



Harris County Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2025–2029

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Commissioners Court



Lina Hidalgo
County Judge



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Precinct 1



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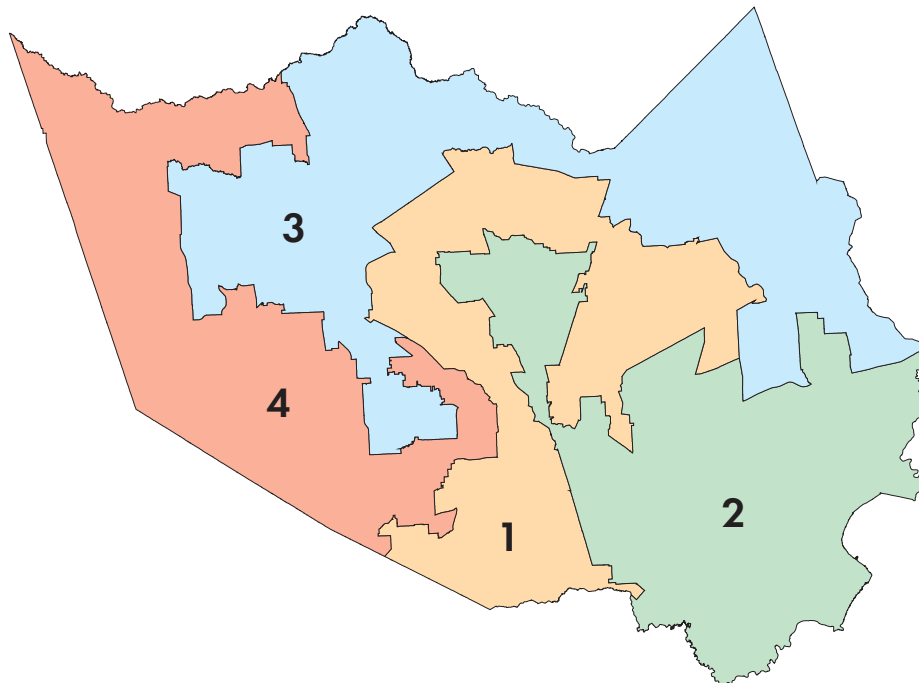


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Harris County Precincts



Introduction

In 2023, Commissioners Court embarked on the development of a five-year strategic plan to clearly communicate Harris County's direction to residents, stakeholders, and employees. Commissioners Court approved a strategic framework on April 23, 2024, and the full plan on October 29th, 2024. In addition to serving as a communications tool, the plan's purpose is to increase alignment between the County budget and Commissioners Court's priorities and to better guide the work of County departments and partners.

The plan includes Harris County's vision, purpose, and guiding principles; six goals, 23 objectives, and 83 initiatives; and a wide range of metrics for tracking the state of Harris County as a community and the progress of our efforts. The plan will focus our work while accounting for the extensive responsibilities of Harris County government. By tracking our priority work both qualitatively and quantitatively, we will foster a culture of continuous improvement that emphasizes performance for and accountability to Harris County residents.

The strategic planning process was informed by one-on-one meetings with each Commissioners Court member, a special meeting of Commissioners Court held on April 1, 2024, numerous workshops and meetings with the Strategic Planning Committee—which consists of representatives from each Commissioners Court office—multiple meetings with and other feedback from leaders of departments reporting to the Office of County Administration (OCA), workshops with "County Champions" from various County departments, a

community survey, a County employee survey, charettes (collaborative community planning work sessions involving community stakeholder individuals and organizations) hosted individually by each member of Commissioners Court, and workgroup sessions with subject matter experts for each of the six strategic goal topics.

The strategic plan's objectives and initiatives represent key priorities, and the plan does not include everything the County does in general or must do specifically to achieve the stated goals. Work by County departments that is not included in the strategic plan will continue to be funded as appropriate and tracked for performance improvement and prioritization purposes.

The strategic plan is a living document and is intended to adapt and evolve over time to address emerging issues and changes in circumstances. The plan's initiatives will be reviewed annually in conjunction with the budget process and the analysis of performance data. Initiatives that do not produce the intended results may be reworked or ended, and new initiatives may be incorporated within the five-year duration of this plan. The metrics included in this plan are thorough and ambitious; they will be adjusted as needed to reflect changes in initiatives or availability of data. In addition, we will revisit goals and objectives at least every five years to reflect changes in direction called for by the community and Commissioners Court to better improve our performance.



Vision

By 2050, Harris County will be...



Safe and Fair

All communities are safe and free from violence, trauma, and racial and economic disparities, and the justice system operates fairly for all.



Thriving

Our economy is inclusive, resilient, and equitable, where all can support their families and build wealth, and businesses large and small can grow and innovate.



Resilient

All communities—regardless of race, income, or geography—are free from environmental harms and prepared for climate change and disasters.



Connected

Every neighborhood has access to well-maintained green spaces, modern infrastructure, and affordable, reliable, and sustainable transportation options.



Healthy

Everyone has access to health care, and health disparities across communities are greatly reduced.



Secure

All residents have quality, affordable, and safe housing.

Purpose

To provide community-centered services and infrastructure effectively, efficiently, and equitably, creating opportunities for all to be safe, healthy, and economically secure.

Community-centered services and infrastructure

In a county as large and diverse as ours, one-size-fits-all services and infrastructure may not work for everyone. We tailor our work to the unique circumstances and needs of our distinct neighborhoods. That means listening to residents, understanding problems, and targeting investments and outreach as much as possible. Also, we define infrastructure broadly, to include streets, bridges, channels, parks and other public spaces, trees, trails, fiber cables, and more.

Effectively, efficiently, and equitably

We commit to delivering services with integrity, transparency, and accountability, holding ourselves to the highest standards. Effective services are accurate and high-quality. Efficient services minimize waste of time, funds, and resources. Equitable services are just, fair, and inclusive, shifting more to communities where we have historically underinvested and removing barriers to access, such as language and ability.

Safe, healthy, and economically secure

We believe Harris County should be a place where each person is free from violence and trauma; lives in quality, affordable housing; receives quality resources when facing climate-related disasters and environmental hazards; gets quality and responsive mental and health care; and benefits equitably from our growing regional economy.

Guiding Principles



Serving people first: We put people at the center of everything we do, provide equitable access to services, and serve with empathy.



Leading with accountability: We set clear goals for improving service delivery, use data and evidence to inform decision-making, measure and communicate progress, learn from success and setbacks, and hold ourselves to the highest standards of integrity.



Embracing change: We embrace new challenges and opportunities, adapt to change, and disrupt the status quo when needed to achieve goals.



Engaging partners: We respectfully collaborate with communities, local partners, and all levels of government to solve our biggest problems.



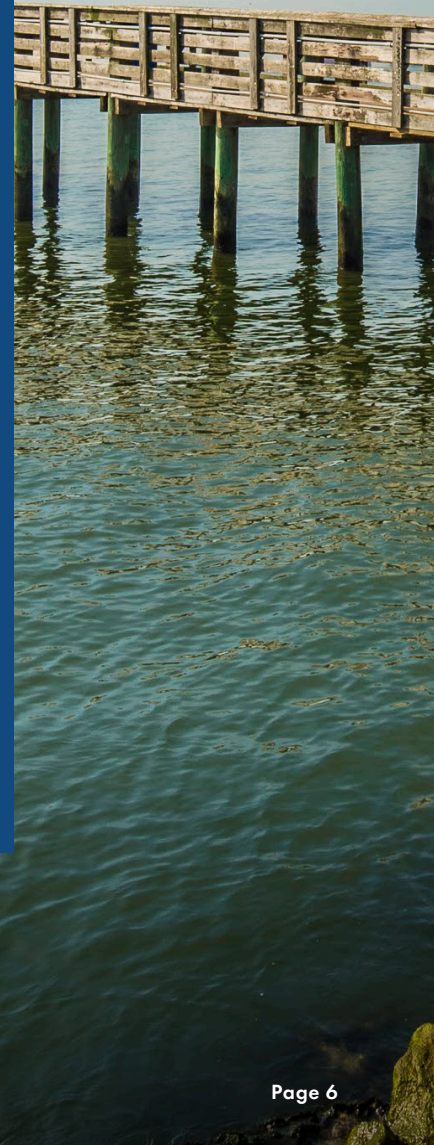
Prioritizing equity: We embrace the diversity of our community and integrate equity in all County work to reduce and prevent disparities.



Empowering employees: We provide opportunities for employees to thrive and make Harris County a place where people want to build careers.



Investing responsibly: We align resources with policy goals, ensure long-term financial sustainability, and follow best practices to deliver high value to those we serve.



Strategic goals and objectives

Goal 1: Make Harris County safer and more just

- Objective A: Reduce violent crime across the County
 - Objective B: Reduce criminal legal system exposure that does not advance public safety
 - Objective C: Improve safety and health conditions in the jail
 - Objective D: Reduce racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the criminal legal system
 - Objective E: Increase efficiency across the legal system
-

Goal 2: Connect our community with safe, reliable, equitably distributed, and well-maintained infrastructure

- Objective F: Ensure safety and security for all using the county’s transportation network in alignment with the County’s Vision Zero plan
 - Objective G: Expand and optimize multimodal transportation options
 - Objective H: Improve the condition and resilience of County transportation, flood control, and other infrastructure
 - Objective I: Increase access to safe, clean, and enjoyable green space
-

Goal 3: Make our economy more inclusive

- Objective J: Grow the number and size of MWBEs
 - Objective K: Provide workers with training and other supports (e.g. child care) to participate fully in the local economy
 - Objective L: Foster more living-wage jobs that ensure worker safety, benefits, and stability across all educational levels
 - Objective M: Ensure that Harris County remains the best place in the region to start and grow a business, with a focus on equitable economic growth
-

Goal 4: Improve physical and mental health outcomes across all communities

- Objective N: Improve the health behaviors of community members
 - Objective O: Increase access to quality health care, including preventive and behavioral health
 - Objective P: Improve children’s health outcomes
-

Goal 5: Minimize the impact of climate change and disasters

- Objective Q: Encourage residents, businesses, and public entities to significantly reduce their environmental footprint for the health of our region
 - Objective R: Enhance disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and resiliency
 - Objective S: Equitably reduce the health, economic, and other impacts of climate change and disasters
 - Objective T: Reduce GHG emissions from County operations by 40% by 2030
-

Goal 6: Help residents achieve housing stability

- Objective U: Build and preserve affordable housing, particularly for low-income families
- Objective V: Reduce eviction and foreclosure rates among residents
- Objective W: Transition people experiencing homelessness into permanent supportive housing

GOAL 1

Make Harris County safer and more just



Residents deserve to live safely. Yet addressing safety only through traditional criminal legal system solutions has led to jail overcrowding, court backlogs, and strains on the County budget. We can make our communities safer and support victims through effective, holistic approaches that prevent violence and trauma, narrow racial and ethnic disparities, elevate both the efficiency and fairness of the justice system, center rehabilitation, and minimize unnecessary legal system exposure.



Strategic objectives:

- Objective A: Reduce violent crime across the County
- Objective B: Reduce criminal legal system exposure that does not advance public safety
- Objective C: Improve safety and health conditions in the jail
- Objective D: Reduce racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the criminal legal system
- Objective E: Increase efficiency across the legal system



Community indicators:

- Violent crime rate¹
- Average daily jail population
- Jail detention rate by race/gender
- Incarceration rate by race/gender
- Recidivism rate

¹ For the purposes of this indicator, violent crime includes murder, rape and sexual assault, robbery, and assault. Information will be obtained from the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System.

