

CRIME & SAFETY



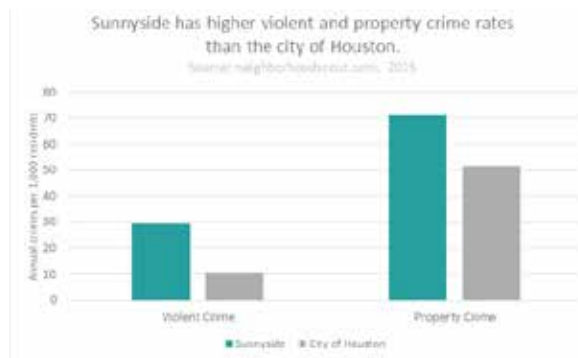
EXISTING CONDITIONS

In 2015, a Census tract in Sunnyside was ranked the 2nd most dangerous neighborhood in the country, according to Neighborhood Scout crime statistics, up from two years ago, when it was ranked the 6th most dangerous neighborhood.⁶² With a violent crime rate nearly triple that of the city of Houston equating to roughly a murder a month, residents want to tackle crime issues in their community before they become like those of other large cities, such as in Chicago and Baltimore.

Traditional crime control methods are not working in Sunnyside. Houston's policing strategies have resulted in extremely high numbers of residents being incarcerated and their lives ruined. Yet even with this high rate of incarceration crime levels remain high.



Hundreds of Sunnyside residents took to the streets in November 2015 as part of a series of "Unity and Peace Walks." Photo by ForwardTimesOnline.com



62 Neighborhood Scout. (2015). "Top 25 most dangerous neighborhoods in America"; Stanton, R. (2013). "Two Houston neighborhoods called most dangerous in U.S." Houston Chronicle.

Sunnyside residents are a caring community yet one which is blighted by violent, prolific crime and drug use. Current anticrime approaches fail to adequately leverage the power of community to prevent community members from resorting to crime. Sunnyside residents want to develop a dialogue between people engaging in crime and community members and leaders who can seek to assert more positive values and engage in more proactive interventions to

prevent these individuals from slipping into more serious crimes.

RESPONSE TIMES

Residents have stated that it often takes police an hour or more to respond to a call, if they ever arrive. This is corroborated by HPD's response time data by police beat.

The table on the following page shows the average response times to calls fielded by the Houston Police Department for 2010 to 2014. These times are categorized by the

“Priority Response Code” which is based on the severity of the caller’s emergency. An “E” indicates the most urgent calls, such as active pursuits or an officer in need of assistance, followed by life threatening situations and property crimes (prioritized based on whether they are in progress or already happened), and finally minor infractions and municipal ordinance violations. While HPD is, on average, meeting their response time goals for the most serious calls, they are failing to meet their goals for less serious crimes citywide.

Average response times for Sunnyside’s beat (14D10) are shown below. Although citywide response times have been failing to meet the department’s goals for Codes 3-5 since 2014, HPD has failed to respond to these codes in Sunnyside for the last four consecutive years. In the case of Codes 4 and 5, Sunnyside residents, on average, must wait well over an hour for an officer to respond to their call. This is well above the department’s goal of around half an hour. Average response times in emergency calls have also been higher than the department’s goals. In an area with extremely high levels of reported crime like Sunnyside it is doubly important to have a rapid and adequate police response.

Priority Response Codes	CY 2010	CY 2011	CY 2012	CY 2013	CY 2014*	Total Response Time Goal
E	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.5	5
1	4.4	4.6	4.9	5.0	5.0	6
2	8.7	9.2	9.8	9.6	9.8	10
3	16.6	18.9	22.0	22.1	24.8	23
4	25.0	28.7	34.0	34.2	36.8	28
5	23.0	28.2	35.0	34.4	38.4	35

HPD report to city council on response time goals and actual response time averages city wide in minutes. Priority Response Codes Key: E = Officer or firefighter assist; 1 = Threat to life in progress; 2 = Life threat occurred or property crime in progress (urgent); 3= life-threatening delayed report, property crime occurred (non-emergency); 4= serious criminal incident (non-emergency); 5=minor property crime or municipal offense (non-emergency). Source: Houston Police Report to City Council, September 2014.

