

great
ourregion
2040

Part 1 of 2



Our Region, A **Great** Region

Our Region is the 13 counties and 134 cities and towns within the 12,500-square mile Houston-Galveston Area Council service area. It is the place that more than 6 million of us call home. By 2040, forecasts predict that we will add another 3.7 million residents to this total, along with 2 million more jobs.

Our Region excels by many important measures – a robust economy, diverse population, abundant natural assets, and a variety of distinctive communities. But there are also concerns—some immediate and some longer term—that we will need to address if we are going to be a Great Region in 2040.

What can we do **today** to ensure an even better **tomorrow**?





Our Great Region 2040 offers a road map to make sure we are a great region in 2040, including the following **Big Ideas**:

Our Great Region 2040

Our Great Region 2040 is a high-level plan whose aim is for Our Region to be one of the world's greatest places to live, work, and succeed, as defined by measurable goals, by the year 2040.

It is the result of the efforts of hundreds of organizations and thousands of people from across H-GAC's 13-county service area.

It is based on research, analysis, and extensive public input, along with the knowledge and expertise of local leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, spanning Our Region's urban, suburban, rural, and coastal areas.

Its recommendations build on many successful local initiatives, as well as new ideas generated during the plan's development. Some entail regional collaboration; others can be pursued by local communities, now, or in the future. All are entirely voluntary; so the success of this plan will be up to us.

Hitting these marks will require a concerted effort, including efficient public investments and stewardship of taxpayer dollars, an engaged private sector, and the active participation of community-based organizations and individuals that reflect the diverse voices of Our Region.

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Economic Development

Strengthening our economic competitiveness through an educated and skilled workforce



Environment

Securing a clean and ample water supply



Healthy Communities

Cultivating places where people can lead active, healthy lives



Housing

Providing balanced housing choices near jobs, services, and transportation options



Transportation

Achieving a world-class transportation network



Resiliency

Increasing our resiliency to disaster and a changing environment



Our Region's Communities

Our Region is made up of a variety of communities, including coastal, rural, suburban, and urban areas. Participants from all these areas helped ensure the strategies and recommendations in *Our Great Region 2040* can be tailored to the unique needs of each of these areas. Important considerations in moving forward on the plan's initiatives are maintaining local autonomy and citizen involvement in decision-making and the protection of private property rights.

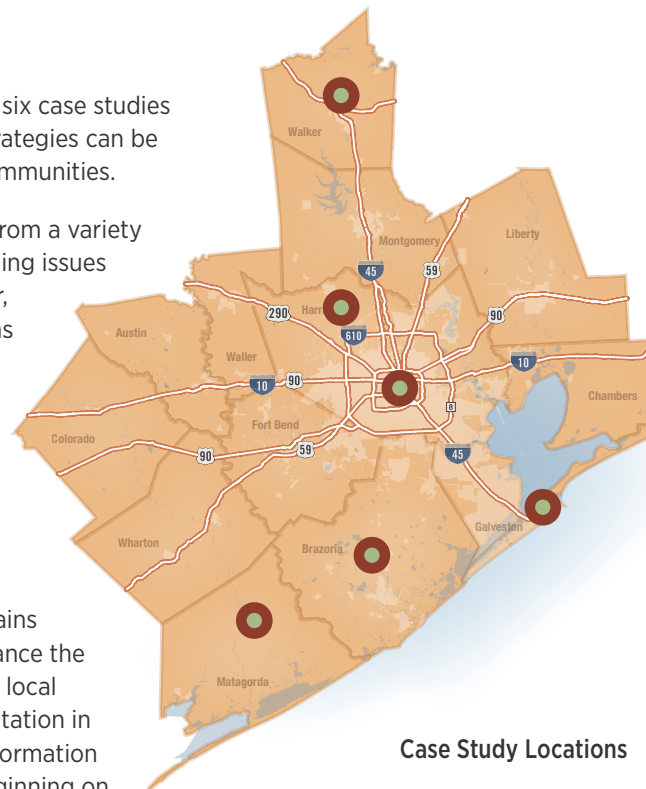


Case Studies

Our Great Region 2040 includes six case studies that highlight ways the plan's strategies can be implemented in Our Region's communities.

