



**VISION:**  
Self sufficient  
individuals and  
families in safe  
and healthy  
communities

**MISSION:**  
To work in  
partnership with  
the community to  
promote and  
protect the  
health and social  
well being of  
Houstonians

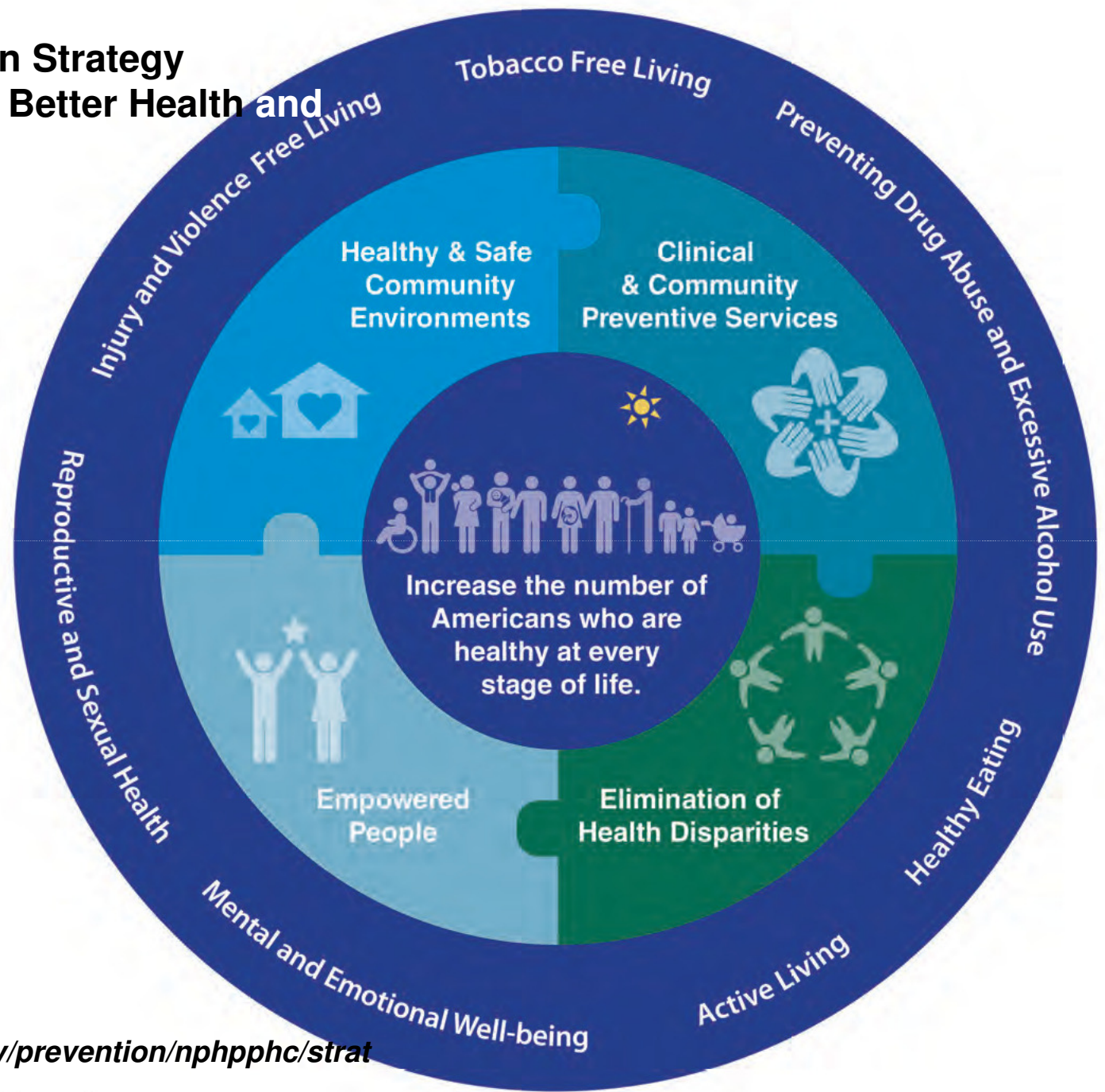
# 2012 NACAA Fall Membership Meeting

## Environmental Justice and Permitting: Local Experience

by  
**Arturo J. Blanco**  
**October 1, 2012**

**US Administration:  
National Prevention Strategy  
America's Plan for Better Health and  
Wellness  
June 16, 2011**

*"The National Prevention Strategy recognizes that good health comes not just from receiving quality medical care, but also from **clean air and water**, safe outdoor spaces for physical activity, safe worksites, healthy foods, violence-free environments and healthy homes."*