Response Codes	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Response Time Goal
E	0.6	2.3	6.2	5.3	4.3	5
1	4.0	5.1	3.7	3.7	5.9	6
2	7.7	11.3	7.4	7.6	10.9	10
3	14.1	28.5	23.1	26.8	35.8	23
4	21.0	52.4	38.6	47.3	66.6	28
5	22.4	53.2	42.5	46.6	71.2	35

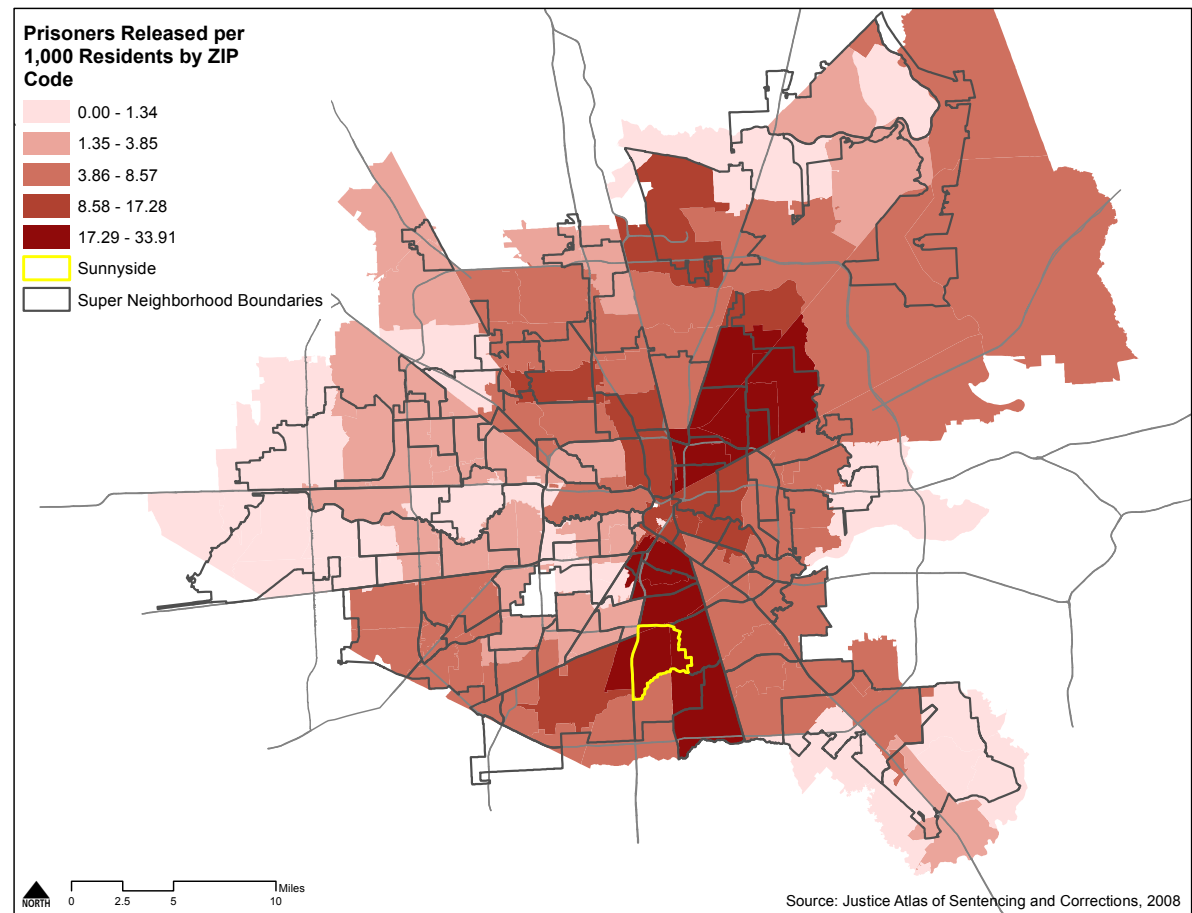
In the recent past, Sunnyside’s police response times have been high for even emergency calls. Today, response times exceed the department’s goals for urgent Code 2 calls. Response times for calls coded as non-emergency codes are exceed the expected time ranges many times over. Source: Houston Police Department, 2015.

