants from non-English speaking countries; children of varying ages need different approaches to help them build English literacy, while parents who speak primarily their native language may struggle to find quality jobs and help their children with school and homework. Children from low-income families in Gulfton often experience hardship in trying to graduate from high school due to pressure to join the workforce from a young age; in the Impact Zone, high schools have a 54% graduation rate. Increasing the overall literacy rate of both families and students will help families overcome these challenges. Several potential actions to increase the literacy rate include: setting a goal for literacy standards within the Impact Zone, conducting aggressive literacy advocacy and outreach programs; giving students year-round schooling options; providing school supplies and books to students who cannot afford them; organizing after-school reading and math clubs; and recruiting volunteers and mentors to a literacy-focused mentoring program for children and adults.

Case Study:

- * Alliance for Multicultural Community Services provides English language instruction to eligible underserved residents including refugees and immigrants. The teaching approach stresses on contextualized instructions on job readiness and related vocabulary on health and safety, financial literacy, navigating the community, and food and shopping. Several trainings also offer distance education.
- * Houston Community College offers Adult Education & Literacy Program to provide better access to post-secondary education and employment opportunities. Their services include Adult High School for credit recovery for students completing a high school diploma, Adult Basic Education for students functioning below 8th grade, High School Equivalency (HSE) Preparation for students completing a Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency, Employer-based ESL and Literacy, etc.



Source: Wikimedia Creative Commons

3.4 Improve the quality and mix of existing housing stock.

3.4.1 Upgrade the condition of existing housing stock to promote residents’ health with sustainable, energy-efficient, and resilient building design.

Type: Project

Role: Coordinate

Safer, more dignified, and healthier housing options were a common desire for residents and stakeholders. Property managers suggested cost-sharing opportunities with the city or area nonprofits to pursue sustainable, energy-efficient building fixture upgrades on properties with the goal of improving the appeal of apartment complexes in the community and improving people’s health outcomes. This remains a complex issue in the Impact Zone where 63% of structures were built prior to 1980 and have become ‘naturally-affordable’ due to the building stock’s aging and deterioration.

Retrofitting the existing stock can generate substantial cost-savings to residents, as well. Estimates point to nearly 15% of household expenses used on utilities for low-income families, while high-income families pay closer to 2%.² Desired efficiency improvements include:

- * Building envelope improvements (i.e. windows, floors, insulation)
- * Air conditioning, heating, ventilation
- * Energy efficient appliances
- * Indoor air quality
- * Landscaping
- * Solar PV and wind turbines
- * Resources and education

Several states and cities in the United States have established multifamily efficiency programs to help property owners with green certifications and retrofits. Critical to establishing successful local programs is having state laws or incentives that allow utilities to offer multifamily efficiency programs. Connect Community and partners can evaluate existing resources and incentives in the State of Texas to identify potential sources.

2 http://energyefficiencyforall.org/sites/default/files/EEFA%20Fact%20Sheet%204.15_0.pdf

Existing resources:

- * Texas PACE Loans
- * City of Houston tax abatements for LEED construction (City of Houston. Code of Ordinances. Chapter 44, Taxation. Sec. 44-131. - Leadership in energy and environmental design (LEED®) tax abatement.)
- * ENERGY STAR federal tax credits for appliances

There are additional federal incentives available to non-rental properties and commercial building owners with minimal application in the Impact Zone. Connect Community and partners should prioritize supporting multifamily properties in the Impact Zone and apply through the City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department’s Home Repair Program due to the prioritization of Complete Communities neighborhoods recently afforded to Gulfton. The Home Repair Program allows households earning less than 80% area median family income with direct assistance for repairs for roofing, plumbing, electrical and heating or system replacement to alleviate life, health or safety hazards. Additional exterior repairs are available if a property is deemed too dangerous for the health and safety of residents. For the long-term, residents, property owners, and Connect Community stakeholders should work with the City of Houston to craft policy on a green building retrofit component within the Home Repair Program that can support substandard apartment complexes in a consistent way, with larger scale green upgrades.



Source: Wikimedia Creative Commons, Tietgen College Student Housing

3.4.2 Enhance amenities available in existing housing.

Type: Project

Role: Coordinate

As Gulfton’s housing stock receives investment to make local apartments universally code-compliant, healthy, and sustainable. Community-based investors and philanthropic investors should also consider adding amenities such as community gyms, health clinics, community meeting rooms, retail offerings, programmed green spaces, and/or community gardens within these complexes. These assets can improve quality of life for residents while also generating revenue from monetizing passive property into ground leases.

-Easiest Retrofit: Re-purpose a few parking spaces into a community garden or pocket park. Community gardening and opportunities for outdoor play will improve families’ satisfaction with their apartments, potentially reducing turnover. These assets will also help to improve community health and well-being.

-Low-Difficulty Retrofit: A simple multipurpose “community room” can be created by re-purposing a former ground-floor apartment unit. This may involve removing non-load-bearing walls and appliances, and bringing the room up to fire code for group occupancy.

-Moderate-Difficulty Retrofit: Add ground-floor amenities like a resident gym, a computer lab, or an improved laundry room that become a differentiator for the property and improve residents’ health. While these amenities may be more expensive to construct, maintain, and secure, if operated correctly they can provide significant benefits to residents and help keep tenants in place. Partnerships with philanthropic and community partners may help accomplish some of the build-out and outfitting of these spaces.

Case Study: Rolling Hills Apartments (St. Paul, Minnesota)

While St. Paul, Minnesota may be geographically far from Houston, its East Side faces many of the same issues as Gulfton: refugees and immigrants arriving from across the globe, and apartment housing that is dilapidated but comparatively affordable for the region. The Twin Cities office of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and non-profit Lutheran Social Services worked with the owners of an existing, run-down apartment complex to renovate the housing units and add new amenities into the complex. Some of the amenities now available to residents include:

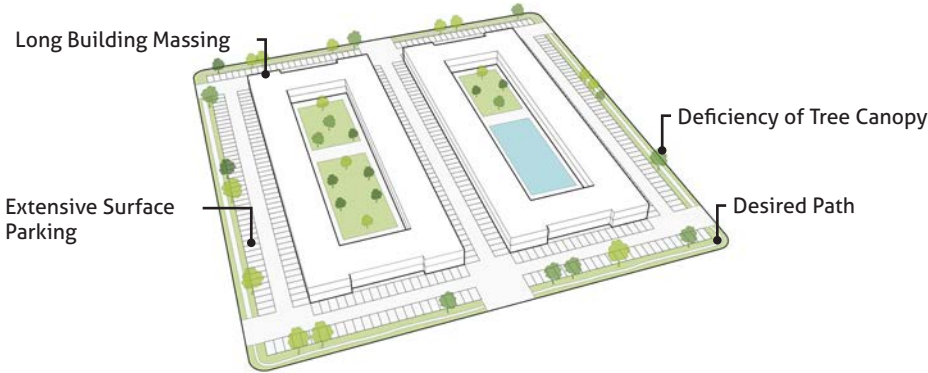
- * Renovated apartment units with energy-efficient and green building features
- * Multi-purpose community room that hosts a variety of group activities, including fitness classes and cooking classes
- * On-site social services including job placement assistance and links to neighborhood-based small business development assistance
- * Community gardens and connections to a local urban farm
- * Exam room operated by a local Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)

Source: <https://buildhealthyplaces.org/whats-new/rolling-hills-apartments-st-paul-minnesota-2/>

RETROFITTING RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

These conceptual images demonstrate the type of incremental retrofits that can be pursued in the Impact Zone with existing properties. The illustrations emphasize the potential of capitalizing on excess surface parking to attract new investment opportunities. Apartment properties can reduce their parking need by offering reduced rents to residents who 'consume' less parking.

Existing



Potential Enhancements



4

Thrive



During the engagement process, residents and stakeholders wanted to ensure that Gulfton-Sharpstown families can “prosper in place” -- meaning that local families shouldn’t need to leave the neighborhood for better jobs, affordable housing, or a stronger quality of life. Strategies and actions in this section seek to improve quality of life by creating new public and civic spaces that bring people together; growing economic opportunity for residents; and pursuing mixed-income, multi-generational development to ensure that existing residents will benefit from revitalization efforts.



Develop a Multicultural Community Center Campus as Gulfton-Sharpstown’s signature public space and place

Type: Project
Role: Participate

PRIORITY PROJECT #4

Gulfton Green is a proposal for a central public space to serve the Gulfton-Sharpstown community. The concept (illustrated on page 84-85) would become a placemaking destination at the highly-frequented community center surrounded by social services, non-profits, neighborhood clinics, schools and community services. The concept starts by re-imagining the public and private space that bind these properties together and leverages redevelopment of these sites into a shared vision for enhanced greenspace and social gathering places. Gulfton Green builds on the legacy of BakerRipley’s “village center” campus with an expanded site that reaches Hillcroft Avenue with greenspace, hardscaped public spaces, mixed-use development, and a walkable/ bikable public realm. The concept also includes mixed-income housing, public parking facilities, a revamped community center, and streetscape improvements that extend the reach into the residential and civic uses east and southwest of this campus in Gulfton-Sharpstown. New development of a clinic by Legacy Community Health and interest in consolidating surface parking lots by adjacent property owners and tenants, is the impetus that could spur a vision for the re-design of this site. The project could set a community-led vision for the campus - representing a microcosm of the City of Houston’s Complete Communities and PlanHouston objectives - with a phased approach able to command private and public investments from local, state and federal sources.

Key features of the concept include the addition of mixed-use, mixed-income housing, extensive and diverse landscaping elements, plaza spaces for social gathering and events, and a redesign of High Star Drive. This investment could also provide opportunities for diverse programming of retail, dining and service-

based businesses, public parking, and safe, thoughtful accomodation of pedestrian and multi-modal circulation should be factored in further design efforts.

A strengthening of signalized pedestrian crossings (i.e. compact intersections) eastward across Hillcroft Avenue is also considered to facilitate safe walking and biking between the residential communities in Gulfton toward the destination. Parking garages strategically located on the periphery of the site would reduce the need for surface parking and lower the amount of traffic moving through and around the site.

