

This report is presented as a resource document for the ***Imagine Houston*** process. Its contents are the result of almost a year of public discussion and represent the consensus of the focus group volunteers. While the Planning & Development Department provided support to the process, it did not screen, edit or modify anything contained herein.

**Community
Safety**



March, 1995

Dear Fellow Houstonians:

The *Community Safety* Focus Group of **Imagine Houston** would like to challenge and encourage you to help us make Houston a safer place. The following goals and actions for a safer community are contingent on everyone's help, young and old.

With the current concern over crime, especially juvenile crime, we have taken the approach that effectively reducing crime requires more than simply letting the police and courts catch and incarcerate felons. Houston can never be a safer City of Houston if we rely on criminal justice resources alone. It is the responsibility of all citizens to create a safer environment. This includes individual and corporate citizens. Business has as much a stake in promoting a safe community as the people who live there. Our Vision Statement reflects this view: "All citizens participating in making Houston a safe, secure City of Houston."

We tried to think beyond merely increasing the number of police and prisons and address some of the more fundamental causes of unsafe behavior. Drugs lead to crime, and gangs contribute greatly to juvenile violence, but why do people turn to drugs and gangs? There is a more basic problem that we tried to identify and remedy -- individual responsibility. Each of us is responsible for our own actions, and parents are responsible for the behavior of their children. With an ever growing number of single parent homes, teens are left more and more to their own devices and are more easily influenced by movies, television, and music. Without appropriate role models, of whom parents should be the most prominent, peer pressure and immaturity dominate.

We as parents, friends, neighbors, and human beings are obligated to provide the proper guidance, example, and discipline to ourselves and our children. Even the teenagers who participated on the Youth Forum saw positive role models, especially parents, and less violence in TV and movies as necessary to reducing crime.

Only after we all assume responsibility for ourselves and our commitments, whether business or personal, will Houston ever become a truly safe place. More police is always an option, but do we want to live in a virtual police state where everyone is under suspicion? Or, do we want to be able to walk our streets, sit on our porches, and sleep through the night unmolested with confidence that we are surrounded by mature, responsible Houstonians?

Respectfully,

The *Community Safety* Focus Group



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In March of 1994, Houstonians seized an opportunity created by Mayor Bob Lanier to help determine the future of our community. Over one thousand people participated in a three-day **Imagine Houston** forum, during which they identified the issues facing Houston and set the agenda for future discussions.

Imagine Houston is a community-wide visioning process designed to bring people together to share information, learn about each other's viewpoints and to develop a consensus on the issues, goals and opportunities that will shape Houston's future. It will result in a plan that public, private and not-for-profit organizations can use as guidance on how to structure programs, services and financing to the betterment of our community.

After the March forum, working groups called focus groups, were formed to deal with specific topics:

Community Safety
Fostering Our Cultural Resources
In Service to the Public
Learning For Life
Minding Our Natural Resources
Taking Care of Ourselves
Where We Live
Where We Meet
Where We Work

An additional group, the *Youth Focus Group*, was subsequently created to obtain ideas from Houston's young people on the issues facing them.

Membership in the focus groups was open at all times to anyone; nearly one thousand Houstonians participated in

discussions from March to December. The work completed by the focus groups is the result of those public discussions. Each group developed a vision statement and a list of goals and actions that can be taken to achieve the goals.

While each focus group concentrated on its respective topic, certain themes emerged as constants throughout the reports. They include:

economic competitiveness... with other cities throughout the world, internationalism, job growth and training, economic opportunity for all residents;
education... youth, education, preparing the leaders to lead, ensuring our future by ensuring theirs;
community building... self-defined "urban villages", the idea of belonging to a community, personal responsibility;
urban and natural resources... space and place, physical elements blending with the natural environment, a livable community;
celebrating diversity... through public art, cultural and educational training, and through equal access for all.

Imagine Houston does not stop here. These ten reports form the foundation for the work of the **Imagine Houston** Steering Committee in creating a vision plan for Houston. The Steering Committee consists of members appointed by Mayor Lanier, a representative of each Council Member and a representative from each focus

Preface

group. The Committee recognizes the importance of continued public dialogue. When complete in Spring 1995, this Plan should serve for the next 20 to 30 years as the basis for actions by every segment of our community including individuals and public and private-sector organizations.