Goal 1 objectives and initiatives

OBJECTIVE A

Reduce violent crime across the County

Initiative A1: Expand reach of the Relentless Interrupters Serving Everyone program

Initiative A2: Apply “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” principles to improve built environments of neighborhoods and increase safety

Initiative A3: Increase resources available to families exposed to domestic violence

Initiative A4: Improve safety through targeted pursuit of violent crime suspects

OBJECTIVE B

Reduce criminal legal system exposure that does not advance public safety

Initiative B1: Increase the use of effective and efficient deflection responses using non-criminal justice resources for non-violent behaviors, particularly those primarily related to substance use, mental health, poverty, and homelessness

Initiative B2: Increase law enforcement’s use of deflection and crisis co-response programs to address mental and behavioral health crisis situations and issues related to substance use, mental health, poverty, and homelessness

Initiative B3: Increase school-based juvenile justice diversion and other interventions

Initiative B4: Increase the jail deflection and diversion rate

Initiative B5: Equitably reduce pretrial supervision through Pretrial Services efforts

OBJECTIVE C

Improve safety and health conditions in the jail

Initiative C1: Support the Jail and Community Safety Infrastructure Governance Advisory Committee’s and Resident Advisory Committee’s efforts to increase non-carceral options and improve safety, security, and other conditions in jail facilities

Initiative C2: Reduce the length of stay for detained persons who require competency restoration

Initiative C3: Operationalize new and build upon successful pilot interventions targeted to reduce the jail population

OBJECTIVE D

Reduce racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the criminal legal system

Initiative D1: Enhance reentry program support

Initiative D2: Increase the employment rate of individuals exposed to the justice system through a workforce reentry strategy that starts at intake

Initiative D3: Improve outcomes for indigent defendants through holistic services and connections to necessary resources

Initiative D4: Implement a pilot program to end non-safety related traffic stops by law enforcement

Initiative D5: Reduce reliance on court-appointed counsel by supporting the expansion and improving the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the PDO and MAC

Initiative D6: Create a dashboard that comprehensively summarizes the number of people that interact with the criminal justice system

OBJECTIVE E

Increase efficiency across the legal system

Initiative E1: Modernize data and technology architecture across the legal system

Initiative E2: Revamp the case appointment system

Initiative E3: Decrease time to disposition by implementing case workflow improvements in line with recommendations from the National Center for State Courts

OBJECTIVE A

Reduce violent crime across the County

Measurable results

- i. Decrease the violent crime rate²

INITIATIVE A1**Expand reach of the Relentless Interrupters Serving Everyone program**

Harris County Public Health (HCPH) will continue to work to reduce gun violence using a public health approach that operates outside of and is complementary to law enforcement through the Relentless Interrupters Serving Everyone (RISE) program.

Additional context/details:

- RISE uses credible messengers with lived experience to interrupt violence and defuse immediate tensions. The program currently operates in two neighborhoods (Cypress Station in unincorporated Harris County and Sunnyside in the City of Houston). HCPH will use data to determine the need for expansion to other areas. Potential expansion could include increasing capacity to serve three to five additional neighborhoods, implementing brick-and-mortar “peace centers,” and operating mobile “peace buses.”
- Since its inception, RISE has impacted more than 7,500 people by developing meaningful relationships within impacted communities and has prevented at least 50 instances of gun violence.
- Other localities have seen decreases in gun-related violence from the implementation of similar violence interruption programs.

INITIATIVE A2**Apply “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” principles to improve built environments of neighborhoods and increase safety**

The Justice Innovation Team, HCPH, and the Harris County Engineering Department (HCED) will continue to partner with Commissioner Precincts to support “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” (CPTED) planning and implementation efforts in high-risk and underserved communities, including through the County’s Clean Streets, Safe Neighborhoods program, and by incorporating these principles in County infrastructure design more broadly.

Additional context/details:

- Clean Streets, Safe Neighborhoods, a program funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), seeks to improve street lighting, sidewalks, and visibility in residential areas, as well as to restore vacant lots (including but not limited to demolishing abandoned buildings and adding greenery) and implement infrastructure investments and improvements shown to enhance public safety (such as civic art projects). Pilot program funds are being used across 11 neighborhoods.
- CPTED efforts should be based on best practices and target communities and projects where such investments can have the highest impact.

² For the purposes of this measurable result, violent crime includes murder, rape and sexual assault, robbery, and assault. Information will be obtained from the FBI’s National Incident-Based Reporting System.

INITIATIVE A3**Increase resources available to families exposed to domestic violence**

The Harris County Department of Economic Equity and Opportunity (DEEO), in partnership with the Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (HCDVCC), will increase access to early interventions for children and families exposed to domestic violence.

Additional context/details:

- Harris County had intimate partner homicides double from 2019 to 2022 (to 64), per a 2023 study by the University of Houston's Institute for Research on Women, Gender, and Sexuality.
- Children exposed to domestic and intimate partner violence experience trauma and are at greater risk of depression and anxiety, and these risks increase when children themselves are abused.
- The Early Childhood Resiliency Fund, an ARPA-funded program, is expected to grant awards to service provider organizations by early 2025 to implement trauma-informed home visitation and parent coaching models, expand mental health and other therapeutic interventions, address the needs of children with disabilities and developmental delays, and establish partnerships with local schools and child care centers to reach more children exposed to domestic violence.
- The Domestic Violence Assistance Fund assists those fleeing domestic violence by increasing access to services and safety through a flexible funding approach that provides direct financial assistance to survivors to support their immediate safety needs.

INITIATIVE A4**Improve safety through targeted pursuit of violent crime suspects**

Harris County will continue its partnership with the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) to increase clearance rates for outstanding warrants involving violent crime suspects, including the Violent Persons Warrant Task Force.

Additional context/details:

- The Violent Persons Warrant Task Force was created by the Harris County Commissioners Court in May 2022. The task force, comprised of teams of Sheriff's and Constables' deputies, tracks down and apprehends the most violent offenders with outstanding arrest warrants.
- At the time of the Task Force's creation, over 700 people were wanted in Harris County for murder, with over 25,000 people having open arrest warrants for felonies. Within approximately the first 10 months, the program cleared over 1,300 outstanding warrants (including 31 murder warrants, 205 family violence warrants, 244 assault warrants, and 177 child abuse warrants).
- More rigorous evaluation will be conducted to determine the program's causal impact on violent crime and optimize its effectiveness.



OBJECTIVE B

Reduce criminal legal system exposure that does not advance public safety

Measurable results

- | | |
|--|---|
| i. Increase the deflection and diversion rate | vi. Increase the juvenile deflection and diversion rate |
| ii. Decrease the average daily jail population | vii. Decrease the average daily juvenile detention population |
| iii. Decrease the detention rate | viii. Decrease the juvenile detention rate |
| iv. Decrease the incarceration rate | ix. Decrease the juvenile recidivism rate |
| v. Decrease the recidivism rate | |

INITIATIVE B1**Increase the use of effective and efficient deflection responses using non-criminal justice resources for non-violent behaviors, particularly those primarily related to substance use, mental health, poverty, and homelessness**

Through collaboration with relevant partners, Harris County will further develop and expand alternative response and deflection programs by:

- Increasing the use of existing non-criminal justice programs through trainings and systems integration within law enforcement dispatch and response processes.
- Working with HCSO and other relevant law enforcement agencies to identify more opportunities to use stop/call deflection.
- Enhancing coordination with community-based mental health services, substance use treatment centers, sobering centers, justice-involved housing, etc.
- Increasing investment in deflection infrastructure and wraparound community-based services.

Additional context/details:

- HCPH's Holistic Assistance Response Team (HART) responded to nearly 12,000 calls in its first two years of operation after launching in 2022 as a pilot within two of HCSO's five districts.

INITIATIVE B2**Increase law enforcement's use of deflection and crisis co-response programs to address mental and behavioral health crisis situations and issues related to substance use, mental health, poverty, and homelessness**

Harris County will partner with law enforcement agencies (and other stakeholders as applicable) to increase their use of deflection and crisis co-response programs to address mental and behavioral health crisis situations and issues related to substance use, mental health, poverty, and homelessness.

Additional context/details:

- As of May 2024, the Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT) program, which pairs law enforcement officers with Harris Center licensed master-level clinicians, had received 1,852 calls, 626 (34%) of which were resolved on scene and 82 (4.4%) of which resulted in a jail diversion.
- Clinician and Officer Remote Evaluation (CORE) partners law enforcement officers with Harris Center licensed master-level crisis clinicians via a computer tablet so that clinicians can conduct a brief assessment and advise the officers on the best course of action with an individual during a law enforcement interaction.

- Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) diverts individuals engaged in low-level drug crime, prostitution, and crimes of poverty and connects them with case managers and wraparound services.
- The Harris Center’s Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT) includes psychiatrists, nurses, clinicians, and psychiatric technicians that provide services to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.

INITIATIVE B3

Increase school-based juvenile justice diversion and other interventions

The Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (HCJPD) will expand programming that seeks to decrease criminal legal system exposure for high-risk teens through increased coordination with independent school districts on juvenile justice across Harris County by:

- Measuring outcomes of the pilot programs run by community-based organizations (CBOs) through funding from the Youth Justice Reinvestment Fund, to consider continuation of funding.
- Seeking to formalize a juvenile diversion program that would aim to reduce unnecessary arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system for low-level offenses in schools.

Additional context/details:

- School-based jail diversion programs have been executed successfully in other jurisdictions, such as Philadelphia, with social workers connecting diverted youth to community-based services within 72 hours.

INITIATIVE B4

Increase the jail deflection and diversion rate

Through collaboration with all relevant community partners and justice system stakeholders, OCA’s Justice Innovation Team will support the increased use of deflection and diversion programs and the reduction of detention and/or incarceration for nonviolent offenses by:

- Partnering with HCSO, the District Attorney (DA), and other law enforcement agencies in Harris County to improve education for arresting officers and increase awareness, enthusiasm, and buy-in for diversion programs.
- Increasing the use of diversion strategies at various stages of the process by expanding the use of effective and equitable existing programs or the development of new programs with the goal of deflecting individuals from the justice system when appropriate and/or creating more opportunities for diversion post-arrest.
- Improving data sharing among the DA, law enforcement, court judges and staff, Pretrial Services (PTS), and OCA’s Justice Innovation Team.

INITIATIVE B5

Equitably reduce pretrial supervision through Pretrial Services efforts

Commissioners Court will support efforts by PTS that foster equitable consideration of pretrial supervision decisions by informing District and County Court at Law Judges’ bonding decisions with data-driven and outcomes-based recommendations to prioritize pretrial release using the least restrictive means to ensure public safety. These approaches include stepdown efforts, court notifications, and other ways to reduce the use of discretion in pretrial decisions.

Additional context/details:

- PTS and the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab partnered to work with judges to pilot a data-based mechanism for “stepping-down”/adjusting supervision conditions in real time, limiting unnecessary conditions and alleviating significant caseload increases following misdemeanor bail reform.



OBJECTIVE C

Improve safety and health conditions in the jail

Measurable results

- i. Decrease the average daily jail population
- ii. Decrease the violent incident rate in the jail
- iii. Reduce jail deaths
- iv. Reduce detention officer turnover
- v. Reduce the number of people not receiving timely medical treatment/attention
- vi. Track the number of individuals hospitalized
- vii. Track the number of people with chronic conditions
- viii. Track the number of people with substance use disorders
- ix. Track the number of people rerouted to medical facilities for health reasons

INITIATIVE C1**Support the Jail and Community Safety Infrastructure Governance Advisory Committee's and Resident Advisory Committee's efforts to increase non-carceral options and improve safety, security, and other conditions in jail facilities**

Commissioners Court will support the planning and recommendation development by the Jail and Community Safety Infrastructure Governance Advisory Committee (JGAC) as it evaluates options to advance:

- The development of non-carceral facilities that improve community safety; and
- The safety and security of persons in custody and staff working in the detention facilities.

These efforts will be supported by the Resident Advisory Committee (RAC) to ensure community engagement and transparency throughout the planning and implementation process.

Additional context/details:

- The JGAC serves as the coordinating entity to offer recommendations on how to improve current facilities and/or design new facilities. The RAC also supports planning efforts by fostering community engagement and ensuring transparency in the planning and implementation process.
- The JGAC will be advised by an infrastructure working group that will provide detailed, subject-matter expertise and input on any infrastructure projects proposed by the JGAC. The working group will provide cost estimates, timelines, and any plans for implementation related to additional future recommendations.
- Efforts will also include collaboration with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) to consider opportunities to reduce the jail population.
- A financial authorization request was approved by Commissioners Court in June 2024 for a list of priority projects proposed by JGAC that represent the most immediate needs of the jail, including safety, security measures, and deferred maintenance, totaling \$122 million.



INITIATIVE C2**Reduce the length of stay for detained persons who require competency restoration**

Harris County will improve access to restoration services for detained persons declared incompetent to stand trial through both community restoration and the Jail-Based Competency Restoration (JBCR) program by:

- Identifying opportunities to increase use and effectiveness of the current JBCR program, which provides on-site competency restoration services.
- Identifying opportunities to work with partners at new and existing facilities to further reduce the restoration backlog.
- Supplementing the restoration process with community “stepdown” beds so that program participants can reinstate insurance and access treatment with wraparound services.

