

Planning, Designing, and Building Healthy Communities

H-GAC Livable Centers 2025 3-part series

A light blue map of the Houston-Galveston Area Council region, showing county boundaries. The map is centered in the background of the slide.

Roundtable #2

Designing for Healthy Communities

Agenda

- Framing + Recap
- Design Charrette: Reimagining a Stress-Free Community
- **Break**
- Gallery Walk + Design Presentations
- Collective Reflection + Takeaways

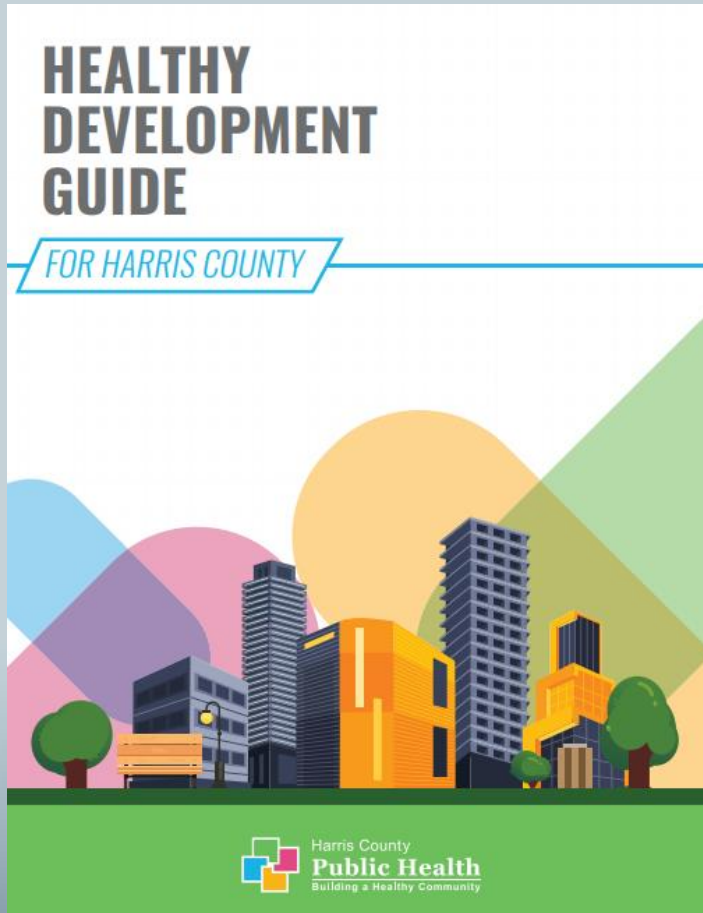
Healthy Community Considerations

Challenges/Opportunities for urban, suburban, and rural places:

Active Living	Healthy Food	Environmental Exposure	Emergency Preparedness	Social Cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active Transportation• Recreation• Traffic Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access• Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Air Quality• Water Quality• Soil Contamination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Natural Hazards• Climate Change• Infectious Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infrastructure• Housing and Community Development• Public Safety

Metrics for Planning Healthy Communities
American Planning Association

Featured Tool



- Non-regulatory guide intended to prompt conversations and critical thinking regarding health and development

Healthy Development Guide

Why This Matters



18.8%

of adults report 14+ days/month of poor mental health



70%

of local deaths tied to heart disease, cancer, and diabetes



24%

Increase in hypertensive heart disease deaths (2016-2021)



50th out of 50

Texas ranks last in adult mental health care access

Source: [Houston State of Health, 2022](#). [Houston State of Health Mortality Dashboard](#). [Harris County Public Health, 2024](#). [Chronic Disease Report Health Needs Council Report, 2024](#)

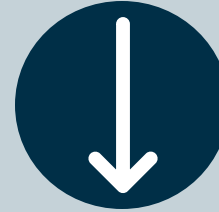
Defining Health-Conscious Design Principles



Mobility & Access



Green Infrastructure



Reduce Stress



Inclusive Access



Wellness



Social Connectivity



Systems Coordination



Local Priorities

Key Focus Areas

Guiding Principles

Health-Conscious Design in Action

Planners are not therapists, but every design decision impacts public mental health.



Photo Credits: Thermory, Houston Chronicle, Johnny Than, Houston Public Media

Design Scenarios



Mosaic Bend



Pinebend Commons



Willow Trace

Images generated with Envato Elements AI

Design Charrette Instructions

Time to get creative!

- Review your community snapshot + map
- Use your design prompt to guide ideation
- Layer sketch concepts using trace paper
- Consider: mobility, housing, climate, access, identity
- Choose group presenter/s for share out



A light blue map of the Houston-Galveston Area Council region, showing county boundaries. The word "Break" is centered over the map in a large, bold, dark blue font.

Break

A light blue map of the Houston-Galveston Area Council region, showing county boundaries. The text "Gallery Walk" is centered over the map.

Gallery Walk

Design Can Be Healing

Planners are not therapists, but every design decision impacts public mental health.

Design Decision

- Green infrastructure reduces stress hormones
- Restorative spaces offer mental reset
- Walkable, connected communities improve mood & mobility
- Social spaces foster connection & belonging
- Disinvestment & exclusion amplify psychological stress
- Inclusive, people-centered planning builds resilience

The Impact of Urban Planning on Mental Health

From Theory to Practice

What Will You Carry Forward?

This roundtable was a space for:

- Creative, low-stakes experimentation
- Systems-level reflection on stress and well-being
- Cross-sector dialogue around shared challenges

Before you leave, reflect on:

- What surprised or challenged you today?
- What's one concept you might test (formally or informally) in your work?
- Who in your organization or network should hear about this conversation?

Annual Land Use & Transportation Workshop: **Health-Conscious Communities - Integrating Urban Design, Planning, and Public Health**

- September 18, 9AM-12PM (networking 9-9:30AM)

All events held in H-GAC 2nd floor conference rooms

Sources

- Houston-Galveston Area Council. (2025, April 3). *Roundtable 1: Planning for Healthy Communities*. Retrieved from: <https://www.h-gac.com/getmedia/a69073a6-dfb0-4bad-9048-2669abf27d54/04-03-2025-H-GAC-LC-Roundtable1>
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