<http://www.healthcare.gov/prevention/nphpphc/strategy/report.pdf>

**Seven Priorities for EPA's Future  
MEMORANDUM**

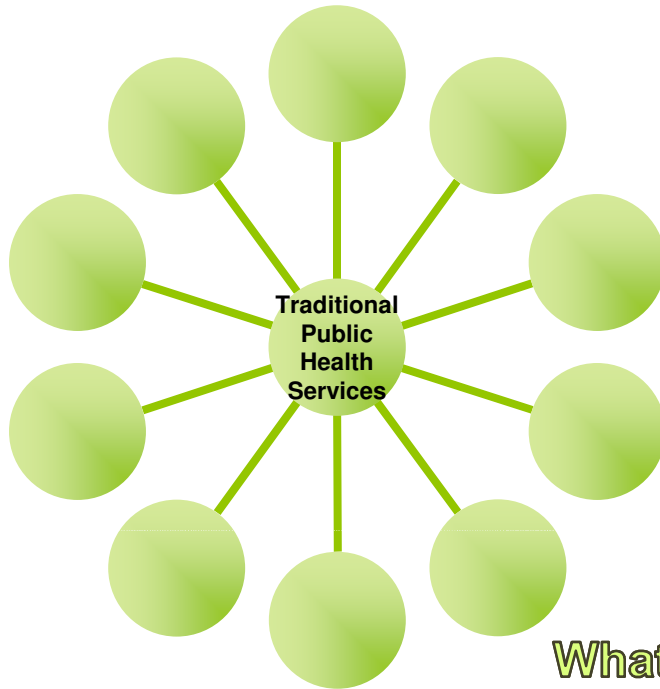
From: Lisa P. Jackson, Administrator

To: All EPA Employees

- **#6 Expanding the Conversation on Environmentalism and Working for Environmental Justice:** We have begun a new era of outreach and protection for communities historically underrepresented in EPA decision-making. We are building strong working relationships with tribes, communities of color, economically distressed cities and towns, young people and others, but this is just a start. We must include environmental justice principles in all of our decisions. ***This is an area that calls for innovation and bold thinking***, and I am challenging all of our employees to ***bring vision and creativity to our programs***. The protection of vulnerable subpopulations is a top priority, especially with regard to children. Our revitalized Children's Health Office is bringing a new energy to safeguarding children through all of our enforcement efforts. We will ensure that children's health protection continues to guide the path forward.

<http://blog.epa.gov/administrator/2010/01/12/seven-priorities-for-epas-future/>

## Current state:



What do they have in  
common?

Shared vision & mission...



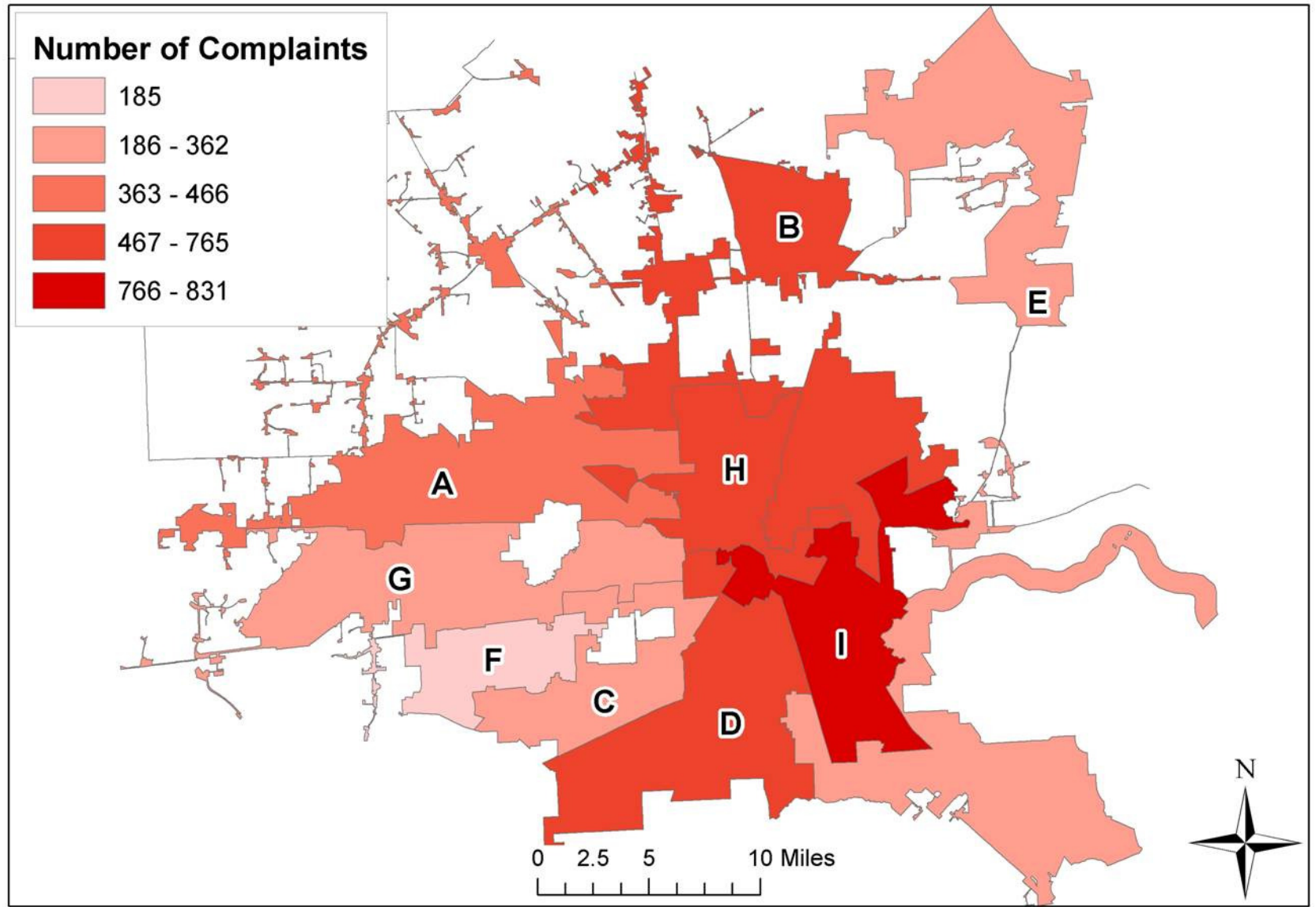
...but working in synergy?

