

INTRODUCTION

The Brays Oaks community both benefits from and struggles with the fact that it is part of the larger Houston region. On one hand, the community benefits from being a part of one of the most robust regions in the country. At the same time, Brays Oaks must compete with a wide variety of communities throughout the region for new investment and reinvestment.

Current and potential homeowners, business owners, property owners, consumers and tourists all have numerous options on how and where they should spend their time and money. Should they invest where they currently live or move? Should they continue to invest in their business or property at its current location? Where should they shop for groceries, clothes and other potential purchases big or small? Where should they enjoy a dinner out, play in the park, or hold their next event?

The intent of this Economic Development Strategic Plan is to allow the Brays Oaks community to stand out in a crowded field of competitors as a logical place for investment. It is designed to take an honest look at the current conditions and trends taking place in Brays Oaks, seek out the opportunities available to the community, and then create a path toward economic prosperity that can be practically implemented by the Brays Oaks Management District and its various partners.

THE KEYS TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY



SEE YOUR STRENGTHS

From its numerous international institutions and well designed neighborhoods, to its network of drainage channels and the Willow Waterhole, the Brays Oaks Management District has a number of assets that are the basis for a distinctive and vibrant local economy

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BECOME YOUR BRAND

The current image of the area is not reflective of this community. The Brays Oaks Management District is the one entity with the capacity to reframe that story. More than creation of a new logo or some occasional marketing, the brand should become a source of pride and a positive representation of this unique community



BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Creating economic prosperity is a team effort. Seeking out and maintaining partnerships with other organizations and individuals that share common interests or goals will substantially increase the capacity and capabilities of the District



STAY ON COURSE

In the world of baseball, every fan hopes to see a home run; however, most games are won through a far less exciting series of singles, doubles and the occasional stolen base. Building a strong and vibrant economy is similar. It requires the patience to celebrate the small victories and to stay focused on the long term vision.

TYPES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Brays Oaks Management District can be involved in every facet of economic development. To date, the district has placed the majority of its economic development focus into Community Development and Capacity Building with limited effort applied to Information Delivery and Brand Identity. The District has added landscape enhancements and identification markers to a series of medians throughout the district. It has also been involved in planning major improvements throughout the area including roadways, parks, trails, and stormwater detention. Similarly, the district has placed an emphasis on public safety and elimination of blight. Doing so has allowed the District to positively impact some perception issues that could keep investors away.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP & SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



BUSINESS RECRUITMENT & ATTRACTION



EXISTING BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

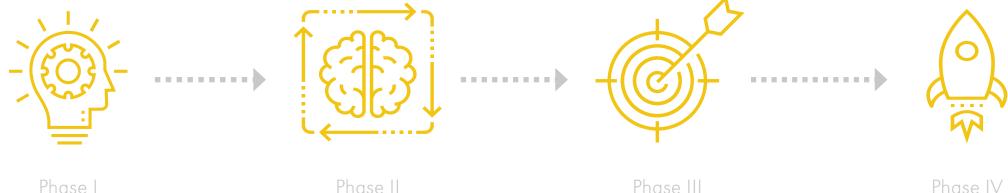






COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT &
CAPACITY BUILDING

THE PLANNING PROCESS



UNDERSTANDING

The planning process begins with an honest understanding of current conditions and the efforts undertaken to move forward. How did the community evolve to where it is today? What makes the Brays Oaks community unique in comparison to other areas of the Houston region? What is getting in the way? How is the BOMD making economic development happen? Is the community on the right track?

BRAINSTORMING

Phase II involves conceptualizing solutions that can help the Brays Oaks community realize its full economic potential. Built upon the results of the first phase, Brainstorming envisions physical enhancements, programmatic changes, partnerships, new ideas, and new approaches to established ideas. This phase creates new possibilities for the district while discarding elements that could be getting in the way of success.

RECOMMENDING

Phase III introduces a series of action items designed to bring the concepts from the previous phase into reality. Each action recommended as part of the Economic Development Strategic Plan is directly tied to one or more types of economic development and can be completed by the BOMD through funding, leveraging, advocating or informing as previously described. Recommendations are not ideas - they are practical and implementable tasks.