Imagine Houston is an extraordinary exercise in grass roots democracy. The committed citizens who participated have given our community insightful ideas to lead Houston into the next century. We are grateful for their efforts. We are hopeful about our future.

Section 1: Introduction

Vision

All citizens participating in making Houston a safe, secure City.

Executive Summary

When the *Community Safety* Focus Group formed in March 1994, its purpose was to author a viable means for creating a safer environment for ourselves and for our children. By definition, community safety includes the topics of police, fire and emergency management. However, the group briefly alluded to fire and emergency management, and chose to focus on the issues of crime and crime prevention.

Vision

It was the hope of the group that the recommendations made during this process would serve as a catalyst. This catalyst would compel people to begin thinking about their community and how they need to take part in improving safety. It is the desire of the group to see all Houstonians view public safety not as a luxury but as a responsibility. Throughout the process, this vision has directed the group to examine what appears to be the major issues of crime and who is responsible for the prevention of crime.

Issues

The issues considered to be the most important by the group are the lack of community involvement, parental involvement and education. These issues are considered to be important because even though they are not the direct cause of crime, they do seem to contribute to a permissive attitude

toward crime. Reflected in this attitude is a sense of apathy that makes people believe that one person cannot make a difference. Therefore, in place of these factors police forces continue to grow in size and complexity. However, mere police intervention cannot solve these issues. Likewise, simply throwing money at these problems cannot solve them. The problem in resolving these issues is not the lack of resources, but the way individuals think about crime.

Responsibility

The traditional paradigm, or operational model, is that safety and public protection was a job left to the Police Department. A person could call their local police officer and they would take care of the problem with little citizen involvement. The new paradigm, which we are asking the public to consider, is that crime prevention is the responsibility of every individual. Therefore, if we all take a proactive role in monitoring our neighborhoods, our children, and ourselves our communities would be much safer places.

In monitoring our neighborhoods, we discussed the idea of the greater use of citizen patrol groups, police-citizen partnership, and forcing land owners to be responsible for activities occurring on their properties. In monitoring our children, the group discussed the ever increasing need for parents to take a more active role in raising their children. We also discussed that this must happen in conjunction with the local school system and business community. Finally, in monitoring ourselves, the group is referring to the fact that it should be the citizens of a city who are responsible for the prevention of crime. These ideas are

not new by any means, but they represent a major, positive shift in community thinking. If people can begin to believe in these ideas and begin to incorporate them into every aspect of their personal and business lives, as well as their own communities, safety in Houston will improve.

Background

One of the groups formed during the March forum was the *Community Safety* Focus Group. The goal of this group is to develop a means to make Houston a safer city. Reflected in this goal is our Mission Statement: “To identify fundamental public safety issues and to develop strategies to address those issues; thereby, enhancing the quality of life and the safety of our community.”

Public safety generally includes police, fire, emergency medical service (EMS), and emergency management, which involves natural disasters and large-scale catastrophes. However, the perceived threat of crime today, especially juvenile and gang related crimes along with the prevalent drug use, has made it a top concern among people of all ages. Therefore, this group decided to emphasize law enforcement and crime prevention in most of the goals they developed.

The composition of this group was as diverse as the city in which they live. Included were leaders of neighborhood associations and civic groups, lawyers, police officers, church representatives, a criminal justice professor, and other concerned citizens. As a result of this diversity, many unique perspectives were brought to the topic. These perspectives contributed to ideas

ranging from a volunteer police force to land owner accountability to school uniforms. Also brought up in the discussion were both sides of the gun control argument as well as different means of drug control. However, despite the diversity of the members, all seemed to agree that the key to effective crime prevention was to have community involvement, in one form or another, and ultimately, individual responsibility. Therefore, most of the goals have an element of requiring public participation.