Investments to be leveraged:

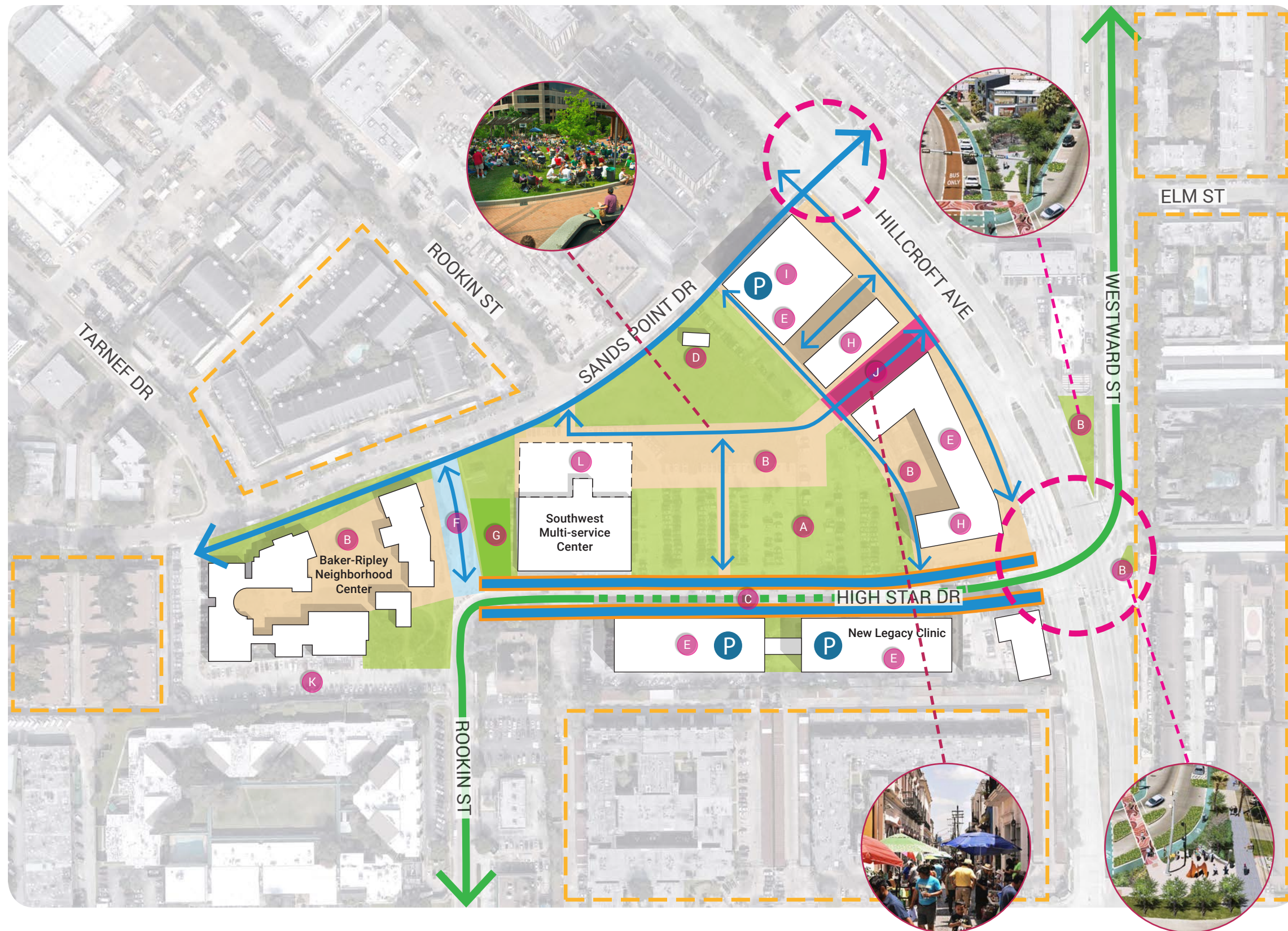
- * City of Houston’s bikeway redesign of High-Star
- * Legacy Clinic and parking structure
- * Houston Parks Board interest in supporting parks and greenspace

Other potential investments that could support an expanded multicultural campus:

- * Mixed income housing subsidies from disaster recovery sources
- * Qualified Opportunity Funds (i.e. Opportunity Zones)
- * New Market Tax Credits
- * City of Houston’s Complete Communities
- * Philanthropic support for a state-of-the-art community center, including a signature library, groundfloor retail, updated programming, and workforce development training



Gulfton Green



- (A) MAIN GREEN
- (B) PUBLIC PLAZA
- (C) BIKE LANE
- (D) AMPHITHEATER
- (E) MIXED-USE, MIXED-INCOME
- (F) EXISTING PEDESTRIAN PLAZA
- (G) EXISTING COMMUNITY GARDEN
- (H) EXISTING MID-RISE TOWER
- (I) MIXED-USE, PARKING GARAGE
- (J) MARKET ALLEY
- (K) GREENSPACE/PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION OPPORTUNITY
- (L) BUILDING EXTENSION

0 50 200 feet



↔ Pedestrian Circulation
↔ Bike Lane



High-Density Residential
Greenspace



Hardscape
Enhanced Pedestrian Realm



Compact intersection
Public parking

4.1 Support living-wage jobs and entrepreneurship.

4.1.1 Provide multilingual financial literacy training and credit counseling for residents.

Type: Program

Role: Support

The Alliance for Multicultural Community Services’ Financial Opportunity Center also hosts multilingual financial literacy and credit counseling services for Houston’s low to moderate income refugee, immigrant, and other underserved populations. When developing the new resident welcome program, Connect Community should list this service as a free and culturally competent resource.

The Women’s Resource helps women and girls acquire essential financial knowledge, skills and confidence. Currently, the closest location is at Jewish Family Services on Braeswood Blvd. Women-only classes may provide a welcome space for Gulfton residents who prefer gender-segregated learning environments. Additionally, Connect Community could partner with the organization so Women’s Resource volunteer instructors could lead classes at the Community Center.

4.1.2 Provide small business banking options and microloans through local credit unions.

Type: Program

Role: Advocate

Many large banks offer low cost accounts for small businesses, but they are usually paired with high penalties for exceeding limits or not meeting minimums. Local credit unions are often better equipped to serve local small businesses. Connect Community should identify credit unions who best support small business needs and who offer Small Business Administration

(SBA) loans. While there are several types of SBA loans, providing this list to a future local merchants association will help demystify the process and give entrepreneurs foundational knowledge of creating a financially healthy business.

4.1.3 Network with Houston companies to establish apprenticeship and training opportunities for Gulfton residents.

Type: Program

Role: Lead

Connect Gulfton residents to companies, manufacturing associations, and small business associations for potential apprenticeship, training, and job opportunities. It is important to build both hard skills that include formal education, technical expertise, English language skills, etc., as well as soft skills including resume building, interview preparation, networking ability,

communication skills, etc. An important aspect would be to create programs for people who have degrees or certifications in their home countries and put use of them in appropriate jobs. Another emphasis should be on developing a female workforce.

4.1.4 Establish adult education programs, including job and workforce training and digital literacy resources.

Type: Program

Role: Lead

Provide necessary skills to adults to catch up with their education to complete high school diploma and higher studies, improve English language skills, career training, and offer digital literacy to access employment opportunities. The schedule of adult education classes

should be flexible that include morning, afternoon, and evening courses. An adult-centered curriculum, free textbooks, progress evaluations, access to computer-aided instruction and distant education should be incorporated in the program.

Case Study:

Harris County Department of Education aims to equip the underemployed adults with basic skills to become economically self-sufficient. In addition to offer work-site based English language skills, the center also offers literacy classes in different parts of the city by partnering with various community organizations.

4.2 Develop public amenities that bring people together as a community.

4.2.1 Provide community services through multipurpose gathering spaces for Gulfton/Sharpstown residents.

Type: Project

Role: Lead

In order to facilitate community gathering, educational and after-school opportunities, workforce development programming, and community organization capacity-building, Gulfton residents and stakeholders wanted to see a variety of multipurpose and community spaces available in the Impact Zone and surrounding neighborhoods.

in session. The construction of this 17,600 square foot enclosed facility—including full gymnasium, auditorium, meeting rooms, offices, and cafeteria—will support education and community wellness initiatives driven by residents and available to all. The Hub will be a place where resources and ideas are shared and community is strengthened.

Currently, Connect Community has contracted Phase 1 of the Community Hub building on the KIPP Connect campus -- also known as a “cafegymatorium” because of the multipurpose nature of this space. The Community Hub is utilized by KIPP students during the day, but open to the community after school and when school is not

Phase 2 will be built on the campus of St. Luke’s United Methodist Church next door and will feature a full YMCA, Teen Connect, Legacy clinic, and community partners and event space.

Connect Community Hub - Conceptual Image



Source: Connect Community

4.2.2 Pursue a signature library that celebrates Gulfton’s multicultural identity, includes multipurpose community assets, and attracts visitors from across the city.

Type: Project

Role: Advocate

During the community engagement process, many stakeholders expressed excitement and interest in expanding the function of public libraries to become a central part of everyday life. Pursuing a signature library could materialize in many different ways, but

drawing from national examples, they must include a locally-relevant element. To celebrate Gulfton’s diversity, library staff could highlight literary works by showcasing residents’ art, artifacts, and keepsakes from their country of origin.

Case Study - Creating Signature Libraries with Additional Community Amenities

In October 2016, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and Chicago Public Library (CPL) announced a partnership that will create three new mixed-income housing developments connected to public libraries. All three new developments have been designed by internationally recognized architecture firms, are highly anticipated, and are in varying stages of construction.