INCARCERATION

Sunnyside and other predominantly minority neighborhoods not only experience high crime rates, but also have higher rates of individuals admitted to prisons. Sunnyside’s 77051 ZIP code had the second highest admission rate in the city at 32.94 new prisoners per 1,000 adults, meaning that for every 1,000 adults in 77051, about 33 adults are going to prison each year. Sunnyside was second to Kashmere Gardens. The zip code 77033, which includes a portion of Sunnyside and neighboring South Park, had the third highest admission rate of 28.9. For context, Harris County’s overall admission rate is 5.75 new prisoners per 1,000 adults.

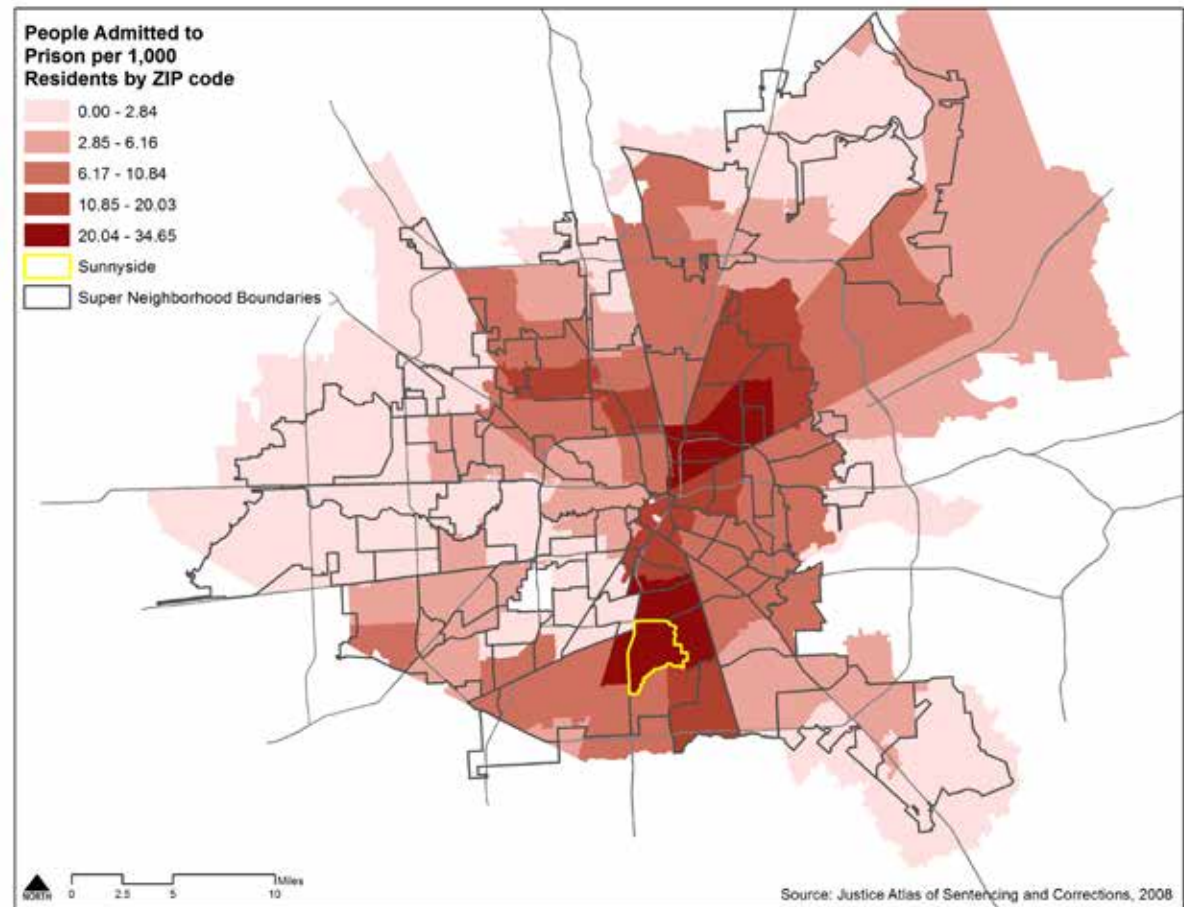
When prisoners are released, they return to Sunnyside at a rate among the highest in the city. Zip code 77051 had the highest prisoner release rate in 2008 at 33.91 prisoners per 1,000 adults. Kashmere Gardens and the Settegast area had the second and third highest prisoner release rates. Harris County overall release rates are 5.35 prisoners per 1,000 adults.

