Planning, Designing, and Building Healthy Communities

H-GAC Livable Centers 2025 3-part series

Planning for Healthy Communities

- April 3, 9AM-11:30AM (networking 9-9:30AM)

Designing for Healthy Communities

- June 26, 9AM-11:30AM (networking 9-9:30AM)

Annual Land Use & Transportation Workshop:
Health-Conscience 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

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Agenda

- Roundtable Introductions

- Planning and Public Health – are they related?

- Harris County Public Health – Healthy Development Guide

- *Break*

- Harris County Public Health – One Health Toolkit

- Q&A/Group Discussion

Introductions

Name and Occupation

Does your role impact public health?
Why or why not?

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What is Planning?

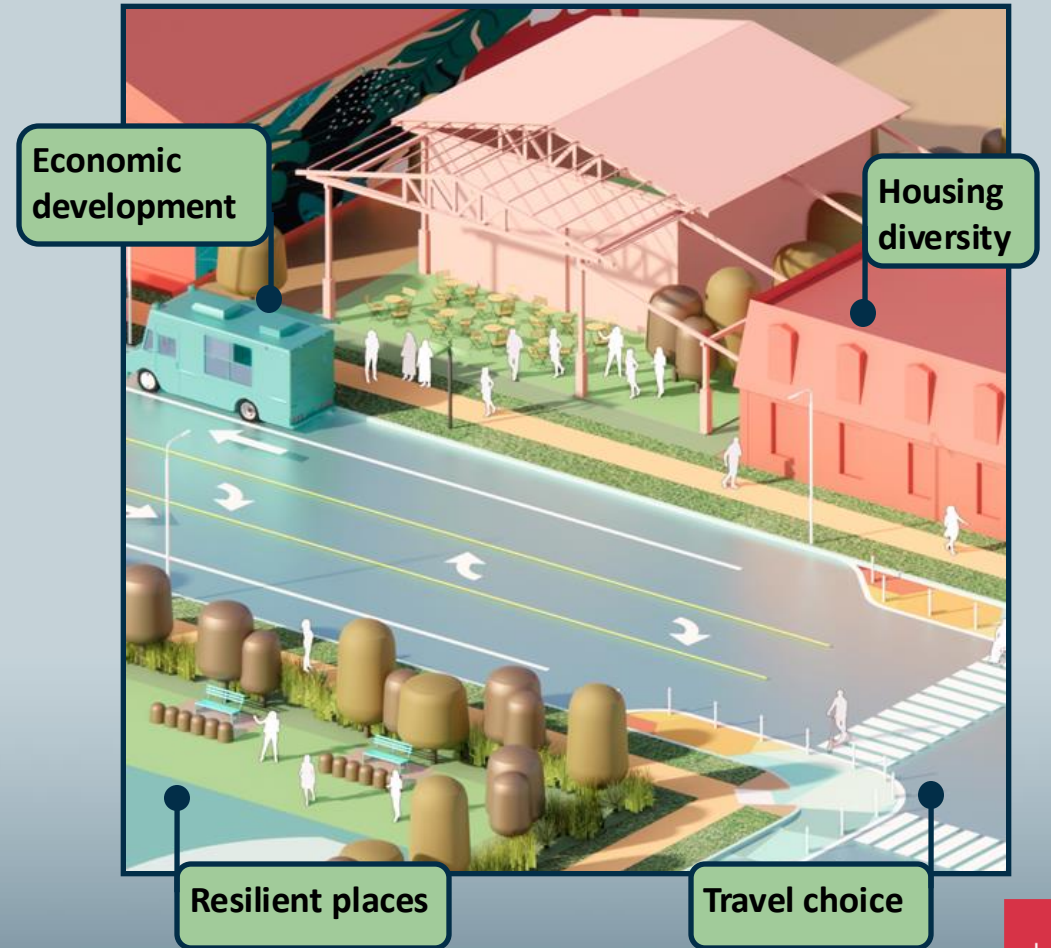"Managing growth, navigating change, and informing decisions…"

APA has 25 different divisions

What Is Planning? American Planning Association
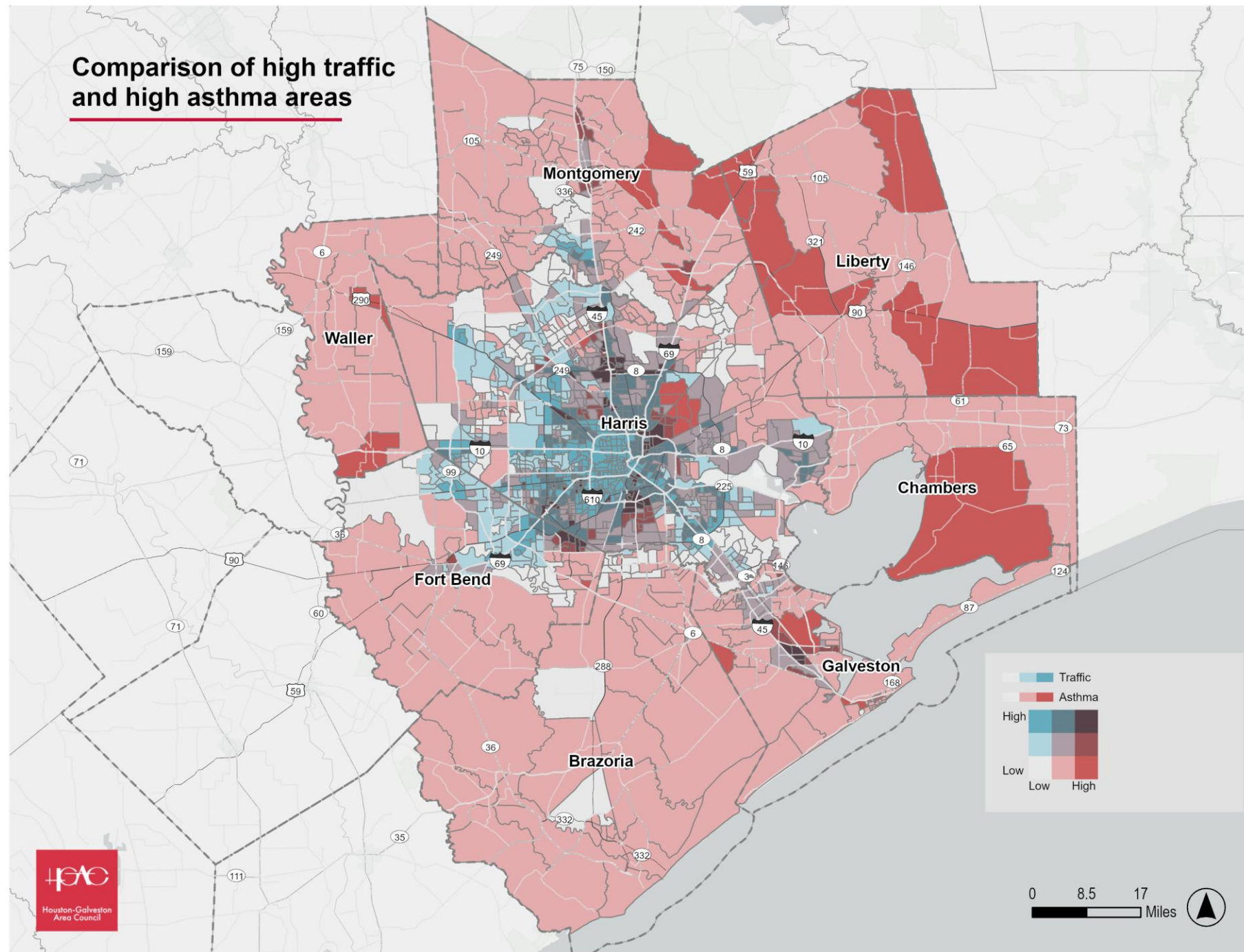
Livable Centers Study Goals

- Create multi-modal travel choices.