Developments: Taylor Street Apartments, Roosevelt Branch Library

Location: Chicago, IL

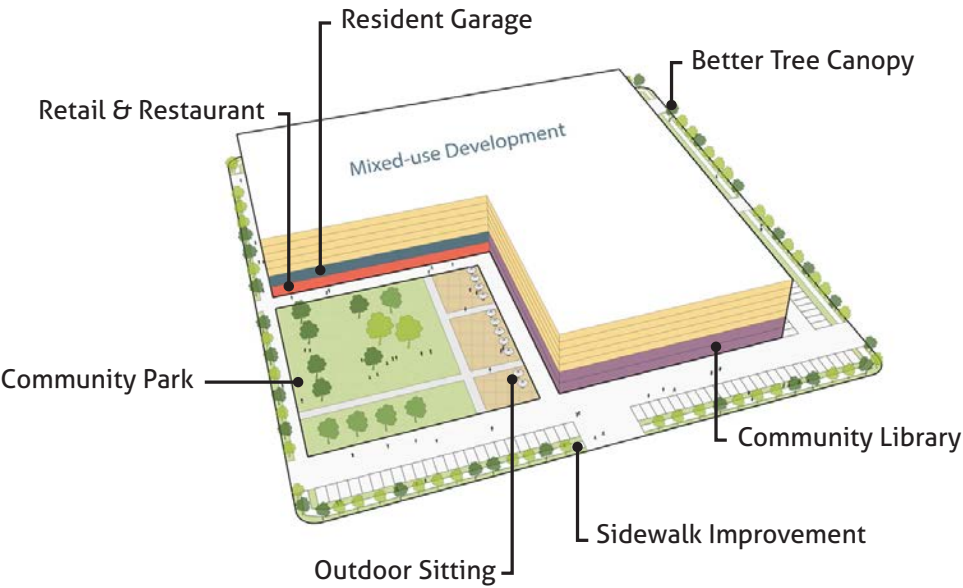
Developers: Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), Chicago Public Library (CPL), Related Midwest

Design: Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Size: 17,000 square foot library, 73 residential units

The two four-story mixed-income residential buildings broke ground in January 2018, and will be connected by a one-story public library. Taylor Street’s 73 units will include 37 CHA units, 29 affordable housing units, and seven market-rate apartments. Nearly half of the funding will come from federal funds for CHA and about a quarter from federal tax credits. Additionally, two different TIF districts will provide financing for the development. Taylor Street residents and library visitors will be able to enjoy a public, landscaped rooftop as well as a community garden behind the building. The site’s ground floor features community space, retail, and floor-to-ceiling windows, which activates the street. Overall, the new development will be an anchor institution that is rooted in the local community and creates affordable housing.

Potential Signature Library with Additional Community Amenities and Mixed Income Housing



4.2.3 Create new parks and public spaces, and improve existing public spaces in the area.

Type: Project

Role: Advocate

Parks and public spaces are essential in facilitating interaction between neighbors and are much needed in the Impact Zone. Parks also help to improve localized air quality, encourage active lifestyles and exposure to nature, reduce heat island effect, and can play a critical role in managing stormwater. Only a sliver of the eastern boundary of the Impact Zone is within a 5-minute walk from a park to Burnett Bayland Park.

A multifaceted approach is included in this plan to expand access to parks and public spaces. For instance, action 2.1a establishes a network of walkable streets throughout the Impact Zone with streetscapes that would serve as linear extensions of public greenspace and anchors residential areas to community gathering places. Additional park space is also recommended at the Southwest Multi-Service Center on Sands Point

Drive, to provide green space opportunities west of Hillcroft Avenue on existing public property. Pocket parks are also encouraged at existing under-utilized rights-of-way -- as seen in the Hillcroft Avenue visual renderings or at De Moss at Tarneff where a parklet is in development. Pocket parks have a small footprint and can leverage underutilized public property as new gathering places, often with passive programming that provide neighborhood residents the ability to form the spaces' utilization in their own image. Participants also suggested collaborating with apartment complexes to redesign their landscapes in ways that made for more amenable greenspace (action 3.4a). This includes converting abandoned courtyard swimming pools into community green space and enhancing green spaces in the perimeter of multifamily properties into safer, more welcoming spaces that people could frequent.

"What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people." -- William Whyte



Source: Wikimedia Creative Commons, Discovery Green Park

4.3 Build an intentionally diverse and mixed-income community.

4.3.1 Create mixed-income development.

Type: Policy

Role: Coordinate

Many families who come to Gulfton-Sharpstown as their first stop in Houston, or their first residence in the United states, leave once they become economically established. These families are often searching for safer neighborhoods, stronger schools, or a better-quality home that they can rent or purchase at an affordable price. The loss of these upwardly mobile families means that the Impact Zone, and the area more broadly, continue to experience a churn of residents and maintain a high concentration of poverty. Meanwhile, national research has shown that children growing up in economically diverse neighborhoods have better prospects for educational attainment and future earnings than children in predominantly low-income neighborhoods. Keeping economically successful families in Gulfton is therefore an important objective for multiple reasons.

As the housing stock ages, there may be opportunities for a full renewal of apartment complexes with mixed-income development that could attract a range of residents and families. Mixed-income development usually has some units with ong-term restrictions on affordability, while other units are rented at the area's market rate prices. Mixed-income properties ensure that low-income residents are not isolated in areas of poverty, but are integrated into an economically and socially diverse community. Generally, mixed-income development still requires subsidies in order to be economically feasible, but it often requires less subsidy than a 100% affordable development. In the Impact Zone, mixed-income development should incorporate larger, family-sized units to ensure that local families and children can benefit from these quality housing options.

Case Study: Renaissance Heights (Fort Worth, TX)

Renaissance Heights is a Purpose Built Community neighborhood in Ft. Worth working toward development of 500 mixed-income housing units known as Renaissance Square. As of early 2018, Phase I of Renaissance Square is complete, including 140 one-, two- and three-bedroom mixed-income apartments, 85% of which are affordable. Phase I also includes a community room, computer lab and fitness center. Future phases of housing development will include senior housing and additional mixed-income rental units. This housing will be co-located on a 200-acre site with service provider partners dedicated to educational improvement, family support systems, teen and young adult programming, child care, and comprehensive health care services. The site also includes a grocery store and other retail options. In Gulfton, the task of redevelopment is slightly more complicated than at Renaissance Square because there is limited undeveloped land. This means that affordable housing developers will need to purchase an existing residential or commercial property, which is likely be more expensive than purchasing available land. Some opportunities to mitigate this issue include:

- * Focus on full renovations and upgrades of existing properties, which may be less expensive than purchasing, demolishing, and rebuilding a currently-occupied property. (See Rolling Hills Apartments case study under Strategy 3.4b.)
- * Determine whether any of Connect Community's partners have property within the Impact Zone or nearby that could be utilized for new housing development. This could include potential site consolidations by Connect Community partners to leave additional land open for development.
- * Work with local faith-based institutions that own property in the Impact Zone to determine whether any may be interested in partnering to redevelop their properties as mixed-use campuses to nclude housing.

Source: <https://purposebuiltcommunities.org/our-network/fort-worth-renaissance-heights/>

Source: http://www.fortworthbusiness.com/news/phase-i-of-renaissance-heights-apartments-complete/article_5478efc0-18da-11e8-9ad5-878d833b1a2a.html

4.3.2 Prevent economic displacement.

Type: Policy

Role: Coordinate

Economic displacement can affect many different types of families and households, including low-income households who may be unable to afford their basic housing needs, as well as moderate- and higher-income households seeking new housing types and additional opportunity. Communities that are most successful at preventing economic displacement provide a range of housing options for residents across the income spectrum, including rental and ownership options.

Currently, one of Gulfton’s most pressing issues is rising housing costs that destabilize households and cause families to move frequently. While housing costs in Gulfton remain below the Houston average, workers’ wages still have not kept up with the rising costs of housing in the Impact Zone or across the country. A

typical minimum-wage employee working 40 hours a week would earn approximately \$1,200 per month; Gulfton rents of \$800-\$900 per month would therefore consume 65-75% of that employee’s income every month. While some residents may be able to find roommates to split the costs of housing, single-parent headed households and elderly residents may face more challenges in finding housing that is affordable and meets their needs. Preventing economic displacement therefore requires:

- * Developing quality, affordable housing units, particularly for families and seniors,
- * Providing job training and placement services that can assist workers to attain living-wage jobs

4.3.3 Develop housing typologies that support and retain multigenerational households in Gulfton.

Type: Project

Role: Coordinate

Currently, much of Gulfton’s housing stock is nearly 50 to 60 years old. As housing continues to age, apartment complexes and homes will be retrofitted or redeveloped. Connect Community should ensure that new housing typology continues to reflect the neighborhood by maintaining communication with property managers

and owners about redevelopment activity and desires to sale. As detailed in the Existing Conditions chapter, the Impact Zone’s average household size (3.11) is larger than the City of Houston (2.88). Keeping three bedrooms as a prominent typology will be important to retain multigenerational households in Gulfton.

4.3.4 Develop public-private partnerships based on incentives that support affordable, quality housing.

Type: Program

Role: Support

The City of Houston’s Housing and Community Development Department (HCDD) has been working on solutions for upgrading poor-quality apartment housing and preventing resident displacement across the city. In the City’s Complete Communities Draft Action Plan for the Gulfton area, one of the stated goals is as follows:

“Apartment renovation and upgrading. ACTION STEPS: Explore programs and funding, including fast track permitting, to renovate area housing while maintaining affordability; Identify and make necessary repairs post Hurricane Harvey; Encourage sustainable and energy-efficient retrofits”

City incentives, including funding and expedited permitting, will be critical to encourage renovation and new affordable housing development in Gulfton and the

Impact Zone. Local incentives can also complement federal programs, such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and New Markets Tax Credit, which help to subsidize mixed-income and affordable housing development. These financial and policy tools make affordable housing development financially feasible for local community development corporations and national affordable housing developers. Connect Community should work closely with HCDD to inform local housing policies and keep track of incentive programs as they evolve, and should work to attract affordable housing developers’ interest in the area through incentives and potential partnerships with community service organizations.

4.3.5 Increase resident stability and reduce frequent turnover.

Type: Program

Role: Coordinate

Frequent turnover of Gulfton residents has an adverse impact on community stability, children’s performance in schools, and psychological health of families. Families who go through frequent unstable housing situations have increased odds of poor caregiver and child health. The over-reliance of property owners on affordability rather than quality of housing to attract low-income

tenants also discourages families seeking quality housing from living in the neighborhood. Partnership among property owners, tenants and nonprofit housing providers can pave the way to stabilize the housing market, incentivize owners to update properties, and provide financial counseling to tenants.

Case Study:

- Enterprise Community Partners, a national housing technical assistance provider, has proposed that non-profit affordable housing providers seek “master leases” with private-sector landlords at a fixed rate for multiple years, and then sublease these units to low-income households. A program like this would reduce turnover for property owners, affords safety from rent shocks to tenants, provides accountability of upkeeping the housing units by nonprofit housing organization, and a built-in emergency savings account for renters.
- Rental Home Stability Program by Community HousingWorks, a California-based non-profit organization, provides flexible payment plans and wrap-around financial support services for residents. The program also offers expert one-on-one coaching to families and connects them to available resources including achievable payment schedules, match savings account (upon completion of the program), workforce supports, and benefits screening.