ZIP	Super Neighborhood	Release Rate	Release Count	Cost \$
77051	Sunnyside	33.91	246	6.7M
77026	Kashmere Gardens	30.01	453	12.4M
77028	Settegast	28.06	290	8.0M
77033	South Park	23.37	389	11.3M
77078	East Houston	22.48	204	9.2M



Recently-released prisoners need a support system in place that simply isn't present in Sunnyside. Support services to address substance abuse and mental health problems, access to jobs and education, and a stable home life all contribute to reducing a released prisoner's chance of recidivism.⁶³

ZIP	Super Neighborhood	Admission Rate	Admission Count	Cost \$
77026	Kashmere Gardens	34.65	523	17.0M
77051	Sunnyside	32.94	239	6.2M
77033	South Park	28.9	481	17.8M
77028	Settegast	26.71	276	11.9M
77021	OST/ South Union	23.56	384	13.3M



⁶³ Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, 2012. "Safer, smarter, and more cost-efficient approaches to reducing crime in Texas."

VISION, GOALS & STRATEGIES

Vision

Sunnyside will be a place where residents feel safe due to:

- **a responsive police presence,**
- **a focus on crime prevention, and**
- **a local culture that cultivates respect amongst its citizens and thereby maintains a low rate of crime.**

Goals

1. Improved police response and protection to enhance witnesses' willingness to report crime
2. Foster a more trusting police-community relationship
3. Emphasize crime prevention, not reaction
4. Support the successful reintegration a person's returning from prison into the community

Performance Indicators

- Reduction in 2015 violent and property crime rates
- Reduction in average response rates among all call codes
- Number of police officers on beat
- Increase in proportion of crimes with a witness
- Average response time in Sunnyside
- Enrollment in youth law enforcement programs
- Resident perception surveys

Strategies

Goal 1: Improved police response and protection to enhance witnesses' willingness to report crime

Ensure residents feel safe to report crime and provide witness statements. Since residents say they often wait hours for police to respond to a call in Sunnyside, residents feel that they are a very low priority to police officers. Some fear retaliation from those causing crimes if they speak up as a witness. If more witnesses could feel comfortable enough to come forward with knowledge of crimes committed in their community, potentially fewer crimes would go unsolved.

Part of encouraging witness statements increasing willingness to provide witness statements may involve changing policy to improve police protections for witnesses of crimes.

Goal 2: Continue to foster a more trusting police-community relationship

Assess existing youth law enforcement programs and national best practices for youth and police programs. Many residents are interested in law enforcement's youth programs, but often they are unaware of the outcomes of the programs or when they inquire programs are full. More needs to be done by the police department to

understand whether these programs are effective in their intended purposes and to expand the ones that are. This should involve extensive community engagement with area youth and parents in higher crime areas such as Sunnyside to understand their needs. The city should then research national best practices for police programs that would better engage youth in law enforcement activities and meet the needs to Houston families. Mentoring or training from HPD could help foster a homegrown police force, supporting community policing efforts.

