

## The Role of Economic Development in Communities: A Public Information Series on the Value of Economic Development

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### Article 10: Regional Planning Explained

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In Article 4 I spoke about the importance of planning within EDOs. Regional planning takes that idea to a much higher level. Planning for economic development is only one part of the bigger picture for community development and strategic planning for communities.

Our local organization for regional planning is HGAC. Many of you may have heard the name HGAC. But what is HGAC and what does it do? HGAC stands for *Houston Galveston Area Council of Governments*. HGAC consists of 13 area counties, which include Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Wharton. HGAC is just one of 24 regional councils of governments in Texas, called COGs, (you can see a map of them here [http://www.txregionalcouncil.org/display.php?page=regions\\_map.php](http://www.txregionalcouncil.org/display.php?page=regions_map.php)).

#### **“Why do we need a regional planning organization?”**

HGAC’s primary mission, as with all COGs, is to oversee and coordinate area planning for a variety of regional issues. A

sub function is overseeing and distributing many state and federal grants associated with planning and community development. Many times planning and grant funding go hand-in-hand.

So, you may be wondering “Why do we need a regional planning organization?” That’s a great question. I would relate it to that old saying “If you don’t vote, someone will vote for you.” Along the same lines, if we don’t participate, then someone else will plan for us. If nothing else, we need to participate as a way to protect our local interest within the region and to stay informed on important issues that impact our community.

At the least, we are joined with other counties in the region by three constant issues: air quality, drainage, and transportation. There are probably more that you can think of, but these are the minimal areas of interconnectivity. So, consequently, HGAC may take the lead on these and other issues to coordinate regional solutions. Membership in HGAC is voluntary and decisions are based on a broad consensus of the members.

As Houston grows, it is important that we become aware of regional plans and, even more importantly, try to participate in the planning process. One of the challenges is the fact that HGAC is located in the Greenway Plaza area. Secondly, many of their meetings take place during the day. However, there are times when they go out into the community and conduct public “townhall-type” meetings for specific planning projects and are very open to coming out and speaking at local community meetings. In addition, you can always visit their website at [www.h-gac.com](http://www.h-gac.com).

Stay tuned for the next part in this series on economic development. If you have any questions or feedback, please feel free to email me at [vyokom@wallercounty.org](mailto:vyokom@wallercounty.org).

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About the Waller County Economic Development Partnership (WCEDP): The WCEDP is a Texas non-profit corporation with an IRS 501 (C) 6 tax designation. We are non-political and have a 24-member board, which includes representation from every community in Waller County that has an economic development program. To learn more, visit [www.wallercounty.org](http://www.wallercounty.org).

Mission: The WCEDP is organized to operate a charitable service center to foster increased, environmentally balanced business commerce, positive growth, and overall cooperation and coordination for all communities throughout Waller County, Texas.