4.3.6 Improve homeownership availability through innovative development approaches.

Type: Policy

Role: Support

As detailed in the Existing Conditions chapter, Gulfton’s homeownership rate is extremely low (7%) compared to Houston overall (56%). Homeownership not only improves community stability, it also impacts the wealth and health of individuals and families. Converting garden apartment complexes into ownership properties using a model known as a “limited equity cooperative” can make homeownership a more accessible goal and can play an integral part in building an intentionally diverse and mixed-income community in the Impact Zone and

Gulfton. Cooperatives are similar to condominiums in that they enable group ownership of a multifamily property. However, in a cooperative, residents own shares in a corporation that in turn owns the property (unlike a condominium, where residents own their portion of the property directly). Limited equity cooperatives incorporate subsidy, allowing each resident to purchase an affordable number of shares in order to establish an ownership share in the building and occupy their own units. This model extends affordable ownership opportunities to low- and moderate-income families.



Source: Wikimedia Creative Commons, Lanx Meer

4.3.7 Support reduced parking requirements for new developments that include affordable housing options, enhanced open and green spaces, or access to high-frequency transit stops.

Type: Policy

Role: Support

Many communities across the country are evaluating the role minimum parking requirements play in the price of housing. Empirical evidence demonstrates the costly impact prescriptive parking requirements have on cities and quality of life. Parking requirements increase the cost per unit due to the mandated reduction in productive real estate available to recover a development investment. These costs are simply bundled into all the units in a development, with no regard for the need or desire for parking. This ultimately complicates development financing and deters housing production. Cities are being encouraged to remove parking requirements and allow developers greater discretion in deciding how much space to allocate for parking based on access to transit or affordability goals -- though there's been a glacial pace in the reduction of parking requirements.

To that end, Connect Community and partners can advocate for reduced parking requirements with the City of Houston in the short-term that will help in providing lower cost housing options when redevelopment does occur in the Impact Zone. In addition, tax increment financing can be pursued by establishing a Tax

Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) in the Impact Zone or partnering with the existing Southwest Houston TIRZ which covers the western half of the Impact Zone. A TIRZ has bonding capacity to support near-term investments in infrastructure, housing, and economic development by capturing the incremental gain in property values over the life of 30-year bonds and utilizing this increment to repay obligations over the long-term. Most important, TIRZs in Houston are required to support affordable housing with 30% of their respective capital budget for development in the TIRZ boundary or as fees in lieu of on-site housing production. This affordable housing allocation could be used in the Impact Zone as financial incentives for development supporting the community's goals and objectives, such as, mixed-income income developments with deep affordability thresholds, reduced parking, additional open and green space, or access to transit stops within a 5 minute walk. For instance, an incentive program can be established with scoring criteria that awards greater points (larger incentive) for projects that fit the criteria determined by the TIRZ and local community.

Implementation

The following chapter provides a roadmap for implementing the framework of this Action Plan. Many of the partner entities who will be involved in implementing were also actively involved in the creation of these strategies through the workgroups and focus groups held during the planning process. The level of involvement and support behind these recommendations by a broad set of stakeholders will assist Connect Community and partners in advancing these recommendations toward implementation. The implementation strategy identifies the following characteristics for each of the recommended actions in this plan:

- * Program, policy or project
- * Connect Community's role (lead, coordinate, support, participate, or advocate)
- * Stakeholders
- * Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)
- * Funding Sources
- * Phasing -- short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years



This chapter also summarizes voluntary associations and special purpose district options available to Connect Community and partners in pursuit of implementation, particularly those with powers to generate new public financing tools. These entities are described in their capacity to create funding streams that can leverage available philanthropic, governmental, and private funding sources and promote the institutionalization of neighborhood leadership in new governance structures. Additional funding sources, for example, can include: Tax increment financing, bonding authority, federal tax credits, capital improvement programs, and operations and maintenance staff time. These entities can help organize marketing for the neighborhood, provide clean-and-safe programs, or collaborate with visionary developers to attract mixed-income housing and supportive retail choices. Below is a list of options reviewed for Gulfton-Sharpstown:

- * Tax Increment Finance Zones (TIRZs)
- * Municipal Management Districts (MMDs)
- * Community Development Corporations (CDCs)
- * Merchants Associations (MAs)
- * Opportunity Zones (OZs)

Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZs) are a special purpose district municipalities can establish in Texas (Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 311) to revitalize and attract investment to a given area. TIRZs cap property taxes collected by local governments at a given level for properties within the established TIRZ boundary and finance public improvements with bonds. The bonds are paid over a 30-year cycle with the incremental increase in property taxes generated from the investments. TIRZs are most effective in redeveloping areas with the prospect of exponentially rising property taxes.

Most important, TIRZs in Houston are required to support affordable housing by dedicating 30% of their capital budget to affordable housing development within their boundary or fees-in-lieu of on-site production. This revenue source can support affordable housing development by providing gap financing to interested developers applying for Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and should be considered as a funding source to attract post-disaster recovery projects.

Municipal Management Districts are an economic development district that can be created by the state through the Texas Legislature or the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (Texas Local Government

Code, Chapter 375). Management Districts are formed by businesses and property owners in a given area through an a special assessment levied and provided to fund the district's operations. Management District's are also able to issue bonds based on the assessment or revenue stream funding a district which is typically much less in quantity than a TIRZ can issue for tax increments of property. Management Districts fund maintenance, beautification, economic development incentives, and minor infrastructure or contributing to larger infrastructure projects.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are non-profit organizations devoted to revitalizing local communities through affordable housing development, economic development, and other programs.

A **Merchant's Association** is an association of business owners assembled to collaborate on common interests or issues. Similar to Management Districts, Merchants Associations focus on economic development activities, business retention, beautification and general marketing efforts for a commercial area. Merchants Associations differ in that an assessment or additional tax is not levied to support these activities, though could become a feature of the association in given time. Merchants Associations often require administrative or legal support which they are able to organize and fund together or they are administratively supported by municipal or chamber of commerce programs.

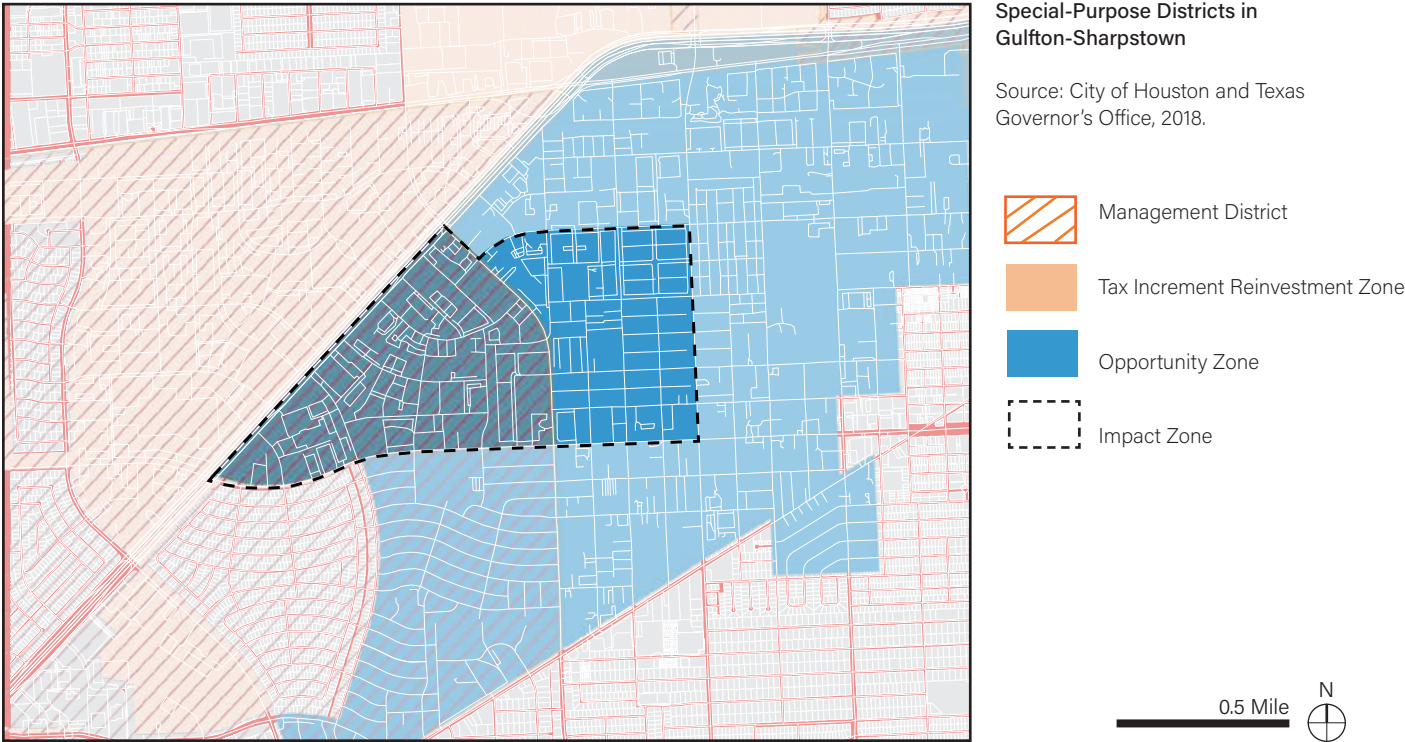
Opportunity Zones are an economic development incentive created by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 intended to steer passive capital gains into distressed urban and rural communities. Gulfton-Sharpstown was nominated by the Texas Governor in March 2018 as an Opportunity Zone and approved by the U.S. Treasury. The program allowed Governors to designate up to 25 percent of eligible census tracts in their states as Opportunity Zones for a 10 year period. Eligible tracts were defined as having a poverty rate of at least 20 percent and a median family income less than 80 percent of the area's median income or are contiguous to eligible low-income tracts with a median family income that does not surpass 125 percent of the low-income tracts' median family income. Opportunity Zones are funded by an investment vehicle known as 'Qualified Opportunity Funds' where investors defer and reduce their capital gains taxes by rolling stock market earnings into the funds rather than sitting idle in stock portfolios.


