

University of Houston Downtown Campus Master Plan

2024 Texas Planning Awards Program
Required Award Criteria Responses

TEXAS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Award Category: Urban Design

This award honors efforts to create a sense of place, whether a street, public space, neighborhood, or campus effort.

Example: Streetscape plans; public space plans; hospital, college or other campus plan.

Eligibility

Open to APA members.

Award Criteria

Describe how the entry satisfies the award criteria (Maximum of 150 words per each item listed under category criteria).

1. Originality, Excellence and Innovation. Document how your entry presents a visionary approach or innovative concept to address needs. Explain how the use of the planning process in this context broadened accepted planning principles within the context of the situation. Describe how technology was creatively used to address challenges and enhance the planning process.

This project focused substantially more on strategic big ideas than traditional campus land development planning. UHD is in a unique context, being both connected to and separate from downtown, primarily because of major infrastructure and physical barriers on all sides. Working within those constraints required creativity to meet UHD's visionary expansion goals.

UHD's growth also requires land acquisition, but development options are highly impacted by plans for highway expansion, and other capital projects, and must rely on strategic partnerships for both land use and programming goals.

This plan was centered around "big ideas" that transform the way that the UHD campus exists in the context of Downtown Houston. We used interactive, visually engaging online survey tools to gather input from university stakeholders: leadership, faculty, students, and neighbors, to create a vision that spoke to the needs of the university and this part of Houston.

2. Compatibility. Demonstrate how your entry integrates and supports the overall planning goals of the neighborhood or community.

UHD began at the historic mercantile building at 1 Main St and was the only UHD academic building until the early 2000s. Since then, UHD has expanded across Buffalo and White Oak Bayous into Downtown and the Near Northside.

We planned around the impact that transformative capital projects like the North Houston Highway Improvement Project and North Canal Flood Mitigation Projects will have on the campus surroundings.

We also planned for synergy between local planning projects and the UHD Master Plan: UHD Main Street builds off Downtown's pedestrian-only Main Street proposal; UHD Housing is planned to be located near new multifamily mixed-use developments in the Warehouse District that resulted from recent community planning; and UHD can build student housing in partnership with POST Houston.

By leveraging surrounding projects and plans, this master plan continues UHD's growth and integration into downtown.

3. [Effectiveness, Results, and Outcomes](#). Describe how your entry has made a difference in the lives of the people affected. Convey the level of effectiveness your entry can have over time. Provide specific outcomes that were a direct result of the Plan.

The UHD master plan addresses programming, connectivity, and accessibility challenges. Academic departments are currently cramped in the historic but outdated One Main Building. As a solution, the academic master plan was informed through this process. We recommended renovating One Main Building into a more spacious and porous building with plenty of natural light and UHD has already chosen designers to begin the important renovation work.

This plan also expands some of UHD's current efforts, like linking communal green spaces into one large "Gator Green," accessible from almost every point of campus.

Instead of helping connectivity, the vast network of bayou trails around UHD has created confusion. The masterplan aims to integrate these trails with bridges and clear signage for easier navigation. Similarly, the local street network at various levels complicates vehicular circulation around campus. Proposed solutions include new intersections and streets to clarify navigation.

4. [Engagement](#). Explain how various public interests were involved and the extent of that involvement. Describe the level of collaboration between leadership and competing interests. Explain how those affected were brought into the planning process for this initiative. What planning processes were used that prioritized meaningful engagement and collaboration with diverse communities, ensuring that their voices and priorities shaped the decision-making process?

The four major goals of this master plan were developed by observing the current conditions and listening to the diverse group of students, faculty, staff, neighbors, and university leadership. A community questionnaire that asked about challenges and opportunities at UHD received almost 450 responses.

People pointed out priorities such as enhancing multimodal access, ensuring campus safety and inclusivity, improving amenities for community interaction, diversifying food options, and optimizing building use. The community also emphasized the significance of centralizing campus activities at One Main Building and expanding student housing options.

Due to the location of UHD and the transformational projects happening in and around campus, the visions will only be possible with the continued collaboration between the university and the City of Houston, the Harris County Flood Control District, METRO, TxDOT, and other stakeholders, including private owners of property needed to make this masterplan a reality.