- Create resilient quality places.

- Promote safe and accessible infrastructure.

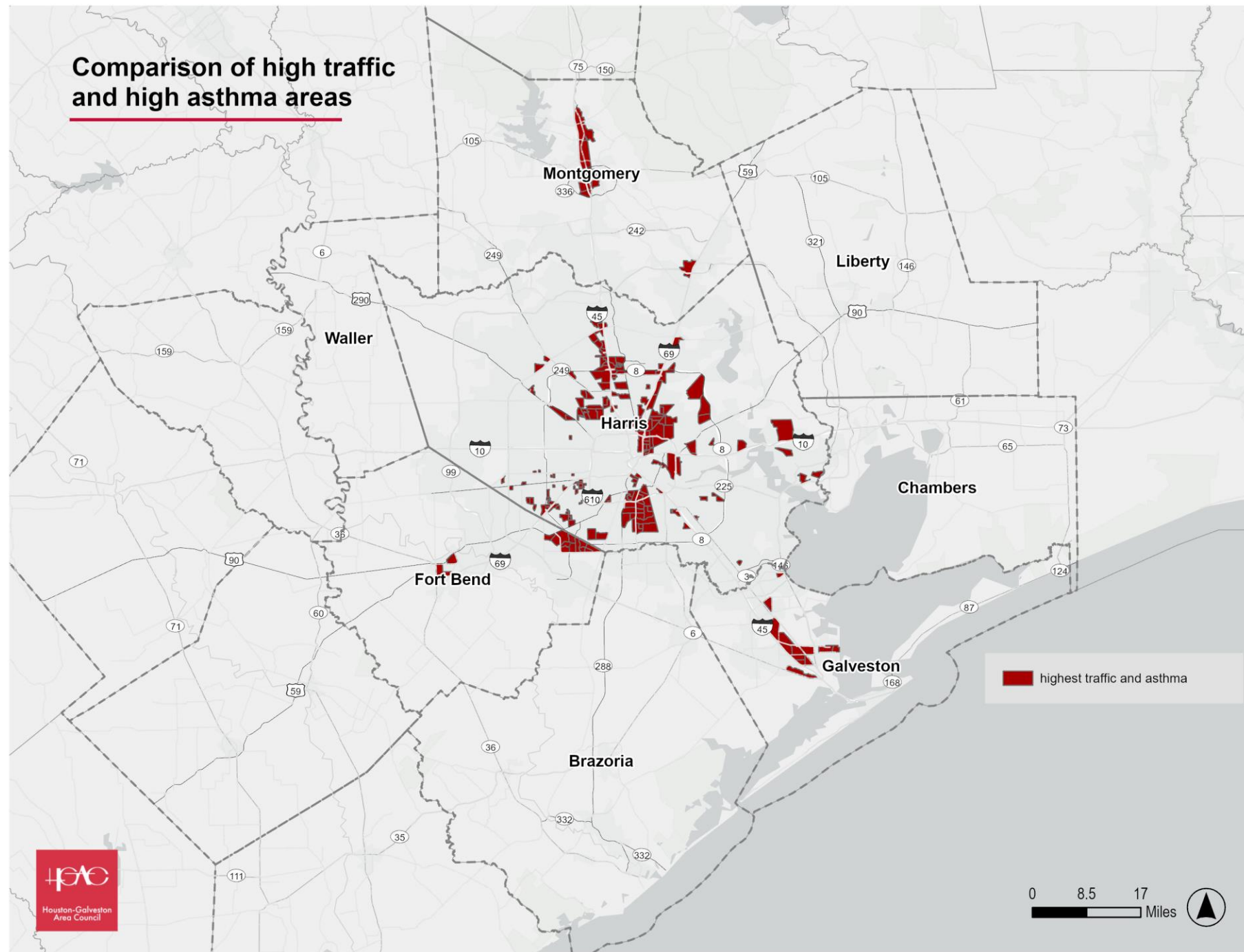- Promote economic development and housing diversity.

Economic development

Housing diversity

Resilient places

Travel choice

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Comparison of high traffic and high asthma areas

Comparison of high traffic and high asthma areas

How Planning Affects Public Health

"Assessing the built environment becomes especially significant because it can **modify, exacerbate, or reduce** health inequities."

"Lower-socioeconomic status and high-minority block groups had **significantly reduced access to facilities**, which in turn was associated with **decreased physical activity and increased childhood obesity**."

(Gordon-Larsen et al. 2006).

Inequality in the built environment underlies key health disparities in physical activity and obesity – PubMed Natl. Library of Medicine

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Planning and Mental Health

Green space

Social Infrastructure

Transportation

Housing

Policy

The Impact of Urban Planning on Mental Health

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Planning and Mental Health

Green space

- Spending time in nature has been shown to **reduce stress and enhance mood**.

- Residents in cities with ample green spaces often report **higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of stress**.

- Green spaces can act as **social hubs and encourage physical activity.**

The Impact of Urban Planning on Mental Health

Planning and Mental Health

Social Infrastructure

- Spaces that support social interactions **facilitate social connectivity and a sense of belonging**.

- A sense of belonging can act as **a buffer against the stresses of urban living**.

- H-GAC's 2024 Fall Planning Workshop discussed the importance of 3rd places.

The Impact of Urban Planning on Mental Health

Planning and Mental Health

Transportation

- Daily commutes are a leading source of day-to-day stress.

- Efficient transportation networks reduce the time spent commuting, **freeing up time for other activities that contribute to mental health**.

- Walkable and bike-friendly infrastructure encourages an active lifestyle, which is shown to have **physical and mental health benefits**.

The Impact of Urban Planning on Mental Health

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Planning and Mental Health

Housing

- The **quality, affordability, and accessibility** of housing can significantly influence the well-being of residents.

- **Poor housing conditions, overcrowding, and lack of privacy** can exacerbate stress and negatively impact mental health.

- **Access to amenities** also plays a crucial role in promoting mental wellness.

The Impact of Urban Planning on Mental Health

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Planning and Mental Health

- Policies that mandate the inclusion of green spaces in new developments **ensure that residents have access to nature**.

- Policies promoting quality affordable housing can help **reduce the financial stress associated with high living costs**.

- Policies that support active transportation and public transit improvements can **alleviate commuting stress and encourage healthier lifestyles**.

The Impact of Urban Planning on Mental Health

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Benefits of Walkability

Health Benefits

Safety Benefits

Social Benefits

Environmental Benefits

Transportation Benefits
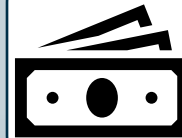
Economic Benefits

Benefits of Walkability - America Walks

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Group Discussions

- Everyone is welcome to
  - respond/rebuttal
  - ask follow-up questions
  - add personal experiences and analogies

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Healthy Community Considerations

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

Active Living	Healthy Food	Environmental Exposure	Emergency Preparedness	Social Cohesion
• Active Transportation • Recreation • Traffic Safety	• Access • Production	• Air Quality • Water Quality • Soil Contamination	• Natural Hazards • Climate Change • Infectious Disease	• Infrastructure • Housing and Community Development • Public Safety

Metrics for Planning Healthy Communities
American Planning Association

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Harris County Public Health
Building a Healthy Community

MISSION

To protect health, prevent disease and injury, and promote health and well-being for everyone in Harris County by advancing equity, building partnerships, and establishing culturally responsive systems.