Each fund is required to invest 90 percent of its holdings in Opportunity Zone assets, which may include investments in business equity, real estate, infrastructure, and housing.


Areas that have existing community plans and high-capacity community organizations are going to be better positioned to direct Opportunity Zone investments toward positive outcomes. Gulfton-Sharpstown has a unique opportunity to guide revitalization through the needs and strategies identified in this Plan and the City of Houston's Complete Communities Gulfton Action Plan. Local partners and city leaders should work to attract Opportunity Fund investment in small businesses and industries that provide career pathways for Gulfton/Sharpstown residents, as well as in new development of quality, affordable housing. This will require a combination of the following efforts:


- * Build relationships with developing Opportunity Funds that invest in Texas communities in order to identify funds that are investing in small businesses and industries that could provide quality careers for Gulfton residents;
- * Work with partners to provide job and entrepreneurship training to provide a qualified workforce ready to take advantage of new career opportunities;
- * Support small business formation and entrepreneurship, especially career pathways that feed into Houston's Innovation District, to ensure Gulfton-Sharpstown residents benefit from the metropolitan area's bold economic development agenda;
- * Invest in quality affordable and mixed-income housing with long-term affordability provisions to build the future housing stock for the community.


Additional public finance instruments not reviewed here but that may be useful to partner with OZ investments could include Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), Small Business Investment Company (SBICs), or Community Developments Banks (CDBs).




Concept	Strategy	Action(s)	Type	Connect Community Role (Lead; Coordinate; Support; Participate; Advocate)		Stakeholders - Who Should be Involved?	Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)	Potential Funding Sources	Phasing -- Short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years)
 Empower (Empoderar)	Develop a Multilingual Community Connector program with community coaches and technology that will assist newcomers in connecting to resources.	Provide multilingual legal help to understand Fair Housing rights and leasing terms.	Program	Participate		Multifamily property owners; apartment managers; Alliance for Multicultural Health; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Texas Organizing Project; Texas Appleseed; COH HCDD; LISC; CDCs	\$	General Funds; Staff Time; CDBG; HUD EOI Grant; LISC Grants	Short-term
		Establish monthly METRO-attended meetings in Gulfton-Sharpstown to assist new immigrants and existing residents in using transit and offer potential job opportunities.	Program	Participate		METRO's Public Affairs Division; Superneighborhood Council; apartment managers	\$	General Funds; Staff Time	Short-term
		Provide a healthcare guide for residents that describes locations and types of local healthcare facilities, including Federally Qualified Health Clinics that provide sliding-scale fee options.	Program	Coordinate		Alliance for Multicultural Health; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Texas Organizing Project; Daya; The Harris Center; CDCs	\$	General Funds; Staff Time; Philanthropic Grants;	Short-term
	Foster civic engagement and community solutions by empowering and developing youth and adult leaders	Create opportunities for youth to transform the area by establishing a youth council arm of the Super Neighborhood and securing resources to fund youth-led projects.	Program	Coordinate		Superneighborhood Council; Young Audiences of Houston; Texas Organizing Project; Sharpstown Civic Association; 8 Million Stories; JUMA; TXRX Labs; reVision	\$	General Funds; Superneighborhood Projects; LISC Grants; Philanthropic Grants	Short-term
		Integrate youth and parents in community activities and organizations.	Project	Support		Superneighborhood Council; Mayor's Office of Education; METRO's Transit Academy; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Texas Organizing Project; Madres de los Parques; Sharpstown Civic Association; 8 Million Stories; JUMA; TXRX Labs; reVision	\$	General Funds; Staff Time	Short-term

Concept	Strategy	Action(s)	Type	Connect Community Role (Lead; Coordinate; Support; Participate; Advocate)		Stakeholders - Who Should be Involved?	Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)	Potential Funding Sources	Phasing -- Short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years)
 Connect (Enlazar)	Establish a network of walkable streets that connect to the area's major destinations, schools, transit stops and parks.	Pursue streetscape redesigns for major streets to promote street life, safe routes to school, and accessibility.	Project	Advocate		TIRZ; Management Districts; Merchant Association; COH Public Works and Engineering; COH Planning and Development Department; METRO; TxDOT	\$\$\$	General Funds; COH ReBuild Program; Highway Safety Improvement Program	Medium-term
		Develop a streetscape manual for safer street design, including creative placemaking at intersections and crosswalks.	Project	Advocate		Scenic Houston; TIRZ; Management Districts; Merchant Association; Apartment managers; Area Schools; Property Owners; Area Non-Profits; METRO; AARP	\$	H-GAC Transportation Improvement Plan; General Funds; CMAQ; METRO's 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities;	Medium-term
		Promote pedestrian-oriented building facades that encourage walkability.	Project	Advocate		COH Planning and Development Department; Property Owners; Merchant Association; TIRZ; Management Districts; AARP	\$	Seek Walkable District status into the COH's Walkable Places	Short-term
		Identify properties likely to redevelop to promote walkable urban design guidelines.	Project	Advocate		TIRZ; Connect Community; COH Planning and Development Department; Management Districts	\$	General Funds; Bond Initiatives; Tax Increment Financing	Short-term
	Add new transit options and infrastructure to benefit Gulfton residents and businesses.	Install benches and shelters at area bus stops.	Project	Participate		METRO; COH's Public Health Department; Management Districts	\$	H-GAC Congestion and Air Quality Mitigation; H-GAC Transportation Alternatives; Capital Improvement Programs;	Short-term
		Build on prior transit improvements to Bellaire Blvd. and advocate for high-capacity transit on the corridor.	Policy	Advocate		METRO; TIRZ; Management Districts; COH Public Works and Engineering; COH Planning and Development; H-GAC High-Capacity Transit Task Force; Federal Transit Administration	\$\$\$	Bond Initiatives; General Funds; Capital Improvement Programming; Tax Increment Financing; CMAQ; TIGER Discretionary Program; FTA New or Small Starts Funding	Long-term
		Promote Service Enhancements to the Hillcroft Route 47.	Project	Advocate		METRO; COH Public Works and Engineering; COH Planning and Development Department; TxDOT; Management District; TIRZ	\$\$	METRO's General Fund; H-GAC Transportation Improvement Plan; Local Matching Sources	Medium-term
		Improve Access to the Hillcroft Transit Center and Promote Multifunctional Greenspace Opportunities at the site.	Project	Participate		METRO; TxDOT; Harris County; COH Public Works and Engineering; Gandhi District; Houston Parks and Recreation Department; Houston Parks Board	\$\$	General Funds; Transportation Alternatives; Management District; Opportunity Zone; TIRZ	Short-term
		Examine how Gulfton residents travel, including their use of technology, in order to better serve their transportation needs.	Program	Participate		H-GAC; TIRZ; COH Planning and Development;	\$	General Funds; CMAQ; Transportation Alternatives;	Short-term

Concept	Strategy	Action(s)	Type	Connect Community Role (Lead; Coordinate; Support; Participate; Advocate)		Stakeholders - Who Should be Involved?	Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)	Potential Funding Sources	Phasing -- Short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years)
 Nurture (Criar)	Celebrate Gulfton's diverse cultures.	Build on interfaith collaboration to advance community well-being.	Program	Support		COH Mayo's Office of Cultural Affairs; City Council District J; Area Faith Groups;	\$	General Funds; Staff Time	Short-term
		Celebrate Gulfton's diversity through public art and cuisine to attract major ethnic and cultural events.	Program	Coordinate		Merchants Association; Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs; Houston Arts Alliance; Young Audiences of Houston; UP Art Studio; Fresh Arts; YMCA; The Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau	\$	General Funds; ArtPlace America; National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town Grant; Knight Cities Challenge; Heart of the Community Southwest Airlines Grant; IOBY's Crowdfunding; NAR's Placemaking Initiative; McConnel Foundations' Cities for People Grant; National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation Scholarships Program	Short-term
		Create a pride-in-place campaign for Gulfton.	Program	Lead		Merchants Association; Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs; Houston Arts Alliance; Young Audiences of Houston; UP Art Studio; Fresh Arts; Sharpstown Civic Association; Superneighborhood Council; Management Districts	\$	General Funds; ArtPlace America; National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town Grant; Knight Cities Challenge; Heart of the Community Southwest Airlines Grant; IOBY's Crowdfunding; NAR's Placemaking Initiative; McConnel Foundations' Cities for People Grant	Short-term
		Arrange neighborhood walking and culinary tours in partnership with local residents and organizations.	Program	Support		Multifamily properties; apartment managers; Superneighborhood Council; Merchants Association; Houston Food Blogger Collective; Ghandi District; Management Districts	\$	General Funds; Staff Time	Short-term

Concept	Strategy	Action(s)	Type	Connect Community Role (Lead; Coordinate; Support; Participate; Advocate)		Stakeholders - Who Should be Involved?	Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)	Potential Funding Sources	Phasing -- Short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years)
 Nurture (Criar) Continued	Support residents to live long and healthy lives.	Conduct multilingual health insurance, health literacy, and reproductive health workshops to improve health outcomes.	Program	Support		ProSalud; Community Health Choice; Legacy Health; YMCA; Alliance for Multicultural Health; Culture of Health Advancing Together; multifamily properties; apartment managers; Superneighborhood Council; Healthy Living Matters; La Unidad11; Texas Organizing Project; Daya; The Harris Center	\$	General Funds; Staff Time	Short-term
		Encourage the enjoyment of high-quality green spaces as a holistic wellness strategy.	Program	Advocate		ProSalud; Area Clinics; Community Health Choice; Legacy Health; YMCA; Alliance for Multicultural Health; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Healthy Living Matters; La Unidad 11	\$	Staff Time	Short-term
		Expand the availability of culturally-competent mental health services in the neighborhood.	Project	Support		CDCs; Community Health Choice; YMCA; Alliance for Multicultural Health; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Healthy Living Matters; ProSalud; La Unidad 11; Texas Organizing Project; Daya; The Harris Center	\$\$	General Funds	Medium-term
		Expand affordable fresh food access.	Program	Coordinate		COH Public Health Department; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Madres de los Parques; Healthy Living Matters; Area Schools; ProSalud; La Unidad11	\$	General Funds; USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program	Medium-term
		Promote community gardening opportunities.	Program	Coordinate		COH Public Health Department; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Madres de los Parques; Healthy Living Matters; Area Schools; La Unidad11	\$\$	Urban Harvest Adopt-a-Garden Program; Staff Time; Therapeutic Garden Grants; Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust; Fiskars Project Orange Thumb; Annie's Homegrown School Garden Grants; SARE Farmer Grants; In Our Back Yard Grants; SARE Partnership Grants/Sustainable Community Grants	Medium-term