In the course of preparing the plan, each member contributed their knowledge of public safety. The group provided some data regarding particular items of interest, wrote down ideas and circulated them among each other for comment. In addition to this informal information sharing approach, we invited guest speakers to discuss different topics. Speakers included: Mr. Mike Foster with the Southwest YMCA, police officers from the Braeburn storefront, Mr. Deloyd Parker from SHAPE Community Center, and Mr. Bill Lake, a private security consultant. Also present at many of the meetings was Assistant Police Chief John Gallemore. Chief Gallemore encouraged the group to think of safety in new and innovative ways. To move beyond traditional ideas and solutions and challenge the existing paradigms, or operational model, which, like a set of filters, often restricts the flow of data.

Over the course of five months (March-August) in 1994, time was spent getting to know each other and determining what concerns each had on the subject of community safety. Several of the

broad issue areas identified are: Community/Neighborhood, Schools, Family, Public Safety, and Emergency Management. During this time we developed a Vision Statement that would set the tone for the work the group would do. Using a modified consensus method in a series of facilitated monthly (and sometimes bimonthly) meetings the group developed a series of goals for each issue area. After presenting the goals to the Steering Committee and the general public for review in August and September the next phase started which was the drafting of actions to go with the goals. In order to assist in implementation the actions identified who would be responsible, when it could happen, how it could be funded, and what priority it was relative to the other actions.

In developing the actions to these ideas, we have tried to promote both new and existing programs as well as concepts that influence behavior and express support for existing safety measures. The group has tried to stay out of administrative matters, such as the deployment and use of police officers, but has rather emphasized support and assistance for those who are on patrol. Furthermore, the actions produced by this group lay more of an emphasis on citizen involvement and the responsibility of the individual to take part in creating a safer environment.

Section 2: Goals and Actions

Community/Neighborhood

Goal 1:

Increase citizen participation and responsibility in the community through improved communication. Apathy of the general public towards public safety issues is a contributing factor in the rise of crime. Spurring involvement would require making people aware of their responsibility as citizens and providing the information and tools necessary for them to get involved.

Action 1.1: Inform people of citizen programs

Making people aware of the various citizen participation programs that are available to them and the effectiveness of each program may spur their involvement. This can be done by presenting police programs to the citizens, through:

- Civic clubs,
- Neighborhood newsletters,
- Positive Interaction Program(PIP) reports,
- Utility bill attachments, and
- Churches.

Participants: City of Houston Public Information Office, City of Houston Departments

Funding: Using existing funding through channels already in place

Timing: Currently, as part of any regular public meetings

Priority: Must

Action 1.2: Training on leadership skills

Creating a program to train and educate concerned citizens on community leadership and organization skills will enable them to become effective leaders in their community and help to bring about positive change in their community.

Participants: Universities, City of Houston

Funding: Tuition and fees for course.

Timing: Some efforts are already under way to establish such programs (i.e. UH Downtown)

Priority: Must

Goal 2:

Make citizens aware of the activities which go on in their community and sometimes on their own property. Responsibility for the activities which occur in a community cannot completely fall on the Police Department. Much of this responsibility must fall on the residents of that community who are there on a daily basis. They should be able to influence the activities in a positive manner, either singularly or collectively.

Action 2.1: Crime information

Making information readily available on crime locations by specific address will help citizens focus their prevention efforts.

Participants: Law enforcement agencies-Harris County.

Funding: HPD general fund, user fees

Timing: A policy to provide that information could be adopted within a year.

Priority: Must

Action 2.2: Homeowner incentives

Making homeowners aware of existing incentives for making their homes and property more secure which will help them take advantage of these benefits in addition to creating a secure environment.

Participants: Private sector, law enforcement, Houston Association of Realtors

Funding: Costs of securing property would be offset by the costs of incentives, such as lower premiums or interest rates.

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Must

Goal 3:

Familiarize police officers with the citizens in their specific beat area to form a trust between the two entities and create a better partnership. The relationship between the Police

Department, especially the beat officers, and private citizens is vital to the effectiveness of neighborhood prevention programs. From this partnership citizens could have greater access to information, quicker response times in their area, and as a result, a lower crime rate.

