

COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT,
HOUSING &
INFRASTRUCTURE

Sunnyside Park
Community Center
3502



History teaches us that Houston city government has deliberately created and maintained a hierarchy of neighborhoods citywide, one that compounds advantages for middle and upper-class white neighborhoods, and compounds the disadvantages for low income neighborhoods of color.

This is part of a common pattern of discrimination against African-American communities. Texas civil rights attorneys Mike Daniel and Laura B. Beshara describe these practices by cities directed against African-American neighborhoods this way:

“Segregation continues to be functional for local governments. It allows government to save money by providing unequal services to a less politically powerful population. Segregation avoids inflicting unpopular burdens such as living near facilities such as sewage treatment plants and landfills on more politically powerful populations.

“The results of the barriers will be to subject minority families to either a lower level of benefits or a higher degree of disadvantages or to both. Segregation is not done to give minorities more of the good stuff. Once in place, these barriers inflict another harm over and above the

material effects of the discrimination. The residents of the underserved and over-burdened neighborhoods are also stigmatized by the rest of the community who ascribe the attributes of the neighborhood to its residents.”

The city’s denial of “the good stuff” to Sunnyside in terms of infrastructure and public facilities has been documented throughout this plan. In this section we turn our attention to another form of discriminatory practices by city, state and federal governments against Sunnyside. We examine how government has acted to deny housing opportunities to poor people of color in wealthier and whiter neighborhoods of Houston while deliberately concentrating poverty housing in Sunnyside and other lower-income African-American neighborhoods. The effect of these governmental practices is devastating on both individual families who need subsidized housing and on neighborhoods of color where that subsidized housing is exclusively sited.

The extreme concentration of poverty in Sunnyside is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. Public opinion surveys have shown for decades that African-

Americans tend to prefer a racially integrated neighborhood.⁷¹

The problem is that a racially integrated neighborhood is very hard to find. In the words of historian Andrew Weise:

“Racism not only limited black access to employment, credit, and public facilities, but it ensured that most African-Americans lived in a racially separate and materially unequal world. Housing discrimination hemmed them in, efforts to segregate schools and other public facilities affected people regardless of class, and other distinctly spatial practices—such as redlining, commercial disinvestment, industrial polluting, and political gerrymandering—compounded race and class inequalities, imposing a burden on everyone who lived in black neighborhoods and limiting the empowering potential of black space.”

Tragically, the type of conditions that drove African-Americans to reject the overcrowded, segregated, physical and environmentally blighted conditions and substandard housing found in the old inner city neighborhoods of Houston a century ago are being maintained today through public policy in Sunnyside.

The result is the same as 100 years ago:

71 Farley, R., Fielding, E. L., & Krysan, M. (1997). The residential preferences of Blacks and Whites: A four-metropolis analysis. *Housing Policy Debate*, 8, 763-800.

many would-be residents with the economic means to do so reject a blighted community for housing opportunities in other neighborhoods and especially in increasingly distant suburbs. The forces that maintain these conditions are still in place after more than 100 years.

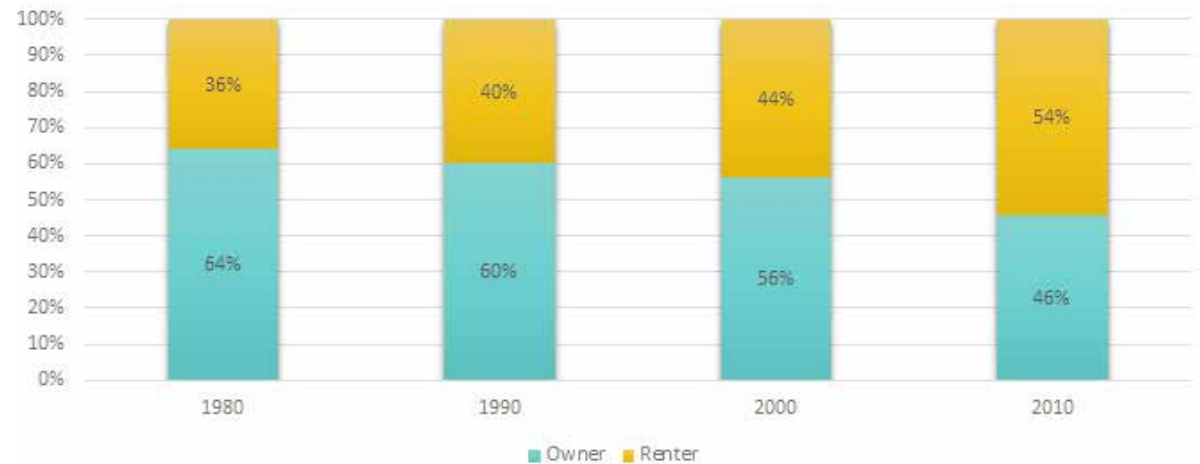
Racial and economic segregation resulting in extreme concentrations of poverty is produced by concentrating the development of government-subsidized housing for extremely low income renters in communities like Sunnyside while blocking the development of any government-subsidized housing in higher income, majority white neighborhoods of Houston. This not only denies low income people of color the opportunity to choose where to live, a right under federal and state law, but it hurts Sunnyside as a community by upsetting the balance of homeowners to renters and the balance of working households to non-working households.

Research is clear that the mere presence of people in poverty and the presence of subsidized housing for the poor generally does not have a negative impact on a neighborhood until the numbers become very high. The effect of poverty concentration appears of little consequence until the percentages exceed 20 percent.⁷²

72 Galster, G.C. 2010. "The mechanism(s) of neighborhood effects: Theory, evidence, and policy

Sunnyside's proportion of homeowners has declined each decade.

Source: ACS 2009-2013



At that point the over concentration of poor households is associated with poorer economic, educational, and health outcomes.⁷³ The longer the imbalance is present, the more harm it does in terms of multigenerational familial poverty. Poverty in Sunnyside has reached 35 percent.

The city of Houston has historically over-concentrated subsidized and low income rental housing in Sunnyside, and along with the Houston Housing Authority, continues to do so today.

implications." Presentation at the ESRC Seminar, St. Andrews University, Scotland, UK, 4–5.

73 Sharkey, P. 2013. *Stuck in place: Urban neighborhoods and the end of progress toward racial equality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

The declines in homeownership, increases in substandard and abandoned housing, massive increases in government subsidized housing, high level of families living below poverty present huge and immediate problems to Sunnyside. Each of these problems can be traced directly to government policies.

The number of occupied housing units has risen gradually since 1990, but the occupancy rate has decreased over that same time due to more vacant, abandoned and derelict homes and rental units, thereby contributing to blight and crime. In the face of increased vacancies from 1990 to 2013, Sunnyside saw a net gain of 945 housing units overall, or about 11 percent gain in the last 23 years. At the

Year	Occupied Housing Units	Total Housing Units	Percent Occupied
2013	8,249	9,782	84
2010	8,250	9,823	84
2000	7,625	8,451	90
1990	7,535	8,837	85

The rapid growth of multifamily units in Sunnyside is largely due to the development of government-approved affordable housing units added to the community in recent years. As shown in the table below, the Sunnyside neighborhood has nine multifamily developments financed by low income housing tax credit and project-based voucher containing 2,219 total units. This represents almost half of all renter occupied housing and over 72 percent of all housing that is not single family detached. These are by far the highest ratios of subsidized housing in any Houston neighborhood.

Compounding the problem posed by the extreme overconcentration of government-subsidized housing in Sunnyside is the nature of the housing inside these subsidized apartment developments. More than 95 percent of all units in the low income housing tax credit properties are set aside

exclusively to be occupied by low income families. Within the apartment developments funded under the project-based Section 8 voucher program, 100 percent of the apartments are set aside exclusively for extremely low income families. Universally accepted best practices in public and subsidized housing development today require apartment developments be created and operated as “mixed income”

same time, the number of owner-occupied homes decreased by 866 units (19 percent). Homeownership declined from 60 percent to 48 percent, while renter occupied units increased by 1,580 units (53 percent) and the neighborhood’s proportion of renters increased from 40 percent to 55 percent. This is an alarming transition with devastating implications for community character.