Additional context/details:

- JBCR is administered by The Harris Center; the program has 50 beds, with 40 intensive beds funded by Texas Health and Human Services (HHS). Using ARPA funds, Harris County Commissioners Court approved a 30-bed (10 intensive beds and 20 “stepdown” beds) expansion of the JBCR pilot program in February 2023. In June 2024, the Commissioners Court directed OCA and/or the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to identify continued funding of the 30 beds for the JBCR program. As of April 2024, the program’s restoration rate was 91%, which is well above the national average.
- Harris County maintains a waitlist of 250-300 detained persons awaiting restoration. JBCR provides a viable alternative option for these individuals by providing a competency restoration program within the jail. On average it can take 8+ months of being held in the jail before a bed becomes available at the state hospital.
- Individuals that require restoration significantly contribute to the high average stay in the jail; these individuals face disproportionate risk due to lengthy jail stays.

INITIATIVE C3**Operationalize new and build upon successful pilot interventions targeted to reduce the jail population**

OCA will support and conduct new and existing pilot programs that aim to address jail overcrowding. Through ongoing collaboration with justice partners, OCA’s Justice Innovation Team will develop potential solutions through process, policy, and/or infrastructure changes supported by data-driven interventions and continuous evaluation of outcomes.

Additional context/details:

- Data analysis within this initiative will consider subpopulations and disparities in demographic groups to better understand and identify trends and develop customized interventions to increase equity.



OBJECTIVE D

Reduce racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the criminal legal system

Measurable results

- i. Decrease racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the jail detention rate
- ii. Decrease racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the pretrial detention rate
- iii. Decrease racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the incarceration rate
- iv. Decrease racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the recidivism rate
- v. Increase the housing rate for recently released individuals
- vi. Increase the employment rate for recently released individuals
- vii. Increase the representation rate of indigent persons before their first court appearance by counsel³
- viii. Increase the representation rate of indigent persons at their first court appearance by counsel⁴

INITIATIVE D1**Enhance reentry program support**

Harris County will inventory existing reentry programs, identify gaps in services, and increase reentry capacity based on best practices and learnings from evidence-based reentry programs. This inventory should focus in part on (supportive) housing-first reentry strategies, while also considering the work described in Initiative D2.

INITIATIVE D2**Increase the employment rate of individuals exposed to the justice system through a workforce reentry strategy that starts at intake**

OCA will support the development of a defendant reentry strategy that starts at intake to increase the employment rates of recently jailed individuals through a variety of approaches, including but not limited to:

- The use of a reentry committee and reentry community engagement coordinator.
- Opportunity specialists with relevant lived experience who help defendants connect to treatment/counseling, wraparound services, and peer support.
- Reentry resource forums and media campaigns aimed at increasing community awareness and addressing misconceptions related to hiring previously incarcerated or justice-involved individuals.

Additional context/details:

- The approaches listed above are based on a multi-pronged strategy implemented by the Camden County (New Jersey) Department of Corrections to improve reentry outcomes.
- The strategy will involve working with employers in the region to increase the number of second-chance hiring opportunities for those convicted of felonies and ensure access to appropriate training opportunities that meet employers' needs. The strategy will consider local workforce needs and a variety of opportunity types (such as paid internships or apprenticeships).

³ Representation should come from counsel whose caseload standards comply with American Bar Association (ABA) or Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) standards.

⁴ Representation should come from counsel whose caseload standards comply with ABA or TIDC standards.

INITIATIVE D3**Improve outcomes for indigent defendants through holistic services and connections to necessary resources**

Commissioners Court will expand the holistic services available to indigent defendants. OCA will work with Public Defender's Office (PDO) and Managed Assigned Counsel (MAC) to identify the most pressing opportunities, such as:

- Expanding current MAC services, which include investigation, immigration, community engagement, and social work.
- Expanding current PDO services, which include access to investigators, mental health professionals, immigration attorneys, social workers, and client advocates (who assist clients with receiving support ranging from medical care to housing to government benefits and more).
- Offering new services, such as social security benefit application support, parole application support, family law advocacy/support, etc.

Additional context/details:

- PDO has around 20 employees focused on Holistic Services, while MAC has six employees on its Holistic Defense Services Team

INITIATIVE D4**Implement a pilot program to end non-safety related traffic stops by law enforcement**

Through a partnership with local law enforcement and other relevant entities, OCA will design a pilot program to end non-safety related traffic stops by law enforcement.

Additional context/details:

- The pilot will measure the impact and feasibility of reducing disparate stops and searches of people in marginalized communities to better use police resources.
- The pilot program design process will consider opportunities for non-law enforcement entities to conduct non-safety related traffic stops.

INITIATIVE D5**Reduce reliance on court-appointed counsel by supporting the expansion and improving the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the PDO and MAC**

Harris County will reduce reliance on court-appointed counsel by:

- Supporting the PDO's expansion of model public defense representation to at least 50% of indigent criminal cases, in line with the strategic plans of the Indigent Defense Committee and the CJCC.
- Supporting the MAC's enhancement of assigned-counsel capacity and quality through continued recruitment, appropriate oversight, and ongoing support of qualified attorneys.
- Increasing accountability regarding outcomes and limiting attorney caseloads to allow for quality defense, ensuring that all indigent representation through the PDO and MAC meets the standards of core ABA principles and caseload standards.

Additional context/details:

- As of May 2024, the percentage of appointments represented by PDO is just 15% of appointed cases (for all misdemeanor and felony cases combined).

INITIATIVE D6**Create a dashboard that comprehensively summarizes the number of people that interact with the criminal justice system**

OCA's Justice Innovation Team will work with all relevant County partners (the CJCC's Racial and Ethnic Equity Committee) and other stakeholders to develop a dashboard that includes data on the number of people stopped, arrested, detained pretrial, and/or sentenced by race and gender, as well as factors such as socioeconomic status, immigration status, homelessness, substance use, and mental health. The data should also be broken down by law enforcement agency, charge type, charging decision, demographics, and other factors. Where possible, the data should be automated for continuous tracking.

The purpose of this dashboard is to:

- Increase understanding of key disparities in the justice system.
- Inform policies and programming to reduce disparities.
- Measure progress and impact of policy/programs on disparities.

OBJECTIVE E

Increase efficiency across the legal system

Measurable results

- | | |
|---|--|
| i. Decrease time to disposition | iv. Increase the percentage of cases managed in a standardized manner ⁵ |
| ii. Increase the percentage of cases that start on their first scheduled date | v. Reduce the number of setting reason codes |
| iii. Reduce the average number of hearings needed to resolve a case | vi. Reduce the number of case resets |
| | vii. Reduce the percentage of inactive cases |

INITIATIVE E1**Modernize data and technology architecture across the legal system**

Harris County Universal Services (HCUS) will enhance management platforms and streamline data sharing across the legal system, supporting recommendations identified within the CJCC strategic plan in conjunction with the Integrated Justice Technology Committee (IJTC).

Additional context/details:

- Identified recommendations within the CJCC strategic plan include:
 - Creating standard definitions and protocols to improve data interpretation.
 - Establishing accurate and valid data metrics, collection, and reporting to improve data integrity.
 - Establishing clear guidelines for the appropriate and essential use of agency and system data to standardize data usage.
- Commitment to this initiative will require continued collaboration with CJCC and IJTC to modernize the data and technology architecture of the legal system across short, medium, and long-term goals/milestones.
- On July 18, 2023, Commissioners Court created the IJTC to work in collaboration with HCUS to prepare a plan for the modernization of the existing JWEB architecture, to be comprised of a multi-phased approach.

INITIATIVE E2**Revamp the case appointment system**

PDO and MAC will work with all relevant partners to support modernization and automation of the case appointment system and standardize processes for indigent persons facing misdemeanor and felony charges to:

- Ensure that counsel is appointed before the first court appearance.
- Increase procedural transparency for clients.
- Enhance consistency and reliability for court staff.
- Improve process efficiencies for the benefit of PDO, MAC, and court staff.

Additional context/details:

- The current misdemeanor appointment process is less compatible with new system needs (since the introduction of the MAC appointment process) and creates additional work for coordinators.

⁵ For data tracking purposes, the standard for case management would be agreed upon with the relevant judicial stakeholders and account for factors including, but not limited to, how data is input and tracked, court dates are scheduled, and case information is maintained and communicated.

INITIATIVE E3**Decrease time to disposition by implementing case workflow improvements in line with recommendations from the National Center for State Courts**

OCA's Justice Innovation Team will coordinate with legal system stakeholders, including the Administrative Office of the Courts, to decrease time to disposition by:

- Supporting improvements to case management efficiency and quality performance, including efforts that align with caseload recommendations from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).
- Assessing judicial officer needs annually using the most recent four-year average of case filings data and considering NCSC's recent judicial workload assessment study as well as the limited availability of County resources.

Additional context/details:

- NCSC's recent caseload assessment study included the following recommendations (among others) for consideration as part of this initiative:
 - Establish and execute a standard caseload management plan from filing to disposition.
 - Develop and use a standardized list of setting reasons and codes.
 - Maximize the use of Harris County Pretrial Services.
 - Optimize courtroom usage and explore the potential to convert unused spaces.
- NCSC also recently conducted a judicial workload assessment study, which recommends that Harris County increase the number of judicial officers (elected judges, associated judges, magistrates, etc.) in its district, statutory county, and statutory probate courts to provide for equitable case processing.



GOAL 2

Connect our community with safe, reliable, equitably distributed, and well-maintained infrastructure



Harris County is responsible for maintaining thousands of miles of roadway, as well as bridges, channels, culverts, sidewalks, and other infrastructure. Historically, public investment in infrastructure has not been distributed across communities based on need. We will modernize our infrastructure and use all available mobility options to improve quality of life, advance equity, and strengthen our economy.



Strategic objectives:

- Objective F: Ensure safety and security for all using the county's transportation network in alignment with the County's Vision Zero plan
- Objective G: Expand and optimize multimodal transportation options
- Objective H: Improve the condition and resilience of County transportation, flood control, and other infrastructure
- Objective I: Increase access to safe, clean, and enjoyable green space



Community indicators:

- Percentage of residents with access to alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles to get to work, school, services, and/or amenities
- Percentage of residents within a 10-minute walk of a park
- Road Condition Index of County-maintained roads
- Percentage of flood control infrastructure with an asset quality score of 4 or 5, by LMI (tracked by LMI at 71% or higher and between 51% and 71%)

Goal 2 objectives and initiatives

OBJECTIVE F

Ensure safety and security for all using the county’s transportation network in alignment with the County’s Vision Zero plan

Initiative F1: Strengthen the County’s commitment to Vision Zero principles and goals

Initiative F2: Improve data collection, utilization, and availability to drive better transportation safety decision-making

Initiative F3: Embed Vision Zero principles into the Harris County Infrastructure Design Manual

OBJECTIVE G

Expand and optimize multimodal transportation options

Initiative G1: Expand pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure on County-managed roads

Initiative G2: Implement designated corridors (e.g., HOV, BRT, truck lanes) in road design

Initiative G3: Develop a bike plan to make Harris County a Gold-level Bicycle Friendly Community

Initiative G4: Conduct a needs assessment and evaluation for HCTS

OBJECTIVE H

Improve the condition and resilience of County transportation, flood control, and other infrastructure

Initiative H1: Complete and implement the Flood Resilience Plan

Initiative H2: Evaluate the feasibility and potential impacts of substantial, large-scale flood mitigation measures to provide equitable and transformational regional benefits

Initiative H3: Scale the HCFCD Asset Management Program to more strategically manage existing assets

Initiative H4: Consistently embed sustainability considerations in the project planning and design process

Initiative H5: Improve broadband reliability and expand wireless access points

Initiative H6: Expand neighborhood drainage programs

OBJECTIVE I

Increase access to safe, clean, and enjoyable green space

Initiative I1: Develop a countywide parks network and connectivity plan

Initiative I2: Formally adopt Imagination Zones as a preferred development approach within the County that improves connectivity to green space

Initiative I3: Prioritize the development of new parks when developing and implementing a plan for how to leverage underused County-owned land, with a focus on equitable access

Initiative I4: Encourage the growth of natural habitats in County channels and improve cleanliness of green spaces while reducing debris and enhancing beautification



OBJECTIVE F

Ensure safety and security for all using the county's transportation network in alignment with the County's Vision Zero plan

Measurable results

- i. Reduce number of traffic-related fatalities on Harris County-managed thoroughfares and intersections
- ii. Reduce number of traffic-related injuries on Harris County-managed thoroughfares and intersections

INITIATIVE F1**Strengthen the County's commitment to Vision Zero principles and goals**

HCED will:

- Streamline management of the Vision Zero program and incorporate Vision Zero into all of the County's horizontal engineering.
- Present annually an updated and results-oriented Vision Zero action plan with clear goals and specific objectives as well as a summary of actions and results—including how Vision Zero principles have been incorporated into existing and new infrastructure—to Commissioners Court and the public.
- Oversee continuous prioritization of new projects based on high-injury data and other information.
- Identify additional corridors in need of safety improvements based on regular evaluation of traffic incidence data and other information (e.g., crash data, Vision Zero Action Plan recommendations, traffic studies, public input).