Action 3.1: Volunteer police force

Allowing a volunteer police force in which the Police Department trains volunteer participants, thereby reducing the need for additional officers for patrol. These participants, consisting of citizens and reserve officers, will have gone through an accredited law enforcement training facility and would be able to function along with a regular officer.

Participants: HPD, civic organizations

Funding: Civic organization fees, tuition, general fund

Timing: Begin program next fiscal year.

Priority: Should

Action 3.2: Police-citizen activities

Fostering police/citizen partnership by conducting activities where officers get to know people in the neighborhood they patrol that will help personalize the beats for the officers and build a working trust in the citizens towards the officers. Some events which could accomplish this are:

Block parties and visits to neighborhood sites (homes, parks, etc.)

Citizens walk a beat with the officers
Promote a “Become a Friend of an Officer”
type of program
Contract deputy patrols
Improved human relations and cultural
sensitivity training
Youth programs - such as D.A.R.E.

Participants: Citizens and businesses

Funding: Civic club moneys, other
individual participation

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Should

Schools

Goal 4:

Make schools a safe place where students do not feel threatened and parents do not worry about their safety. The original design of the school was to be a place where people, young and old, could go to better themselves and improve their situation in life (i.e. “Knowledge is Power”). However, in recent years the school has often become an environment where young people deal drugs, bring firearms, and foster territorial wars as members of gangs.

Action 4.1: Increase morals and ethics

Emphasizing morals and ethics in the schools, and in the home, is needed in order to teach

proper behavior and instill a greater respect for human life in students.

Participants: Schools, parents

Funding: School districts, individuals

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Must

Action 4.2: Year-round schools with longer hours

Extending school to year-round for non-working age students and requiring school uniforms would leave less unsupervised time and keep clothing from inducing conflicts. During the summer months and in the evenings many students are unsupervised by an adult because their parents are working or just not around. Also, the type of clothing worn by many students can trigger feelings of envy and resentment, or threaten others by displaying gang colors or trademarks.

Participants: School districts,
Legislature & citizens

Funding: General school budget,
available State and Federal funds

Timing: Within the next two school
years

Priority: Should

Action 4.3: Increase academic extra-curricular activities

Increasing year-round academic extracurricular activities that provide college preparation and life-long skills for all students builds constructive citizens. There is a need for young people to have academic as well as athletic extracurricular programs which will not only serve to keep them off the street, but also raise their self-esteem. This can be accomplished by more even distribution of program funding.

Participants: School districts,
University Interscholastic League
(UIL)

Funding: School district budgets

Timing: Next fiscal year

Priority: Should

Action 4.4: Leave school facilities open after school

School facilities should be left open after regular school hours to allow for use as recreation centers so that students, especially younger ones, will have a supervised place to be after school.

Participants: School districts, citizens, City of Houston and Harris County

Funding: School, City of Houston, and Harris County budgets, volunteer staffing

Timing: As soon as possible, when liability issues are resolved

Priority: Could

Family

Goal 5:

Provide resources to strengthen and support the family and teach morals and ethics. The prevention of crime requires teaching children at a young age respect for themselves and others.

Action 5.1: Parental involvement in child's life

Pass ordinances which require parents to be more responsible for their children's actions and reduce absentee parenting.

Participants: City of Houston & Harris County

Funding: Existing

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Must

Goal 6:

Promote safe and affordable housing for all citizens. Every person should have a home where he or she can feel safe and unashamed.

Action 6.1: Enforce building codes

Firmly enforcing the standard building codes assures safe buildings in which people can live and work.

Participants: City of Houston

Funding: Existing

Timing: Immediately

Priority : Must

Public Safety

Goal 7:

Improve safety in public spaces to avoid an insular, clannish attitude among neighborhoods. By improving safety, people will come together and work towards a more harmonious city. The feeling that it is not safe to go to public places

like malls, parks, or restaurants hinders many from gathering together and perpetuates the perception of an unsafe city.

Action 7.1: Improve street lighting

Improving street lighting would improve visibility for driving or walking and eliminate hiding spaces for criminals.

Participants: City of Houston, HL&P, Neighborhood groups

Funding: City of Houston, large scale or neighborhood-wide plans would need to be incorporated in the Capital Improvement Plan and annual budget.