Over the last 23 years, Sunnyside has become a majority renter neighborhood. Robust homeownership percentages are a sign of neighborhood stability, indicating that residents have a financial investment in the neighborhood, and therefore care about the long-term quality of the neighborhood’s amenities, such as schools, businesses and other homes. In Sunnyside, the number of single family homes has inched up over the last decade, but single family housing is still declining as a share of housing types.

The following table shows that a faster increase in construction of multifamily and attached units is largely the reason the neighborhood is now majority-renter. **Multifamily units have increased by 47 percent in the last twenty years, while single family units have increased by 3 percent.**

Year	Single Family Detached		1 to 9 Units Attached		Multifamily (10 or more units)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2010	6,726	68	1,637	17	1,443	15
2000	6,196	73	1,203	14	1,070	13
1990	6,510	74	1,176	13	980	11

In Sunnyside, multifamily units are almost exclusively occupied by low income families of color dependent upon government rent subsidies. While rental housing is not inherently bad for neighborhoods (and nor are low-income families), increased concentration of poverty coupled with a decline in homeownership exacerbates problems around crime, education and housing.

9 Housing Tax Credit Properties

Name	Year of Award	Total Units	Total Low Income Units
Kings Row	2004	180	180
Cullen Park	2002	240	240
Belfort Pines	2001	248	248
Simmons Garden (Elderly)	1995	120	120
Reed Parque Townhomes	1998	192	165
Lansborough Apartments	2006	176	141
Reed Road Senior Residential (Elderly)	2006	180	172
Cypress Creek at Reed Road	2007	132	126
Scott Plaza Apartments	1989	149	149
Total		1,617	1,541

4 Project-based Voucher Properties

Anna Dupree Terrace		150	150
Pilgrim Seniors III (Elderly)		40	40
Sunflower Terrace		160	160
Wesley Square		252	252
Total		602	602
Grand Total		2,219	2,143

developments. This means that public policy today requires developments typically be operated so that no more than one third of the tenants are extremely low income households.

A household is determined to be “housing burdened” if they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. Housing cost burden varies by income group and whether a household rents or owns.⁷⁴ According to Census ACS 2014, unsurprisingly, the poorest households in Sunnyside are the most likely to be housing burdened. Of the 40 percent of households in Sunnyside earn below \$20,000 per year, 29 percent of these households are housing burdened. Any household making below \$24,250 are considered extremely low income in Harris County. These extremely low-income households are more likely to be housing burdened or live in unsafe conditions either due to inability to maintain their homes. Further, market rental housing meeting the needs of this income group are almost always poorly maintained.

⁷⁴ Cost burden data broken down by renter and owner households in Sunnyside were not used due to small sample sizes in the Census American Communities Survey, yielding incomparable data.

The next highest housing burden is on households earning between \$20,000 and \$35,000 annually. These households account for 23 percent of Sunnyside’s population, and 13 percent are cost burdened. These income levels roughly equate to households earning between 30 and 50 percent median family income in Harris County.

Household Income Limits, Harris County, 2015

Income Category	% of Area median income	Top of Income Range
Extremely Low Income	0 to 30	\$24,250
Very Low Income	31 to 50	\$34,650
Low Income	51 to 80	\$55,450
Harris County Median	100	\$69,300

Notes: Based on a household of four in Harris County

The 4-person Low-Income limits are based on 30%, 50%, and 80% of median family income estimated for Harris County, Texas.HMFA

Sources: HUD FY 2015 Income Limits

Households Spending Over 30% of Income on Housing Costs

Household Income	Households spending 30% or more	Households in this income range (Percent)
Less than \$20,000	29%	39%
\$20,000 to \$34,999	13%	23%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	3%	12%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1%	11%
\$75,000 or more	0%	7%

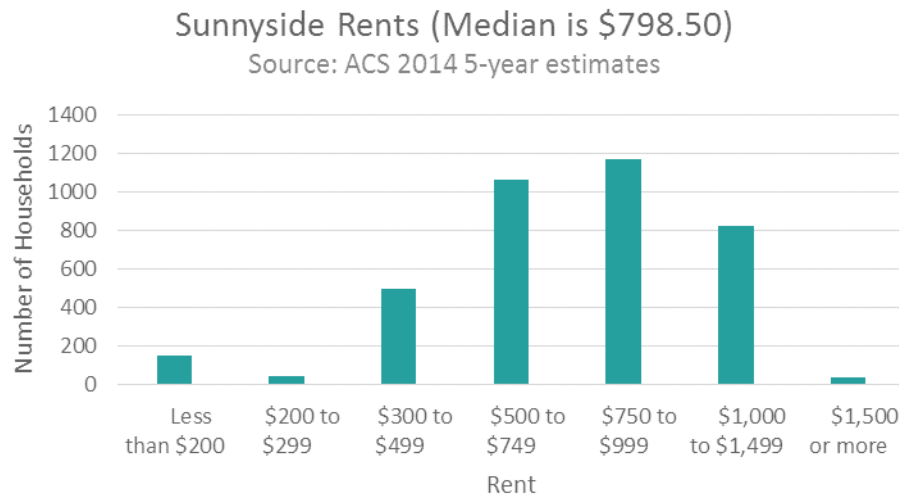
Source: ACS 5 YR 2014 Financial Characteristics

In Sunnyside, Fair Market Rents are high compared to the median rent of \$798.50.

For owners renting to households needing two or more bedrooms, they may be able to ask more for rent by opting into the Section 8 program than they could on the broader rental market. As household size increases and the need for more bedrooms increase, renting to Section 8 tenants becomes more lucrative for the owner. This may be one factor in the building of new multi-bedroom homes and duplexes in Sunnyside in the past couple of years.

It is very likely this process of landlords opting into the Section 8 program for higher rent rates is likely contributing to the extremely high concentration of subsidized housing and poverty in Sunnyside.

Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs, formerly known as Section 8 Vouchers) are rent vouchers issued by the Houston Housing Authority to very low and extremely low income households to use to rent a housing unit in the private housing market. HHA has 17,000 households using vouchers to pay their rent. Because private landlords can legally discriminate against renters using vouchers under Texas law (many other states prohibit such discrimination) the residences of voucher holders are disproportionately concentrated in lower income African-American neighborhoods. Among the 88 super neighborhoods in Houston, Sunnyside has the third highest concentration of



Harris County, Texas Fair Market Rents 2015					
	Efficiency	1 Bedroom	2 Bedrooms	3 Bedrooms	4 Bedrooms
FMR	\$599	\$721	\$890	\$1,215	\$1,502

Source: HUD Fair Market Rents 2015

voucher holders with 703 families relying on a voucher to afford a place to live there.