VISION

A Harris County in which all people can achieve their full potential for health and well-being.

VALUES

Harris County Public Health embraces a foundation of progressive work anchored by the department's cornerstone values guiding our work to improve the community's health and well-being.

Leadership • Service and Excellence • Quality • Collaboration • Communication • Inclusion and Belonging
Accountability, Integrity, and Stewardship • Professionalism • Compassion

Built Environment Unit

To improve the health and equity of Harris County residents through the development and improvement of healthy, safe, and active built environments where individuals live, learn, work, worship, and play.

Goals

- Inform and/or make recommendations to decision-makers about improving policies and plans related to the built environment to improve health outcomes.

- Enhance cross-sector collaboration and provide technical assistance to communities and agencies interested in improving the built environment.

- Engage the community to build local knowledge and support opportunities to facilitate equitable change that promotes health and well-being.

Health in All Policies (HiAP)

A strategy that strengthens the link between health and other policies, creating a supportive environment that enables people to lead healthy lives

Considers the intentional or unintentional impact of non-health policies on individual or population health

Non-health sectors can include Education, Housing, Transportation, Economics, Engineering, and others…

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Focus Areas

Sidewalks, Roads, Transit
- Safe Crossings
- East End Bike Plan

Parks and Trails
- Safe Routes to Parks, Baytown
- Parks and Trails Task Force

Schools
- Safe Routes to School
  - Baytown, Acres Homes, and Pasadena
  - Expansion to all ISDs

Housing and Development
- Healthy Development Guide
- Actions for Health Equity in Settegast

Mapping and Analysis
- Demographic and Health Data Analysis
- GIS Mapping
- Infrastructure Assessment Tool

Environment
- Nuisance Planning Project
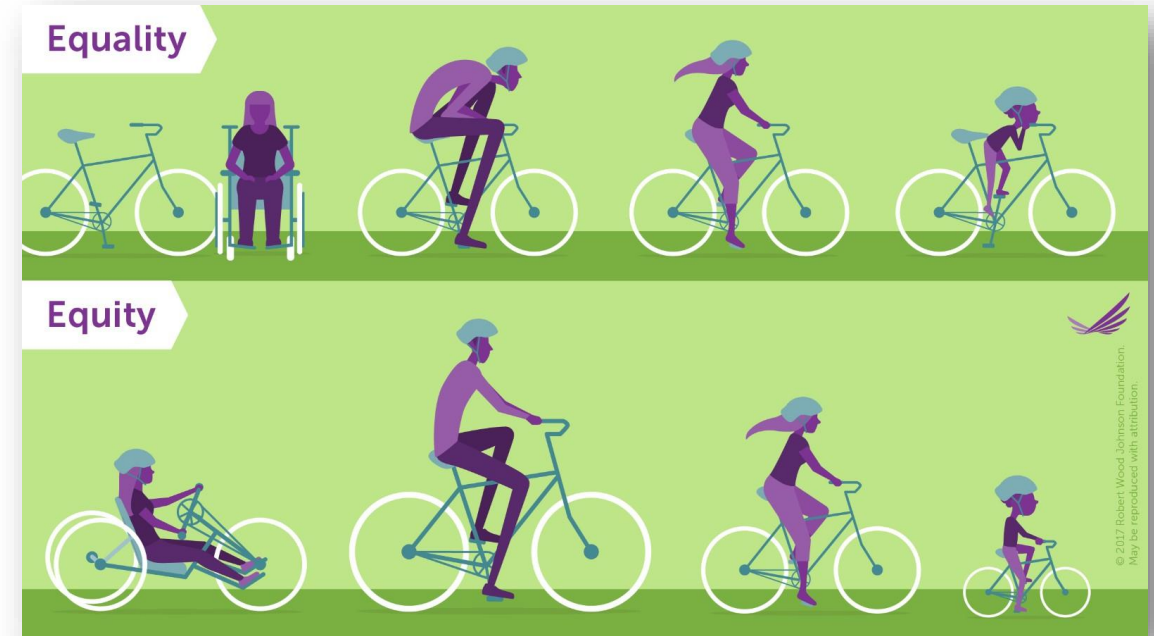- Climate Vulnerability Assessments
- 2020 & 2024 Heat Mapping Campaigns

The **BUILT ENVIRONMENT** includes the man-made design and layout of communities in which people live, learn, work, worship and play.

ART

COFFEE

MARKET

PETS SHOP

Improving the built environment can help create communities that make the healthy choice the easier choice for residents.
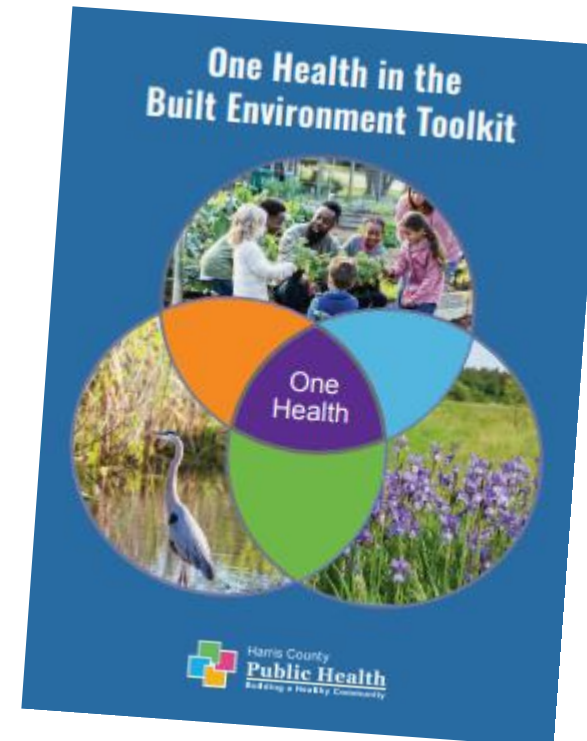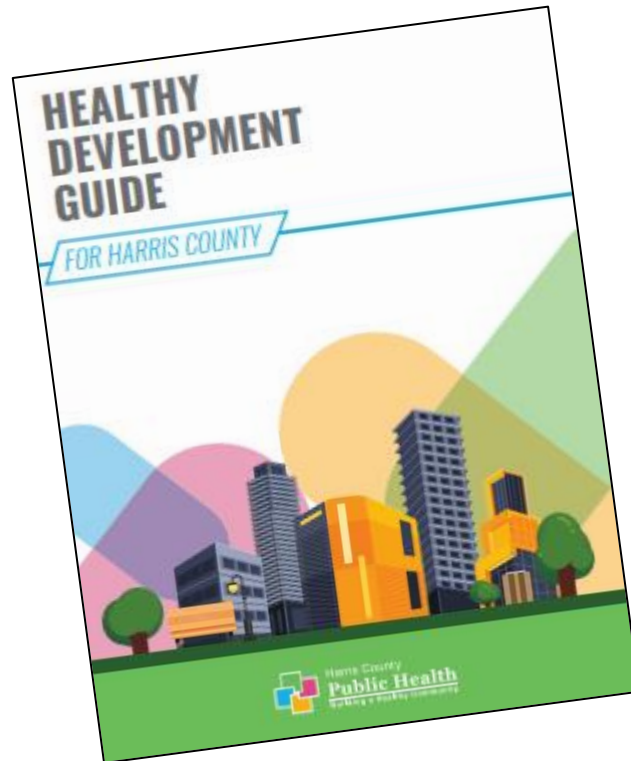
What is Equity?