Timing: Current procedures for requesting street lights could be made available as part of the City of Houston's regular public contact.

Priority: Must

Action 7.2: Regulate outdoor pay phones

Regulating the location and use of outdoor pay phones to keep drug dealers from using them as their base of operations.

Participants: AT&T, GTE, City of Houston

Funding: Regular administrative procedures for the phone companies and HPD.

Timing: A policy for applicants and vendors could be adopted immediately.

Priority: Must

Action 7.3: Local approval of alcohol licenses

Allowing for local approval of licenses involving the sale of alcohol would give the City of Houston the ability to limit its presence. By regulating the location of liquor sales with relation to churches, schools, and each other alcohol availability would be reduced.

Participants: Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, City of Houston

Funding: Regular city and State permitting procedures

Timing: Legislation could be presented to City Council within one year.

Priority: Should

Goal 8:

We can better increase safety through accessible and thorough information on existing resources and agencies. Various programs have been established to deal with 'at-risk' youths, or neighborhood security, but they are often unknown.

Action 8.1: Inventory of clubs, programs, and activities

Inventorying community-based clubs, programs, and activities in various areas of the city should be made accessible to any interested citizens. Such an inventory should note the factors involved, active participants, and degree of success in producing good citizens.

Participants: United Way, City of Houston, Houston-Galveston Area

Council (HGAC), Neighborhood Civic Clubs, Audubon Society and other such groups that do public outreach on social concerns

Funding: Federal and State criminal justice funds, user fees, subscriptions

Timing: A list of programs and activities could be completed in 12 months. The success and other factors would be part of an ongoing analysis and review.

Priority: Should

Goal 9:

Overcome bias and understand cultural differences to resolve problems that may stem from the City of Houston's diverse population. Varying languages, religious differences, and plain bigotry can affect the way people interact.

Action 9.1: Cultural sensitivity training

Cultural sensitivity awareness and training for the general public can help reduce problems between ethnic and/or racial groups.

Participants: Schools, public and private sector

Funding: Existing

Timing: Programs are in existence now. To be part of a school curriculum may require State action which would take at least two years.

Priority: Must

Goal 10:

Require and enforce landowner responsibility for assuring the safety of their property by eliminating environments favorable to unsafe conditions, ranging from dilapidated buildings to gang hangouts. In cases of homes or businesses that allow an environment conducive to unsafe conditions, it may be necessary to specifically target those properties for correction.

Action 10.1: Registration of rental properties

Registration of rental property to assure decent, safe, and sanitary housing, would help preserve the character of the community. Apartment complexes and property management agencies would be required to account for the condition of their property and the tenants they allow. Registration would not necessarily apply to owner occupied units, such as someone renting a spare room or a garage apartment.

Participants: City of Houston, HUD

Funding: Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, city permitting and inspection procedures

Timing: Legislation could be done within one year.

Priority: Must

Action 10.2: Bill landowners for excessive service

Billing landowners for excessive police, fire, or inspection calls to their properties could offset the cost of providing these services and encourage more responsibility by the owner. In extreme cases of negligence by property owners who show no inclination of maintaining the property or discouraging criminal elements, such an action would spur responsibility.

Participants: City of Houston

Funding: Negligent property owners

Timing: Policies and cost estimates could be prepared within one year.

Priority: Should

Goal 11:

Reduce crime, violence, and fear in our society through an assurance that these situations are not the norm but undesirable exceptions to polite society. The constant barrage of news regarding crime and violence disturbs everyone. News of criminals being paroled early or being put on probation raises safety concerns and lends to an atmosphere of paranoia.

Action 11.1: More balanced reporting of crime in the media

While crime is newsworthy, a more balanced approach to reporting criminal activity would reduce the perceived threat it poses. Reporting

on the general conditions and showing the successes of the police and community could encourage people rather than discourage them.

Participants: Media

Funding: Existing

Timing: Beginning immediately but ongoing

Priority: Must

Action 11.2: Improve monitoring of parolees

Improving the monitoring of those on parole and probation will help assure their adjustment to society and hold them accountable for their actions.