IMPLEMENTING

Finally, the planning process concludes with an Implementation program of the action items recommended in the previous phase. Phase IV prioritizes recommendations and adds a level of detail including a general concept of cost, partners that mutually benefit, and potential funding sources.

UNDERSTANDING BRAYS OAKS



Population

Population	102,502
Daytime Population	77,130
Workers	20,722
Residents	56,408
Households	36,923
Average HH Size	2.76
Race	
White	37.7%
Black	35.3%
Asian	6.7%
Hispanic Origin	41.5%



INCOME

Median HH Income	\$43,65
Per Capita Income	\$23,65
Single Family Homes	
Households	25,873
Population	70,992
Median HH Income	\$52,078



Housing

Housing Units Median Value:	42,436 \$167,280
Housing Units	
Owner Occupied	34%
Renter Occupied	53%
Vacant	13%



ECONOMY

Total Businesses:	2,925
Total Employees:	19,743
Businesses by Number of	
Employees	
1-4	59%
5-19	26%
10-19	9%
20 or more	6%

OBSERVATIONS



The first impression of any community occurs along its entryways and is reinforced along its corridors. Neither is good news for the current condition or reputation of the Brays Oaks community. The community is not "run down" or deteriorating, although there are obvious apartment buildings and commercial areas that are in poor condition. Rather, the lack of new development throughout the area gives it an aged appearance that, when coupled with a lack of diligent upkeep, provides the community with a "tired" look.



Very few areas of the community are fortunate to have as many substantial and well placed green spaces as the Brays Oaks community. Large scale medians with established trees have the width and potential to rival those found in communities such as the Heights and the area surrounding Rice University. Improvements along Brays Bayou only enhance the stately tree-lined appearance of the Braeswood corridor. The Willow Waterhole continues to grow in quality and its contribution to the community. Drainage channels throughout the area provide bands of green that reach between neighborhoods and commercial areas. Add these to the various green spaces throughout the community, such as BraeBurn Golf Course and Country Club, Glenshire Park Hager Park, and the Westbury Community Garden as well as potential future green spaces resulting from major drainage improvements.



Many of the residents of Brays Oaks walk, ride bikes or take transit as an alternative to driving. Connectivity for travel without a car may very well be the single biggest missed opportunity in Brays Oaks. The drainage channel network that travels throughout the area is designed for purposes of stormwater management. However those same drainage channels connect every neighborhood in the community to schools, parks, places of worship, commercial centers, and more. The level of connectivity potentially available in the community should be a major marketing feature and a source of attracting new investment to the community. The recently enhanced trails along Brays Bayou provide a strong visual and aesthetic connection to the rest of Houston that can draw visitors into the area. Similarly, ongoing discussion of rail service has the possibility of transforming the surrounding area if designed appropriately.



Houston has evolved into the most diverse metropolitan area in the United States and many communities throughout the city reflect that diversity. Even so, Brays Oaks stands out and offers its own brand of diversity that is apparent in its places as well as lifestyles of many of its residents. The Jewish community may have the strongest historic ties to the Brays Oaks community and that relationship is visible in places such as the Emanu El Memorial Park, Chabad Lubavitch Center, Congregation Beth Rambam, Congregation Torah Vachesed, as well as restaurants and other amenities. Many of the communities most architecturally ambitious buildings are places of worship, such as the Braeswood Assembly of God, St. Thomas More Catholic Church, Zarathushti Heritage and Cultural Center, and the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany. Several other very recognizable structures represent various cultures throughout the Houston community such as India House and Raindrop Turkish House.



Residents of Brays Oaks have historically suggested that the area neighborhoods represent a major asset to the community and they are not wrong. Many of the neighborhoods defy their age and, unlike the surrounding area, have successfully maintained a sense of vibrancy and character. In many cases, the quality of the neighborhoods is hidden as a result of a development pattern that reserved property along major corridors for commercial and multifamily purposes.