Additional context/details:

- HCED's work on this initiative could also include coordination of meetings of the Vision Zero Implementation Committee and of biannual meetings across internal and external stakeholders to ensure a coordinated effort of engineering, education, and enforcement strategies.
- New projects might include those along the 33 high-injury corridors and routes identified in the Safe Routes to Schools Plans.

INITIATIVE F2**Improve data collection, utilization, and availability to drive better transportation safety decision-making**

HCED will improve the quality and availability of data related to dangerous thoroughfares and intersections by:

- Launching a user-friendly public dashboard with pertinent data that is updated at least annually within the first year of the strategic plan's adoption, improving Vision Zero data fidelity and making the data more accessible to decision makers and the public at large.
- Developing and updating a methodologically robust high-injury network at least every two-to-three years, with information disaggregated by drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians as well as by type of crash and whether it resulted in an injury or fatality.
- Updating and further building out the Vision Zero website with initiatives, projects, programs, annual goals, and progress.
- Studying the costs and benefits of additional traffic-related deaths/injuries investigations beyond police reports. For example, a Severe Accident Forensic Evaluation (SAFE) would be conducted directly after a fatal crash involving pedestrians, bicycles, or cars.
- Streamlining the user experience for reporting dangerous thoroughfares and intersections.
- Working to seamlessly share dangerous thoroughfares and intersections data among Harris County, the City of Houston, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO), and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

Additional context/details:

- While traffic injuries and fatalities data are monitored, they are often not adequately developed and analyzed by experts. As a result, the data are not as informative as they could be for engineers, policy makers, and the public broadly when considering safety interventions and designs and for other purposes.

- A SAFE involves police officers, traffic engineers, and representatives from local community groups with expertise on roadway designs and pedestrian safety. Results of the SAFE could be used to expedite the consideration and installation of corrective measures to reduce the risk of future crashes at the same location.
- As an example, a robust methodology for developing a high-injury network should account for vehicle miles traveled, as higher-traffic areas will generally have more crashes than lower-traffic areas.

INITIATIVE F3

Embed Vision Zero principles into the Harris County Infrastructure Design Manual

HCED will work with relevant departments (including Commissioner Precincts) to update the Infrastructure Design Manual to include more design options that incorporate multi-modal transportation and safety features to help achieve Vision Zero.

Additional context/details:

- Historically, the County’s Infrastructure Design Manual, which was last updated in October 2023, has favored motor vehicle capacity and speed, often at the expense of safety for pedestrians, bikers, and drivers.
- As part of this update, a roadway’s desired speed should offer specific designs that would be likely to result in the optimal speed of traffic along that roadway. For example, the design manual can offer specific recommendations for designs on roads with a desired speed of 20 MPH. Some of these new designs include traffic calming interventions like speed tables, roadway narrowing, curb extensions, and median islands to discourage speeding and reduce accidents.



OBJECTIVE G

Expand and optimize multimodal transportation options

Measurable results

- i. Increase number of riders for HCTS
- ii. Increase investments aiming to improve METRO ridership
- iii. Increase number of miles of protected bike lanes/trails and such miles that connect to at least one amenity
- iv. Increase number of residents that report using sidewalks and/or trails regularly

INITIATIVE G1**Expand pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure on County-managed roads**

HCED and the Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA) will expand bike lanes to connect key community areas and upgrade pedestrian pathways above Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance standards (e.g., audible timers at crossings) to promote sustainable travel and improve safety and accessibility.

Additional context/details:

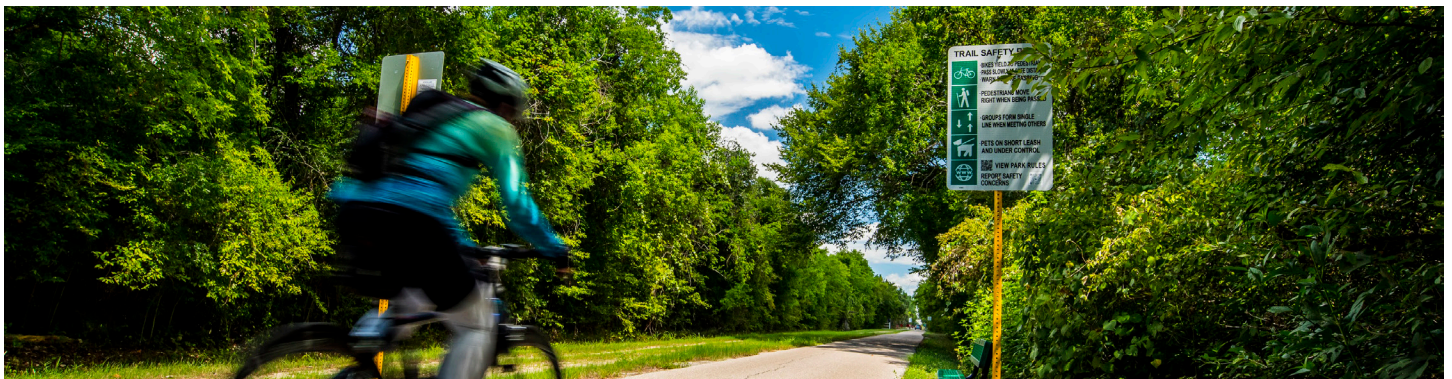
- Over 100 intersections, including many along Harris County toll roads, will receive safety upgrades in line with the Vision Zero Plan.
- HCTRA's "Safe Access Improvements" effort focuses on planned upgrades to the bike and pedestrian environment along the Toll Road infrastructure, as well as improved intersection safety.

INITIATIVE G2**Implement designated corridors (e.g., HOV, BRT, truck lanes) in road design**

HCED will work with HCTRA to implement designated corridors such as high-occupancy vehicle (HOV), bus rapid transit (BRT), and truck lanes to enhance accessibility, foster economic development, and provide residents with multiple reliable transportation options.

Additional context/details:

- Designated corridors are specific parts of roadways or entire routes that are allocated for particular types of vehicles or transportation modes to improve traffic flow, safety, and efficiency.
- HCED will also leverage findings from the HCTRA Freight Study to identify potential corridors for BRT systems and designated trucking lanes to alleviate congestion throughout the Toll Road network.



INITIATIVE G3**Develop a bike plan to make Harris County a Gold-level Bicycle Friendly Community**

HCED will develop a Harris County Bike Plan to make cycling a safe, convenient, and a preferred mode of transportation for residents of all ages and abilities. The Bike Plan will guide the prioritization and development of bike infrastructure, especially in areas where it can have the most significant impact on community resilience and equity. Upon publication of the bike plan, HCED will require planning and design consultants to reference and adhere to the plan when making modifications to intersections and thoroughfares.

Additional context/details:

- The County’s bike plan can build on the City of Houston’s 2017 Bike Plan, which emphasizes safety, accessibility, ridership growth, and the development and maintenance of biking facilities within the City of Houston’s jurisdiction.
- To be recognized as a Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists, applicants must demonstrate efforts and success in all five of the following categories: Engineering, Encouragement, Education, Evaluation & Planning, Equity & Inclusion. A Gold-level community typically shows strengths in at least three-to-four “E” categories.

INITIATIVE G4**Conduct a needs assessment and evaluation for HCTS**

Housing and Community Development (HCD) and OCA will collaborate to assess the current-state service offerings of Harris County Transit Services (HCTS) and identify gaps and areas of need.

Additional context/details:

- The assessment will offer recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and utilization of the current HCTS network, aligning County stakeholders on a future strategy that reimagines HCTS, and pursuing community engagement and funding opportunities.
- HCTS currently provides a range of transportation services, including fixed-route bus services in several communities such as Baytown, La Porte, and Crosby, as well as micro transit, ADA-compliant paratransit, non-emergency medical transportation, and limited on-demand and Park and Ride services.
- HCTS fixed-route services are perceived as ineffective, primarily due to the infrequency of service (driven in part by limited funding).



OBJECTIVE H

Improve the condition and resilience of County transportation, flood control, and other infrastructure

Measurable results

- | | |
|---|---|
| i. Decrease the number of structures at risk of high-frequency flooding | v. Decrease the number of backlog infrastructure maintenance projects with an asset quality score of 4 or 5 |
| ii. Increase the percentage of new flood risk reduction projects benefiting census tracts with LMI at 71% or higher | vi. Increase the number of projects over \$1m that utilize the Envision framework |
| iii. Increase the percentage of new flood risk reduction projects benefiting census tracts with LMI between 51% and 71% | vii. Increase the percentage of socially vulnerable households with reliable high-speed internet access |
| iv. Reduce the number of miles of flood risk reduction channels that need to be restored | |

INITIATIVE H1**Complete and implement the Flood Resilience Plan**

The Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) will develop a Harris County Flood Resilience Plan, which will serve as a comprehensive plan for improving the County's resiliency to flooding.

Additional context/details:

- The plan will:
 - Include input from a wide range of partners, including community members, other jurisdictions, County departments, the Community Flood Resilience Task Force, and the Infrastructure Resilience Team.
 - Identify future needs for all facets of flood resilience, including mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery, and identify solutions across engineering, public health, housing, emergency management, transportation, and drainage.
- HCFCD has been working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) since 2018 to overhaul the County's floodplain maps. These maps are expected to be published in late 2025. The corresponding data will be a critical input to the Flood Resilience Plan so that the most accurate flood risk data are utilized when evaluating neighborhood-level resilience.

INITIATIVE H2**Evaluate the feasibility and potential impacts of substantial, large-scale flood mitigation measures to provide equitable and transformational regional benefits**

The Solutions for Adaptive Flood Mitigation Empowering Resilience (SAFER) study will explore the benefits and costs of large-scale capital infrastructure projects that could result in a more robust approach to flood reduction.

Additional context/details:

- By using the Section 203 process, projects identified by the SAFER study can be considered for inclusion in the Water Resources Development Act for potential federal funding.
- The study will consider social, environmental, and economic factors and impacts.

INITIATIVE H3**Scale the HCFCD Asset Management Program to more strategically manage existing assets**

HCFCD will scale its Asset Management Program (AMP) to all 23 watersheds to proactively plan using a data-driven process to provide a comprehensive understanding of the magnitude of deferred maintenance, and more generally improve management of HCFCD's assets to minimize costs and maximize value for taxpayers.

Additional context/details:

- The AMP was initiated as a pilot for three watersheds to serve as a proof of concept for providing HCFCD a comprehensive inventory of assets across all 23 watersheds in Harris County. The pilot phase includes development of an assessment of condition and a system for continuous monitoring.
- The pilot created HCFCD's first asset inventory based on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which included the digitization of over 6,900 channel assets and their components and resulted in over 7,000 inspections to support the development of cost estimates for repairs, replacements, and project packaging.

INITIATIVE H4**Consistently embed sustainability considerations in the project planning and design process**

HCED will form a community working group that includes OCA's Office of Sustainability and partners from the Climate Justice Plan process to collaboratively modify the County's infrastructure project planning and design process to determine the best ways to incorporate the Envision framework within its standard operating procedures.

Additional context/details:

- The Envision framework is an infrastructure planning process that embeds sustainability and resilience considerations into planning for public infrastructure investments.
- Select Harris County projects have been Envision-certified, but it is not currently standard practice to use the Envision framework for Harris County project planning today.
- Changes to HCED's standard operating procedures could include using the pre-assessment checklist and/or applying for a formal third-party verification under the Envision program (for projects that meet a certain cost threshold).

INITIATIVE H5**Improve broadband reliability and expand wireless access points**

HCUS will leverage available assets by working collaboratively with County partners, including HCPL, to expand the free wireless broadband network and access points, particularly in community centers and public spaces and especially in historically marginalized communities.