Participants: Texas Department of Corrections (TDC), Harris County Sheriff's Dept. and other responsible agencies

Funding: State and Federal criminal justice funds

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Must

Action 11.3: Obtaining proportionate criminal justice funding

Obtaining proportionate criminal justice funding for Harris County from State and Federal sources can help reduce crime. Hiring and training police officers, building and maintaining prisons, and the associated expenses of law enforcement in general is often supplemented through State and Federal funds.

Participants: Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies, HUD, United Way

Funding: State and Federal criminal justice funds, CDBG funds

Timing: Applications can start now for the next budget year and then be ongoing

Priority: Must

Action 11.4: Protect victim's rights

The victims of crimes should be heard when sentencing or paroling criminals. Protection of the victim's right to feel secure and the assurance that justice has been achieved should be considered when dealing with convicted criminals. In many cases, possible restitution should be paid by the perpetrators or their parents, if appropriate.

Participants: Criminal justice system, TDC, law enforcement agencies

Funding: Responsible parties should pay restitution

Timing: Immediately, but some enabling legislation may take up to (2) years.

Priority: Should

Goal 12:

Reduce the availability of alcohol and drugs to juveniles and the general public. A vast majority of crime is alcohol and drug related; therefore, curbing the supply of drugs and alcohol is necessary to improve public safety.

Action 12.1: Reduce demand for drugs through education

Attacking the demand for illegal drugs through a concerted emphasis on the consequences of

drug and alcohol abuse and related activities would be a more permanent solution than interdiction and intervention. All efforts will continue to be needed, though, in the war on drugs.

Participants: Parents, HPD, schools, churches

Funding: Existing

Timing: Programs like D.A.R.E. and 'Just Say No' exist, but they could be intensified and made a regular part of the school curriculum.

Priority: Must

Action 12.2: Regulate alcohol in City of Houston parks

Enforcing the City of Houston's restriction of alcohol in city parks will assure a secure environment at gatherings in public places

Participants: City of Houston, Legislature

Funding: Existing

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Should

Goal 13:

Reduce juvenile crimes and violent/destructive gang activities. The alarming number and violence of teen crimes today has created a need to focus more attention on juvenile crime.

Action 13.1: Making juvenile records carry over to adulthood

Allow juvenile records to be kept open after minors become adults. Juvenile criminal

records are closed after they become adults. As a result, they start over with a clear record even if they have a history of criminal behavior.

Participants: State Legislature, State and local law enforcement agencies

Funding: Existing and any Federal and State criminal justice funds.

Timing: Legislation within the next (2) years

Priority: Must

Action 13.2: Identify the fundamental factors to crime

Identifying the economic, social, and psychological characteristics that contribute to criminal behavior can lead to specific strategies to deter criminal activity. Such efforts are ongoing and need to continue so the fundamental factors (e.g. family, hope, etc.) can be adequately addressed.

Participants: Law enforcement agencies, Universities, any applicable agencies

Funding: Much of this research is funded by existing sources. Remediation may come through a variety of public (e.g., CDBG, criminal justice, etc.) and private funds (e.g., foundations, businesses, and individuals).

Timing: Ongoing

Priority: Must

Action 13.3: More summer programs for youth

Additional, low cost summer programs are needed to keep youth occupied. One of the problems expressed by local youths has been the availability and affordability of existing activities.

Participants: All public and private sectors

Funding: Facilities can be funded through CDBG monies which will allow school facilities to be open for activities

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Must

Action 13.4: Promote safe-houses

Encouraging and promoting safe-houses will enable youths to seek shelter from abusive homes or other unsafe environments.

Participants: HPD, home owners, families, media

Funding: Existing

Timing: Existing shelters could be made known immediately.

Priority: Should

Action 13.5: Exposing youth offenders to hardened criminals

Exposing youth offenders to hardened criminals (i.e. "Scared Straight" type programs) and victims of crime can show them the ultimate consequences of their actions. This could help deter the criminal intentions of some juveniles.