Conditions that allow all to **participate, prosper, and reach** their full potential and where no one is disadvantaged from achieving their potential because of **socioeconomic or environmental** conditions

What Does a Healthy Community Look Like?

Healthy Community Design Principles

- **Mixed-land use**
- **Public transit**
- **Pedestrian and bicycle-friendly**
- **Safe public places for social interaction**
- **Housing for different incomes and different stages of life**
- **Green spaces and parks that are easy to walk to**
- **Fresh, healthy food outlets**
- **Accessible and socially equitable**

Healthy Community Design Benefits

Promote good mental health

↑ air and water quality

↑ opportunities for physical activity

↑ access to healthy food

↑ social connectivity and sense of community

↓ risk of traffic-related injuries

Ensure social equity for all community members

The Healthy Development Guide and
The One Health in the Built Environment Toolkit

How we prepared the Healthy Development Guide and One Health in the Built Environment Toolkit

Review existing similar guides from governments and organizations

In-depth conversations with other local agencies and organizations

Conversations with local planners, developers, and public health experts

In-depth literature reviews

The Healthy Development Guide

Purpose:
To ensure that health and well-being are equitably considered during the planning and development process in Harris County.
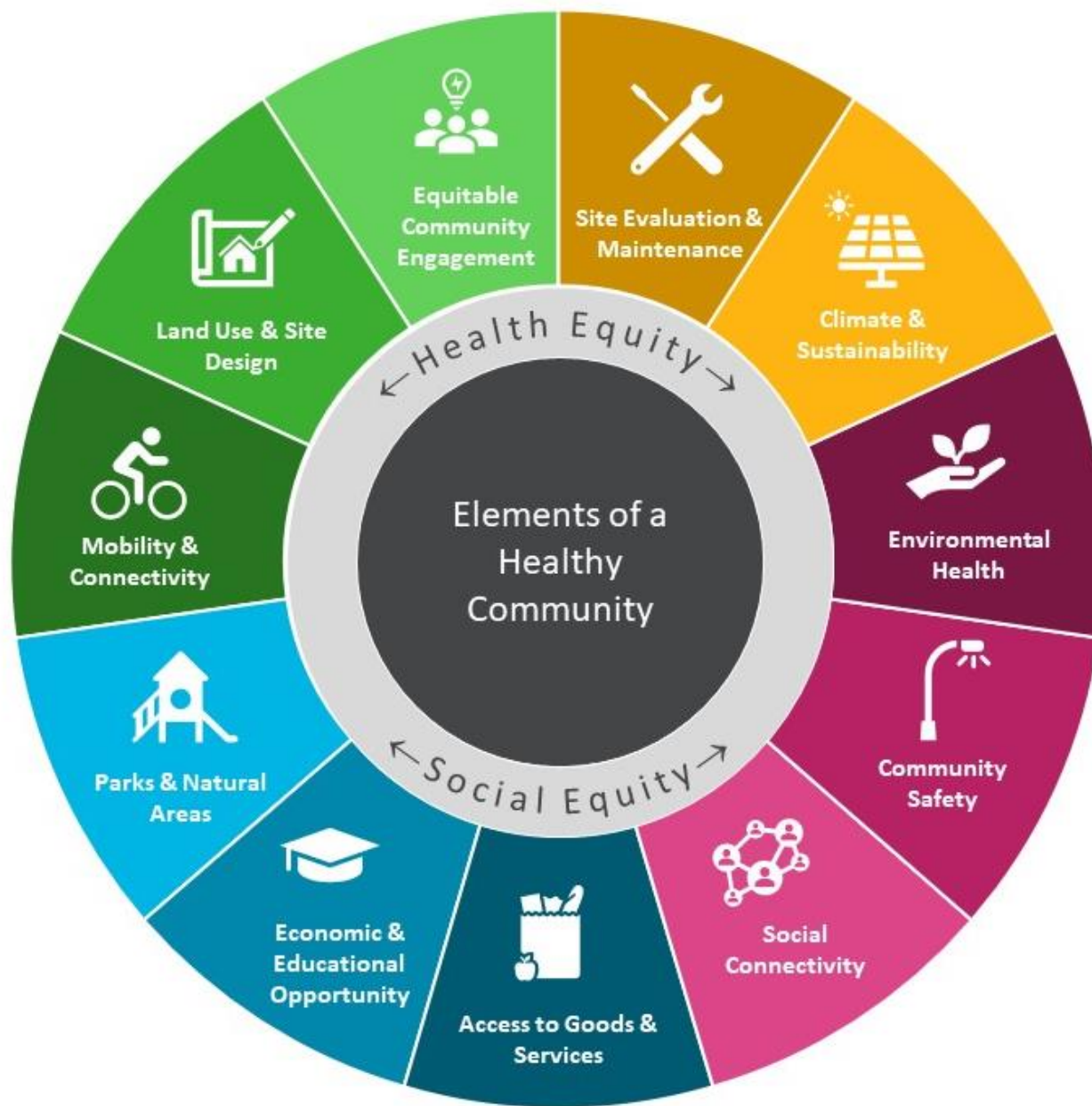
What is the Healthy Development Guide?

- Non-regulatory tool that showcases best practices in design and planning to maximize equity, health, and well-being