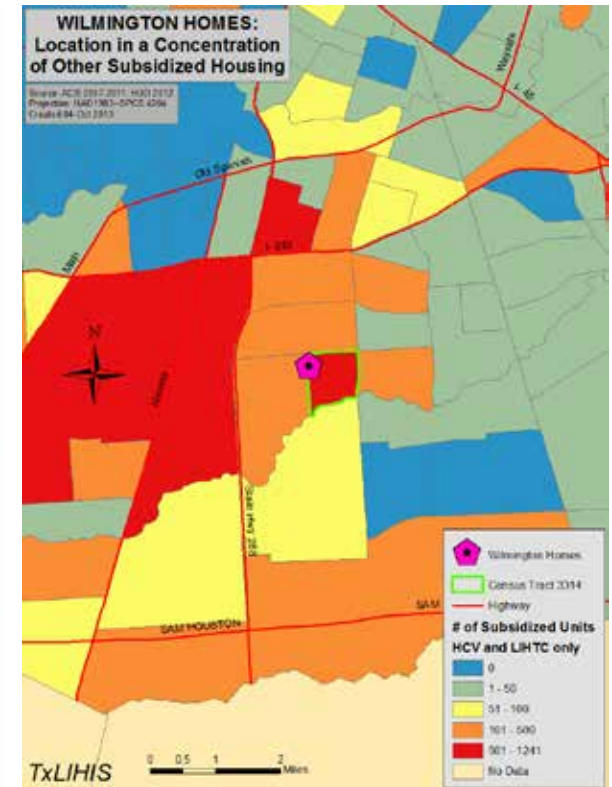
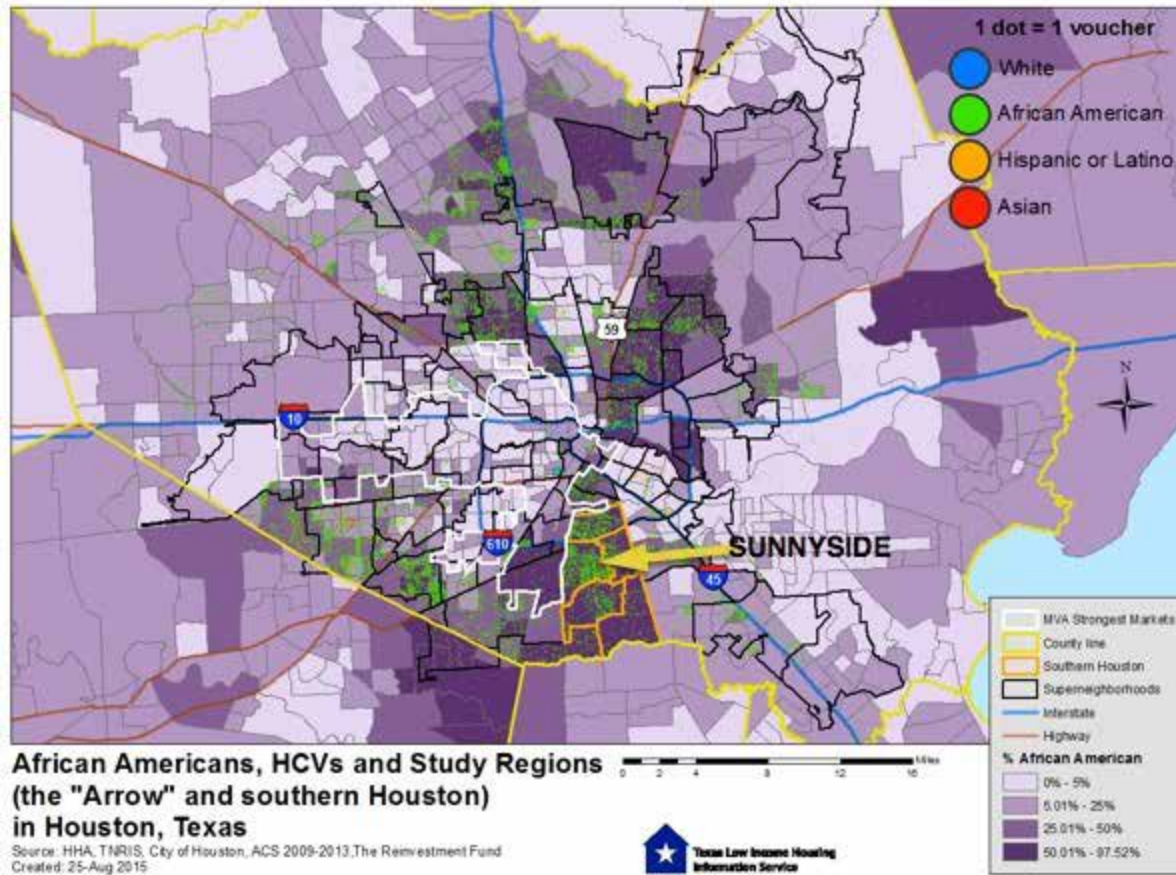
The fact that many landlords with apartments outside high poverty neighborhoods of color will not accept HCVs thwarts a family's ability to choose where to live with their voucher and often forces them to compete for a limited supply of apartments with landlords willing to rent to them. Since long lines of families with vouchers are seeking to rent anything available to them before their voucher expires, landlords can easily find tenants to rent marginal quality apartments

in areas with high crime and poor schools. Eventually this free market dysfunction leads to the "ghettoization" of voucher holders, which results in negative consequences to the families and to the surrounding neighborhoods. This is a severe problem in Sunnyside today.⁷⁵

In recent years, local officials have called for more subsidized housing in Sunnyside, further keeping the neighborhood low income and impoverished.

Prior to 2012, Sunnyside census tracts had a high number of both Housing Choice Vouchers and Low Income Housing Tax Credit properties, as well as one public housing development. As shown in the map, the neighborhood had vastly disproportionate

⁷⁵ For an expose on the effect of these practices in Houston see "The divide: Barriers to a better home," Monica Rohr, *Houston Chronicle*, November 8, 2015.



share of subsidized housing in contrast to its neighbors to the east and northwest.

In 2013, the Houston Housing Authority proposed to use 4 percent Low Income Housing Tax Credits and Disaster Recovery funds to construct three additional subsidized housing projects in Sunnyside: Cullen at Bellfort, Wilmington Homes, and Highway 288 at Airport. The 421-unit mixed income project at Cullen and Bellfort was to be part of

a mixed use development, possibly including a grocery store along with other commercial development. However, the "mixed income" residential units were exclusively for 60 percent median family income (MFI) and below. Twenty percent of the units were for extremely low income households (less than 30 percent MFI). The first phase was to be the affordable housing with no guarantee that the grocery or other commercial uses would be developed.

Wilmington Homes was a public housing development in Sunnyside that was damaged by Hurricane Ike. The housing authority proposed to replace its 108 units of public housing with 148 affordable housing units, of which 37 units would be Project Based Voucher units and 37 would be public housing. All of the new units would have been subsidized, resulting in the addition of 40 subsidized units to a Census tract with the most subsidized housing in the neighborhood.

The proposed development at Highway 288 and Airport called for 410 multifamily units, 79 single family units, 52 units for chronically homeless households, and a commercial compound. All residential units were to serve families earning 60 percent MFI or below 20 percent of the multifamily and single family units were to be restricted to families earning less than 30 percent MFI. The commercial retail centers were to be built only after half of the multifamily units were developed and during the construction of the rest of the multifamily and homeless housing. The proposed area was over 99 percent minority and the average household was earning between 30 percent and 50 percent MFI. Over 24 percent of residents in the area were below the poverty level. For this and other reasons, Texas General Land Office denied HHA's application for CDBG-DR funds for these projects, and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs denied HHA low income housing tax credits for the Wilmington project.

While mixed income and mixed-use development could be a good fit for Sunnyside, recently proposed ideas of "mixed income" need a reality check. A neighborhood cannot be revitalized by concentrating more poverty in one area. Again, affordable rental housing development generally does not lower property values or produce other negative outcomes unless, as is the case in

Sunnyside, the number of the subsidized units overwhelms the non-subsidized housing stock.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Unsafe housing is a significant concern for Sunnyside residents. Much of the housing stock dates to the 1950s, and many properties have become hazardous due to absentee landlords, inadequate code enforcement and insufficient housing repair programs for low-income homeowners. Code violations from Sunnyside in 2015 alone reported 219 instances of dangerous buildings and 194 instances of properties failing to meet minimum standards.

Sunnyside has some of the largest numbers of, and most severe, code enforcement problems in the city. Severe code violations related to land blight, such as commercial business activity in a residential area, illegal dumping and abandoned buildings, were analyzed between 2010 and 2011. Sunnyside had the 5th highest number of violations of all Super Neighborhoods in 2010, with over 3,200 deed and code violations, the vast majority of which were code violations. Sunnyside also has one of the highest concentration of "dangerous building" code violations, a violation category considered the most severe among those recognized by the city. Over the same time period, Sunnyside did not have a high number of



Sunnyside has more structures with severe code violations than almost any other super neighborhood in Houston.