Concept	Strategy	Action(s)	Type	Connect Community Role (Lead; Coordinate; Support; Participate; Advocate)		Stakeholders - Who Should be Involved?	Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)	Potential Funding Sources	Phasing -- Short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years)
 Nurture (Criar) Continued	Offer all residents access to high-quality education options.	Increase quality early childhood development opportunities.	Program	Support		Collaborative for Children, Early Matters Houston, Children's Learning Institute, HGAC (child care subsidies and Texas Rising Star)	\$\$	Existing funding for quality improvement (e.g., Texas Rising Star)	Short-term
		Develop cultural competency assistance for teachers and school administrators to build relationships with students and families.	Program	Coordinate		Area school leaders; COH Office of New Americans; Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees; Texas Appleseed; Houston Justice Coalition; Texas Organizing Project	\$	Staff time; National Education Association Diversity Toolkit; National Institute of Health Clear Communication Program; Philanthropy	Short-term
		Provide at-risk students with access to culturally-competent counseling and social services.	Project	Coordinate		HISD; Area Schools; JUMA; 8 Million Stories; Mayor's Office of Education; Breakthrough Houston; Collaborative for Children, Early Matters Houston, Children's Learning Institute; TXRX Labs; reVision	\$\$	General Funds; Staff Time; Bond Initiatives	Short-term
		Incorporate additional programs to close grade deficiency gaps at the K-12 levels.	Program	Lead		Collaborative for Children, Early Matters Houston, Children's Learning Institute, Young Audiences of Houston; Breakthrough Houston; YMCA; SER Niños	\$	Staff Time; Philanthropy	Medium-term
		Increase the overall literacy rate of families and students.	Program	Lead		Collaborative for Children, Early Matters Houston, Children's Learning Institute, Families Empowered; Houston Public Library; Prestige Learning Institute; Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees; Houston Center for Literacy; YMCA; Families Empowered	\$	Staff Time	Ongoing
	Improve the quality and mix of existing housing stock.	Upgrade the condition of existing housing stock to promote residents' health with sustainable, energy-efficient, and resilient building design.	Project	Coordinate		COH HCDD; TIRZ; Management Districts; COH Office of Sustainability; multifamily property owners; apartment managers	\$\$\$	General Funds; Bond Initiatives; COH Home Repair Program; CDBG; HUD LBHC Grants; Federal Tax Credits for ENERGY STAR upgrades	Medium-term
		Enhance amenities available in existing housing.	Project	Coordinate		CDCs; TIRZ; Management Districts; multifamily property owners; COH HCDD; COH Planning and Development Department	\$\$\$	General Funds; Bond Initiatives; Public-Private Partnerships	Medium-term

Concept	Strategy	Action(s)	Type	Connect Community Role (Lead; Coordinate; Support; Participate; Advocate)		Stakeholders - Who Should be Involved?	Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)	Potential Funding Sources	Phasing -- Short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years)
<div></div> <div>Thrive (Prosperar)</div>	Support living-wage jobs and entrepreneurship.	Provide multilingual financial literacy training and credit counseling for residents.	Program	Support		Local Initiatives Support Corporation; Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees; Houston Community College; Prestige Learning Institute	\$	Staff Time; General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; Opportunity Zone Qualified Opportunity Funds	Medium-term
		Provide small business banking options and microloans through local credit unions.	Program	Advocate		Area Credit Unions; H-GAC Workforce Development; Prestige Learning Institute; Local Initiatives Support Corporation	\$	General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; Opportunity Zone Qualified Opportunity Funds; Philanthropy	Short-term
		Network with Houston companies to establish apprenticeship and training opportunities for Gulfton residents.	Program	Lead		Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Greater Houston Partnership; Houston Exponential (HX); Texas Medical Center; TXRX Labs; Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston	\$	Staff Time	Medium-term
		Establish adult education programs, including job and workforce training and digital literacy resources.	Program	Lead		Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Greater Houston Partnership; Houston Exponential (HX); Texas Medical Center; TXRX Labs; Local Initiatives Support Corporation; Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees; Houston Community College; Prestige Learning Institute	\$	Staff Time; General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; Opportunity Zone Qualified Opportunity Funds; Philanthropy	Medium-term
	Develop public amenities that bring people together as a community.	Provide community services through multipurpose gathering spaces for Gulfton/Sharpstown residents.	Project	Lead		COH Public Health Department; Culture of Health Advancing Together; Madres de los Parques; Healthy Living Matters; Area Schools; La Unidad11; Houston Parks Board; Houston Parks and Recreation; YMCA; Area non-profits	\$\$	General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; Opportunity Zone Qualified Opportunity Funds	Medium-term
		Pursue a signature library that celebrates Gulfton's multicultural identity, includes multipurpose community assets, and attracts visitors from across the city.	Project	Advocate		Houston Public Library; Houston Endowment; Local Initiatives Support Corporation; Breakthrough Houston; Families Empowered; Southwest Management District; Opportunity Zone; Young Audiences of Houston; SER Niños; COH Office of New Americans; Philanthropic Organizations	\$\$\$	General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; Opportunity Zone Qualified Opportunity Funds	Long-term
		Create new parks and public spaces, and improve existing public spaces in the area.	Project	Advocate		HPARD; Houston Parks Board; Madres de los Parques; TIRZ; Management Districts; AARP; Sharpstown Civic Association	\$\$\$	General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; ArtPlace America; National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town Grant; Knight Cities Challenge; Heart of the Community Southwest Airlines Grant; IOBY's Crowdfunding; NAR's Placemaking Initiative; McConnel Foundations' Cities for People Grant	Short-term

Concept	Strategy	Action(s)	Type	Connect Community Role (Lead; Coordinate; Support; Participate; Advocate)		Stakeholders - Who Should be Involved?	Cost (\$ - \$\$ - \$\$\$)	Potential Funding Sources	Phasing -- Short-term 0-2 years, medium-term 3-5 years, long-term 5-10 years)
 Thrive (Prosperar) Continued	Build an intentionally diverse and mixed-income community.	Create mixed-income development.	Policy	Coordinate		COH HCDD; TIRZ; CDCs; HHA; Seeds of Sharpstown; YMCA; LISC; Developers; Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs; U.S. HUD	\$\$\$	General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; HUD Grants; LIHTC; Section 8 New Construction and Substantial Rehabilitation Grants; CDBG; HOME Investment Partnership Program; Houston's Low Income Housing Fund; Multifamily Housing Bonds;	Medium-term
		Prevent economic displacement.	Policy	Coordinate		COH HCDD; TIRZ; CDCs; Houston Housing Authority; LISC; Property Owners; Texas Organizing Project	\$\$	General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; HUD Grants; LIHTC; Section 8 New Construction and Substantial Rehabilitation Grants; CDBG; HOME Investment Partnership Program; Houston's Low Income Housing Fund; Multifamily Housing Bonds;	Ongoing
		Develop housing typologies that support and retain multigenerational households in Gulfton.	Project	Coordinate		CDCs; LISC; Rice Design Alliance	\$	Staff Time; Design Competition	Short-term
		Develop public-private partnerships based on incentives that support affordable, quality housing.	Program	Support		CDCs; LISC; Developers; Seeds of Sharpstown; Opportunity Funds	\$\$	Staff Time; Legal Expertise;	Medium-term
		Increase resident stability and reduce frequent turnover.	Program	Coordinate		CDCs; Area Schools; LISC; multifamily properties; apartment managers	\$	Staff Time	Short-term
		Improve homeownership availability through innovative development approaches.	Policy	Support		COH HCDD; TIRZ; CDCs; HHA; LISC; Developers; Seeds of Sharpstown; multifamily properties;	\$\$	General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; Opportunity Zone Qualified Opportunity Funds	Medium-term
		Support reduced parking requirements for new developments that include affordable housing options, enhanced open and green spaces, or access to high-frequency transit stops.	Policy	Support		COH Planning Commission; COH Planning and Development Department; CDCs; TIRZ; Management Districts; Lenders	\$	Staff Time; General Funds; Tax Increment Financing; Bond Initiatives; Opportunity Zone Qualified Opportunity Funds	Short-term

Appendix A: Qualitative Data Study

Appendix B: BHAG Summary 1

Community Needs Assessment
A Preliminary Report on the Qualitative Data Study

CONNECT COMMUNITY
Robert Wimpelberg, All Kids Alliance
Lindsey Mattick, AmeriCorps Service Volunteer
August 2017

Background

The Board of Directors of Connect Community launched a Community Needs Assessment in the summer of 2016 with a straightforward set of goals that included

- recruit community members to help gather information on community needs,
- understand the needs and inform the community,
- prioritize the needs and decide how they will be addressed, and
- provide information to Connect Community leadership as it develops a multi-year strategic plan.

To meet these goals, two studies were undertaken, one *quantitative* and one *qualitative*. Here we report preliminary findings from the qualitative data study.

Methodology

The qualitative data study had two information sources: interviews with **KEY INFORMANTS** and conversations with **FOCUS GROUP** members, all from the community. The interviews and group conversations were guided by these nine key topics:

- The new Connect Community Center
 - Civic Engagement
 - Education
 - Health
 - Housing
- Quality of Life
 - Transportation
 - Services for Newcomers
 - Work/Workforce

The volunteers conducting the **KEY INFORMANT** interviews and those facilitating the **FOCUS GROUP** discussions were instructed to invite the participants to talk about each of the nine key topics, one at a time.

Specific to the topic of the new Community Center, participants were asked to think about kinds of features that would best serve them.

For the eight other topics, participants were asked reflect on their positive and negative experiences in the community and the needs that remain unaddressed.

Interviews and group conversations were completed between November of 2016 and April of 2017.