The case studies were selected from a variety of entities and examine overarching issues of regional importance. Together, they provide a tool box of actions and practices that can be used by other communities across Our Region as they respond to similar challenges and opportunities.

Beginning on page 6, the six Big Ideas of the plan are explored by topic area. Each section contains voluntary strategies to help advance the concepts of the plan as well as a local example of advancing implementation in the case study. More detailed information about the strategies is found beginning on page 22.



Case Study Locations

Goals for Our Great Region 2040

The 15 goals of the plan are organized around the framework of "People, Places, and Prosperity." The public helped shape these goals through an extensive public engagement process. These goals allow us to help measure our progress and success toward achieving the vision of a great region.

People

- Residents have access to education and training opportunities to allow them to realize their full potential
- Residents live in safe, healthy communities with transportation options, including walking, biking, transit, and driving
- Our Region enjoys clean and plentiful water, air, soil, and food resources to sustain healthy future generations
- Residents are physically and mentally healthy and are able to lead healthy lifestyles
- Our Region provides choices for individuals and for local communities to fulfill their needs





Places

- Our Region coordinates infrastructure, housing, and transportation investments, creating areas of opportunity and enhancing existing neighborhoods
- Our Region values and preserves its unique ecosystems, working landscapes, parks, and open spaces, and the ecological benefits they provide
- Communities have a range of quality housing choices that meet the diverse needs and preferences of all residents
- Our Region efficiently uses, reuses, and conserves its natural resources by managing waste
- Communities are strengthened by strong social ties, local gathering places, and residents who participate in social, civic, service, and faith organizations



Prosperity

- Our Region has a diverse economy and skilled workforce that support businesses, innovation, and entrepreneurship
- Residents have access to job opportunities that support a good quality of life and financial stability
- Transportation infrastructure promotes effective goods movement and is well-connected to other global destinations
- Our Region embraces its rich multicultural, historical, and natural assets to ensure our communities retain their unique character
- Our Region is resilient and adaptive to economic downturns and environmental or natural disasters



Economic Development



To be a great region in 2040, we should strengthen our economic competitiveness through an educated and skilled workforce.

A strong economy not only means having diverse, good-paying jobs, but also being able to attract new types of employment that will keep Our Region competitive and thriving, providing more opportunities for all to prosper.

What?

Our Region has one of the most robust economies in the nation with major economic assets including the energy, agriculture and medical industries; international ports; and new plant expansions. However, our workforce is aging and our schools are not producing enough skilled workers to keep pace with

the growing economy. Continuing Our Region's economic success depends on keeping and attracting businesses, creating diverse job choices, and providing access to technology to all areas of Our Region. Continued success also depends on having a competitive workforce. Early career and technical education, expanded apprenticeships, job training centers, and community college programs will strengthen the employment base and ensure the competitiveness of Our Region.

Why?

- A skilled and educated workforce will enable us to “locally source” the jobs that our employers need to fill, improving their competitiveness and raising workers’ incomes as well as attracting new businesses.
- An educated, employable workforce will reduce unemployment and poverty in Our Region, lowering public costs for housing and other social programs.
- Residents employed in jobs that provide financial security will have a better quality of life and will add to Our Region’s economy by spending money at local businesses.

Strategies

This section emphasizes how Our Region can maintain a **competitive economy**, support **thriving businesses**, and develop a **prepared workforce**.

- Improve the opportunities for lifelong learning by scaling up and coordinating efforts, from quality early childhood education to GED and community education programs to skills training for seniors.
- Expand programs to improve job and financial skills and promote self sufficiency.
- Increase availability of information on job skills needed by employers to educational institutions, allowing them to better tailor their course and training offerings.
- Promote business attraction and retention efforts through multi-jurisdictional coordination and financial incentives.
- Increase availability of high speed data connections and broadband Internet across the region, especially in rural areas.
- Institute a “buy local, make local, grow local” campaign to support local businesses.

More information for these strategies is on pages 22 - 23 or online at www.ourregion.org.



Additional Resources

Measuring Our Progress

Achieving the goals and Big Ideas in the plan will take time. We can measure Our Region's progress by tracking key indicators. Often referred to as performance metrics, the indicators need to be meaningful and based on quantifiable data.