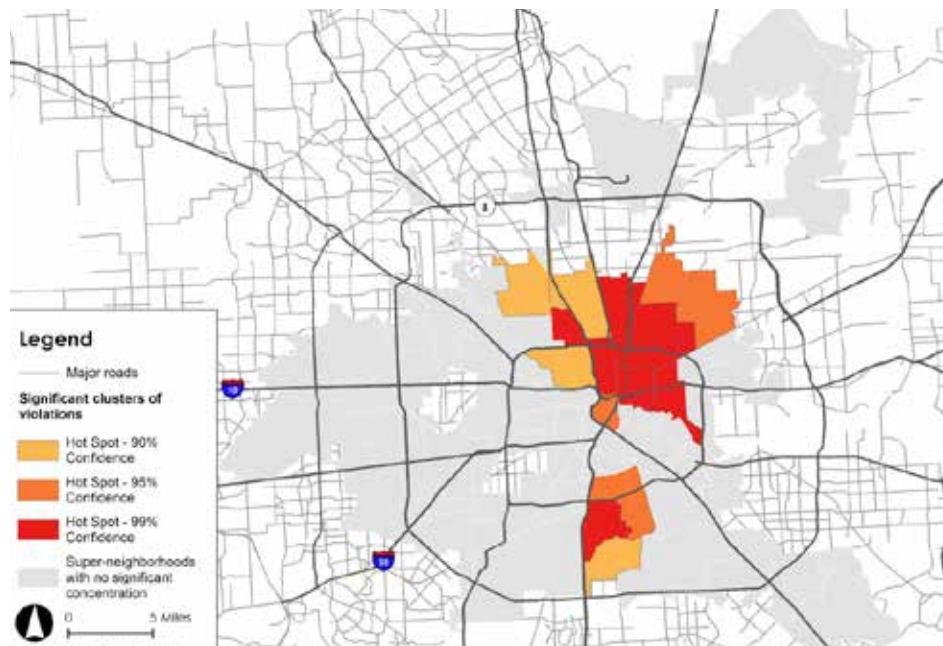
Code Violations in Sunnyside, 2015

Building Violation	Count
Dangerous Building Total	219
Vacant Building that has been unsecured for over 7 days	73
Unsafe Floor or Roof	49
Part of Building Not Properly Attached	48
Unfit for Occupancy or Dangerous for Public Health, Safety, or Welfare	21
Building with 33% damage to supporting structures or 50% damage to nonsupporting members or outside walls	14
Two or More Vacant Buildings under Common Ownership Situated Near One Another (Even if Secured)	9
Leaning Walls of Vertical Structures	2
Other	3
Minimum Standards Total	194
Storage of Trash, Inoperable Vehicle, Building Materials Etc	116
Doors and Windows of any Vacant Building secured	15
Connection to sewage discharge into public sanitation system or approved septic system	9
Operational and Safe Electric Circuits and Outlets	5
Hazardous Hole, Crack, Break, or Loose Material	5
Other	44
Nuisance	1,056
Junked Vehicle	135
Heavy Trash	42
Total violations	1,646

Source: City of Houston Building Code Enforcement Violations

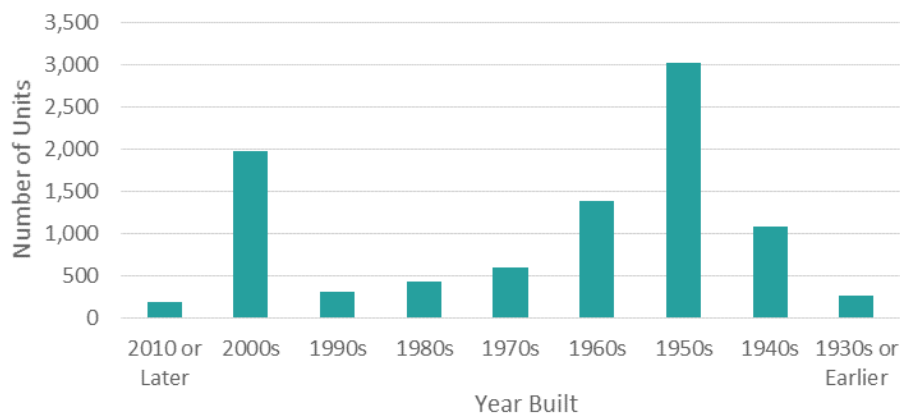
Data for Zipcodes 77033 and 77051

"Dangerous Building" Code Violations by Super-Neighborhood



Age of Housing Stock in Sunnyside

Source: ACS 2014 5-year estimates



	Arrow		Sunnyside	
	Number	Percent of Houston Total	Number	Percent of Houston Total
Population	496,871	23	21,911	1.0
Area (in miles)	99.5	16	6.4	1.0
Drainage Projects	66	43	1	0.7
Sidewalk Projects (in miles)	127	28	14	3.1
Street Projects (in miles)	219	39	2.6	0.5
Rebuild Houston CIP Projects	56	35	0	0.0
Rebuild Houston CIP Funding	\$471,745,046	36	\$0	0.0

Source: City of Houston Public Works Department, 2015

deed restriction violations, either due to the lack of deed restrictions in Sunnyside or lack of knowledge of deed restrictions that exist.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Areas lacking quality infrastructure are less safe and have more trouble attracting private investment. Sunnyside has not received its fair share of infrastructure improvements for decades. We have noted that Sunnyside was developed as a subdivision outside the city limits, lacking drainage, sidewalks, streetlights, etc. When the city annexed Sunnyside, residents expected these services would be provided. They have generally been disappointed.

In theory, infrastructure projects are selected based on need and benefit, which is a

function of the number of people in the area served. If projects were distributed equally, the proportion of projects an area receives would be equal to its proportion of residents or land area in the city.

Sunnyside accounts for one percent of the Houston population and one percent of Houston's land area. However, the neighborhood has had only one drainage project in one subdivision (0.7 percent of all drainage projects) since 2000. Since 1999, Sunnyside has had 14 miles of sidewalk built (3.1 percent of all sidewalk miles built) and 2.6 miles of street improved (0.5 percent of all streets improved).

In contrast, a disproportionate amount of infrastructure improvement has taken place



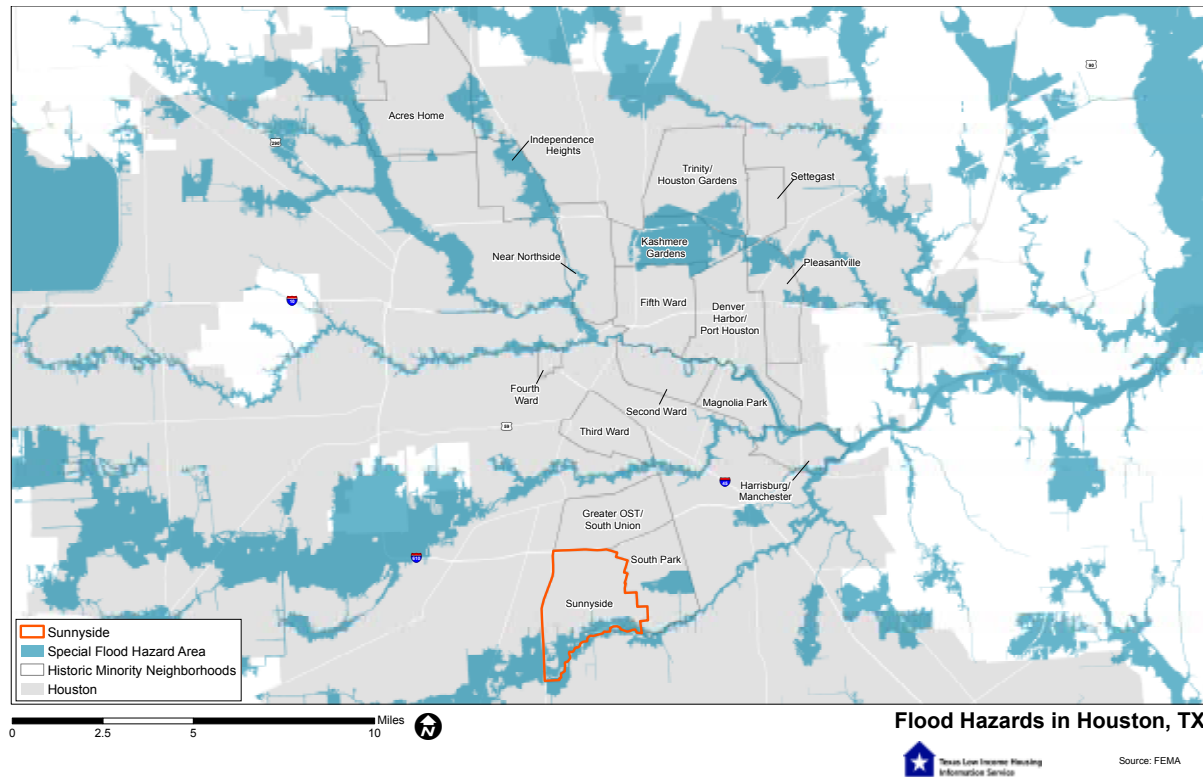
Photo from abc13.com



Dumping in a drainage ditch in Sunnyside, photo from the *Houston Chronicle*.

in "the arrow," an affluent, largely white area of Houston with the strongest real estate markets indicated by the most recent Market Value Analysis. The arrow accounts for 23 percent of Houston's population and 16 percent of its land area, but has received 66 drainage projects (43 percent of all projects), 127 miles of sidewalk (28 percent) and 219 miles of street improvements (39 percent).

