

Case Studies

Background

In July 2012, H-GAC and its Coordinating Committee released a call for proposals in which eligible entities could apply for funding of a sustainability case study. The purpose of the case studies is to demonstrate ways that the sustainability goals developed in the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) can be applied to issues at the local level and in a variety of geographic contexts. The case studies are intended to focus on implementation, moving beyond the planning level of the broader RPSD. It is expected that a broad range of communities will be able to utilize the recommendations and outcome(s) of the case study(s) if they share a similar geographic context or issues.

Each applicant had to demonstrate how their proposal met those criteria. The criteria included demonstration of how the proposal aligned with the 15 RPSD goals and the six HUD Livability Principles. In addition, applicants had to describe how their project would serve a transferable model for other entities. A panel of reviewers made up of the Coordinating Committee and H-GAC evaluated and scored the proposals. The proposals with the highest scores were chosen. Out of 18 applications, six were chosen. Five of the case studies were approved by the H-GAC Board of Directors on September 19, 2012 and the Bayou Greenway Initiative Case Study was approved on November 20, 2012. All of the case studies are to be completed by April 30, 2013, with the exception of the City of Houston Urban Framework which will wrap-up in mid-May, and the Bayou Greenway Initiative Case Study will be completed in June 2013.

1. Bay City North Downtown Plan:

Bay City is a rural community of about 17,500 people two hours southwest of Houston. The study focuses on the creation of a revitalization plan for an area filled with vacant lots and brownfields north of its historic downtown. The plan focuses on the creation of quality mixed use development with a variety of available housing types to attract young professionals and needed jobs in the area, as well connections from the study area to its downtown.

Current Status: An advisory committee was established at the beginning of the project. Input was gathered from more than 100 current and prospective residents, business leaders, and city staff members via interviews, focus groups, open houses, and advisory committee meetings. In January, the advisory committee approved the general approach, market analysis, and overall master plan. The final public meeting for the plan occurred on April 11. The implementation plan is currently under development and includes a development-phasing plan, financial and regulatory mechanisms, and other strategic recommendations.

2. Bayou Greenway Initiative

The Bayou Greenway Initiative (BGI) Case Study will develop a mechanism to implement the segments of the BGI that are outside the limits of the City of Houston. The scope of the project will be limited to Cypress Creek from its confluence with Spring Creek to US 290 in Northwest Harris County. A major component of the case study will be developing the mechanisms for coordinating with the various jurisdictions along the corridors to help ensure continuity of the BGI. The mechanisms may include guidelines, funding recommendations, and development of Memorandum of Understanding or Memorandum of Agreements (MOU/MOA).

Current Status:

The project has currently kicked-off, the stakeholder advisory group has been formed, a public engagement plan has been finalized, the existing conditions of the study area have been completed, and the sustainability gap analysis is complete. The stakeholder advisory group reviews the draft materials and deliverables and has been instrumental in identifying the appropriate mechanisms for reaching and engaging the jurisdictions and special districts within the study area.

The case study has a stakeholder advisory group that has been meeting at regular intervals in the project. The group has met on the following dates: Friday, December 14, Friday, January 18, and Friday, February 22, April 5. An additional meeting is scheduled for April 26. The group is composed of civic leaders, commercial property owners, the president of the local community college, and other active and interested community leaders. The Public Involvement Plan has been completed and the draft report for Tasks 1 and 2 (Existing Conditions and Sustainability Gap Analysis) is complete. An online survey of needs and priorities for the Cypress Creek Greenway was completed and a series of public meetings and open houses were held in the last week of March.

3. Brazoria County

The study examines the entire coastal ecosystem of Brazoria County which includes several bays and estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico as well as the areas 20 miles of land inland from shore. The county seeks to develop a coastal master plan that includes a new set of Best Management Practices to handle and protect the coastal natural resources. The master plan will also include specific policy and planning recommendations to mitigate short and long-term impacts of future development in the coastal community.

Current Status: The consultant has finished a draft of the complete plan which includes four sections. The first chapter is an inventory of public parks and lands in Brazoria County, this includes a map of connectivity between parks and other public lands, as well as access to these areas. The second chapter is a needs assessment for the County Parks and public lands based on a public survey and two public meetings held in January. The third chapter is a review of the environmental and geologic factors affecting the county and explains the unique natural setting and characteristics of Brazoria County including the Columbia Bottomlands and hardwood forests. The fourth chapter is a section on land management recommendations for the County and a discussion of the HUD livability principles, and how the County can benefit by protecting natural areas and improving quality of life. This plan includes many maps showing locations of all public facilities, geologic formations, and target lands to be acquired for public purposes. The Technical Advisory Committee met on April 10 to review the contents of the plan, and they along with the County will be turning in comments to ATKINS by Friday, April 19 in order to complete the plan.