More, the neighborhoods of Brays Oaks offer a substantial buying power that has been largely ignored by area retailers. As a whole, the median household income in Brays Oaks is \$43,658 and is substantially lower than the median household income of \$52,144 for the City of Houston. However, when households living in multifamily homes are removed, the median household income of in Brays Oaks to \$52,078 - on par with the remainder of the city.



The Brays Oaks community has been fighting against a perception problem for decades. Long known as Fondren Southwest, the community has been considered a place that struggles with crime and disinvestment. Despite a change in name and a number of improvements in the area, the community has been unable to completely shake its negative image.

To date, various organizations have made limited efforts to directly counter the image of the community. The Brays Oaks Management District has sought to make physical improvements in the community such as gateway signage and landscaping at select intersections and has also played a role in addressing criminal activity in the area. The District has also played a role in some marketing activities and other enhancement efforts.



Brays Oaks is a community of small businesses at a scale that far exceeds the number of national brand and franchise businesses in the community. The number of "mom and pop" businesses shows a strong entrepreneurial spirit in the residents and business owners in the area. That sense of business development and entrepreneurship is critical to the long term success of the community. Statistics show that the economic impact of locally owned small businesses on a community is substantially higher than the impact of franchises or national brand "chain" stores. That entrepreneurial spirit is also the reason for some of the community's most recognizable restaurants such as Cool Runnings and Calliope.



To be competitive in today's marketplace, a community must have one or more destinations that are interesting to residents and attractive to guests. People are increasingly drawn to activity centers that offer a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment options within a single, highly walkable area.

One of the major reasons residents with disposable income are choosing to spend money outside of the Brays Oaks community is the lack of shopping and dining destinations within the community. Commercial centers in Brays Oaks are not intended to be highly walkable nor are they designed to maintain a person's interest for several hours. Beyond commercial centers, destinations in the community are limited. The Willow Waterhole may provide the single largest destination in the community; but it is limited in scope except on those days that activities are held.



Thanks to Mother Nature, perception hasn't been the only major issue that Brays Oaks has had to overcome. Before Hurricane Harvey the Harris County Flood Control District had undertaken Project Brays as a means of reducing flooding. Unfortunately, the extensive efforts at improvement have proven insufficient. Studies conducted by the District have resulted in additional improvements that could assist the area; however, much work remains before residents and investors feel like the risk of loss has decreased.

10 OPPORTUNITY IS TRULY WAITING AT THE BRAYS OAKS DOORSTEP

Timing is appropriate to pursue a vision for economic development in Brays Oaks. The community has made strides in addressing issues that contributed to the negative perception of the area. At the same time Brays Oaks is gaining interest as people seek affordable housing options within proximity to employment centers such as the Texas Medical Center and Uptown.

CONCEPTS

Build Your Brand and Create Your Story

Connectivity as if Life Depended On It

Be Local, Buy Local, Grow Local

The Brays Oaks community needs a brand that can be recognizable, uniquely "Brays Oaks", highly marketable and capable of successfully competing against past brands and negative perceptions. The Brays Oaks Management District has a name and a logo, but neither is strong enough to embolden a sense of identity for the area. The brand should be an honest representation of the community.

The BOMD should acquire expertise to assist the community in building a brand and establish a brand awareness program that includes both strategic and ongoing marketing. Continuous and strategic use of the brand will be a critical component to building a new, more appropriate perception of the community.

Brays Oaks is in a highly unique position to be the most well connected community in Houston with or without the need for a vehicle. More, the need to walk here is more than a matter of health or recreation. It is a requirement as a result of economic condition for some and faith for others. The combination and the fact that space is available to make improvements makes Brays Oaks an excellent and highly fundable community.

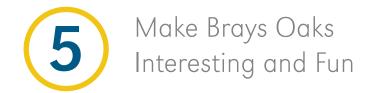
Improving Brays Oaks for walking, cycling and better connection to transit has numerous benefits for health and overall quality of life. It also has the added benefit of making the area attractive to a new audience that is seeking those benefits and amenities.