Additional context/details:

- The Harris County Office of Broadband currently offers over 100 free wireless access points at County facilities and maintains a map of public Wi-Fi locations on its [website](#).
- Available County assets for broadband access points could include public radio towers, library facilities, street infrastructure, and Harris County Pollution Control Services' air quality monitoring towers.

INITIATIVE H6**Expand neighborhood drainage programs**

HCED will expand neighborhood drainage programs that improve the internal drainage systems by:

- Conducting a thorough analysis to determine the full funding requirements for subdivision drainage projects.
- Exploring sustainable revenue sources to support the initial \$350 million (and future potential funds) allocated by the County for neighborhood projects.

Additional context/details:

- Drainage systems channel stormwater to major waterways and away from structures at risk of flooding during intensive rain, especially those located in the flood plain.
- Over 300,000 structures are estimated to be within the current 500-year floodplain (representing about 25% of structures in Harris County).
- Other jurisdictions have implemented stormwater fees based on square feet of impervious cover to fund flood mitigation and water quality programs. These fees incentivize private investment to reduce runoff.

OBJECTIVE I

Increase access to safe, clean, and enjoyable green space

Measurable results

- i. Increase the percentage of residents within a 10-minute walk of a park
- ii. Increase the percentage of residents in unincorporated Harris County that report being “very satisfied” with cleanliness of nearby parks
- iii. Decrease the number of underused County-owned land parcels

INITIATIVE I1**Develop a countywide parks network and connectivity plan**

The parks network and connectivity plan will seek to expand County-managed trails, sidewalks, and bike paths to create safe pedestrian and/or cyclist access to all parks and green space within Harris County.

Additional context/details:

- This plan will build upon Park-Smart Precinct One as well as Precinct 1’s park master plan and trails and bike plan, Precinct 2’s Parks and Trail Master Plan (2023), Precinct 3’s Parks and Trails Master Plan (2023), and Precinct 4’s Healthy Parks Plan (2024), in addition to serving as a key input to the County Transportation Plan.
- This plan should also incorporate (as applicable) the Houston Bike Plan and the Harris County Bike Plan to be developed under Initiative G3.

INITIATIVE I2**Formally adopt Imagination Zones as a preferred development approach within the County that improves connectivity to green space**

OCA will work with HCED, FCD, HCD, and Precincts to create criteria to encourage developers to meet Imagination Zones (IZs) standards.

Additional context/details:

- IZs are a development approach that strives to create affordable, socially and economically diverse, and resilient housing and neighborhoods.
- Harris County will work with other jurisdictions to pilot Imagination Zones where applicable.
- In 2019, HCED, with community partners, explored alternative land planning standards focused on sustainable practices and community connectivity, leading to the creation of Harris County IZs, which encourage developments such as hike/bike trails and urban gardens.

INITIATIVE 13

Prioritize the development of new parks when developing and implementing a plan for how to leverage underused County-owned land, with a focus on equitable access

Through the Technical Advisory Group, OCA will work with DEEO, HCED, HCD, HCFC, and the Commissioner Precincts to increase public green space access by prioritizing the development of new parks as part of the County's work related to the Putting Assets to Work (PAW) Incubator, which seeks to develop and implement a plan for how to leverage underused County-owned land, with a focus on areas lacking equitable green space access.

Additional context/details:

- The County recently participated in the PAW Incubator to quantify the size and value of the County's real estate portfolio, identifying over 20 square miles of land that could potentially be repurposed.
- Commissioners Court established the Technical Advisory Group in September 2024 to develop a proposed policy relating to and to manage the Putting Assets to Work program.

INITIATIVE 14

Encourage the growth of natural habitats in County channels and improve cleanliness of green spaces while reducing debris and enhancing beautification

The County will work with HCFC and other departments to implement a process for encouraging the growth of natural habitats in County channels and improving the cleanliness of green spaces while reducing debris and enhancing beautification where possible, working with the Commissioner Precincts as needed.

Additional context/details:

- If approved by the voters, the tax rate under consideration as part of the November 2024 elections would provide funding to HCFC to enhance its maintenance operations.



GOAL 3

Make our economy more inclusive



Education, income, and wealth disparities across races, ethnicities, and gender persist for Harris County, despite a growing economy. We will expand access to high-paying, quality jobs and opportunities to build wealth for all residents, so all are included in regional prosperity.



Strategic objectives:

- Objective J: Grow the number and size of MWBEs
- Objective K: Provide workers with training and other supports (e.g. child care) to participate fully in the local economy
- Objective L: Foster more living-wage jobs that ensure worker safety, benefits, and stability across all educational levels
- Objective M: Ensure that Harris County remains the best place in the region to start and grow a business, with a focus on equitable economic growth



Community indicators:

- Percentage of Harris County contract dollars paid to MWBEs
- Number of affordable and accessible quality child care slots
- Percentage of households living below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold
- Income Gini coefficient (inequality indicator)

Goal 3 objectives and initiatives

OBJECTIVE J

Grow the number and size of MWBEs

Initiative J1: Address disparities in businesses' access to capital through the Harris County Opportunity Fund

Initiative J2: Increase the strength and size of MWBE prime vendors

Initiative J3: Strengthen enabling support and processes for MWBE programming

OBJECTIVE K

Provide workers with training and other supports (e.g. child care) to participate fully in the local economy

Initiative K1: Advance child care quality and accessibility through workforce development programming and child care slots

Initiative K2: Partner with community organizations to create new and build upon existing apprenticeship opportunities

Initiative K3: Increase reskilling and upskilling opportunities by leveraging community colleges, nonprofits, and other training and resource providers

Initiative K4: Expand adult literacy programs

OBJECTIVE L

Foster more living-wage jobs that ensure worker safety, benefits, and stability across all educational levels

Initiative L1: Design a set of policies for Harris County to set dynamic living wage rates and ensure essential worker protections and high-quality benefits for all Harris County contracts, employees, and economic agreements

Initiative L2: Further expand and enforce contractor worker safety policy/standards

OBJECTIVE M

Ensure that Harris County remains the best place in the region to start and grow a business, with a focus on equitable economic growth

Initiative M1: Develop a County economic development strategy that advances effective and equitable economic growth



OBJECTIVE J

Grow the number and size of MWBEs

Measurable results

- i. Increase percentage of prime and sub-prime County contractor dollars paid to MWBEs
- ii. Increase the MWBE share of countywide GDP (if available)

INITIATIVE J1**Address disparities in businesses' access to capital through the Harris County Opportunity Fund**

DEEO will target outreach to businesses owned by people of color and by women for the Harris County Opportunity Fund to increase investment in MWBEs.

Additional context/details:

- People of color and women entrepreneurs have traditionally faced greater challenges in securing financing, decreasing their opportunity to participate in County contracts.
- The Opportunity Fund is a revolving loan fund that offers micro and growth loans at reduced interest rates, with an aspirational target of investing 65% of investment dollars in businesses owned by people of color and 50% in women-owned firms.

INITIATIVE J2**Increase the strength and size of MWBE prime vendors**

DEEO, in coordination with the relevant County departments, will develop and implement policies and programs that increase opportunities for (and the share of) prime vendor contracts for MWBEs, including through mentorship, unbundling, and other methods.

Additional context/details:

- In Harris County from October 2022 to March 2023, MWBEs were awarded 90.9% of subcontractor dollars, but only 18.2% of prime contractor dollars.
- Unbundling involves determining whether components of a project can be separately procured or if a project can use a phased contracting approach to increase MWBE participation without affecting the quality and timeliness of project delivery.
- As an example program, DEEO's Pathways to Prime pilot provides MWBEs with specialized technical assistance and business development support to help transition them to prime contractor roles. As the program evolves, DEEO may explore partnerships with local banks to create a cashflow loan program and work closely with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to define complementary roles that support program services.



INITIATIVE J3**Strengthen enabling support and processes for MWBE programming**

DEEO, in coordination with the relevant County departments, will strengthen Minority/Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) vendor support and processes and increase active participation of MWBE vendors in its contracting opportunities by:

- Streamlining the vendor contracting experience.
- Improving invoice payment timeliness to prevent vendor cash flow challenges.
- Enforcing stricter oversight of vendors working with MWBE subcontractors through compliance tracking, including payment reporting, participation goal monitoring, and other contract commitments.
- Updating contracts that are up for renewal with MWBE requirements.

Additional context/details:

- MWBEs are often more negatively affected by cashflow challenges, heightening the need for faster invoice payments.
- Emphasis will be placed on review of MWBE inclusion plans during procurement bidding processes.
- Prime contractor oversight will be increased using a compliance tracking system.
- Prime contractors failing to meet their MWBE commitments will face increased accountability measures.



OBJECTIVE K

Provide workers with training and other supports (e.g. child care) to participate fully in the local economy

Measurable results

- | | |
|--|---|
| i. Increase number of credentialed child care workers | iv. Increase the number of individuals placed in living-wage jobs through County workforce development initiatives (by race/gender) |
| ii. Increase the number of affordable, accessible, and high-quality child care slots | v. Increase percentage of adults with at least a GED or vocational certificate |
| iii. Increase slots in apprenticeship, upskilling, and reskilling programs | |

INITIATIVE K1

Advance child care quality and accessibility through workforce development programming and child care slots

DEEO will improve child care workforce development and increase the number of child care slots by:

- Building on the progress of child care programs funded by ARPA and collaborating with relevant stakeholders to develop a long-term child care quality and accessibility strategy.
- Optimizing federal and local resources, including those from the Gulf Coast Workforce Board.
- Advocating for local, state, and federal funding.

Additional context/details:

- The Early REACH (Raising Educational Access for Children in Harris County) program, an active ARPA-funded program, has created 800 new high-quality child care slots and served 1,051 children as of August 2024.
- The Accessible Child Care Training Supports (ACCTS) Program, an ARPA-funded program, aims to upskill 1,000 child care workers and help them complete professional development, including credentialization.

INITIATIVE K2

Partner with community organizations to create new and build upon existing apprenticeship opportunities

DEEO will partner with community organizations to advance the most effective apprenticeship programs by:

- Mapping and understanding resident access to a variety of apprenticeship programs.
- Identifying gaps between program opportunities and needs.
- Identifying partnership opportunities.
- Supporting the apprenticeship programs that have demonstrated the most impact.

Additional context/details:

- The county's Apprenticeship Advantage program, an active ARPA-funded program, is designed to expand the range of industries offering apprenticeships and increase the capacity of existing programs.
- Apprenticeship Advantage has worked with 567 participants to date (164 with NPower for jobs in the technology industry and 403 with Texas Gulf Area Labor Federation in fields such as plumbing, public transportation, welding, and live entertainment).

INITIATIVE K3**Increase reskilling and upskilling opportunities by leveraging community colleges, nonprofits, and other training and resource providers**

DEEO will evaluate and enhance upskilling and reskilling programs to advance residents' current career paths and development of new skills to adapt to evolving job markets, with a focus on populations facing the largest hurdles to opportunity.

A key component of this initiative will be to map out the existing landscape of offerings and industries prime for participation, identifying opportunities for the County to best elevate efforts within the community. This effort can be conducted as part of the economic development strategy (Initiative M1).

Additional context/details:

- Local community colleges currently offer programming that supports upskilling and reskilling opportunities. These programs can be supported by the Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education (TRUE) Grant Program, which supports public higher institutions to create, redesign, and expand short-term workforce education and training programs in high-demand occupations.
- UpSkill Houston, through the Greater Houston Partnership, has supported upskilling efforts since 2014 as part of an employer-led initiative to mobilize leaders from businesses, K-12 school districts, community colleges, CBOs, and public agencies.
- The analysis of the existing landscape should also account for the work of various nonprofits in Harris County also providing reskilling and upskilling opportunities.
- Hire Up Harris, an ARPA-funded Harris County program overseen by DEEO, is a workforce development initiative that connects individuals with resources and training opportunities to advance career-readiness for high-quality jobs that pay a living wage, provide benefits, and have the potential for further economic advancement. As of August 2024, 1,388 residents have been served by this program.

INITIATIVE K4**Expand adult literacy programs**

The Harris County Public Library (HCPL) will study the current literacy program infrastructure across Harris County to provide resources that maximize adult literacy opportunities and expand economic opportunities.

Additional context/details:

- 20% of Harris County residents ages 5 or older do not speak English or do so "less than very well" (per the U.S. Census Bureau).
- Residents that improve their literacy proficiency level from 1 or lower to proficiency level 2 (on the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies proficiency scale) are estimated to be able to increase their annual income by over \$13,000 on average (based on Gallup research on behalf of the Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation).
- The Gulf Coast Workforce Board uses public adult education funds to support contractors to provide English language and other instruction to help adults acquire the skills needed to earn a high school equivalency, enter college or career training, and/or succeed in the workforce.
- HCPL operates the Growing Readers early literacy program for children from birth to age 5.