Establish a community policing model in Sunnyside. Traditional policing often focuses on responding to emergency calls to protect civilians from criminals. Community policing, in contrast, assists civilians in creating a safe and orderly environment by not only responding to criminal activity in progress, but by also utilizing civilian education, proactive patrol techniques, increased accountability, and officer discretion. Community policing is an opportunity for community residents and police to learn more about one another and to break down dangerous stereotypes.

Some steps Houston could take to move toward a community policing model include:

- Appoint police officers to beats who live in the beat;

- Require officers to perform proactive patrol techniques such as bike and foot patrols;
- Encourage police to get to know neighborhood youth by instituting a monthly sports game or other more informal afterschool interactions between police and the community; and
- Institute implicit community bias training for the community and police to attend (require the training for all officers).

Implement a pathways program for youth and young adults from high-crime neighborhoods to work in local law enforcement. HPD recently admitted that only 20 percent of Houston police officers live in the city of Houston, a figure that adds to the feeling of "them" vs "us" and distrust of police.⁶⁴ This statistic prompted the department to propose to incentivize police officers to live in high crime neighborhoods like Sunnyside.⁶⁵ Instead of trying to entice cops who live in other areas to come live in Sunnyside, HPD should establish a program to recruit and train people from the Sunnyside neighborhood to be police officers. Sunnyside residents should receive incentives to remain residents of the neighborhood in

⁶⁴ Miller, D. "HPD plan would pay officers to live in some neighborhoods." KHOU 11 News. July 28, 2015.

⁶⁵ Driessen, K. "Council punts on program to pay officers to live in high-crime areas." Houston Chronicle.

order to establish a community-based police force.

This program could go beyond “community policing” approach to a more grassroots “community-based” policing. The police department could start by partnering with area high schools and community colleges to develop a program to get those who are most vulnerable to crime and gang life on the right side of the law.

Establish Sunnyside as a laboratory for alternative community crime intervention techniques. Sunnyside could be a Safe Neighborhoods Laboratory where community residents, the police department and universities work together to develop alternative, effective practices for community policing, crime prevention and post-incarceration community reintegration. In order to affect this, public funds should be dedicated to the experiment and critical community institutions including churches, schools and civic associations should be brought together with law enforcement officials, sociologists, criminal justice reformers and academic experts to define a new paradigm for crime prevention.

Goal 3: Focus on crime prevention, rather than reaction

Improve educational attainment, employment and community involvement among youth and formerly incarcerated.

Crime rates are higher where there are fewer education or job opportunities. Studies have shown that increased educational attainment reduces criminal activity.⁶⁶ Focusing on school improvements, afternoon programs and jobs for youth, and re-entry or second chance programs and jobs for ex-offenders will help prevent crime in the long-run.

Break the school-to-prison pipeline.

Banning expulsions and suspensions for early grades was the first step HISD took towards breaking the school-to-prison pipeline. Young students who are expelled or suspended are up to 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not.⁶⁷ The traditional form of discipline leads children exhibiting behavioral problems or possible mental health problems from suspensions and expulsions to alternative schools and eventually juvenile court. This process of pushing children out of schools and into the criminal justice system is deemed the school-to-prison pipeline.

⁶⁶ Moretti, E. 2005. “Does education reduce participation in criminal activities?” Columbia University Symposium.

⁶⁷ U.S. Departments of Education & Health and Human Services, *Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Setting*, 2014.

Restorative Discipline in Texas

Restorative Justice is a paradigm shift in how students are disciplined. Like traditional student discipline, Restorative Discipline comes from the criminal justice system. Restorative Discipline gives a voice to all parties in a dispute, aiming to repair relationships between a victim and offender by helping a student understand the harm caused and gives them an opportunity to directly make amends.