- Prompts conversations and thinking by posing guiding questions

- Outlines a series of health-promoting development concepts with examples
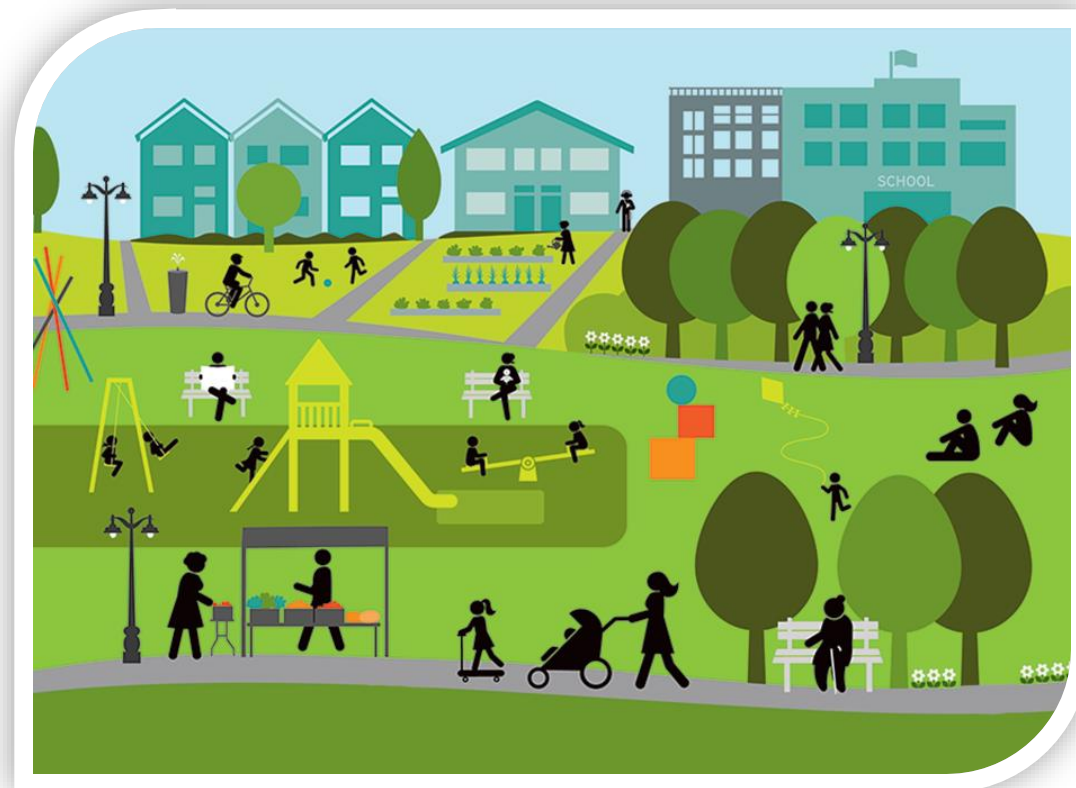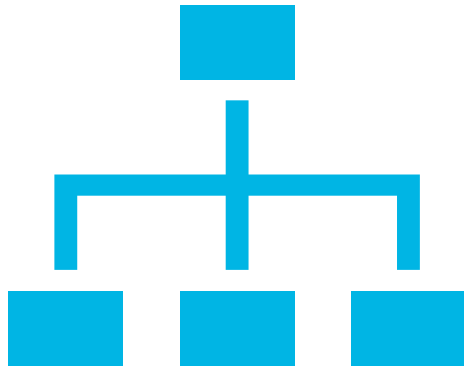
Elements of a Healthy Community
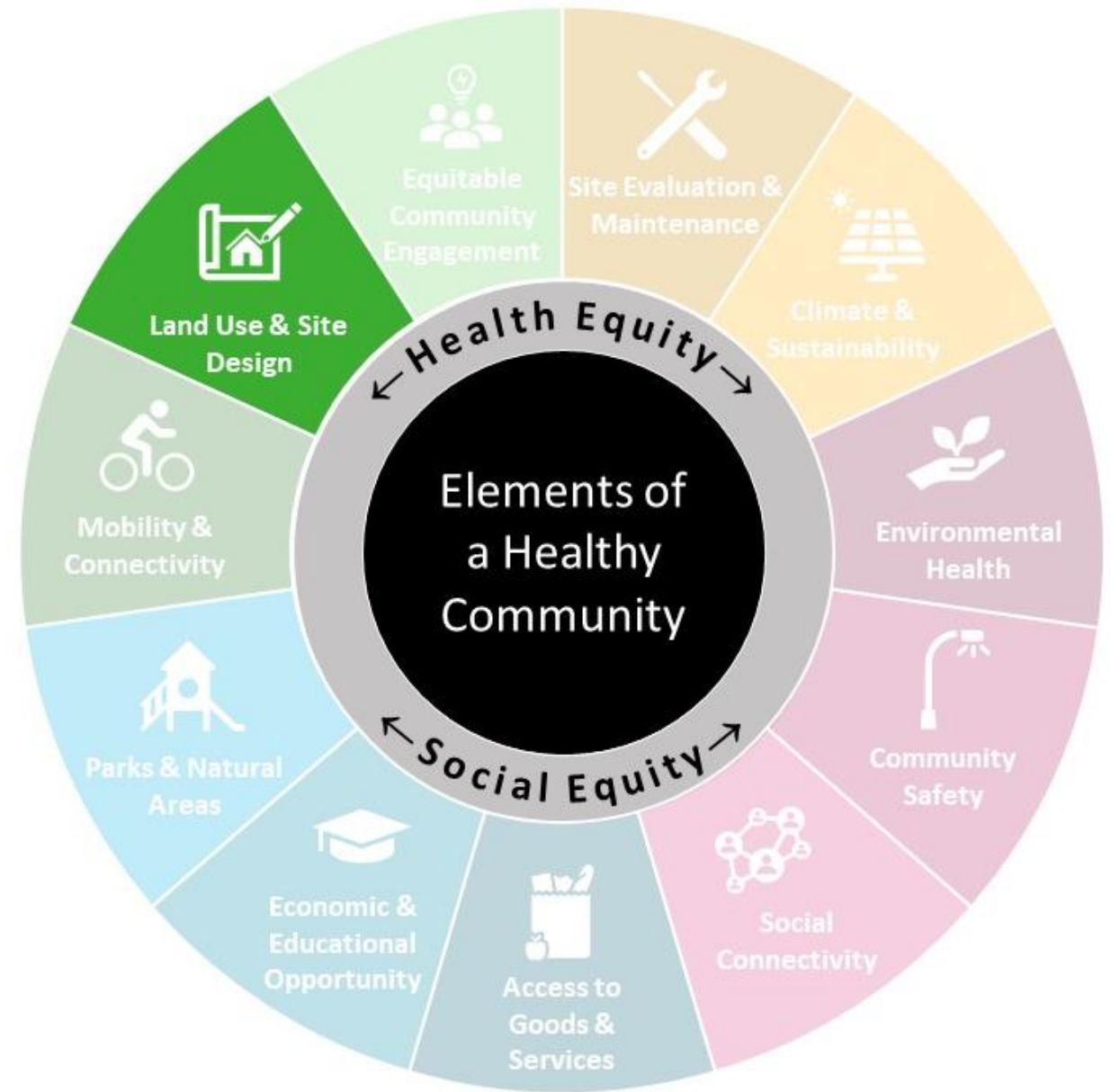
How to Use the Guide

- Prompt discussion of healthy community design
- Understand relationship between community design and health
- Utilize those elements that apply to your project

Each Element covers:
- Why the element matters to development?
- Why the element matters to health?
- What is in Harris County's future?

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Land Use and Site Design

Elements of a Healthy Community

Health Equity

Social Equity

- Equitable Community Engagement
- Site Evaluation & Maintenance
- Climate & Sustainability
- Environmental Health
- Community Safety
- Social Connectivity
- Access to Goods & Services
- Economic & Educational Opportunity
- Parks & Natural Areas
- Mobility & Connectivity
- Land Use & Site Design

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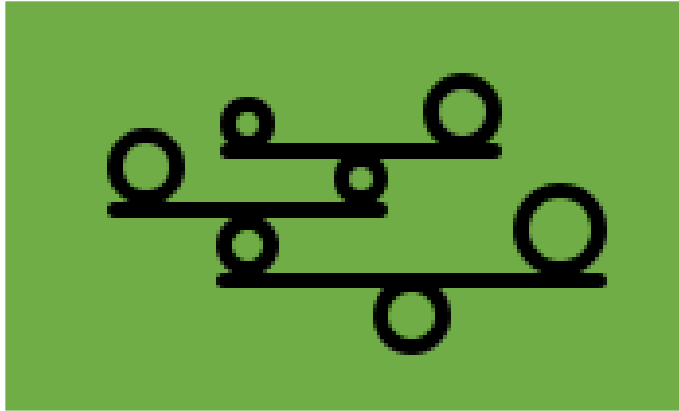
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Land Use and Site Design

Housing

Multi-Family, Mixed-Use, & Non-Residential

Why Does Land Use and Site Design Matter to Development?

Why Does Housing Matter to Health?

Why Does Housing Matter to Health?

Challenges:
o Climate risks
o Interest rates
o Housing costs and burden rates

Opportunities:
o Diversified housing options
o Updates to development codes
o National focus on housing

Detached Single-Family Houses · Duplex · Cottage Court · Fourplex · Townhouse · Triplex Stacked · Multiplex Medium · Courtyard Building · Live/Work · Mid-Rise

Missing Middle Housing

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OPTICOS

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HOUSING GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. **Serve diverse housing needs.**
   1.1. Does it expand the diversity of housing types and sizes in the area, including diversity in terms of square footage, number of bedrooms, height, stories, and designs?
   1.2. Does it include both renter- and owner-occupied units?
   1.3. Is it designed to allow for aging in place or does it have units serving various generations' needs?