Examples of metrics that can be used to measure progress toward the **Economic Development** Big Idea include:

- High school completion rate
- Number of skills training and workforce programs
- Rate of job growth

The Gulf Coast Workforce Board's *Workforce Report Card* is a successful example of using performance metrics. This annual report evaluates Our Region compared to other similar regions in the U.S. and considers industries, jobs, quality of life, education and overall well-being. The report also assesses the Houston-Galveston region in the context of a larger, global economy.

Visit www.ourregion.org to learn more about the performance metrics included in the *Our Great Region 2040* plan.

Case Study

Bay City North Downtown Plan

New manufacturing facilities will bring an additional 900 jobs to Bay City in Matagorda County over the next five years. However the city currently lacks the housing options and retail amenities to accommodate a growing workforce, particularly younger workers.

This case study presents a master plan for a 40-acre, primarily vacant area, north of Bay City's historic downtown. Today, this area is unattractive to residents and visitors, but it also represents a potential site for a quality mixed-use development, offering a range of housing choices that can respond to the emerging market demand and add to the city's tax base.

The study recommends a phased approach to redeveloping this area, funded by a combination of public and private investments. The four-year plan includes projects such as building demolition and site clearing on city-owned properties; infrastructure upgrades; enhancements to waterways, parks, and trails; and streetscape updates, including sidewalks and plazas. Incentives and public-private partnership techniques are outlined to encourage private development, including apartments, townhomes, patio homes, traditional single-family homes, and mixed-use projects offering commercial and residential space.

This local example examines local implementation of strategies focusing on:



Economic Development



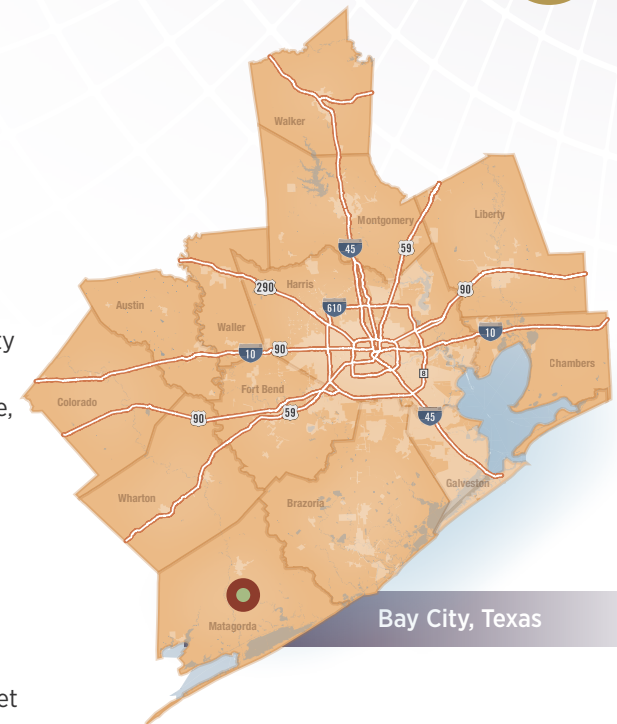
Transportation



Environment



Housing



Bay City, Texas

Environment



To be a great region in 2040, we should secure a clean and ample water supply.



Our Region's 16,000 miles of waterways and coastlines, along with our 3,000 parks and natural areas, are among our greatest assets. Having clean air, water, and outdoor recreational opportunities will be crucial to Our Region's future health, quality of life, and economic vitality.

What?

As Our Region grows in population, our water demand will also increase for irrigation, agriculture, business and industry, recreation, and drinking. But our water supply is finite and is reduced in times of drought. The quality of our water is also a concern—most waterways in Our Region do not meet state water quality standards for recreation. Ensuring that our water is clean, not only for drinking, but also to maintain healthy fisheries and recreational opportunities, is an important part of securing our water future. Developing new supplies, increasing water conservation and reuse, and protecting water quality will be crucial to ensuring we have adequate resources in the future.

Why?