The Brays Oak community has both the space and the entrepreneurial spirit to meet nearly all of the needs of the existing and future residents, employees and guests of the area. The Brays Oaks Management District should play a role in creating a healthier environment for small business in the area as well as building the diversity of businesses to meet local need and demand. There are a myriad of ways in which BOMD can build support for local businesses and urge the community to "shop local" ranging from marketing and "shop local" campaigns to rewards programs. Simultaneously, BOMD can spur the creation of a more diverse and desirable mix of businesses through promotion of pop-up retail in existing buildings, a retail challenge to promote desired businesses, and incentives/support. BOMD can perform similar functions for service and office activities.

Brays Oaks is also unique in that it is home to two community gardens, including the highly recognized Westbury Community Garden. It is equally unique in that it has space for growth of more local produce. This provides the potential for healthy, local food and a completely new market (and marketing opportunity).



Green Should be Your Color





When selected as an alternative to "Southwest Fondren" the name "Brays Oaks" was apt because it recognizes the absolute wealth of green space that is and can be seen throughout the community. The concept of "green" in Brays Oaks has the potential to mean many things: nature, recreation, sustainability, sustenance, health, beauty, and a deep respect for the environment.

Brays Oaks should capitalize on and grow its wealth of green spaces, including its esplanades, medians, park spaces, drainage channels, detention amenities, natural areas and even landscaped private property because they have the potential to be transformative and because it can provide the amenities that are highly desirable to all audiences. More, however, the green spaces in Brays Oaks are an opportunity to stand apart in other ways. Green space in Brays Oaks can be a business opportunity and another means of bringing positive attention to the community.

Put simply, there should ALWAYS be something going on in the Brays Oaks community, whether large or small, that draws attention and potentially people into the area. By playing a role in "programming" activity in Brays Oaks, the BOMD is taking another step in building the new story of the community. On a larger scale, BOMD should play a role in fostering one or more events that attracts a regional audience to the area and that the community can become known for. The District can also spur small activities ranging from pop-up retail, food truck events and more to simply promoting artists to play music in the park or add temporary artwork.

The District should also consider "tactical urbanism" as a means of adding new and interesting, temporary activities. Perhaps a portion of a parking lot is turned into a playground for an evening with creative kids activities. Tactical urbanism also allows for "experimentation" with ideas. For example portions of a parking lot can be replaced with temporary trees and fake landscaping to see the impact and test whether parking is excessive. The BOMD can request ideas from the community and implement them as an experiment and to simultaneously build a partner in the community.

The Brays Oaks Management District is not a developer but that should not deter the district from establishing a vision for the look and feel of the area and coordinating with both the private and public sectors to make it possible. District leadership should take the opportunity to define the vision for the community, including appearance and standards and then set out to determine the methods to be used to bring that vision to fruition. For example, if the District were to adopt standards that promoted innovative onsite stormwater management then it might expect all projects funded by BOMD to include those stormwater management techniques. Similarly, the Board could consider incentives to spur development or redevelopment to the standard expected by the community or to include specific amenities that would add value to the community but would otherwise not be constructed.



Be a Resilient, Living Laboratory for Stormwater Management

It may seem difficult to perceive of any good that can become of flooding, but recent awareness of the need to aggressively address flooding throughout the Houston region and find better ways to plan for it may very well play to the strengths of the Brays Oaks community. The concept is simple. Brays Oaks should become the region's leader in understanding and implementing techniques of living with and adapting to stormwater. Brays Oaks has the natural areas and development opportunities to become a living laboratory like no other place in the region. It has the attention of major research institutions and the proximity. Opportunities include coordination with institutions to integrate aspects of stormwater management throughout every aspect of Brays Oaks, to test the impacts of those amenities, improve upon them and fully implement those that are successful. Vacant land can become opportunities for alternative design of neighborhoods and structures utilizing some of the best minds in planning and architecture and enticing coordination with international partners. More, the relationships with partners could include location of new educational and research facilities in the area. The effort could result in an entirely new business niche ranging from services and consulting to production of stormwater management products.