This infrastructure inequality is being compounded today. Houston's most recent capital improvement plan, Rebuild Houston, has no drainage or pavement projects



excessive flooding during heavy rain events. The neighborhood relies almost exclusively on open drainage ditches along residential roads, a system which is largely the same one that was built before the area was annexed. Sunnyside's drainage ditches are suitable for a small, rural community rather than suburban area it has grown into today. Moreover, the ditches make installing sidewalks in the neighborhood cost-prohibitive to the city, since in many cases the ditches take up the entire right of way and curb and gutter drainage would need to be installed first.

Among the inadequate improvements are drainage ditches that are poorly maintained by the city. The map below shows the location and level of service (quality of drainage provided) for each open ditch in Houston, and below that a similar map of Sunnyside. Forty-three percent of these ditches perform inadequately (shown in red), meaning they will fail in any major rain event. Areas in orange comprising 9 percent of all ditches will fail to provide drainage in the average two-year storm event, while areas in yellow (5 percent of all ditches) will fail in an average five-year event. Large areas on the community are subject to very frequent flooding as a result of the inadequate open ditch drainage system that has served the community for a century. These problems are worsening over time, as densities and impervious cover increase.

planned for Sunnyside from 2015 to 2020. However, "the arrow" is receiving over a third of all Rebuild Houston projects, despite it being home to less than a quarter of Houston's population and less than a fifth of its land area.

DRAINAGE

In the map above, FEMA 100-year floodplains are shown, which are areas where there is a 1 percent chance of a flood occurring in any given year. Much of the southernmost portion of Sunnyside along Sims Bayou is in this floodplain. Though the Harris County

Flood Control District (HCFCD) recently spent \$345 million expanding Sims Bayou, which makes up Sunnyside's southern boundary, there were inadequate investments made in the city drainage system in Sunnyside that conveys water to the bayou, rendering the improvements ineffectual for correcting Sunnyside's drainage issues.⁷⁶

Sunnyside's outdated open-ditch drainage system is one of the most significant infrastructure problems in Sunnyside, causing

⁷⁶ Moran, Chris. "Sims Bayou project nears end; flooding remains concern." *Houston Chronicle*. July 11 2010.

OPEN DRAINAGE FACTS

88 percent of open drainage ditches are located in neighborhoods with a non-white majority

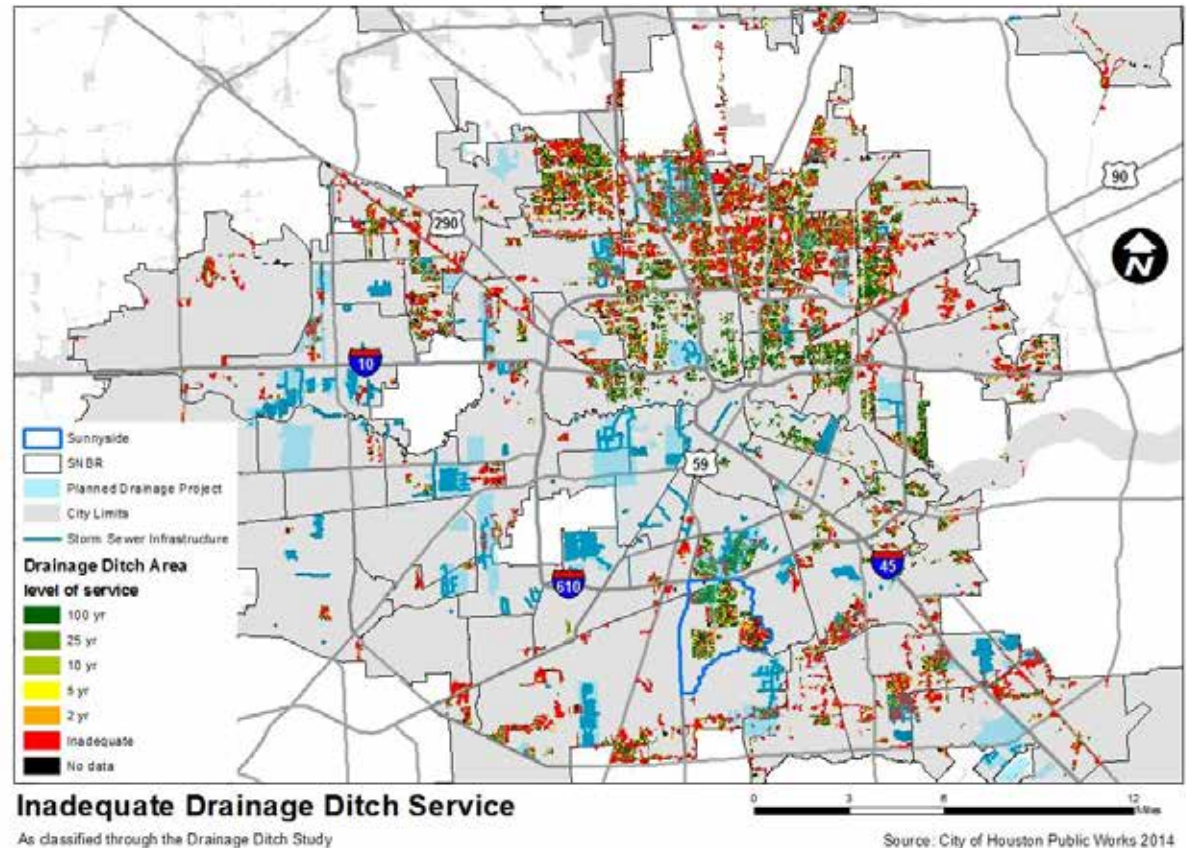
43 percent of open drainage ditches in Houston provide inadequate drainage service

Open drainage ditches often occupy the space where sidewalks would be, making their construction difficult if not impossible

The open drainage ditch map also shows where storm sewer projects have occurred since 1999. Only one new drainage improvement project has served a portion of Sunnyside since 2000, a deplorable fact that has left many Sunnyside residents frustrated with their city government. In contrast, 43 percent of all drainage projects in the city since 2002 have been located in the largely white, higher income areas, known as the "arrow," despite the arrow only accounting for 16 percent of the city's land area and 23 percent of the city's population.

SIDEWALKS

Sidewalks are largely nonexistent in Sunnyside, despite the significant share of the population without cars, the elderly, people with disabilities and school children. These populations walk in the street because no sidewalks are available, often precariously