OBJECTIVE L

Foster more living-wage jobs that ensure worker safety, benefits, and stability across all educational levels

Measurable results

- i. Increase percentage of households with living-wage income
- ii. Decrease number of County contractor deaths and injuries
- iii. Increase the number of living-wage jobs with benefits created through County contracting and economic development incentives (by race/gender)
- iv. Increase the number of individuals placed in living-wage jobs through County workforce development initiatives
- v. Decrease the percentage of households living below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold

INITIATIVE L1

Design a set of policies for Harris County to set dynamic living wage rates and ensure essential worker protections and high-quality benefits for all Harris County contracts, employees, and economic agreements

OCA will develop policies that progressively adjust the \$15/hour wage floor for County employees, contractors, subcontractors, temporary positions, and companies seeking County-issued economic incentives and abatements to reflect a living wage and high-quality benefits.

Additional context/details:

- Commissioners Court has directed OCA to develop policy recommendations that support this initiative.
- The wage floor should be informed by tools like the MIT Living Wage Calculator.
- As a large, influential employer in the county, Harris County government policies related to compensation, benefits, safety, compliance, and enforcement can help shape the overall labor market in the county.

INITIATIVE L2

Further expand and enforce contractor worker safety policy/standards

Harris County DEEO, with policy support from OCA, will develop and enforce comprehensive contractor safety policies that elevate standards of worker safety by:

- Requiring mandatory safety training and stringent guidelines for high-risk activities.
- Enforcing contractor creation of detailed safety protocols with enforcement and accountability measures.
- Increasing transparency and systematic compliance checks.

Additional context/details:

- These policies will build upon the Contractor Safety Record Policy enacted in January 2023.
- To support contractor compliance, DEEO will carry out quarterly compliance audits across a range of projects and industries.
- Commissioners Court will consider requiring contractors to provide essential safety information to workers on-site, conducting post-award audits, and using third-party monitoring where feasible.

OBJECTIVE M

Ensure that Harris County remains the best place in the region to start and grow a business, with a focus on equitable economic growth

INITIATIVE M1

Develop a County economic development strategy that advances effective and equitable economic growth

DEEO will develop a comprehensive economic development strategy focused on growth, sustainability, equity, and inclusion.

Additional context/details:

- The plan will define the County's role in economic development, identify target industries, and outline strategies for supporting business startup, business expansion, and addressing economic disparities that may include consideration of tax incentives, workforce development, placemaking, opportunities for deregulation, customer service, partnerships, and the role of transportation and housing.
- The plan will be informed by an understanding of current stakeholder pain points and future needs as the economy evolves. It will be developed in cooperation with regional partner organizations, and focused on how Harris County can complement rather than duplicate current strategies.



GOAL 4

Improve physical and mental health outcomes across all communities



According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Harris County scores lower than peer counties on resident health outcomes, and severe disparities exist across communities in those outcomes. We will continue to address the social determinants of health through County services to equitably improve health outcomes.



Strategic objectives:

- Objective N: Improve the health behaviors of community members
- Objective O: Increase access to quality health care, including preventive and behavioral health
- Objective P: Improve children's health outcomes



Community indicators:

- Life expectancy disparities by race/ethnicity and zip code
- Composite community health score⁶
- Percentage of residents with affordable access to health care⁷
- Obesity rate (children and adults)

⁶To be developed. May include inputs such as mean household income, average education level, birth rate per 10,000 residents by zip code, chronic disease prevalence, and other health-specific factors.

⁷Percentage of insured or enrolled in Harris Health's Financial Assistance Program.

Goal 4 objectives and initiatives

OBJECTIVE N

Improve the health behaviors of community members

Initiative N1: Improve coordination of public health efforts and campaign delivery among local health agencies and nonprofits

Initiative N2: Increase food/nutrition education and access to healthier food

Initiative N3: Promote increased physical activity of residents

Initiative N4: Reduce the usage of tobacco and vape products

OBJECTIVE O

Increase access to quality health care, including preventive and behavioral health

Initiative O1: Coordinate health organizations to improve access and care

Initiative O2: Expand impact of care coordination teams through the ACCESS program

Initiative O3: Increase utilization of health-related public benefits

Initiative O4: Increase community health care capacity

OBJECTIVE P

Improve children’s health outcomes

Initiative P1: Develop a strategy for holistic child health

Initiative P2: Expand lead reduction program to reduce child exposure

Initiative P3: Enhance maternal and child health and development services



OBJECTIVE N

Improve the health behaviors of community members

Measurable results

- i. Decrease life expectancy disparities:
 - a. By race/ethnicity
 - b. By income
 - c. By zip code
- ii. Decrease smoking (tobacco and vape), drug use, and alcohol use rates
- iii. Decrease obesity rate
- iv. Increase participation rate for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and nutritional programs
- v. Decrease the percentage of residents reporting no leisure-time physical activity month-to-month

INITIATIVE N1**Improve coordination of public health efforts and campaign delivery among local health agencies and nonprofits**

HCPH will enhance collaboration with local health agencies and nonprofits to streamline services and extend program reach.

Additional context/details:

- Initial collaboration will align and streamline areas such as public health messaging and strategic interventions to extend the reach of programs that improve healthy behaviors.
- Priority areas and health behaviors—such as smoking cessation, nutrition and exercise, and HIV/STD prevention campaigns—will be determined through Community Health Assessment findings.

INITIATIVE N2**Increase food/nutrition education and access to healthier food**

Harris County will strategically enhance the nutritional health of its residents by:

- Providing comprehensive nutritional education and literacy by hosting educational workshops to inform residents about the benefits of healthy eating and meal preparation.
- Assessing unmet needs, including the location of food deserts, as well as the efficacy of current food access initiatives.
- Diversifying strategies to overcome obstacles to accessing healthy food and amplify reach in the county, such as adding Spanish translations to resources, incentivizing more businesses to focus on selling healthier options, and encouraging the development of urban farms.

Additional context/details:

- Close to 700,000 Harris County residents live in a food desert and 20% of children experience food insecurity according to a 2024 report by Children at Risk.
- The PAW Incubator could identify opportunities to develop urban farms.

INITIATIVE N3**Promote increased physical activity of residents**

HCPH will address the problem of obesity by promoting increased physical activity among residents and assessing unmet needs and the efficacy of existing initiatives to inform service quality improvements and expansion efforts.

Additional context/details:

- Some strategies to motivate residents to increase physical activity that have been adopted by public health entities in other jurisdictions include:
 - Public health “nudges” (behaviorally informed interventions designed to influence people’s decisions and behaviors in a way that promotes better health outcomes)
 - Partnerships with local businesses and schools for a unified messaging campaign
 - Free fitness classes in County parks
- Additional efforts might include:
 - Ensuring access to parks, free access to physical activity programs, and transportation to those programs
 - Potential partnerships with community organizations such as FIT Houston to increase opportunities to engage in physical activity
- Existing physical activity initiatives include the Texercise program and individual Commissioner Precinct programs.

INITIATIVE N4**Reduce the usage of tobacco and vape products**

To reduce the use of tobacco and vape products among youth and adults, HCPH will assess the status and efficacy of its current tobacco vaping/cessation program and explore how to expand and/or modify the program to increase its impact.

Additional context/details:

- HCPH currently offers a tobacco vaping/cessation program, which provides tobacco/vaping education and directs participants to the Texas Quitline and MD Anderson Cancer Centers for additional cessation support. Harris County has a 16% adult cigarette smoking rate (per the 2024 County Health Ranking).
- Example programs to consider include:
 - Quitlines staffed by trained professionals
 - Personalized counseling sessions
 - Providing access to nicotine replacement therapies
 - Incentivizing local employers to adopt cessation programs



OBJECTIVE O

Increase access to quality health care, including preventive and behavioral health

Measurable results

- i. Reduce emergency room utilization rate
- ii. Reduce the maternal mortality rate and associated racial/ethnic disparities
- iii. Increase the Harris Health Financial Assistance Program (formerly known as “Gold Card”) enrollment rate
- iv. Decrease the age-adjusted mortality rate from chronic diseases
- v. Decrease mental distress among adults
- vi. Increase enrollment rates in:
 - a. Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace
 - b. Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
 - c. Family Planning Plan (FPP)
 - d. Healthy Texas Women (HTW)
 - e. Medicaid
 - f. Medicare Savings Program (MSP)
 - g. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - h. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

INITIATIVE O1**Coordinate health organizations to improve access and care**

The County will enhance its role as a community health strategist by convening a coalition of key health organizations, including Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and other providers, payers, and funders, to serve as a regular collaborative forum, creating a consistent platform for collaboration and strategic health planning.

Additional context/details:

- HCPH is currently leading an effort to assess the county’s health needs and develop a comprehensive improvement plan that includes active participation from HHD, Harris Health, and community partners.
- This effort will include a coordinated strategic planning effort to tackle the county’s most significant access challenges, beginning with developing a shared understanding of the county’s needs and facilitating data and resource sharing.

INITIATIVE O2**Expand impact of care coordination teams through the ACCESS program**

HCPH will connect vulnerable populations in need of various services to care and interventions through the Accessing Coordinated Care and Empowering Self Sufficiency (ACCESS) program.

Additional context/details:

- ACCESS addresses social determinants of health through its integrated care coordination model, providing holistic services to the following cohorts:
 - Black Maternal Health Cohort
 - Homeless, Physical and Behavioral Health Cohort
 - Latino Chronic Disease Cohort
 - Reentry Cohort
 - Violence Prevention Cohort
- ACCESS will measure clear outcomes through comprehensive programmatic review and data collection, tracking, and reporting.

INITIATIVE 03**Increase utilization of health-related public benefits**

Through partner engagement, HCPH will connect residents to insurance and public benefits, including Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace, Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Family Planning Plan (FPP), Healthy Texas Women (HTW), Medicaid, Medicare Savings Program (MSP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Harris Health’s Financial Assistance Program (formerly known as the “Gold Card”).

Additional context/details:

- In Harris County, approximately \$1 billion of public benefits are unclaimed and unused annually.
- The HCPH Connect program is designed to bridge the gap between eligibility for and enrollment in these public benefits. By providing direct, in-person assistance, the program facilitates the signup process for individuals at community-based organization sites, libraries, and other public spaces.
- This work will also increase awareness among residents of the HCPH Connect enrollment process and improve data collection methods to better measure the program’s impact.
- HCPH and Harris Health will engage with stakeholders who can help enroll more eligible populations into Harris Health’s Financial Assistance Program to encourage the use of preventive health care.

INITIATIVE 04**Increase community health care capacity**

Through collaboration with Harris Health, Commissioners Court will conduct community engagement and analysis to determine the optimal locations for new health centers managed by Harris Health and to track the progress and impact of the bond program.

Additional context/details:

- Following voter approval of a \$2.5 billion bond in November 2023, Harris County is supporting the expansion and upgrade of several Harris Health facilities.
- The bond funding will increase bed capacity and community access points for quality health care, including the establishment of three additional health centers managed by Harris Health in Precincts 2, 3, and 4.



OBJECTIVE P

Improve children's health outcomes

Measurable results

- i. Decrease childhood obesity rate
- ii. Reduce the infant mortality rate and associated racial/ethnic disparities
- iii. Decrease the number of homes in the county with lead-based paint hazards

INITIATIVE P1**Develop a strategy for holistic child health**

Through collaboration with Harris Health, DEEO's Early Childhood division, and relevant Harris County entities, HCPH will develop an equitable strategy for holistic child health, expanding preventive care and addressing social determinants of health by:

- Strengthening partnerships and integrating services across education, nutrition, mental health, and other areas.
- Ensuring interventions are culturally sensitive and accessible.
- Evaluating current programs to prioritize those with the strongest evidence for positive impact.

Additional context/details:

- HCPH will establish measurable goals and metrics to monitor progress, as well as provide a transparent framework for assessing the strategy's effectiveness.
- HCPH will also engage with FQHCs as appropriate as part of this effort.

INITIATIVE P2**Expand lead reduction program to reduce child exposure**

HCPH will reduce child exposure to the harmful effects of lead by:

- Expanding the scope of HCPH's current lead testing and abatement program, including more screenings of children and remediation of homes.
- Addressing the shortage of licensed contractors through HCPH collaboration with labor unions to establish worker training on lead remediation.