Build Partnerships because Economic Development is a Team Sport

Each proposed concept for improvement of economic conditions in the Brays Oaks community can be implemented through a variety of tasks, programs, and capital projects. Fortunately, in nearly every situation, there are other entities available to assist through expertise, time, labor and/or funding. By seeking out organizations with a common interest in a solution and building coalitions and partnerships, BOMD can leverage and stretch resources in order to achieve more and to recognize more effective solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Green space. Connectivity. Culture. Amenities. There is no question that the Brays Oaks community has the foundation for a distinctive identity forged around those elements, as well as others, such as music and art. With improvement Brays Oaks can enjoy vibrant commercial activity. It can become a place that is interesting to visit. More, it can become a hub for reinvestment. Doing so requires a transition from visionary concepts to the realities of action.

Recommendations reflect the actions needed to realize the concepts presented as part of the Brainstorming process. Each recommendation is intended to help to realize a concept or to remove an issue that is a barrier to reinvestment.

The Brays Oaks Management District Economic Development Strategic Plan is a comprehensive document. It would be impossible to implement each recommendation immediately. Rather, implementation of the recommendations identified in this plan is expected to occur incrementally over time and through close collaboration and cooperation among a number of partners utilizing a variety of funds and resources.

Recommendations have been prioritized by leadership of BOMD and placed into one of three categories of time: immediate, midterm and long-term. Additionally, each recommendation includes implementation guidance in terms of potential partners, anticipated cost, and possible funding sources. Each is intended to be general in nature. For example, funding sources and partners for festivals or for transforming drainage channels into trails can vary widely based upon theme, magnitude, activities, location, and more.

The Implementation Program is intended to be highly flexible. Changes occur. Opportunities arise. Funds or partners may appear or become available sooner than anticipated..

Priority

Immediate	Within 2 Years
Mid-Term	2 to 5 Years
Long-Term	More than 5 Years

Cost

\$	\$50K or Less
\$\$	\$50K to \$250K
\$\$\$	More than \$250K

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Immediate Term Actions: 0 to 2 Years

Recommendation	Funding Level	Partners	Potential Funding Sources
Engage a consultant through the RFP or RFQ process to prepare a branding study for the Brays Oaks District.	\$\$	BOMD, Consultant	BOMD
While waiting for the branding study to be completed, as a temporary measure, prepare a community profile that highlights the strengths and opportunities of the District to be used immediately in marketing efforts to businesses and other entities.	\$	City of Houston, H-GAC, Consultant	BOMD
Develop a Business Retention and Expansion Program	\$\$	Ambassadors	BOMD
Identify and Enhance Places for the Brays Oaks Community to Socialize, Gather and Celebrate.	\$\$ - \$\$\$	Local Businesses, City of Houston, Harris County, Nonprofits, HCC, Houston ISD	BOMD, City of Houston, Harris County, Nonprofits
Be involved and engage in capital improvement projects going on in and around the district by other entities including the City of Houston, Flood Control District, METRO and Harris County.	\$	City of Houston, Harris County, Harris County Flood Control Districts, Fondren Foundation, Fort Bend County Toll Road Authority, METRO	BOMD, Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (proposed)
Revisit and update as necessary the comprehensive trail system as part of the Parks Master Plan update to reflect current conditions and priorities.	\$	City of Houston, Harris County, Consultant	BOMD, Harris County, FEMA Disaster Mitigation Planning Grant
Invest in "Tactical Urbanism" to Support the Community Brand	\$-\$\$\$	AARP, City of Houston, Harris County, H-GAC, Arts Community	BOMD, HGAC, City of Houston, Harris County, Foundations