- Having clean and ample water is a primary economic factor for continued growth and directly impacts an appreciable portion of our current economy.
- Reducing water pollution can lower the cost of treating our drinking water and unlock the recreational potential of our waterways.
- Designing development that takes advantage of natural systems can reduce infrastructure costs and help conserve water.
- Preserving natural areas, especially along waterways, can reduce runoff pollution and provide other benefits, such as floodwater storage, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

Strategies

This section emphasizes how Our Region can protect the **quality of the environment**, improve how we **manage resources**, and increase awareness of the **value of ecological benefits**.

- Work together on long term structural solutions to increase water storage and distribution capacity.

- Create watershed protection plans to protect recharge zones and water sources, as well as waterways and wetland buffer areas.
- Establish alliances to coordinate water conservation and protection efforts across Our Region, including sharing data and best practices, developing financial incentives, and implementing public awareness programs.
- Increase awareness of the economic benefits of environmental systems.
- Conserve natural assets through multi-benefit green infrastructure projects and designing with nature, such as Low Impact Development and expanding Our Region's network of open space and trails along waterways.
- Develop a regional plan to conserve high quality natural areas.
- Promote efficient resource management, including energy, solid waste, and water.

More information for these strategies is on pages 24 - 25 or online at www.ourregion.org.

Case Study

Additional Resources

Strategy Playbook

The *Strategy Playbook* describes more than 80 voluntary strategies individuals, organizations, and governments can use to implement the vision, goals, and objectives of *Our Great Region 2040*. The playbook includes a suite of funding sources, tools, and successful examples used in Our Region and elsewhere.

Examples of **environmental strategies** described in the *Strategy Playbook* include:

- Create a regional forestry management plan.
- Promote voluntary efforts showcasing private innovation in reducing industrial emissions.
- Develop a model program to promote the reuse of construction and demolition debris.

Visit www.ourregion.org to download the *Strategy Playbook* and additional resources.

Brazoria County Plan for Public Parks and Sustainable Development

Brazoria County's coastal ecosystem contains some of the highest quality natural areas in Our Region. Its bottomland forests, rivers, bayous, bays, and coastline provide wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

This case study lays out a coastal master plan for the Brazoria County Parks Department that contains a new set of management practices to protect the county's coastal natural resources, along with strategies for accommodating new growth in ways that take advantage of the natural landscape. Major recommendations include phased expansion of the public parks system and other public lands and improving access and providing amenities such as trails, kayak launches, and educational displays. Conservation design techniques, such as preserving wildlife habitat within new developments, using native plants in landscape, and using natural systems to help buffer storm surges and store flood waters, are also detailed.

This local example examines local implementation of strategies focusing on:



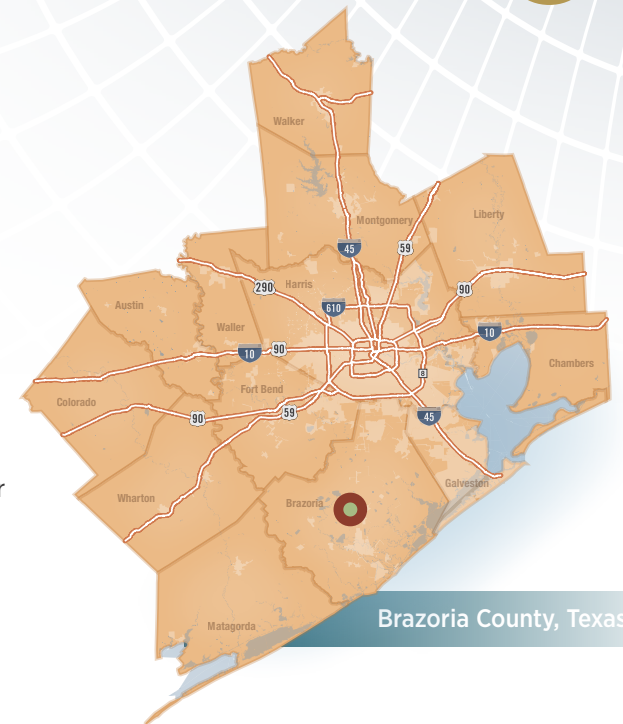
Environment



Healthy Communities



Economic Development



Brazoria County, Texas

Healthy Communities



To be a great region in 2040, we should cultivate places where people can lead active, healthy lives.

Our Region is home to a world-class medical center, but our rates of some preventable diseases are higher than national averages.