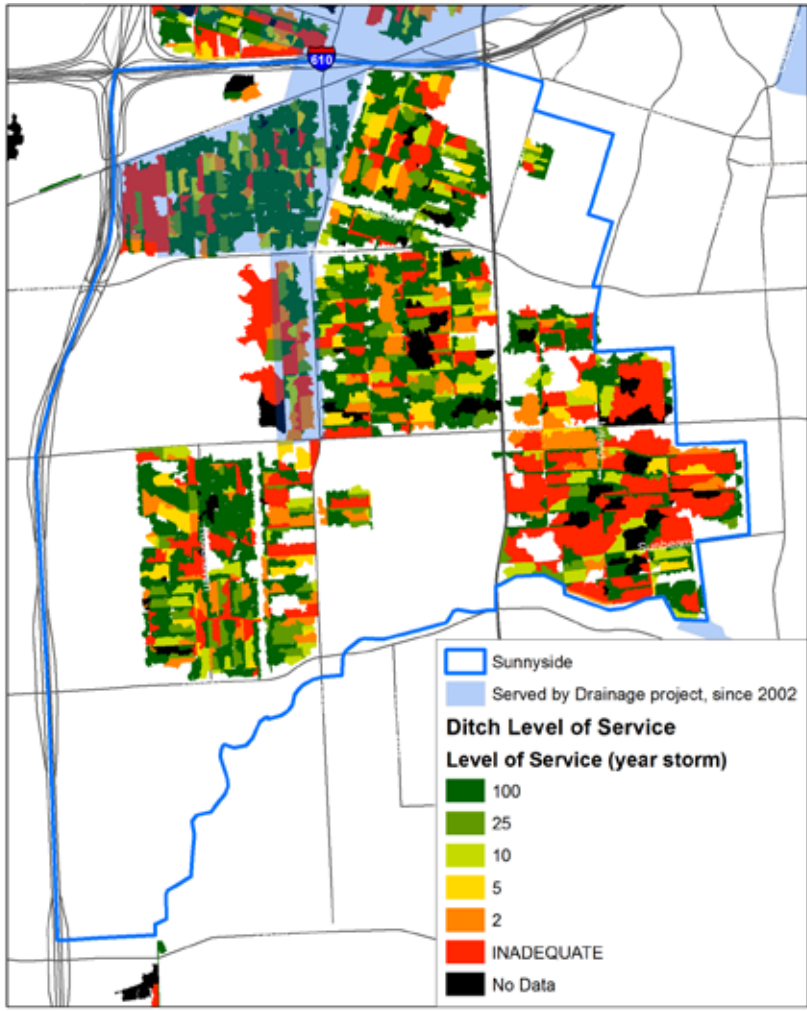


walking or maneuvering wheelchairs in a narrow section of road between deep open drainage ditches and vehicular traffic.

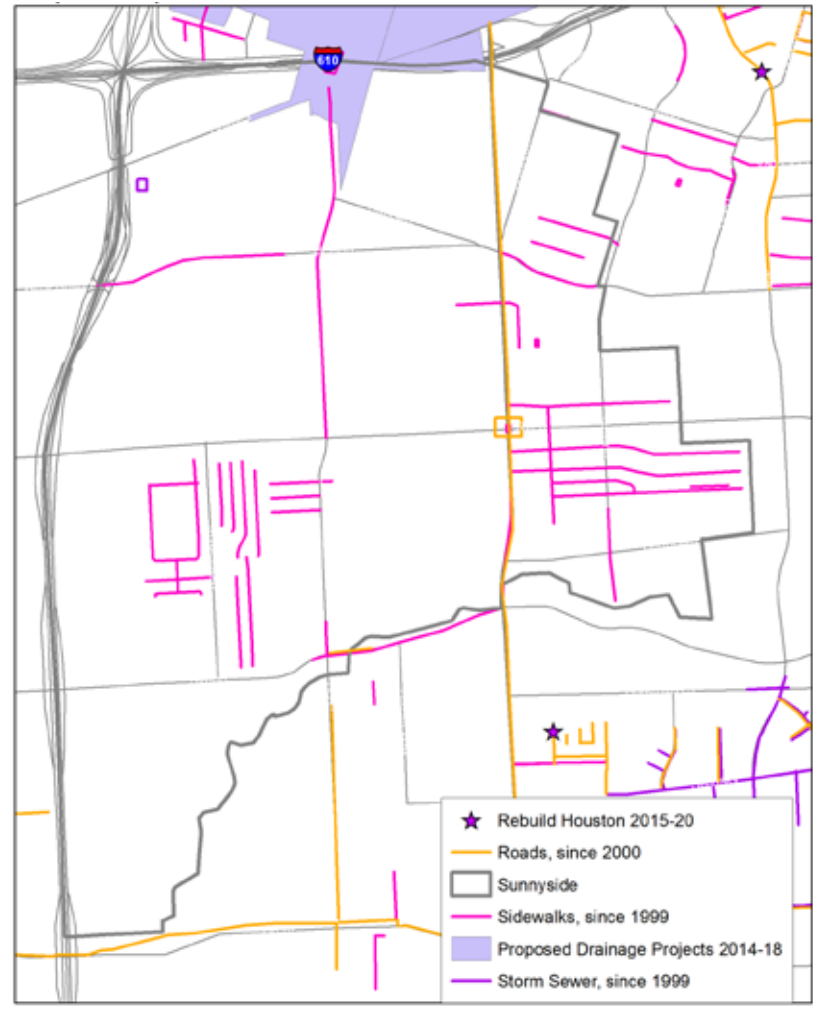
The capital improvements analysis on the next page shows there to be a disproportionate number of sidewalk project miles in block groups with a white majority and within "the arrow" since 1999. Sidewalks are vital in areas where low income households are concentrated, as they are more likely to not own a vehicle and need

to walk to a bus stop or their destination safely. The true extent of this sidewalk infrastructure inequality cannot be known because, incredibly, the city does not have a comprehensive database of sidewalk locations and their condition. Additionally, what development regulations do exist that pertain to sidewalks can be overridden by city staff.

Drainage Ditch Level of Service in Sunnyside



Capital Improvements in Sunnyside



Vision

Sunnyside will have quality housing that is inclusive, diverse and affordable to persons of all income levels.

Infrastructure will meet residents' needs and be prioritized in a way to support and encourage public and private partnerships.

Community vision and community led initiatives will direct the redevelopment of Sunnyside.

Local residents, businesses, and political officials will build strong partnerships to gather the resources needed to tackle Sunnyside's key issues.

Goals

1. Adopt and implement Sunnyside's community master plan
2. Increase and preserve homeownership
3. Improve existing multifamily rental housing, reduce the overconcentration of government-subsidized apartments
4. Provide quality public services
5. Support and enhance community development and economic development

Performance Indicators

- Rate of redevelopment of vacant lots to single family houses
- Number homes and multifamily units rehabbed
- Increase homeownership rate to at least 55 percent by 2030
- Number of substandard houses and vacant lots that become decent, safe and affordable
- Increase in number of residents who can afford their housing
- Community perception surveys

Strategies

Goal 1: Adopt and implement a community master plan

Support Sunnyside’s citizen directed neighborhood planning processes, provide a process for their review and approval by the city and direct city departments to develop implementation plans based on the approved neighborhood-led planning processes.

Instruct city departments to identify, support and coordinate with a world-class community development corporation to work with private foundations and federal agencies to revitalize public infrastructure, secure private capital investments and repair substandard housing in the Sunnyside neighborhoods. The lack of funding for community revitalization has led to the strangulation of the neighborhood based community development movement. In Houston today, the fourth largest city in the US, there are only a handful of active community-led CDCs, most principally focused on producing new housing. Together, these CDCs probably produce on average less than 200 units of housing a year. Yet Houston grows by more than 125 people each day. CDCs, which should be the essential, neighborhood-based, democratic infrastructure for community engagement and revitalization, thus cannot effectively play that critical role. While CDCs

have been virtually starved out of existence by the diminishing funding for community development, many CDCs today are also weighed down by a business model based exclusively on the continual building of new subsidized housing. CDCs are essential to fair housing and neighborhood equity. But CDCs are dying. They must have access to the funding to carry out their mission of community development and empowerment and get away from only developing subsidized housing.

Establish a process that engages citizens in dialogue with developers so that when developers seek city funds for projects within their neighborhoods, neighborhood leaders can negotiate appropriate Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) with the developers. Wealthier neighborhoods routinely negotiate on the details of proposed development projects in their areas and gain concessions and agreements from developers. This seldom takes place in Sunnyside because of a lack of an official neighborhood organization to carry on such negotiations but more particularly because elected officials do not back up the civic clubs attempting to get developers to the negotiating table. Even more of a problem is the position of city housing department officials that the neighborhood associations must not “interfere” in the city staff’s agreements with private developers seeking



federal funds and TIRZ housing dollars to carry out projects in the neighborhood. Houston city government should accord Sunnyside community leaders the same opportunity as wealthier neighborhoods to negotiate the details on redevelopment initiatives, especially when those initiatives use public funds.



Top and middle: Existing Sunnyside homes. Bottom: Possible new home built from a self-help, owner-builder housing initiative.

Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership

Establish a homeowner and renter stabilization project for elderly and residents with disabilities. Sunnyside is home to several vulnerable populations. Twenty two percent of Sunnyside’s population has a disability as compared to less than 10 percent of Houston’s population. Sunnyside also has a very large cohort of individuals 65 years of age or older who are living alone. Sunnyside also has relatively few people living in group quarters, demonstrating the desire of residents to be independent and continue to live in their own homes. Yet, often elders do not have the means to maintain their homes. A coordinated effort by the city and CDCs should target public, private and voluntary assistance to repair homes or make accessibility improvements for elderly homeowners and homeowners with disabilities to ensure these residents live in decent, safe and sanitary homes.