MID-TERM ACTIONS: 2 TO 5 YEARS

Recommendation	Funding Level	Partners	Potential Funding Sources
Implement and integrate the community brand throughout the District so it can be well recognized and known	\$ - \$\$\$	City of Houston, Harris County, Consultant	BOMD
Work with partners and entities in brand recognition and co-branding.	\$-\$\$	City of Houston, Harris County, Businesses, Nonprofits, ISD	BOMD, City of Houston, Harris County, Businesses
Identify partners and programs including grants to leverage funds in order make key trail and pedestrian connections.	\$ - \$\$	H-GAC, Consultant	BOMD, City of Houston, Harris County, H-GAC, Fondren Foundation, Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (proposed)
Conduct a Retail Challenge in the Brays Oaks District that could serve as a fun way to bring attention to the area and potentially bring the desired types of businesses to Brays Oaks.	\$ - \$\$	"Business Community, Lenders, Foundations"	BOMD, Foundations, Businesses, Nonprofits
Create a "Local First" campaign aimed at supporting local small businesses in the District and designed to shift culture and spending patterns in the District toward supporting local independent businesses.	\$ - \$\$	Business Community, AMIBA	BOMD, City of Houston, Local Businesses
Build a Small Business Intelligence Program	\$	U of H Small Business Development Center, SBA, Lone Star, TSU, H-GAC, Houston Business Development Inc.	BOMD
Maintain a Profile of Critical Economic Development Focused Marketing Information	\$	City of Houston, H-GAC	BOMD

Mid-Term Actions: 2 to 5 Years (continued)

Recommendation	Funding Level	Partners	Potential Funding Sources
Create an incremental development program to grow a local a development community	\$\$-\$\$\$	City of Houston, Incremental Development Alliance, Local Finance Institutions, Community Investment Guarantee Pool	BOMD, Local Financial Institutions
Partner with a Commercial Property Owner to Cluster a Series of Pop-Up Retail Spaces or Create a Shared Location for Local Businesses to Market Goods and Wares.	\$ - \$\$	Property Owners, Local Businesses,	BOMD, Local Businesses
Establish a Program to Promote and Incentivize Green Infrastructure Improvements.	\$ - \$\$	City of Houston, Harris County, Scenic Houston	BOMD, Nonprofits, JPB Foundation
Program Spaces and Promote the Arts, Fitness and Wellness and More as Business and Employment Opportunities.	\$ - \$\$\$	HCC, Houston ISD, Nonprofits	BOMD, Grants, Foundations
Establish One or More Major Annual Events Unique to Brays Oaks.	\$\$-\$\$\$	City of Houston, Harris County,Local Businesses, Nonprofits, Houston ISD, Music & Arts Community	BOMD, City of Houston, Nonprofits, Business Community
Introduce a Coworking Option to Brays Oaks.	\$\$-\$\$\$	Local Businesses, Nonprofits	BOMD, Business Community, Property Owners
Establish a Set of Guiding Principles for Development and Redevelopment.	\$	Local Businesses, Community Organizations	BOMD

Long-Term Actions: More Than 5 Years

Recommendation	Funding Level	Partners	Potential Funding Sources
Reinvent the Medians of Brays Oaks.	\$\$-\$\$\$	City of Houston, Harris County, HCFCD, Scenic Houston	BOMD, City of Houston, Harris County, Nonprofits
Establish a Private Equity Fund to spur investment in the community.	\$\$ - \$\$\$	Private Investment Firm, Local Businesses	BOMD, Local Residents, Investors
Promote Brays Oaks as the "Living Laboratory" for Resiliency and Green Infrastructure.	\$\$-\$\$\$	Colleges, Houston ISD, City of Houston, Harris County, HCFCD, Foundations	BOMD, JPB Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Houston Endowment, Other Foundations
Develop a Resiliency Plan for the Brays Oaks Management District with a focus on transformative and actionable solutions.	\$\$	City of Houston, Harris County, HCFCD,	H-GAC, BOMD, FEMA Disaster Mitigation Planning Grant
Transform "Green" and "Resilient" into Businesses and Jobs in the Brays Oaks Community.	\$ - \$\$	Community College, Local Businesses, Non Profits, Community Investment Guarantee Pool	BOMD, Lenders
Strategically Prepare to Reinvent Aging Commercial Centers.	\$\$\$	Property Owners, Private Investors	Private Investors, Property Owners, BOMD