4. Galveston: Sustainable Return of Investment (SROI) Calculator:

The purpose of the study is to develop a Sustainable Return on Investment (SROI) framework that would act as a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis methodology for proposed city investments and initiatives. The SROI framework would provide a more accurate assessment of the costs and benefits of proposed investments by integrating their social and environmental impacts into the traditional financial analysis methodology. The SROI will be performed on three projects: curb-side recycling by either the city or a private entity; water conservation and grey water re-use; and implementing complete streets principals on a roadway segment. In addition to the SROI analysis will be completed on these projects, an excel-based model will be developed so that other communities may complete SROI on their own similar projects.

Current Status: The Stakeholder Advisory Committee met in November to identify the projects to be analyzed and develop a public engagement strategy. The projects were chosen from a list of projects that have been identified from various city plans and initiatives. In December 2012, a survey instrument was released to the public to get feedback on the community values in their relation to sustainability. The results from the survey were analyzed and are being included into the report. The final SAC meeting was on March 21 and the draft report will be completed in mid-April.

5. Houston: Framework for Urban Development

The scope for this case study encompasses the City of Houston which includes both urban and suburban areas. The city faces several issues including urban sprawl, low density, and lack of pedestrian safety. The purpose of the study is to develop a comprehensive framework of policy tools and regulatory incentives the city can use to selectively encourage dense, sustainable

neighborhoods in appropriate locations, while maintaining the character of existing neighborhoods. The case study will help integrate land use and transportation planning by coordinating land development standards with new transit investments, and by providing affordable housing in dense areas around new transit lines.

Current Status: The Stakeholder Advisory Committee has been meeting on a monthly basis and last met in mid-April (April 11). A draft report has been composed and includes a vision, goals, sustainability gap analysis, peer review, and needs assessment. Currently, two scenarios were run on each of the three urban center pilot projects to show what the development cost, and civic benefit would be when using existing regulations vs. the draft framework recommendations. The project team is working to refine the methodology used in the pilot project scenarios, further develop the set of tools and expectations for development in urban centers, as well as include input from the SAC, as well as the April public meetings and vision workshop into the draft final report. In addition, an online poll is being conducted until April 26 to gauge public sentiment on the proposed development toolbox and expectations. The final SAC meeting will be held on May 1, ~~and the final report will be complete by May 20.~~

6. Huntsville: Harnessing Huntsville's Potential

Huntsville is a rural city of roughly 30,000 people that has a jobs and housing imbalance and is seeking to comprehensively address the ability to create and maintain quality, affordability, and a range of housing options while subsequently attracting economic development. Currently the city contains a large renter population as well as a large amount of public land that is owned by the federal and state governments. The long term benefits of the study include positive branding, improvement of the housing stock, the increasing and diversification of the labor pool market, and the increasing and promotion of business expansion and development for the city.

Current Status: The City of Huntsville appointed a stakeholder advisory committee (SAC) made up of the school district, realtors, city planning and public works department representatives, Walker County, H-GAC, a hospital and a public university. The SAC meets monthly. To date, two rounds of focus groups and public meetings have been held. The final public meeting occurred on March 28th, and the final report will be released in late-April. The report will include an analysis of past studies, a needs assessment, ten project recommendations, an implementation framework and a sustainability gap analysis.

Recommended Action: Information only, no action needed.

Public Outreach

OurRegion Video Production:

Six area focused videos have been completed. Each video shows sustainable projects happening in our region. These videos will be launched in the spring of 2013 to draw attention to OurRegion and some sustainable measures that are already happening in the community. A longer “documentary” piece is still in the production stage. There are still a few interviews to complete in order to make this a well rounded effort. Individual focused videos are available as of March 2013. This task is set for completion by April 2013.

The videos will be released on the OurRegion website, the OurRegion YouTube channel and in an eblast to our contacts lists. The schedule is below.

May 1st	Our Region Gives
May 8th	OurRegion Moves
May 15th	OurRegion Nourishes
May 22nd	OurRegion Recycles
May 29th	OurRegion Saves
June 5th	OurRegion Volunteers

ACTION: Coordinating Committee Members are being asked to contact Amanda Thorin to join in with the launch schedule. Each member is encouraged to upload the videos to their prospective websites as they are released and also forward on the emails launching the videos to their contact lists.

Community Resource Guide:

The consultant team is working to produce a Community Resource Guide to help community members better understand how to navigate participation in their communities. This document is in a conception phase and is set to be completed in the fall of 2013 to be released in conjunction of the draft regional plan. This is an ongoing project and is in a draft stage.

Recommended Action: Information only, no action needed.