Ethnicity and Age Distribution of FOCUS GROUP Participants

Ethnicity*	Age			Total	% of total
	10-19	20-29	30+		
African	7	0	7	14	17.3%
Asian	2	3	22	27	33.3%
Caucasian	0	0	4	4	4.9%
Hispanic	4	2	30	36	44.4%
Total	13	5	63	81	
% of total	16.0%	6.2%	77.8%		

- In this study, the term, “African” residents largely refers to Congolese; “Asian” residents include Pakistanis, Afghans, and others whose primary language is Arabic; “Hispanic” residents are from Mexico and Central and South America.

Hispanic residents make up 71% of the Connect Community population. Thus, the ethnic distribution of **FOCUS GROUP** participants clearly over-represented Asian and African residents. About 45% of Connect Community residents are younger than 25; this means that the age distribution in the **FOCUS GROUPS** over-represented older residents.

There were twelve **FOCUS GROUPS** convened:

- 5 small groups (5-6 participants) that included South Asian and Middle Eastern residents, primarily over 30 years old,
- 3 groups – 2 large (12-14 participants) and 1 small (6 participants) – that included Hispanic residents, primarily of 30 years old,
- 2 small groups (4 and 7 participants) that included African and Hispanic teenagers,
- 1 small group (7 participants) that included African residents, all over 30 years old, and
- 1 small group (4 participants) that included Caucasian participants, all over 30 years old.

Five **FOCUS GROUPS** were conducted in English, two in Spanish, two in Pashto, and one each in Arabic, Swahili, and Urdu. Discussions were tape-recorded, and written transcripts were produced from the recordings. Then, non-English transcripts were translated into English.

In total, the 12 **FOCUS GROUPS** generated 208 pages of written copy.

Ethnicity and Rates of Responses

Asian participants in the **FOCUS GROUPS** made 58% of the comments that were coded and analyzed. Hispanic participants accounted for nearly 24%. African participants provided 12% and Caucasians another 6%.



Ethnicity and Age Distribution of Focus Group Participants					
Ethnicity*	Age			Total	% of total
	10-19	20-29	30+		
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These percentages mean that Asians – who are overrepresented as focus group participants compared to their presence in the impact zone – are further overrepresented in the commentaries that this study has generated about the interests, satisfactions, concerns, and needs of residents in the Connect Community.

Preliminary Findings

A Word about Our Methodology

The 334 pages of transcript were analyzed with the nine key topics in mind. After multiple readings of the transcripts, segments of text were hand-coded according to the key topics.

This process generated 1037 coded segments.

Segments could be grouped in large numbers under the key topics. In addition, within a key topic, some segments shared semantic affinity with other segments, and we joined these into groups called “micro-topics.”

For example, under the key topic, “transportation,” we took comments like “the time charts are incorrect” and “buses don’t come when it says they will” and joined them under a micro-topic “inaccurate Metro time tables.”

In total, we identified 110 micro-topics.

While it’s useful to highlight the most frequently occurring micro-topics, for general analyses we took the additional step to group micro-topics into topic clusters. Under the key topic “quality of life,” for example, we joined the micro-topics of “poor quality roads” and “poor street-lighting” to create a topic cluster we labeled “negative infrastructure.”

Our analyses then tracked the frequency with which coded segments of text (participant comments) were associated with key topics, topic clusters, and micro-topics. It was our guiding assumption that more frequent occurrence of a key topic, topic cluster, or micro-topic expressed a greater community interest in that item, always reminding readers that the participants in this study over-represented the Asian, African, and older segments of Connect Community.

Community Center

Comments about the Community Center were analyzed separately from information on the other eight key topics. Because the planned Community Center was only included in the topic list for the FOCUS GROUP sessions (and not the KEY INFORMANT interviews), the responses analyzed below come solely from the 81 participants in the focus groups.



In nearly half (49%) of their comments, FOCUS GROUP participants pointed to center programming as their main interest, specifically English classes and computer classes (Microsoft applications). Another 20% of their comments named the kind of facilities they wanted available. Here they named a gym most frequently; one or another respondent mentioned a lounge area, child-care space, library, health clinic, and café or store. About 10% of their comments participants asked that Community Center programs be affordable.

Differences by Ethnicity

More than half of the comments about the Community Center came from Asian participants, and another 25% from Hispanic participants.

The Asian participants requested instructional classes principally in English as a Second Language and computer applications. They also cite general “skills” classes, instruction in cooking, sewing, cosmetology, culturally-sensitive sex education, the Quran, and languages other than English. A few Asian participants asked that classes be offered separately for men and women.

Hispanic participants also wanted classes but primarily in movement such as soccer, even swimming. The two focus groups comprising teenagers -- seven of whom were Hispanic and four African – also voted for activity classes.

Community Assets

Next we separated out the positive comments that respondents made about living in the Connect Community area. These kinds of comments accounted for 16% of the total; they were expressed with equal frequency by key informants and focus group participants.

Over half (55%) of the positive comments related to the key topic: quality of life. KEY INFORMANTS liked the diversity (and acceptance of diversity) in the community; focus group participants described the area as “close-knit,” and said that they like living near others who share their culture. A significant number of FOCUS GROUP participants liked the proximity of shops and services and the fact that they were concentrated in one densely commercial area of the community.

While positive comments were associated with other key topics – such as health, transportation, work/workforce, civic engagement, and services for newcomers – the only cluster of comments that reached a significant frequency related to health: large numbers of FOCUS GROUP participants and KEY INFORMANTS alike said that they valued and liked the health services provided in the community.



Differences by Ethnicity

More than 75% of the positive comments about community assets area came from Asian residents.

Community Needs

General Results

About two-thirds of all the comments coded in this study matched one of four key topics: quality of life, education, housing, and an emergent key topic: language/cultural barriers.

Quality of life comprised a set of needs that captured over 24% of the comments by KEY INFORMANTS and 30% by FOCUS GROUP participants.

Education came up in nearly 17% of the comments from KEY INFORMANTS and over 14% from FOCUS GROUP participants.

Percentages for housing were about 14% for each set of respondents, and language/cultural barriers accounted for about 11% for each set.

For KEY INFORMANTS, the topic that ranked fifth highest was work/workforce, and for FOCUS GROUP participants it was TRANSPORTATION.

Frequency of Key Topic Comments among KEY INFORMANTS and FOCUS GROUP Participants

KEY INFORMANTS				FOCUS GROUP Participants			
Key Topics	Comments		Oppor- tunity Time	Key Topics	Comments		Oppor- tunity Time
	No.	%			No.	%	
Quality of Life	58	24.2%	100%	Quality of Life	145	30.0%	85.2%
Education	40	16.7%	85.7%	Education	70	14.5%	93.8%
Housing	34	14.2%	92.9%	Housing	68	14.0%	50.6%
Language/Cultural Barriers	27	11.3%		Language/Cultural Barriers	53	11.0%	
Work/Workforce	23	9.6%	64.3%	Transportation	50	10.3	70.4%
Civic Engagement	18	7.5%	78.6%	Health	41	8.5%	53.1%
Transportation	15	6.3%	71.4%	Work/Workforce	36	7.4%	56.8%
Services for Newcomers	13	5.4%	35.7%	Services for Newcomers	13	2.7%	24.7%
Health	12	5.0%	64.37%	Civic Engagement	8	1.7%	37.0%



The other major topics – health, civic engagement, and services for newcomers – each received fewer than 10% of the comments, whether from KEY INFORMANTS or FOCUS GROUP participants. Services for newcomers and civic engagement were especially low; among FOCUS GROUP participants, they garnered only 2.7% and 1.7% of all comments.

“Opportunity Time” for Each Topic

Because we noticed how infrequently services for newcomers and civic engagement were mentioned by FOCUS GROUP participants, we were prompted to analyze all KEY INFORMANT and FOCUS GROUP transcripts to see if the ways that the interviewers or focus group facilitators controlled the discussions might have had some effect on the results.

By noting the point in the transcript when the session leader explicitly brought up a new topic and then counting the page space until the topic changed, we were able to make a rough calculation of the portion of time each topic might have received during a session. From this calculation we created a factor we call “opportunity time,” which equates to the likelihood that a participant was introduced to the topic and had enough time to discuss it before the session concluded.

We conclude that “opportunity time” may, in fact, explain why the topics of services for newcomers and civic engagement garnered so few comments from focus group participants, and why services for newcomers generated so few comments from key informants. For all other topics, there is only a weak correlation, if any, between the number of comments a topic received and its “opportunity time.”

Ethnicity and the Key Topics

Knowing the ethnic composition of the focus groups, we were able to unpack our findings to some degree. The most significant observation is that, although Asian participants comprised about a third of the focus group participants, they accounted for 57% of all the coded comments.

In reverse, Hispanic participants were 44% of the focus group members but provided fewer than 20% of the comments. African participation was also relatively also high but their comments infrequent.

If we look into specific topics, however, the subgroups become more and less prominent.

- Asians had, far and away, the most concerns about two topics: language/cultural barriers and transportation.
- Complaints about matters of quality of life were elevated across all groups except Africans.
- The nine African and Hispanic teenagers who participated in two of the focus groups spoke up mostly on issues of quality of life, education, and housing. For reasons that may be easy to infer, they expressed few or no concerns about health, language/cultural barriers, work/workforce, or civic engagement.



Distribution of Comments from Focus GROUP Sessions by Ethnicity

Key Topics	Asian		African		Hispanic		Caucasian		Teens (Afr/Hisp)		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Quality of Life	45	31.0	3	2.1	40	27.6	23	15.9	34	23.4	145
Education	49	64.5	3	3.9	9	11.8	4	5.3	11	14.5	76
Housing	42	61.8	7	10.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	19	27.9	68
Health	52	72.2	4	5.6	13	18.1	3	4.2	0	0.0	72
Barriers	42	82.4	7	13.7	0	0.0	1	2.0	1	2.0	51
Transportation	41	77.4	6	11.3	0	0.0	1	1.9	5	9.4	53
Work/Workforce	18	46.2	10	25.6	7	17.9	3	7.7	1	2.6	39
Services for Newcomers	7	41.2	8	47.1	1	5.9	0	0.0	1	5.9	17
Civic Engagement	7	70.0	1	10.0	2	20.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	10
Total: All Topics	303	57.1	49	9.2	72	13.6	35	6.6	72	13.6	531

In the remainder of this section of the report, we take up each key topic individually and present the key findings related to it. For each topic we also explore response variations associated with ethnicity in the results from FOCUS GROUP participants.