2. **Promote access to affordable housing.**
   2.1. Does it provide affordable housing to:
      - Extremely low-income households (at or below 30% of AMI)?
      - Very low-income households (at or below 50% of AMI)?
      - Low-income households (at or below 80% of AMI)?
      - Workforce households (80% to 120% of AMI)?
   2.2. Does it create a mix of housing types either within the development or the larger area (including townhomes, traditional large-lot single family, dense single family, duplexes, triplexes, four-plexes, accessory dwelling units, condominiums, apartments, etc.)?
   2.3. For multi-family housing, does it include a variety of differently sized units, such as studio apartments, 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units, live/work units, multi-plexes, townhomes, and/or lofts?
   2.4. Is government-subsidized affordable housing distributed throughout the development and not concentrated in a specific area?
   2.5. Is affordable housing designed to look like market-rate housing?

3. **Prioritize people over vehicles.**
   3.1. Do driveways or garages face the street?
   3.2. Does it include alley access?
   3.3. Can driveways be shortened, and are driveways necessary?

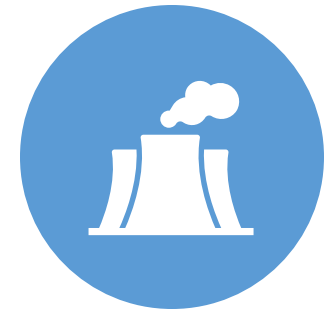# Environmental Health
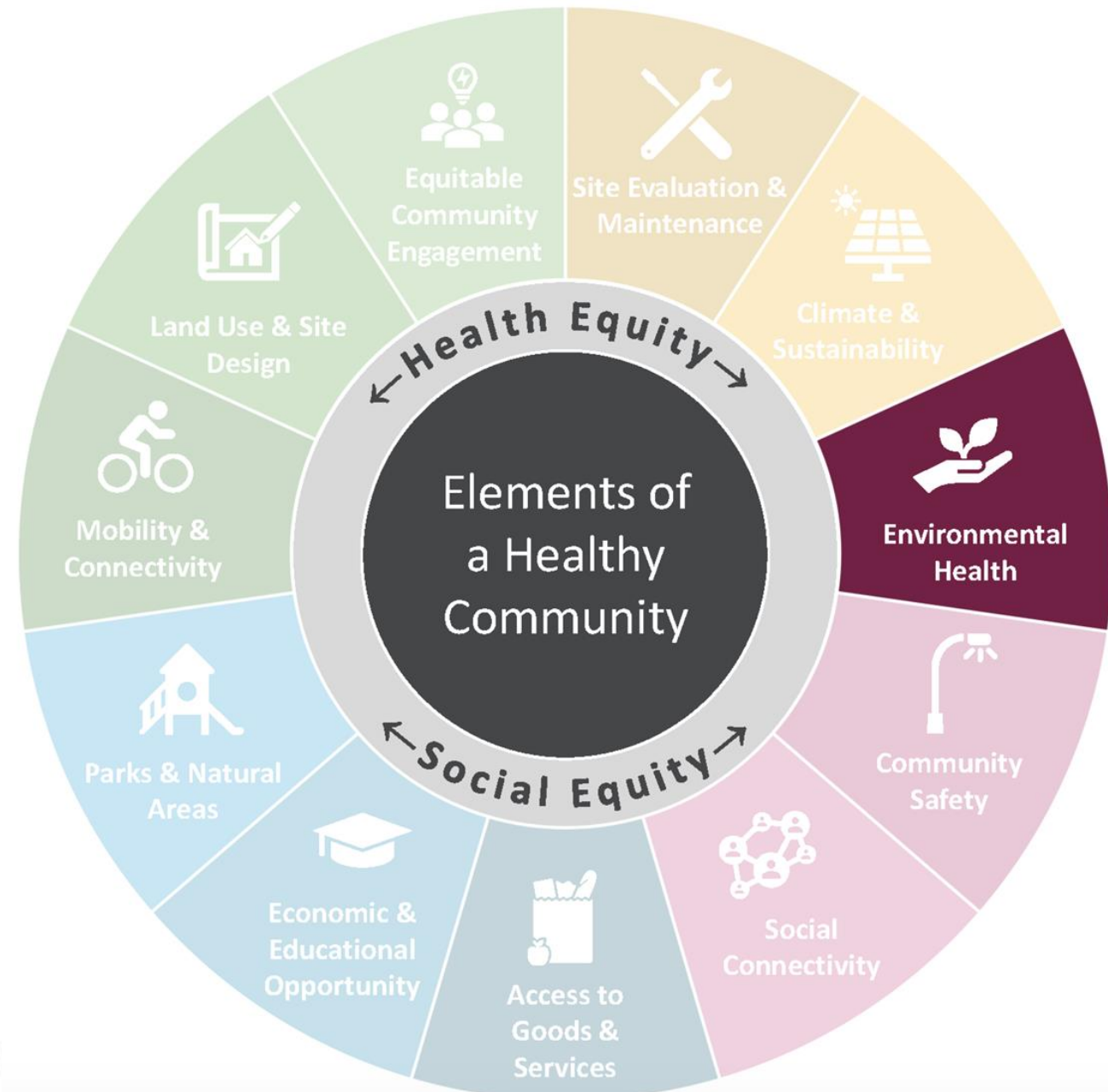
What is Environmental Health?

INDOOR +
OUTDOOR AIR
QUALITY

WATER QUALITY +
QUANTITY

NOISE POLLUTION

EXPOSURE TO
CHEMICALS +
HAZARDOUS LAND
USES

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Why Does Environmental Health Matter to Development?

- Land and property values
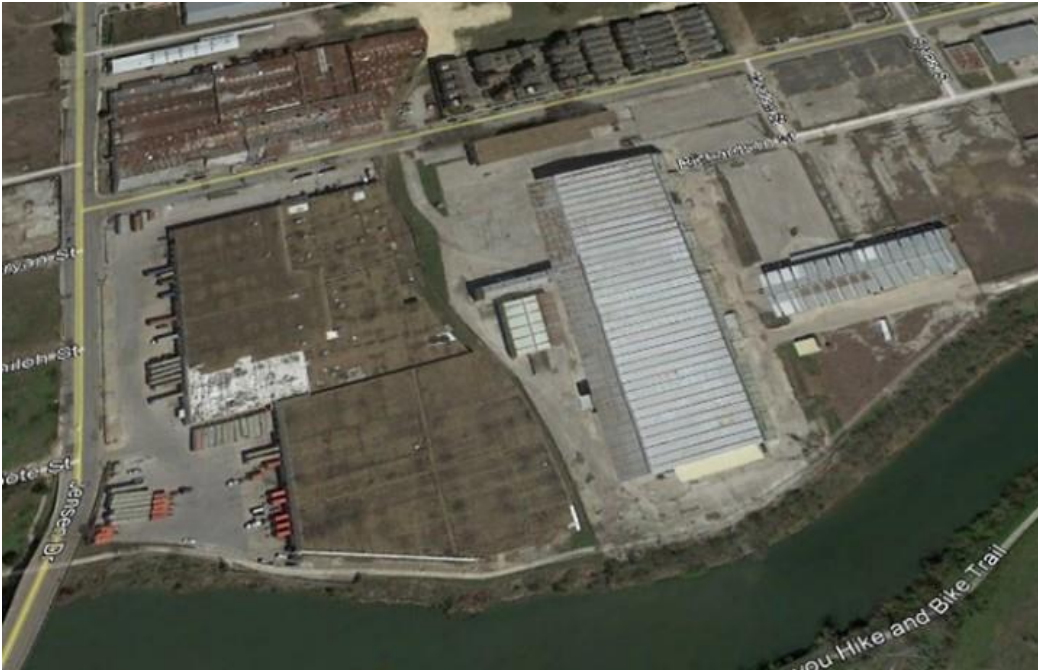- No zoning
- Materials and design directly impact human health