Additional context/details:

- In Harris County, lead exposure remains a significant health concern, particularly for children who are most vulnerable to its harmful effects.
- The County has already committed \$11.3 million for abatement to address 271 homes and \$3 million for blood lead testing for about 20,000 children.

INITIATIVE P3**Enhance maternal and child health and development services**

HCPH will build on the progress of the Maternal and Child Health Program (MCHP) and explore potential implementation of other programs that enhance maternal and child health services, improving both physical and mental health outcomes for these populations.

Additional context/details:

- MCHP is an evidence-based home visitation initiative aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality by providing comprehensive support, including wellness checks, prenatal care, and connections to health care services.
- The program, funded by ARPA, currently aids 237 participants and has shown success in fostering healthy pregnancies and family environments.
- HCPH will monitor outcome data to validate the program's success and potentially support securing future funding beyond ARPA.
- HCPH also runs the Maternal Mental Health program, which provides connections to key behavioral health programs.

GOAL 5

Minimize the impact of climate change and disasters



Flooding, extreme heat, increasingly intense storms, and other climate-induced risks continue to plague our region, along with environmental and human-caused threats and hazards. We will equitably champion climate adaptation, resilience, and mitigation strategies as well as respond to environmental hazards to make Harris County a sustainable and livable county for decades to come.



Strategic objectives:

- Objective Q: Encourage residents, businesses, and public entities to significantly reduce their environmental footprint for the health of our region
- Objective R: Enhance disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and resiliency
- Objective S: Equitably reduce the health, economic, and other impacts of climate change and disasters
- Objective T: Reduce GHG emissions from County operations by 40% by 2030



Community indicators:

- Countywide Greenhouse Gas emissions
- Number of heat-related deaths and illnesses
- Percentage of countywide energy usage from renewable sources

Goal 5 objectives and initiatives

OBJECTIVE Q

Encourage residents, businesses, and public entities to significantly reduce their environmental footprint for the health of our region

Initiative Q1: Improve air quality monitoring and enforcement

Initiative Q2: Increase energy resilience of Harris County through deployment of affordable, reliable community solar

Initiative Q3: Develop capacity to measure and regularly publish countywide emissions and set reduction goals for the County as a whole

OBJECTIVE R

Enhance disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and resiliency

Initiative R1: Embed resiliency hubs within vulnerable communities to increase access to emergency resources

Initiative R2: Pilot conservation-focused maintenance and green infrastructure for cost savings and environmental benefits

Initiative R3: Strengthen the County's emergency response function

OBJECTIVE S

Equitably reduce the health, economic, and other impacts of climate change and disasters

Initiative S1: Leverage RAAM mobile units to collect data on environmental injustice in Harris County

Initiative S2: Prioritize the preservation of trees and expand the tree canopy program in underserved areas

Initiative S3: Increase accessibility and reliability of County cooling and warming centers

Initiative S4: Reduce the disparate social, economic, environmental, and health impacts of climate change through the implementation of a Harris County Climate Justice Plan

OBJECTIVE T

Reduce GHG emissions from County operations by 40% by 2030

Initiative T1: Power HCTRA with 100% renewable energy while reducing energy usage in partnership with the County

Initiative T2: Make County buildings more energy efficient

Initiative T3: Update HCED guidelines to promote greener projects

Initiative T4: Leverage the County's buying power to create additional renewable green energy infrastructure

Initiative T5: Update fleet to increase fuel efficiency and reduce emissions

Initiative T6: Encourage employees to reduce emissions from commuting and local work trips

Initiative T7: Establish a sustainable purchasing policy for County procurement

Initiative T8: Improve reporting and measuring of County waste stream



OBJECTIVE Q

Encourage residents, businesses, and public entities to significantly reduce their environmental footprint for the health of our region

Measurable results

- i. Increase the number of air quality concerns identified and corrected
- ii. Increase access to the benefits of affordable, reliable community solar in low-income and disadvantaged communities
- iii. Increase the percentage of the County electricity grid powered by renewable energy sources
- iv. Decrease countywide GHG emissions

INITIATIVE Q1**Improve air quality monitoring and enforcement**

Pollution Control Services (PCS) will increase the number of Community Air Monitoring Program (CAMP) sites and mobile Rapid Ambient Air Monitoring (RAAM) vehicles to improve responsiveness to air quality abnormalities.

Additional context/details:

- PCS currently uses a network of 34 CAMP sites and 1 RAAM vehicle. CAMP and RAAM tools help identify emission sources and patterns to inform regulatory actions and support responses to emergency situations, like chemical fires. Expansion will prioritize monitoring in historically marginalized communities at greater risk of industrial pollution.
- To increase the impact of these tools, PCS will develop a communications strategy that alerts individuals and businesses when air quality reaches harmful thresholds, as well as increase pollution enforcement in partnership with the County Attorney's Office.
- PCS will also improve the resident pollution complaint process by providing residents the ability to track the status of their complaints and for PCS to refer cases to the City of Houston Bureau of Pollution Control (as applicable).

INITIATIVE Q2**Increase energy resilience of Harris County through deployment of affordable, reliable community solar**

Through collaboration with HCFCD, HCED, and any relevant departments, OCA's Office of Sustainability will increase the use of solar power and enhance energy resilience by outfitting public buildings with solar energy capabilities and supporting the implementation of Texas Solar for All Coalition programming through its awarded grant funding.

Additional context/details:

- The Texas Solar for All Coalition, led by Harris County and including multiple partners across Texas, was awarded nearly \$250 million in grant funding to deliver community and residential solar to more than 46,000 low-income and disadvantaged communities and households across Texas. The grant funding will be used to invest in construction of new community solar arrays in Harris County. Low-income households would then be able to opt into this program, benefiting from increased grid resilience and savings in the form of a credit or discount on monthly electricity bills.

INITIATIVE Q3**Develop capacity to measure and regularly publish countywide emissions and set reduction goals for the County as a whole**

OCA's Office of Sustainability will work to reduce emissions across the county, including those from the private sector, by:

- Establishing community-wide reduction goals.
- Comprehensively measuring, publishing, and tracking progress toward reduction goals for emissions.
- Identifying ways to encourage residents to reduce their emissions at the individual level, such as working with the Toll Road Authority to explore incentivizing residents to use electric vehicles (EVs) by offering free toll access to EV drivers.

Additional context/details:

- This effort will mirror other regional climate planning strategies, with support of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Climate Reduction Grant, and leverage existing data sources, such as CenterPoint's energy usage metrics and the Greater Houston Partnership's regional assessments, to create a detailed emissions profile for Harris County.
- This initiative will involve close coordination with both the content and the partners involved in the Climate Justice Plan (which is currently in development and described in more detail in Initiative S4).



OBJECTIVE R

Enhance disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and resiliency

Measurable results

- i. Increase the number of people enrolled in the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEAR) program
- ii. Decrease the number of deaths, illnesses, and injuries from heat events and other disasters
- iii. Increase percentage of HCFCD maintenance/infrastructure spending on green approaches

INITIATIVE R1**Embed resiliency hubs within vulnerable communities to increase access to emergency resources**

Harris County will develop and expand a network of resiliency hubs to support residents during emergencies by:

- Completing the conversion of 16 County buildings into resiliency hubs.
- Building on previous Commissioner Precinct case studies to assess current needs, opportunities, and limitations of potential facilities, and to manage the expansion of the resiliency hub network in partnership with community organizations.
- Providing technical guidance to community groups establishing their own hubs.

Additional context/details:

- Hubs [provide support to vulnerable populations](#) before, during, and after extreme weather events and other disasters, and may include spaces such as community centers, recreational facilities, or multi-family housing buildings, along with surrounding infrastructure like parks or local businesses.
- The Harris County Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (OEM) will equip residents with skills to prepare for and respond to disasters by integrating its Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training programs into these hubs.

INITIATIVE R2**Pilot conservation-focused maintenance and green infrastructure for cost savings and environmental benefits**

HCFCD, HCED, and OCA's Office of Sustainability will support current and new pilots and identify the most impactful conservation-focused maintenance and green infrastructure practices for the community and the environment by exploring:

- Natural approaches to land management.
- The effectiveness of native grass seed mixes for HCFCD projects.
- The integration of trees within stormwater retention basins.
- The use of bioswales on HCFCD buyout lots.
- Potential new partnerships related to green infrastructure.
- Biophilic design principles and their application to Harris County's built environment.

Additional context/details:

- These pilots will result in further integration of green infrastructure into new construction and ongoing maintenance work to not only preserve natural ecosystems but also create long-term cost savings and environmental benefits.
- The Environmental Defense Fund is studying solutions that protect against toxic flooding, representing a potential partnership for Harris County to address inland toxic flooding.

INITIATIVE R3**Strengthen the County's emergency response function**

OEM will strengthen its emergency response function and capabilities by focusing on the following opportunities:

- Embedding technology and data functions within OEM.
- Enhancing the ability to provide recovery support after disasters by collaborating with County departments and other partners.
- Improving utilization and training of staff dedicated to OEM activities.

Additional context/details:

- Embedding technology and data functions within OEM: Advanced analytics and AI will be used to transform available data into actionable insights (including via GIS mapping) for the public regarding emergency response planning by analyzing public reactions and identifying the most impacted areas in real time.
- Enhancing ability to provide recovery support after disasters: The Recovery Support Functions (RSF) team, which works with community partners to deploy resources and assess community needs post-disaster, will be expanded to alleviate capacity challenges in meeting the full spectrum of RSF services. This expansion will enable effective management of recovery efforts, such as aid distribution and FEMA reporting, without diverting resources from other critical OEM functions.
- Improving utilization and training of staff dedicated to OEM activities: Formal arrangements will be established for departments to temporarily dedicate staff as needed to work within and be coordinated by OEM to ensure consistent coordination and preparedness planning, both during emergencies and in non-crisis periods.



OBJECTIVE 5

Equitably reduce the health, economic, and other impacts of climate change and disasters

Measurable results

- | | |
|--|---|
| i. Improve air, soil, and water quality in targeted low-income neighborhoods | iv. Decrease the number of deaths, illnesses, and injuries from heat events and other disasters |
| ii. Decrease the number of people in pollution-burdened communities (as identified by the EPA) | v. Reduce the number of people exposed to extreme heat in high-heat risk areas |
| iii. Increase tree canopy coverage in targeted low-income neighborhoods | vi. Reduce heat mitigation disparities |

INITIATIVE S1**Leverage RAAM mobile units to collect data on environmental injustice in Harris County**

PCS will leverage its RAAM mobile units to conduct a comprehensive air monitoring community case study program (with a focus on communities disproportionately affected by pollution) and propose targeted interventions and policy recommendations to improve environmental conditions in partnership with HCPH's Environmental Division and HCED.

Additional context/details:

- PCS has identified five communities for initial case studies through tools such as the EPA Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool and Houston Health Survey Data, with plans to expand to a location in Precinct 4.
- The RAAM will be deployed to identify pollution sources and quantify their impact on air quality. This initiative may also extend to water quality testing and soil sampling to provide a more complete assessment of environmental health.
- Evidence-based recommendations may include new regulations, community-led initiatives, infrastructure improvements, or investments in clean technology to advance environmental justice.

INITIATIVE S2**Prioritize the preservation of trees and expand the tree canopy program in underserved areas**

HCFCFCD will equitably expand its tree canopy program, increasing the focus on areas with high Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) scores, to increase green coverage and access to outdoor spaces in coordination with multiple entities, including HCFCFCD, HCED, and the Commissioner Precincts.

Additional context/details:

- The current HCFCFCD tree planting program plants 12,000 to 15,000 trees annually, requiring an investment of approximately \$130 per tree, which covers the cost of purchase, planting, and two years of maintenance.
- Through this effort, the County will deliver cooler urban areas, effective water management, flood mitigation, and cleaner air.
- The County will leverage the EPA Environmental Justice Screen and H3AT mapping data to set specific tree planting goals for targeted communities, particularly along trails and in canopy-deficient areas, transparently tracking progress against goals with a public-facing dashboard.
- At least in the short term, this work will be associated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ForUsTree grant program. HCFCFCD and multiple Commissioner Precincts received this grant in 2024.

INITIATIVE S3**Increase accessibility and reliability of County cooling and warming centers**

In coordination with OEM, HCPL and Commissioner Precincts will enhance the accessibility and reliability of its network of warming and cooling centers to ensure that residents have safe refuge during extreme weather conditions by:

- Increasing the number and operating hours of centers across the County.
- Developing a comprehensive network that integrates both County and municipal sites.
- Establishing operating criteria to increase proximity and capacity for all residents.