Concerns about Quality of Life

Concerns about quality of life issues were the most prominent of all topics for both KEY INFORMANTS and FOCUS GROUP participants. Participants complained about social and infrastructure inadequacies. On the social side, the single most frequent concern was violence and gang activity. Concerns over security accounted for 34% of all quality of life issues raised in respondents’ comments.

Infrastructure complaints centered on poor street lighting and inadequate sidewalks (9%), bad traffic, especially near schools (8%), flooded streets (6%), and wanting bike lanes on the streets (6%).

Differences by Ethnicity

Negative comments about quality of life came most frequently from Hispanic participants (43%) and slightly less frequently from Asian participants (35%). African participants only made 7% of these kinds of comments during focus group sessions. On the issues of security, violence, and gang activity, teen participants (comprising two African and seven Hispanic youth) joined Asian and older Hispanic participants in equal intensity to voice their concern.



Concerns about Education

The second most frequent set of complaints for KEY INFORMANTS and FOCUS GROUP participants relate to education. KEY INFORMANTS were generally unhappy with the community’s public schools, without being very specific; some comments suggested that they were referring primarily to HISD schools. Those KEY INFORMANTS were also concerned that the schools had too little funding.

For FOCUS GROUP participants, the primary complaint was that they don’t understand the American education system, in general, and the distinction between “public” and “charter” schools, in particular.

Reinforcing a major concern related to quality of life, an additional concern that came up in the FOCUS GROUP sessions about education was a need for more school security.

Differences by Ethnicity

Nearly 65% of all comments about education came from Asian participants. Another 15% were voiced by the African and Hispanic teenagers in their two FOCUS GROUP sessions.

The Asian participants had the most difficulty understanding the education system. Teenagers were the most concerned about security at school.

Concerns about Housing

Housing ranked third in importance for both KEY INFORMANTS and FOCUS GROUP participants. These respondents were unanimous in naming the problems: apartments are of low quality, they suffer from poor management, they are dirty and trash-ridden, and the rents are too high.

Differences by Ethnicity

Once again, Asian residents provided the majority of comments (62%), and their complaints spread across the four issues of poor quality, poor management, trash, and high rents.

The African and Hispanic teenagers were especially vocal on this subject, making 28% of all the comments. Their complaints overlapped those of the Asian participants, and they added infestations and poor water quality to the list of concerns about housing.

Concerns about Language and Cultural Barriers

The topic of language and cultural barriers was not crafted as a discussion item in either the KEY INFORMANT or FOCUS GROUP protocols. However, it recurred so frequently that we added it to the key topic list.



In comparative frequency, language and cultural barriers placed fourth (out of nine topics) for both KEY INFORMANTS and FOCUS GROUP participants. About 11% of the comments made by either set of respondents focused on this issue.

As a first consideration, language barriers caused the FOCUS GROUP respondents general frustration in their daily lives. In addition, participants said that not knowing English made it difficult to help their children with school ; the parents couldn’t communicate with teachers, couldn’t read school communications and report cards, and couldn’t assist their children with homework.

Second after its consequences for education, language barriers made it difficult to find employment; our participants said that, if they had a job, they often didn’t understand their supervisors’ requests and couldn’t defend themselves when wrongly accused of bad performance. With somewhat lower frequency, the participants talked about their inability to use health services effectively and to navigate the transportation system.

The issue cited most frequently as a cultural barrier had to do with American attitudes about relationships between boys and girls and sex education in the schools; they found boy-girl relationships too casual and information about sex too explicit and comprehensive for younger children.

The second most frequent area of cultural disharmony related to health care. Seeing a different doctor at each visit, having to make an appointment, and being prescribed medications with minimal testing concerned our participants. With less frequency, they talked about tensions over religion, using credit when they’re used to cash, and the demand to be on time and meet deadlines.

Differences by Ethnicity

Asian FOCUS GROUP participants made 83% of the comments on language and cultural barriers; African participants accounted for another 14%. Hispanic participants made no references to language or cultural barriers.

Concerns about Transportation

Transportation registered in fifth place for FOCUS GROUP participants (10.3%) and seventh for KEY INFORMANTS (6.3%). Few specific comments met the threshold of significance, but those that might be noteworthy had to do with a general dislike of the Metro system, inaccuracies in its schedules, having no alternatives to Metro, and the complaint that routes to desired destinations were often indirect.

Differences by Ethnicity

Nearly 9 out of 10 comments about transportation came from Asian and African participants. None were from older Hispanic residents.



Concerns about Work/Workforce

Work and workforce issues were in fifth position for KEY INFORMANTS (9.6%) and seventh for FOCUS GROUP participants (7.4%). KEY INFORMANTS wished that there were more employment opportunities (especially for women), and they wanted more better-paying jobs for community residents. The one topic that rose to prominence among FOCUS GROUP participants has a similar ring: “long hours, low pay.”

Differences by Ethnicity

Although comments about work and workforce were infrequent, they were more evenly distributed on this topic than others: Asian, 46%; African, 26%; and Hispanic, 18%. That said, the predominant concern about long hours and low pay was only voiced by Asian and African participants.

Concerns about Health

For FOCUS GROUP participants, health was the sixth most frequent topic of commentary (8.5%); for KEY INFORMANTS, it ranked last (5.0%).

The issues that FOCUS GROUP participants raised center on lack of insurance, lack of trust in the system, high costs, and long waits. Four of the 14 KEY INFORMANTS were concerned that too many community residents didn’t understand the health care system.

Differences by Ethnicity

The comments of Asian participants predominate on this topic (72%), but Hispanic participants were somewhat more vocal (18%) compared to their comments on other topics.

Concerns about Civic Engagement

As we noted earlier, the topic of civic engagement was not given much time during the FOCUS GROUP sessions; all told, FOCUS GROUP participants only brought it up 10 times. Its position toward the bottom of both sets of respondents may be the result.

Five of those 10 comments were from Asian participants who said they wanted to be more involved in civic life.

Eleven of the 14 KEY INFORMANTS were asked to comment on civic engagement and eight of them expressed a desire to promote it more, to create opportunities for the broader public to be involved with community events.



Concerns about Services for Newcomers

The topic, services for newcomers, was also given limited exposure during FOCUS GROUP sessions and KEY INFORMANT interviews. One notable comment from Asian and African participants is that they wanted better guidance – better caseworkers – to help them navigate the services available.

Although services for newcomers was explicitly introduced in five of the 14 KEY INFORMANT interviews, nine of those interviewed made comments on the topic, either declaring services to be generally adequate or wishing that residents had better guidance for accessing services – a sentiment that was in agreement with many of the FOCUS GROUP participants.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A Summary View of the Results

This qualitative study was undertaken to give voice to those who work and live in the Connect Community impact zone. It was intended to complement the “quantitative” information being gathered from census reports, agency records, and other sources.

There is no way to calculate the significance of the results from this study in a statistically scientific way. That is to say, we cannot use the comments of the participants in this study to claim to know the general sentiments of the population of Connect Community, as a whole.

However, the results here can provide a launching pad for expanded community conversations, and they can give direction to those community work teams that will now create the near-term action agenda for community improvement.

The summary findings, which appear on the next page, show which issues garnered the most attention. The decision process for including items in this summary chart started with a simple calculus of chance occurrence, namely, the number of times a particular key topic, topic cluster, or micro-topic would have appeared in participants’ comments if participants had spread their comments absolutely evenly across all topics, clusters, and micro-topics.

Having a number for chance occurrences of any given key topic, or any particular topic cluster, or any specific micro-topic, we could then calculate the number of comments it would take to arrive at various magnitudes, such as “twice chance,” or “three times chance “ and so on.

We used this “magnitudes-more-than-chance” process to lend some weight to the key topics, topic clusters, and micro-topics that came up most frequently during KEY INFORMANT interviews and FOCUS GROUP conversations. We believe it is these items that desire the most immediate attention.



The chart below captures levels of frequency that were at least twice the number of chance occurrences, and the range goes up to six times the number for chance occurrences. To highlight the comparative frequency of occurrence of these items, we put increasingly darker boxes around the factor of magnitude and topic name as the frequency increased.

MOST FREQUENTLY OCCURRING TOPICS, TOPIC CLUSTERS, AND MICRO-TOPICS			
KEY TOPICS			
KEY INFORMANTS		FOCUS GROUPS	
2x	Quality of Life Issues	3x	Quality of Life Issues
TOPIC CLUSTERS			
KEY INFORMANTS		FOCUS GROUPS	
3x	Housing Complaints	5x	Infrastructure Complaints
3x	Education Complaints	3x	Housing Complaints
2x	Social Complaints	2x	Education Complaints
2x	Infrastructure Complaints	2x	Language Barriers
MICRO-TOPICS			
KEY INFORMANTS		FOCUS GROUPS	
4x	Need Better Caseworkers	6x	Need More Security
4x	Violence and Gang Activity	3x	Violence and Gang Activity
3x	Rents Too High	3x	Bad Traffic, Near Schools
3x	Need More Green Space	2x	Rents Too High
3x	Desire More Civic Engagement	2x	Poor Apt Management
3x	Poor Apt Management	2x	Poor Quality Apartments
2x	Poor Quality Jobs Available		
2x	Poor Quality Apartments		
2x	Need More Security		
2x	Need Job Opportunities, especially for Women		



Recommendations

- The information in this report should be used to inform and guide community conversations.
 - Those conversations can check the results against the lived experience of community residents who did not participate in the qualitative data study.
 - They can amplify the understand to be gained from the qualitative data study by confirming its findings, lending more detail to the findings, and adding insights about community conditions that were not tapped during the study.
- The information in this report should also be used to provide a baseline of understanding to the work groups that will frame the Connect Community agenda for change.
 - In any domain – transportation, education, quality of life, etc. – the leverage points for improving community conditions are many, and the best points at which to begin can be elusive.
 - Data like this report provides, along with the results from the quantitative study, can help a work group to find the most promising starting points with the highest potential to meet residents’ needs and interests.

In the next phase of this discovery process, it will be important to remind constituents that participation in this study underrepresented certain demographic features of Connect Community. For example, Hispanic voices were underrepresented relative to their portion of the general population. Similarly, younger community residents -- those between the ages of 15 and 40 -- were not included among the KEY INFORMANT or FOCUS GROUP participants at a rate matching their presence in the general population.



Appendix C: BHAG Summary 2

Appendix D: BHAG Summary 3