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Why Does Environmental Health Matter to Public Health?
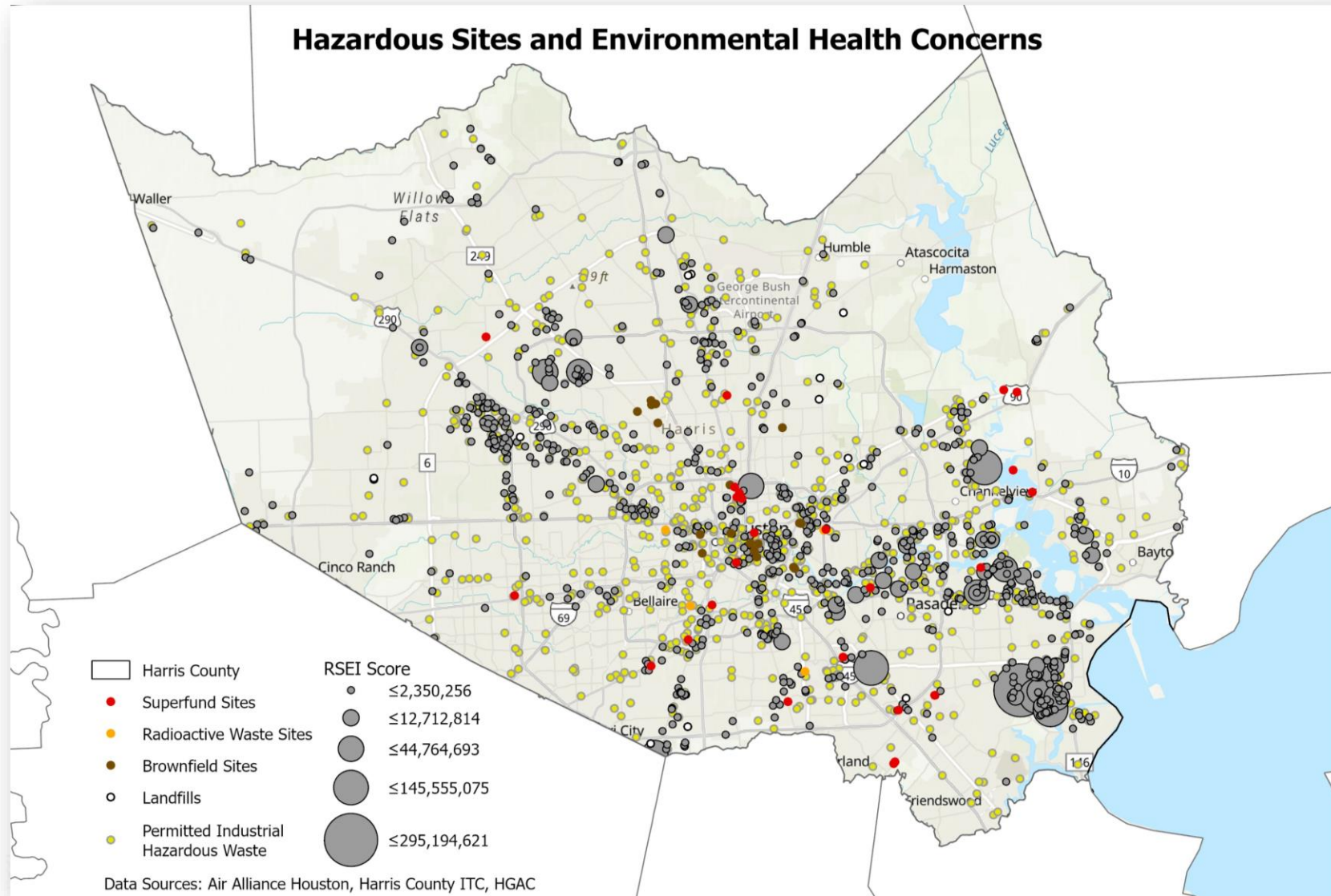
What Does Environmental Health Look Like in Harris County?

What Does Environmental Health Look Like in Harris County?

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. **Design for a safe and healthy indoor space.**

   1.1. Do all the building(s) have central air and heat?

   1.2. Do the windows allow for natural light and views of nature?[251]

2. **Promote good indoor air quality.**

   2.1. Is smoking banned indoors?

   2.2. Are windows operable to allow for airflow?

   2.3. Do air filters and purifiers meet or exceed industry standards?

   2.4. Does it prioritize using wood, tile, or concrete over carpet, which is known to hold allergens?

3. **Promote good outdoor air quality.**

   3.1. Are residential areas and schools located at least 500 feet from major roadways and highways to avoid poor air quality?

4. **Minimize noise pollution.**

5. **Promote good water quality.**

Healthy Development Guide Group Discussion

Designing Affordable, Healthy Housing in a High-Risk Flood Zone

Context: A developer is planning a new affordable housing project in a high-risk flood zone. The project aims to balance resilience, affordability, and health by incorporating climate-smart design, energy-efficient buildings, and accessible green spaces.

1. Who are the stakeholders?
2. What elements of the Healthy Development Guide did you incorporate?
3. How will you ensure long-term affordability while maintaining healthy living conditions?
4. Do you have examples of similar projects in your work?

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Time for a break!
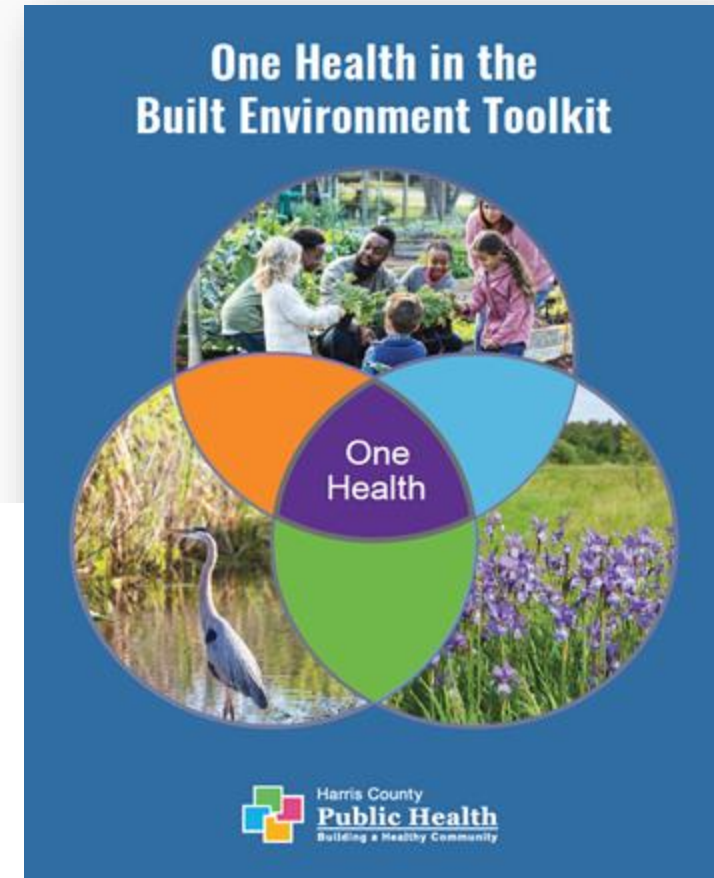
One Health in the Built Environment Toolkit

Purpose:

High-level evaluation of opportunities to bring principles of One Health into actions that uplift health for all.