Undertake a research and public education campaign to raise residents’ awareness to their right to protest their appraisal value. The campaign should also ensure that homeowners understand how to secure all appropriate property tax exemptions.

Establish a Homestead Preservation District. Promote the ability of Sunnyside to increase home ownership, retain affordability and prevent displacement of long-time residents by establishing a district with a city tax set aside for preservation and improvement of affordable housing. Establishing these districts offers a number of tools, including land banks and reinvestment zones to preserve homeownership in disadvantaged neighborhoods and help ease the effects of gentrification.

Consider establishing a community land trust to make homes affordable to existing low income renters who would like to own. Under a community land trust, a nonprofit organization acquires

Special Populations	Sunnyside		Houston	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population living in Group Quarters	41	0.2%	31,822	1.5%
Over 65 Living Alone	847	11.3%	58,491	7.4%
With A Disability (noninstitutionalized)	4,538	22.3%	212,751	9.9%

Source: ACS 2014 5-year estimates

vacant property within the district to use for affordable housing. The land trust retains title to the land, but may sell the homes to low- and moderate-income families. This arrangement allows families to own their homes, without taking on the cost of the land. Not only does the land trust make the homeownership upfront, by reducing or eliminating property taxes, it insulates low-income people against speculative increases in land values, encouraging stability and housing affordability within the community.

Establish a self-help, owner-builder housing initiative to allow people to build new homes and to support the acquisition and rehabilitation of existing homes.

Support community-based real estate services to make buying and selling homes and other real estate easier in Sunnyside.

Negotiate community reinvestment agreement with Houston banks to facilitate home repair and home purchase loans in Sunnyside.

Goal 3: Improve single and multifamily rental housing

Enact a Doors and Windows Ordinance. Ensuring that property owners properly secure vacant buildings is essential to reducing crime and improving safety for surrounding neighbors. The city should fine landlords of multiple properties if a property on a low vacancy block had an opening that

LARA Lots and Community Land Trusts

Empty lots are pervasive in Sunnyside. These contribute to the impression of neglect that keeps many middle income residents from choosing the neighborhood. These lots may also contribute to the high crime rate as there are many spaces that are not being monitored. Redeveloping these vacant lots is a primary goal of Sunnyside. The Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority (LARA) in Houston operates in select zones of the City to acquire vacant properties and transition them to higher uses. If someone lives adjacent to a LARA owned lot they may acquire it if:

- (1) Your property is touching boundary lines with the LARA lot.
- (2) You have lived in your homestead for the past three (3) years.
- (3) You do not owe delinquent taxes.

Lots are also provided for the purpose of community gardens through five year leases. Home builders can also purchase the lot if they have completed at least ten homes and owe no taxes to the City. LARA currently has 61 lots for sale in Sunnyside.

Since LARA does not require affordability beyond the first sale, a CDC, land trust or other interested nonprofit could redevelop lots and attach deed-restricted affordability to the property in order to create and maintain affordable homeownership opportunities in the long-term. If the land holding entity is tax exempt, homeowners in CLT homes could see a significant reduction in property taxes.

was not covered by a functional door or window \$300 per day per opening.

Expand Prohibited Purchasers at Tax Sales to code violators. Prohibit prior code violators from purchasing property at tax sales. Within 15 days after issuing a citation for a code violation, a municipality prohibits the transfer of property at a tax sale to a purchaser who has code violations on other properties owned.

Provide assistance for housing rehabilitation. Through a CDC or nonprofit, Sunnyside residents conduct block-by-block assessment to identify blocks where a package of programs can bring about revitalization by coordinating city and volunteer programs to rehabilitate very low income homeowners' homes, to help low-income renters buy low priced homes, and that rehabilitates safe clean rental property



affordable to low-income people without vouchers.

Reduce substandard housing in Sunnyside to less than twice the citywide rate by 2030 through an effective housing repair, code enforcement and dangerous building demolition program. Part of reaching this goal will require streamlining and accelerating the code enforcement and demolition process, which, based on the flowchart on this page, is highly time consuming and complicated.

Form a partnership with and build capacity of area CDCs to systematically

investigate vacant properties and citizens complaints, enhancing the reaction to citizen complaints, the management of vacant properties as well as increased demolitions. The CDCs should carry out the following activities:

- Follow up on all properties referred to the Department of Neighborhoods to determine their status in the code enforcement process.
- Encourage homeowners to voluntarily initiate repairs and provide assistance and/or information regarding available programs/resources to correct code violations.
- Maintain a list of vacant houses and track changes in ownership, foreclosure proceedings and other transfers.

Address the substandard conditions in some multifamily housing developments

through a coordinated plan of code enforcement, selective demolition and support for new mixed income housing opportunities in higher opportunity areas in other neighborhoods. Establish a goal to correct substandard living environments in existing private subsidized housing developments by 2025.

A majority of the HUD-subsidized multifamily developments in Houston have reached the end of their current contracts with HUD. Sunnyside neighborhood leaders, in

cooperation with HUD and the city’s housing department should develop an assessment of the current conditions on subsidized apartment developments in the community and determine the appropriate future for these developments.

Some properties should be rehabilitated and converted to mixed income housing, while others should be demolished and the units relocated. The goal should be to retain the subsidized housing within the city as a whole and to provide better living conditions for the existing residents while ensuring that no one is involuntarily displaced. In no case should a tenant be involuntarily displaced from the community but they should have choices of where they wish to live. One strategy that should be considered is offering tenants in existing developments the right to stay in the existing, rehabilitated development and the right to choose to move to an apartment in a community of their choice through use of a housing choice voucher. Subsidized apartments that are rehabilitated should provide mixed income housing opportunities to end the segregation of Section 8 families in apartment developments that contain only other very low-income families.

Attract middle income renters to Sunnyside to increase economic diversity while not displacing existing low income residents. All new multifamily rental housing should be required to be economically

integrated. No additional all-Section 8 developments should be constructed. As noted earlier, more than 95 percent (1,541 of 1,617) of all units in the low income housing tax credit properties are set aside exclusively to be occupied by low income families. Within the apartment developments funded under the project based Section 8 voucher program, 100 percent of the apartments are set aside exclusively for extremely low income families. Universally accepted best practices in public and subsidized housing development today requires that apartment developments be created and operated as “mixed income” developments. This means that public policy today requires developments typically be operated so that no more than one third of the tenants are extremely low income households.

Expand the opportunity of Houston Housing Authority’s Section 8 housing choice voucher holders to use their housing vouchers to use their housing vouchers throughout the city and reduce segregation in high poverty neighborhoods. Ensure that housing opportunities for lower income renters are provided in high-quality neighborhoods across the region by requiring that future additional low income housing developments are not disproportionately concentrated in historically low income neighborhoods like Sunnyside, as is currently

the case in Houston.⁷⁷ Providing voucher holders with assistance in finding apartments will improve low income families’ mobility options.

Provide opportunities for renters to purchase their home if abandoned by landlords. Residential Title Claims give longtime residents the opportunity to take ownership of their rental homes when the record owners have died with no will or have abandoned the property. Without property titled in their names, residents may be cut off from property insurance, grants or loans for home repair, utility discounts, etc. Residents would file a lawsuit to quiet title. Local taxing authorities may exempt from real property taxes, the assessed valuation of improvements to deteriorated properties in designated neighborhoods. This exemption allows for a graduated 10-year abatement or the ability to devise an abatement schedule over 10 years.

Develop a citywide plan to provide affordable housing opportunities for persons returning to the community from the criminal justice system. The plan should provide housing options that are designed to encourage lower recidivism by not forcing people into a few low opportunity housing choices.

⁷⁷ Rhor, M. 2015. “The divide: Hunting for a home.” *Houston Chronicle*.