What?

Our Region's overall wellness could be improved and healthcare expenditures could be reduced by cultivating healthy communities - places where people have better access to parks, bikeways, and safe routes to school. Unfortunately, almost half of the people in Our Region live more than 10 minutes from a park or natural area. Active mobility and outdoor recreation can reduce obesity and

the associated health care costs, as can strategies to provide access to healthy food in communities where it is lacking. Many of the strategies for cultivating healthier places can be achieved through better planning and community design, as well as investing in facilities.

Why?

- As Our Region becomes healthier, people will spend less time and money on healthcare, while improving their overall quality of life.
- Illness leads to reduced wages and job loss, hurting our economy through lost taxes and less disposable income.
- With adequate mental healthcare choices, Our Region can prioritize resources, ensuring people have access to the help they need.
- Many healthcare concerns, such as some forms of diabetes, obesity, high cholesterol, and heart disease, are preventable.
- Walkable and bikable communities with ample green space and access to healthy food make Our Region healthier, more livable, and economically competitive.

Strategies

This section emphasizes how Our Region can promote **healthy lifestyles**, increase **access to healthy foods**, and improve **access to care**.

- Establish regional infrastructure and distribution mechanisms to support farmers markets, local agriculture, and other means to provide fresh, healthy food to residents across Our Region.
- Increase current funding and identify innovative funding sources to develop and maintain sidewalks, bikeways, bikeshare infrastructure, and parks/open space that promote more active lifestyles.
- Create a regional task force that works across multiple disciplines (health departments, public safety) to address mental health issues.
- Foster neighborhoods that put an emphasis on health, incorporating elements that promote active living, social interaction, and healthy eating, and allow for aging in place.
- Identify and promote existing and emerging community resources for mental health services.
- Expand availability of community health services and trauma care, particularly in low-income and rural areas.

More information for these strategies is on pages 26 - 27 or online at www.ourregion.org.



Case Study

Building on Success

The success of *Our Great Region 2040* will depend on the support and participation of many in Our Region. However, we are not starting from scratch. Local governments, organizations, and individuals across Our Region are already taking part in activities that promote the goals, Big Ideas and strategies of this plan.

Several of these efforts support **Healthy Communities** and are highlighted in a video series on www.ourregion.org, including:

- Environmental education and energy-efficient schools
- Pedestrian and bicyclist-friendly streets
- Farmers markets and community gardens

The project website, www.ourregion.org, also includes a *Guidebook for Local Governments*, highlighting strategies similar to those found in *Our Great Region 2040* that have been successful in other areas across the country, and a *Community Resource Guide*, connecting residents with state and local programs available in Our Region.

Cypress Creek Greenway

The Bayou Greenway Initiative aims to develop a network of parks and trails along the major bayous that flow across multiple jurisdictions, spanning many diverse communities in and around Harris County. Once complete, this greenway network will provide significant environmental, health, and quality of life benefits, along with the increased property values that are associated with recreational amenities.

This case study looks specifically at the necessary steps for creating the Cypress Creek Greenway, including funding sources and financing strategies. The study also addresses vehicles for promoting coordination among local jurisdictions including Harris County, municipal utility and other special districts, non-profit organizations, schools, neighborhood groups, and businesses.

This local example examines local implementation of strategies focusing on:



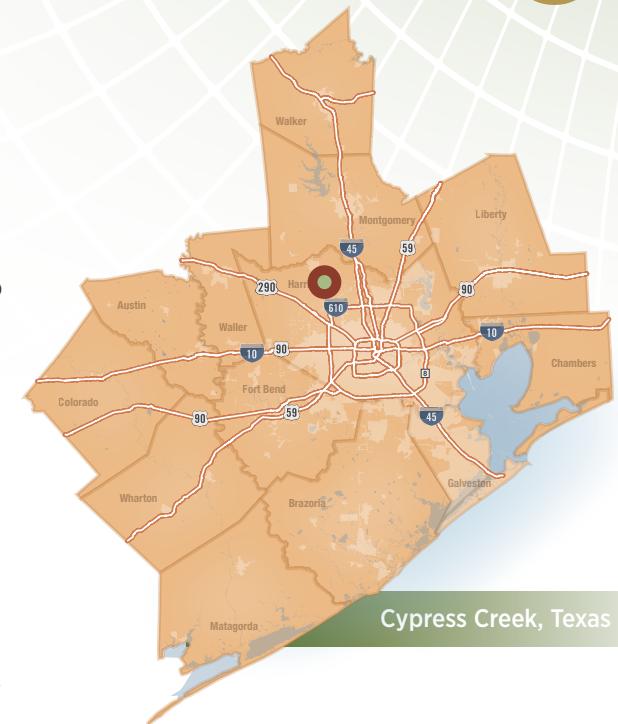
Healthy Communities



Economic Development



Transportation



Cypress Creek, Texas

Housing



To be a great region in 2040, we should provide balanced housing choices near jobs, services, and transportation options.

Everyone in Our Region should have the opportunity to have safe and healthy housing choices that offer access to opportunities and amenities.

What?

Our Region's residents live in dense urban centers, rural towns and suburban communities, near forestlands, on open farm or ranchland, and along the coast. We have a thriving housing market and some of the most affordable housing in the country. However, homeownership is below the national average and housing options for some in Our Region

are unsafe, unhealthy, or have poor access to transportation, employment, and services. We need coordinated strategies to improve code enforcement and encourage rehabilitation of older housing, along with policies that encourage development of new housing in underdeveloped areas where there is existing infrastructure, jobs, schools, and services, or where costs and complications are high, such as in urban areas.

Why?

- Our Region's residents can save time and money by living closer to where they work or living closer to public transportation. Reducing combined housing and transportation costs can help ensure residents do not go without other basic needs, such as healthy foods.
- A variety of housing types offers Our Region's residents the opportunity for independence at various stages of life, including aging in place.
- Adequate housing choices will be an asset to companies looking to relocate or expand in Our Region.
- Efficient and healthy housing choices can lead to both utility and healthcare cost savings.

Strategies

This section emphasizes how Our Region can help support a **thriving housing market**, provide **housing choices** to meet diverse needs, and provide **quality housing** that is both safe and healthy.

- Develop local housing plans to accommodate future growth.
- Provide financial incentives, such as tax foreclosure property programs or property lien dismissals, for developers to build diverse housing types near jobs, transit centers, and services, including mixed-use developments and housing at a variety of price points.
- Develop incentives and a toolkit for matching and maintaining local housing stock to meet economic development needs, bringing greater access to opportunities.
- Identify gaps and opportunities in the quality and supply of the regional housing stock, including housing for seniors or aging in place.
- Develop and enforce local housing codes and standards to ensure owner-occupied and rental housing is safe and healthy.

More information for these strategies is on pages 28 - 29 or online at www.ourregion.org.



Case Study

Additional Resources

Existing Conditions Report/County Profiles

The *Existing Conditions Report* provides a snapshot of what Our Region looks like today and provides a benchmark that we can use to measure our progress in implementing *Our Great Region 2040*.

Example existing conditions for **housing** include:

- Single-family homes represent 71% of the built housing in Our Region, and multi-family residents (two or more families in the same building) account for 29% of the housing units.
- The percent of owned housing units versus rented units in Our Region is 62%.

While the *Existing Conditions Report* looks at Our Region as a whole, the *County Profiles* examine the different attributes that make each of our communities unique.

Visit www.ourregion.org to explore information about your county.

Harnessing Huntsville's Potential

Huntsville is seeking to diversify its jobs base and its housing stock. Making progress has proven difficult on both of these fronts, and the city has large amounts of land owned by the state and federal governments that is not available for development.

This case study outlines a strategy for the city to capitalize on development opportunities where land is available, especially in the area between downtown Huntsville and Sam Houston State University. It includes recommendations for improved sidewalks, bikeway connections, additional greenspace, and related economic development strategies to create positive branding for the city to use in attracting new businesses and residents.

The study provides a clear framework for addressing other priority issues, such as creating affordable housing options; increasing and diversifying the labor pool; and promoting business development, retention, and expansion. This case study is built on studies and plans the city has already completed and will serve as a guide to prioritize actions identified through these efforts.

This local example examines local implementation of strategies focusing on:



Housing



Environment



Transportation