Ed White Middle School in San Antonio is nearing the end of a three-year pilot program instituting Restorative Discipline starting in the sixth grade. In 2012, the school had some of the highest disciplinary sanction rates in the district. In its first year, there was an 87 percent drop in off-campus suspension and 44 percent decrease in total suspensions. In the second year, total suspension dropped 57 percent. Test scores also improved. African-American students in particular, showed improvement in passing sixth grade reading and seventh grade math. Special education students’ reading and math scores improved by 42 percent and 50 percent respectively.

Learn more: Ed White Middle School RD Evaluation 2012-2013 and Ed White Middle School RD Evaluation 2013-2014

In order to give students the best chance to succeed, researchers and local subject-matter experts recommend the following:

- Require teacher and administrator training on research-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Restorative Discipline, which have been shown to improve student behavior and graduation rates;
- Create a legal track to expunge records of youth and young adults under 24 years of age;
- Establish a clearly defined policy for teachers to mark students absent to prevent subjectivity that may contribute to disproportionate number of minorities and boys being truant;
- Provide a first line of defense against mental illness in schools by providing counselors and nurses, especially in schools with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students; and
- Partner with local nonprofit organizations and churches to fill the gaps in providing a safe place to continue studies if a student is suspended.

Monitor and enhance programming of group homes and other institutions that could help rehabilitate ex-offenders. All

organizations that provide services for ex-offenders should coordinate their services to maximize effectiveness. The community should monitor these programs based on best practices to ensure clients are receiving services that emphasize rehabilitation, thereby becoming a productive and involved citizen. However, this does not mean that Sunnyside should have to bear the burden of providing all housing and services for formerly incarcerated individuals in the city. People with felonies who were released from prison should have opportunities to live in other neighborhoods, especially when they are not a former Sunnyside residents. In other words, Sunnyside should have the means to successfully reintroduce its sons and daughters following a felony conviction, but it should not have to bear the burden of other communities.

Additionally, persons returning to the community should have alternatives to choose to live in the community that provides them the best option to find employment, education and safety. In some instances they may need to start life anew outside the community they were living in at the time of their arrest and incarceration.

Perform crime and safety prevention seminars at least quarterly. Many residents appreciate police participation in community events, such as civic clubs, block parties and National Night Out. Police officers should

provide crime prevention and other useful information at least quarterly in conjunction with community events such as civic club meetings. If no event is scheduled, officers should hold their own. Although online information is always available, it cannot substitute for regular interaction with residents of the Sunnyside.

Expand cite-and-release program to all victimless marijuana possessions less than 2 ounces regardless of criminal history. On January 1, 2016, the Harris

County District Attorney is making offering a pre-trial diversion program mandatory in all agencies in the county. The program, offered to first-time offenders caught carrying less than two ounces of marijuana, includes fines, community service and drug education classes in lieu of a citation, charges and a record. While this a step in the right direction, no one should have to incur additions to their criminal record for a low-level offense on a drug that is becoming legal or decriminalized in states across the country.⁶⁸

Goal 4: Support and grow community care services

Sunnyside residents believe respect and good citizenship begin with the family. Therefore, residents have suggested quality services for young mothers, parents, and general

⁶⁸ Rogers, B. Nov. 6, 2015. "DA: Marijuana now means a citation, not a ride to jail." *Houston Chronicle*.

community members be offered, such as teen and young adult parenting classes, community dialogue to increase respect for each other, and family counseling centers.

Prioritize prisoner re-entry services in neighborhoods that receive the most released prisoners, such as Sunnyside.

Prisoner re-entry services can be difficult to find upon release. Until a more comprehensive prisoner re-entry program that provides housing and jobs throughout the city for those released from prison, services need to be offered where prisoners are being released. The goal should be to make it easier for ex-offenders to find these services by putting them in the neighborhoods they go. Services should include substance abuse and mental health.

Amend PHA occupancy and admissions standards related to criminal backgrounds and support changes at a federal level to provide ex-offenders with government housing.