CAN DO Houston

CDH is a nonprofit that focuses on tailored strategies for neighborhoods involving healthy living and active lifestyles. They have had a presence in Sunnyside, providing produce and healthy foods in convenience stores in the neighborhood, as well as leadership and advocacy training. Some of their graduates started a program to create a safe route to food stores from Wilmington House, a public housing development whose residents largely do not have access to a car. The residents began working with the city to request sidewalks, streetlights, and a more secure bridge over Sims Bayou.

CDH also helps communities and schools to create community gardens, nutrition education, and physical activity programs.

Learn more: <http://www.candohouston.org/>



Goal 4: Provide quality public services

Place full inventories and condition assessments of all public infrastructure

(drainage, streets, sidewalks, streetlights, community facilities, etc.) on a citizen friendly online GIS server accessible on the web, since the city's current system is incomplete.

Reform Rebuild Houston to improve accountability and equity in infrastructure spending for low income neighborhoods of color like Sunnyside. The current ways that Houston decides which neighborhoods receive capital improvements such as paved roads, new sewer, water, and stormwater lines and sidewalks put Sunnyside at a disadvantage. The city prioritizes these improvements by the number of people benefited by the project. Therefore, more densely populated areas of the city or neighborhoods that are not plagued by vacant lots are prioritized before Sunnyside. Capital improvement projects should be prioritized by need, namely existing level of service and where new private investment is needed the most. The city continues to overlook the fact that Sunnyside has infrastructure fit for a rural area, leaving Sunnyside as the last place new businesses and jobs want to locate.

Complete the network of sidewalks within Sunnyside to provide safety for the large percentage of residents (including

many elderly and disabled persons) who lack private transportation. Direct city staff to develop a comprehensive infrastructure inventory and use the results to prioritize funding by need. It is difficult to decide what you need to fix if do not know about all of the things needing fixing. Prioritize sidewalk inventory: 1) Assess the location of existing sidewalks and conditions of each sidewalk segment; 2) Assess missing segments in the sidewalk network; 3) Update street condition inventory and drainage study on a yearly basis; and 4) Create inventory of streetlight placement and condition.

Provide a modern, properly engineered stormwater drainage system to replace the deep, dangerous and often inadequate system of open ditch drainage.

Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity

Sponsor a national conference in Sunnyside bringing together community development corporations to showcase best practices for turning around distressed neighborhoods. This would be in conjunction with an initiative to support effective CDCs in Houston.

Convene a summit on community change, gentrification and economic diversity strategies for achieving healthy neighborhoods through residential diversity.

Inventory, license and monitor hazardous incompatible land uses in neighborhoods by 2016.

Reform the city's Section 3 jobs program so that it produces real jobs for people with lower incomes.

Conduct a comprehensive survey of city historical sites and buildings of significance to communities of color and work to provide security, protection and recognition for them.

Develop a master planned site on large city-owned land parcels. The scars of past municipal injustices are still visible in Sunnyside. One such scar is the former Reed Road landfill that lies undeveloped and overgrown in the middle of Sunnyside. Instead of chain link and barbed wire fencing, a phased master plan should be made to clean up and redevelop this parcel. The first phase should make the area less of an eyesore and more of a focal point for recreational activity and community events. This phase of the plan should establish a volume of activity that would be deemed successful and forge the links to realize that level of success, for example by linking to an active lifestyle program that would assure regular use of a hike and bike trail. Achievement of housing goals in this plan should trigger later phases of the master plan, which add with badly-needed amenities such as destination retail, a full-service grocery store, and an emergency

medical facility. This could be incentivized using existing tax incentives, 380 agreements, and the new Sunnyside TIRZ.

Encourage community-serving economic development opportunities. There are a myriad of businesses and facilities needed in Sunnyside that are not being provided outright by the free market. The Economic Development Department needs to provide incentives for services such as medical and minor emergency facilities and grocery stores. This could be achieved by offering resources for small business development, instituting policies that encourage public private partnerships, or working with management districts to provide incentives for community-serving uses.

Support and encourage social entrepreneurship in Sunnyside. Supporting social entrepreneurship means supporting innovative ideas based on business techniques, but rather than the goal solely being profit, social entrepreneurs work to create positive outcomes in society. Some innovative Sunnyside residents have begun working on projects that address neighborhood beautification, school boosters, housing rehabilitation, after school programs, internships, and small business finance. Financial support from other public and nonprofit agencies will help these projects reach a broader audience and help the community help itself.

Stage	Strategy	Target	Associated Goal
Short-term	Establish a process enabling citizens to engage in dialogue with developers at the time developers seek city funds for projects within their neighborhoods to negotiate appropriate Community Benefit Agreements.	Mayor and City Council, P&DR, HCDD, Dept. of Neighborhoods	Goal 1: Adopt and implement a community master plan
	Undertake a research and public education campaign	HCDD, HCAD	Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership
	Establish a self-help, owner-builder housing initiative	HCDD	Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership
	Support community-based real estate services	Private sector with some subsidy from HCDD	Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership
	Enact a Doors & Window Ordinance	Mayor and City Council	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Provide assistance for housing rehabilitation.	HCDD, nonprofit organizations, community development corporations	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Address the substandard conditions in some multifamily housing developments	Dept. of Neighborhoods, Code Enforcement Division, HCDD	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Convene a summit on community change, gentrification and economic diversity strategies	At-risk neighborhoods, University planning departments, Community development corporations	Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity
	Inventory, license and monitor hazardous incompatible land uses	Planning and Development Review	Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity
	Conduct a comprehensive survey of city historical sites and buildings of significance	Planning and Development Review	Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity
Short-term/ long-term	Support, review, approve and implement citizen directed neighborhood planning processes	Mayor and City Council, various departments	Goal 1: Adopt and implement a community master plan
	Place full inventories and condition assessments of all public infrastructure, maintained on a regular basis	Public Works and Engineering Dept., GIS Dept.	Goal 4: Provide quality public services

Stage	Strategy	Target	Associated Goal
Long-term	Identify, support and coordinate with a world-class community development corporation to work with private foundations and federal agencies to revitalize public infrastructure, secure private capital investments and revitalize substandard housing	Mayor and City Council, HCDD, Public Works Dept., community development corporations	Goal 1: Adopt and implement a community master plan
	Establish a homeowner and renter stabilization project for elderly and residents with disabilities.	HCDD	Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership
	Establish a Homestead Preservation District.	Mayor and City Council, HCDD	Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership
	Consider establishing a community land trust to keep homes affordable to existing residents.	Mayor and City Council, HCDD	Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership
	Negotiate community reinvestment agreement with Houston banks	Mayor and City Council, HCDD	Goal 2: Increase and preserve homeownership
	Expand Prohibited Purchasers at Tax Sales to code violators	Mayor and city council, state legislature	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Reduce substandard housing in target areas to less than twice the citywide rate by 2030	HCDD, Dept. of Neighborhoods, Code Enforcement Division	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Form a partnership with and build capacity of area CDCs	Dept. of Neighborhoods, HCDD	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Attract middle income renters to Sunnyside	HCDD, Houston Housing Authority, Economic Development Dept.	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Expand the opportunity of Houston Housing Authority's Section 8 housing choice voucher holders	Houston Housing Authority	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Provide opportunities to renters to purchase their home if abandoned by landlords	HCDD, DON Code Enforcement Division, Mayor and City Council	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing

Stage	Strategy	Target	Associated Goal
Long-term	Develop a citywide plan to provide affordable housing opportunities for persons returning to the community from the criminal justice system	Mayor and City Council, HCDD, Houston Housing Authority	Goal 3: Improve single- and multifamily rental housing
	Reform Rebuild Houston	Public Works and Engineering Dept.	Goal 4: Provide quality public services
	Complete the network of sidewalks within the community	Mayor and City Council, Public Works and Engineering	Goal 4: Provide quality public services
	Provide a modern, properly engineered stormwater drainage system	Mayor and City Council, Public Works and Engineering	Goal 4: Provide quality public services
	Reform the city's Section 3 jobs program	Economic Development Department	Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity
	Develop a master planned site on large city-owned land parcels	Planning and Development Review; Economic Development Dept.	Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity
	Encourage community-serving economic development opportunities	Economic Development Department	Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity
	Support and encourage social entrepreneurship in Sunnyside	Economic Development, HCDD, Parks and Recreation Dept.	Goal 5: Support and enhance community development and economic development activity