INITIATIVE S4**Reduce the disparate social, economic, environmental, and health impacts of climate change through the implementation of a Harris County Climate Justice Plan**

OCA's Office of Sustainability will develop and drive the implementation of the Harris County Climate Justice Plan in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.

Additional context/details:

- The plan centers building meaningful relationships with community-based organizations, frontline community members, and Harris County residents in the planning process.
- Based on community feedback, climate justice is framed under five key pillars: ecology, infrastructure, economy, community, and culture.



OBJECTIVE T

Reduce GHG emissions from County operations by 40% by 2030

Measurable results

- i. Increase percentage of County energy that is renewable
- ii. Decrease County electricity consumption
- iii. Decrease County waste generation
- iv. Increase percentage of County fleet vehicles that are electric

INITIATIVE T1

Power HCTRA with 100% renewable energy while reducing energy usage in partnership with the County

Harris County will work with HCTRA to install solar panels on Toll Road equipment and facilities. The County and HCTRA will work to manage energy usage in HCTRA's facilities and efficiently reduce costs.

INITIATIVE T2

Make County buildings more energy efficient

HCED will install new, energy-efficient equipment and retrofit existing facilities with energy-saving technologies.

Additional context/details:

- Harris County has already achieved a significant reduction in electricity usage, with ongoing efforts such as continuous real-time monitoring and analysis of building operations to ensure facilities are running at maximum efficiency.

INITIATIVE T3

Update HCED guidelines to promote greener projects

HCED will update the guidelines it uses to approve projects and equipment to include more resource efficiency requirements, committing to strict enforcement of these guidelines.

Additional context/details:

- HCED's Design Guidelines, revised in 2022 to address carbon emissions, are set for further updates to promote even greener project development.
- Updates will incorporate measures for energy optimization, such as solar-ready infrastructure, electric vehicle charging stations (in partnership with HCUS's Fleet Division), and compliance with green building certifications like Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED).
- Commissioners Court will review any exemptions to ensure future developments meet the new sustainability standards.
- As part of this initiative, HCED should look for opportunities to apply the Imagination Zones standards (described in Initiative I2) to County facilities as well.

INITIATIVE T4**Leverage the County’s buying power to create additional renewable green energy infrastructure**

Harris County will leverage its buying power to stimulate the growth of renewable energy projects by:

- Using its buying power to increase aggregate regional demand for alternative energy sources in the green energy market.
- Consider pilot projects for solar and battery storage at critical facilities, including structuring power purchase agreements (PPAs) with new solar or wind farms.

Additional context/details:

- Collaborative efforts with entities like Harris Health and NRG Park are underway, with plans to issue a joint RFP for renewable and retail energy to maximize benefits and minimize expenses.
- The Clean Energy Strategy presented to Commissioners Court includes entering into a long-term PPA with new renewable energy assets, enhancing energy efficiency, and supporting community energy programs.

INITIATIVE T5**Update fleet to increase fuel efficiency and reduce emissions**

HCUS and HCED will build upon the plan to reduce emissions from the County fleet by:

- Expanding EV pilots.
- Enhancing level 2 and level 3 EV charging infrastructure.
- Fostering interagency collaboration for EV adoption.

Example additional strategies:

- Right-sizing vehicle fleets.
- Implementing anti-idling policies for internal combustion engine (ICE) fleet vehicles.
- Creating fleet share programs.
- Developing a comprehensive approach to EV fleet management and infrastructure rollout (slated for FY25).

INITIATIVE T6**Encourage employees to reduce emissions from commuting and local work trips**

Human Resources & Talent (HR&T) will work with OCA’s Office of Sustainability to expand ways to support sustainable employee transportation by:

- Encouraging alternative commuting and transportation methods such as carpooling, vanpooling, micro-transit options, and EV fleet sharing programs.
- Analyzing employee commuter survey results to tailor subsequent solutions such as partnerships with public transportation agencies to provide park-and-shuttle services and incentives for using public transit.

INITIATIVE T7**Establish a sustainable purchasing policy for County procurement**

In coordination with Harris County Purchasing Department and relevant County departments, OCA’s Office of Sustainability will establish a sustainable purchasing policy for County procurement that promotes sustainably sourced products and incorporates sustainable materials and waste management requirements into County requests for proposals (RFPs).

The sustainable purchasing policy will specifically target concrete and steel used in infrastructure projects and mandate that vendors measure and report the quantities of concrete and steel used in County projects to obtain the necessary data to make informed decisions and set achievable goals for sustainable purchasing. Subsequently, OCA and Purchasing will develop green procurements guidelines and targets.

Additional context/details:

- Currently, the lack of tracking of non-sustainable materials hinders the County’s ability to set realistic targets for using green alternatives.
- This initiative is a key component of Harris County’s Climate Action Plan, which calls for the creation of a comprehensive green procurement process.

INITIATIVE T8**Improve reporting and measuring of County waste stream**

OCA's Office of Sustainability will develop a plan to track and reduce County waste by:

- Conducting further waste audits.
- Diverting waste from landfills, leveraging insights from initial audits conducted in 2023.
- Implementing Countywide recycling programs.
- Creating educational campaigns to foster a culture of waste reduction and recycling within all County facilities.
- Developing a pilot composting program to explore the benefits of organic waste management.

Additional context/details:

- Waste audits were conducted by HCPH and HCPL in 2023.



GOAL 6

Help residents achieve housing stability



Over half of Harris County renter households (and more than 35% of all households) paid more than 30% of their income on housing costs in 2022 (defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as housing cost-burdened), as the pandemic exacerbated housing inequities. We will develop policies and make investments to address the shortfall of affordable housing and enable people to access and stay in safe and stable housing environments.



Strategic objectives:

- Objective U: Build and preserve affordable housing, particularly for low-income families
- Objective V: Reduce eviction and foreclosure rates among residents
- Objective W: Transition people experiencing homelessness into permanent supportive housing



Community indicators:

- Percentage of households earning <30%, <50%, <80%, <100% AMI that are housing cost-burdened
- Number of eviction and foreclosure filings
- Number of individuals experiencing homelessness

Goal 6 objectives and initiatives

OBJECTIVE U

Build and preserve affordable housing, particularly for low-income families

Initiative U1: Develop community housing plan and dashboard

Initiative U2: Undergo planning process for fast-tracking capability

OBJECTIVE V

Reduce eviction and foreclosure rates among residents

Initiative V1: Enhance and centralize eviction legal aid and financial assistance programs

Initiative V2: Evaluate and strengthen current tenant protection policy

OBJECTIVE W

Transition people experiencing homelessness into permanent supportive housing

Initiative W1: Use data to increase homelessness diversion

Initiative W2: Increase stock of permanent supportive housing



OBJECTIVE U

Build and preserve affordable housing, particularly for low-income families

Measurable results

- i. Decrease the percentage of households earning <30%, <50%, <80%, <100% AMI that are housing cost-burdened
- ii. Increase the number of affordable housing units for low- and moderate-income households throughout Harris County

INITIATIVE U1**Develop community housing plan and dashboard**

HCD will develop a community housing plan to guide affordable housing development.

Additional context/details:

- The plan will establish unified goals and targets for affordable housing development based on findings from the “My Home is Here” study, which identified a need for 20,000 additional affordable housing units annually.
- The plan should be developed in collaboration with the City of Houston and community partners such as the Houston Housing Collaborative and institutions of higher education (IHEs).
- The plan will use and expand upon existing reports that include community feedback, such as HCD’s five-year Consolidated Plan (which includes an affordable housing needs assessment and outlines implementation strategies, outcomes, and key performance indicators for low- and moderate-income affordable housing needs for Harris County residents).
- To complement the plan and interactive dashboard, HCD also will develop specific, measurable target metrics to track progress toward the plan’s goals.
- Examples of potential strategies include:
 - Partnering with IHEs for affordable housing development.
 - Expanding the use of tax incentives to encourage the development of low- and moderate-income affordable housing options.
 - Establishing a Housing Trust Fund, guidelines, and operating structure to offer grants and loans to developers for affordable housing for new construction and the rehabilitation of existing properties.
 - Providing support for the aging population to help them age in place.
 - Protecting and preserving naturally occurring affordable housing.
 - Evaluating and expanding the current tenant protection policy.
 - Leveraging the PAW to build housing on underused County property.
 - Developing a fast-tracking capability for affordable housing development.
 - Implementing initiatives to enhance the quality and resilience of existing housing stock.
 - Using Fair Housing policy to counter NIMBY (i.e., “not in my back yard”) efforts and similar activities.

INITIATIVE U2**Undergo planning process for fast-tracking capability**

HCD will work with HCD to conduct a needs assessment for a fast-tracking capability to streamline the approval process for affordable housing development, including review of current procedures and gathering developer input on administrative and approval barriers. Based on the results of the assessment, a plan will be created to address any pain points.

Potential actions include:

- Streamlining funding approval, processes, and building permitting (while maintaining quality due diligence).
- Promoting new permitting practices that expedite the process for affordable housing development.
- Updating land use regulations within Harris County’s jurisdiction.
- Implementing a “by-right” approval system for projects that comply with existing standards, allowing for automatic approvals based on established housing codes within Harris County’s jurisdiction.

OBJECTIVE V

Reduce eviction and foreclosure rates among residents

Measurable results

- i. Decrease the number of foreclosures
- ii. Increase the number of pre-filing diversions
- iii. Increase the number of post-filing interventions (e.g., legal representation and rental or mortgage assistance)
- iv. Increase the percentage of tenants receiving defense in court
- v. Increase “pass” rate of tenants with legal representation
- vi. Increase the rate of assistance through the County’s diversion programs for individuals who are at risk of losing their housing

INITIATIVE V1**Enhance and centralize eviction legal aid and financial assistance programs**

HCD will work to centralize legal aid funding and identify a future funding and resourcing plan to bolster its eviction aid efforts.

Additional context/details:

- HCD currently runs the Eviction Defense Program, which offers aid and legal services to low-income residents facing eviction.
- HCD should work with the Justice Courts to work to develop a unified approach to eviction prevention.
- In 2023, there were over [81,000](#) evictions filed in Harris County, surpassing pre-pandemic averages by more than [20%](#).
- Eviction prevention funding is currently distributed among various organizations and churches.

INITIATIVE V2**Evaluate and strengthen current tenant protection policy**

To build on the existing tenant protection policy implemented in 2022, HCD will evaluate the policy’s performance and explore ways to expand its reach, including development of reporting mechanisms and ways to better enforce the policy.

Additional context/details:

- The current tenant protection policy, which applies to County-funded housing developments, guarantees the right to timely repairs, protection against unjustified evictions and housing discrimination, and the ability to form tenant unions without fear of retaliation. It also requires landlords to provide alternative housing when a tenant’s unit is unsafe or unsanitary.



OBJECTIVE W

Transition people experiencing homelessness into permanent supportive housing

Measurable results

- i. Decrease the number of individuals experiencing homelessness
- ii. Increase rate of people stably housed six months after transitioning from homelessness

INITIATIVE W1**Use data to increase homelessness diversion**

To build on existing efforts for homelessness diversion, HCD will leverage data-driven strategies and establish all necessary data-sharing agreements to target increased resources and support for partners.

Additional context/details:

- HCD has already taken significant steps to address homelessness diversion through various programs and initiatives. These efforts include the Eviction Defense Program and partnerships with organizations like Lone Star Legal Aid and the Coalition for the Homeless.
- Data will be sourced from the Eviction Lab, Texas Housers, January Advisors, the Way Home's Annual Point in Time Count, and other sources as applicable and feasible.

INITIATIVE W2**Increase stock of permanent supportive housing**

In collaboration with partners, HCD will plan, fund, and develop permanent supportive housing stock, which will include continuing to leverage Project Recovery funds to develop more affordable and accessible rental units and single-family homes in flood-safe areas, in addition to exploring other means of funding.

Additional context/details:

- There are 500,000 low-income rent-burdened households in Harris County (based on Rice University's recent Kinder Institute housing data). The Kinder Institute has also documented that the County, City, and all partners (regionally) need to add over 20,000 affordable housing units a year (likely indefinitely) to keep pace with previously known need and expected population growth.
- The County is also exploring innovative approaches, such as a \$15 million investment in a community land trust to increase the supply of affordable single-family homes, in addition to working with partners.