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What is the One Health in the Built Environment Toolkit?

- Non-regulatory tool
- Showcases best practices of One Health principles, environmental design, and planning to maximize equity, health, and well-being
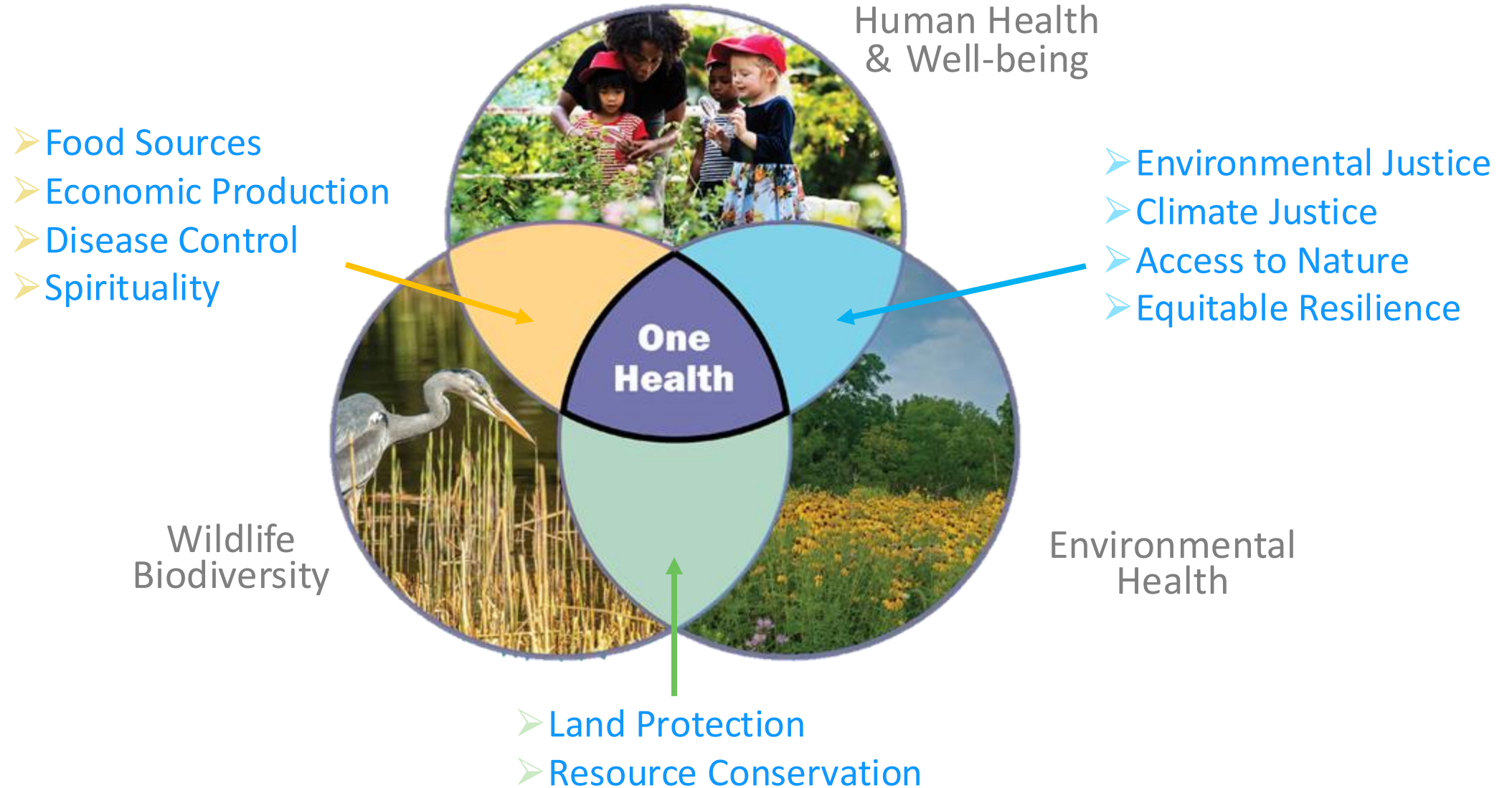- Brings nature and animals to the forefront of conversations

What is One Health?

One Health embraces interconnections between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment

One Health Actions aim to achieve optimal health outcomes for all residents

The One Health Framework

Human Health & Well-being

➢Food Sources
➢Economic Production
➢Disease Control
➢Spirituality

➢Environmental Justice
➢Climate Justice
➢Access to Nature
➢Equitable Resilience

One Health

Wildlife Biodiversity

Environmental Health

➢Land Protection
➢Resource Conservation

Action Categories

Mobility

Stormwater

Architectural-Structural

Greening

Community Capacity

Greening Actions

Parks

Native Gardens

Community Agriculture

Plant Nurseries

Habitat & Wildlife Support

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Implementing One Health

Engaging
- Community Engagement
- Setting Goals and Targets
- Understanding Baseline Conditions

Designing and Implementing
- Designing
- Partnering
- Funding
- Implementing

Operating and Adapting
- Maintaining
- Adapting

Evaluating and Communicating Outcomes
- Monitoring
- One Health Index
- Communicating

Built Environment Improvement Actions — One Health Benefits matrix (Harris County Public Health)

KEY:
- Indirect Benefits
- Direct Benefits

One Health Benefits
- + Low/Low/Med
- ++ Low/Low/High
- +++ Med/Med/High
- ++++ Med/High/High

Built Environment Improvement Actions	Human Health	Environment	Wildlife / Biodiversity	One Health
MOBILITY				
• Pedestrian	HIGH	LOW	LOW	++
• Bicycle	HIGH	LOW	LOW	++
• Vehicular	MEDIUM	LOW	LOW	+
STORMWATER MANAGEMENT				
• Non-Vegetated	LOW	MEDIUM	LOW	+
• Linear Systems	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	+++
• Bioretention	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	+++
• Stream Enhancement	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	+++
ARCHITECTURAL-STRUCTURAL				
• Green Roof	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH	+++
• Vertical Green	LOW	LOW	HIGH	++
GREENING				
• Parks & Schoolyards	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	+++
• Gardens - Yards - Balconies	HIGH	MEDIUM	HIGH	++++
• Community Agriculture	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	+++
• Plant Nursery	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	++
• Habitat & Wildlife Support	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	++++
COMMUNITY CAPACITY				
• Gathering Spaces	MEDIUM	LOW	LOW	+
• Community Services	HIGH	LOW	LOW	++
• Enterprise Zone	HIGH	LOW	LOW	++
• Public Art	MEDIUM	LOW	LOW	+

Build Co-Benefits Over Time

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One Health Toolkit Group Discussion

Redeveloping a Neighborhood Park for Community Health

Context: A city planning department is redeveloping a neighborhood park **to promote physical activity, community engagement, and environmental sustainability.** The department is considering adding walking trails, shaded areas, community gardens, and improved lighting.

1. Who are the stakeholders?
2. What elements of the One Health Toolkit did you incorporate?
3. How does the project address both public health and environmental resilience?
4. What are some ways to measure the success of the project in terms of the elements the city sought to promote?
5. Do you have examples of similar projects in your work?

Roundtable #2:
Designing for Healthy Communities

- June 26, 9AM-11:30AM (networking 9-9:30AM)

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