Housing policy is splitting up families who have a member with criminal history. Moreover, subsidized housing policies are continuing to punish those who have done their time for their crime. Since 2011, HUD has been allowing public housing authorities to exercise discretion when it comes to criminal background policies for admission to subsidized housing.

Based on the problems outlined by the Shriver Report, HUD recently provided a list of best practices to encourage PHAs to provide “second chances” to those with criminal records:⁶⁹

- *Limiting lookback periods.* Some PHAs administer a 12-month lookback period for drug crimes and 24-month lookback period for violent and property crimes.
- *Avoid using arrest records to deny applicants.* An arrest does not mean a conviction. Limit background screenings to convictions.
- *Specify standards for what constitutes criminal activity.* Enumerate specific factors that will be evaluated in a criminal background check.
- *Allow applicants to provide mitigating circumstances* regarding criminal background checks.
- Allow formerly incarcerated individuals who have been recently released to be *added to an existing voucher of a family member* if all parties consent and the individual agrees to several months of support services from nonprofit organizations.

⁶⁹ Adapted from HUD [PIH Notice 2015-19](#). Issued Nov. 2, 2015. And Shriver Center, 2011. “[When discretion means denial: The use of criminal records to deny low-income people access to federally subsidized housing in Illinois.](#)”

- *Hire reentry specialists* to coordinate between formerly incarcerated tenants and their landlord and treatment provider.

Houston Housing Authority’s current tenant screening process goes against many of these national best practices, namely: 1) rejecting an applicant if any household member has had any criminal activity in the last five years; 2) failing to specify standards for what constitutes criminal activity or “criminal acts”; and failing to limit lookback periods or having too long of lookback periods.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Houston Housing Authority. FY 2016. “Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy.” pg. 9

Stage	Strategy	Target	Associated Goal
Short-term	Ensure residents feel safe to report crime and provide witness statements.	Houston Police Department	Goal 1: Improved police response and protection to enhance witnesses' willingness to report crime
	Assess existing youth law enforcement programs and national best practices for youth and police programs.	Houston Police Department	Goal 2: Foster a more trusting police-community relationship
	Implement a pathways program for youth and young adults from high-crime neighborhoods to work in local law enforcement.	Houston Police Department	Goal 2: Foster a more trusting police-community relationship
	Monitor and enhance programming of group homes and other institutions that could help rehabilitate ex-offenders.	Texas Department of Criminal Justice	Goal 3: Focus on crime prevention, rather than reaction
	Perform crime and safety prevention seminars at least quarterly.	Houston Police Department	Goal 3: Focus on crime prevention, rather than reaction
Short-term/Long-term	Establish a community policing model in Sunnyside.	Houston Police Department	Goal 2: Foster a more trusting police-community relationship
	Break the school-to-prison pipeline.	HISD, Community Organizations	Goal 3: Focus on crime prevention, rather than reaction
	Amend PHA occupancy and admissions standards related to criminal backgrounds and support changes at a federal level to provide ex-offenders with government housing.	Houston Housing Authority	Goal 4: Support and grow community care services
Long-term	Establish Sunnyside as a laboratory for alternative community crime intervention techniques.	Houston Police Department, Independent researchers	Goal 2: Foster a more trusting police-community relationship
	Improve educational attainment, employment and community involvement among youth and formerly incarcerated.	HISD, Houston Community College, Houston Economic Development Department, Department of Neighborhoods, Community organizations	Goal 3: Focus on crime prevention, rather than reaction
	Expand cite-and-release program to all victimless marijuana possessions less than 2 ounces regardless of criminal history.	Harris County District Attorney, City of Houston elected officials	Goal 3: Focus on crime prevention, rather than reaction
	Prioritize prisoner re-entry services in neighborhoods that receive the most released prisoners, such as Sunnyside.	Harris County Mental Health, nonprofit organizations	Goal 4: Support and grow community care services