Participants: HPD, TDC, any agency which deals with youth

Funding: State and Federal criminal justice funds

Timing: Some such programs are in existence others could be started immediately

Priority: Should

Goal 14:

Increase the cooperation and information flow between public law enforcement agencies, private security and citizens for a safer business community. Typically, by the time the police or fire departments are involved, the tragedy has already occurred. In creating a safer environment, a more proactive role is needed. An example of a proactive approach is one taken by business in securing its property.

Action 14.1: Promoting workplace safety

Promoting proactive safety by using the workplace to teach safety measures to employees for practice in the community will reach more people than volunteer meetings. By practicing workplace safety, a proactive approach is taken. Using this model, the individual or community can take steps to secure and protect itself. This could be done with regular training sessions or a one-time seminar at the office.

Participants: Private security providers with HPD could translate corporate security techniques into everyday individual and community actions.

Funding: Existing, extra personnel may be needed to conduct the training.

Timing: Immediately

Priority: Must

Action 14.2: Private companies promote community

Businesses can reward and encourage community involvement through incentives. Another proactive approach to community safety is the enhanced involvement of private business through promoting involvement by providing compensatory time for community activities, financial assistance for neighborhood programs, and meeting space for public meetings. Community involvement could even be considered as an element on employee evaluations.

Participants: Public and private sector agencies (State, Federal and Local)

Funding: Reallocation of existing funds and man-hours.

Timing: Many such actions could be started within 12 months, or the next fiscal year.

Priority: Should

Goal 15:

Drastically reduce gun availability to juveniles, substance abusers, mental incompetents, and felons. These groups are commonly the least responsible in the use of firearms.

Action 15.1: Enforce laws which keep guns away from minors

Enforcing the ordinance requiring parents to keep guns out of minors possession will help reduce firearm fatalities. Many juvenile injuries

and fatalities are the result of children finding and playing with or misusing their parents' firearms. Keeping firearms out of reach is a parent's duty.

Participants: Parents, legislature, police

Funding: Existing

Timing: Ongoing

Priority: Must

Action 15.2: Educate children on the dangers of guns

Educating children on the hazards of guns in homes, schools, and on the streets can prevent misuse. Discharge effects and the proper maintenance of firearms needs to be understood by those who handle them. The adage "There is no such thing as an unloaded gun" is an example of what can be taught.

Participants: Parents, law enforcement agencies, and School districts (using UT Health Science Center as model).

Funding: Existing programs and personnel can serve this function.

Timing: Beginning immediately, and becoming an ongoing process.

Priority: Must

Emergency Management

Goal 16:

Coordinate emergency management efforts during a crisis and make the proper procedures known to the public. Floods and other

distresses have left many people stranded, homeless, or dead because of lack of knowledge on what to do and where to go during a crisis. The multiple jurisdictions and responsible agencies need to be coordinated during an emergency.

Action 16.1: Create media crisis panel

Disseminating information through a media crisis panel in times of emergency will let people know where to go, what to do, and what is happening elsewhere.

Participants: Media, City governments, Harris County, FEMA

Funding: State and local agencies, Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), private sector contributions

Timing: As needed

Priority: Should

Action 16.2: Single coordinating agency for emergencies

Allowing a single agency to coordinate or manage all necessary public safety entities during an emergency will reduce bureaucratic delays and jurisdictional conflicts.

Participants: City of Houston, Harris County, HGAC, FEMA

Funding: Existing funds reallocated.

Timing: As soon as possible. Enabling legislature within 2 years,

and a coordinating body within 5 years.

Priority: Should

Action 16.3: Properly equip and train emergency agencies

Properly equipping and training the appropriate agencies for disaster relief will assure an effective response. Different situations require different equipment: fires in high rise buildings require special hoses and ladders, flood disasters require boats, and chemical spills need specific agents for neutralization.

Participants: City of Houston, Harris County, FEMA, National Guard, Coast Guard

Funding: Existing budgets, Federal and State funds, user fees for some rescue or clean-up operations.

Timing: Identification of the most needed elements could be done in a year. To implement the purchase of necessary items, a five-year capital improvements plan for the various agencies should be established.

Priority: Should

Section 3: Appendices