# Challenges

- **Traditional public health functions and traditional environmental functions are structurally separated with respectively separate and limited recourses**
- **Areas of most needs usually involve higher poverty status with mixed zoning issues**
- **Higher concern for food insecurity and basic health and quality of life services restrict residents from discerning between the trees and the forest impacting them**
- **Environmental concerns tend to be widespread and mean different things for different groups**
- **If it can't be seen, smelled, or felt, it doesn't seem real; by contrast, if someone doesn't lose weight soon, the threat of diabetes is readily tangible**

*Example of where air issues predominate...*

**Number of Complaints per Council District from July 2006 to September 2011**



Source: City of Houston 311 and GIS database

# Findings from the Magnolia Park AIM

Final Report July 2008

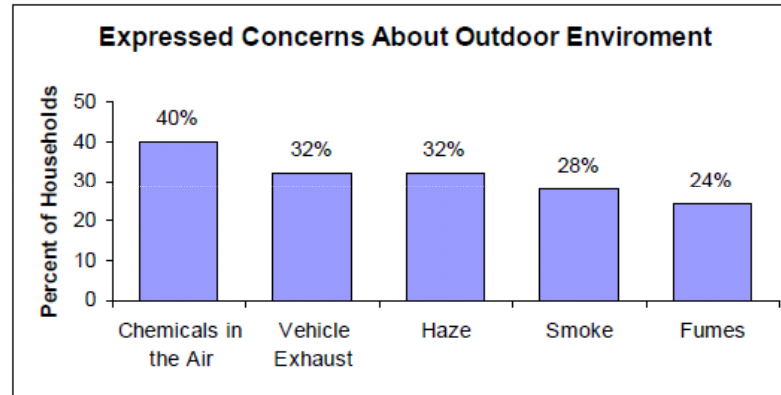
- **25% of households expressed environmental concerns**
  - **Most common was chemicals in the air followed by vehicle exhaust and haze**
- **Examples of issues that City of Houston departments responded to and helped resolve include:**
  - collection of stray animals
  - clearing high weeds in railroad right-of-way
  - **enforcing on outdoor air nuisance**
  - **helped induce improvements of internal environmental controls of certain regulated entities**
  - enforcement on poorly maintained grease traps eliminating food waste exposure
- **Suggested educational and mobilization efforts by government and community based organizations must be directed towards residents to address air quality policy issues.**

*Time limited, yet successful - intervention proved to be 'best practice'*

# Opportunity exists to address issues identified through AIM

## *Outdoor Environmental Concerns*

Figure 3



Two out of five households were concerned about chemicals in the air and one-third was concerned about vehicle exhaust. At least one quarter of household expressed an environmental concern.



## Leveraging public health services and environmental resources, may offer opportunities:

- Engage community organizers, organized environmental advocates, environmental scientists, civic leaders and faith-based organizations on board to **promote and enhance access**
- Improve constituent access with multi-program management and staff anchored on location to **empower residents**
- Bridge traditional public health point of service w/complaint response, referrals to and coordination with less traditional environmental programs to **be a catalyst of response**
- Increase good will and trust between the community and the department, working together without artificial program barriers or boundaries **coalescing neighboring community**

# Challenges/Opportunities

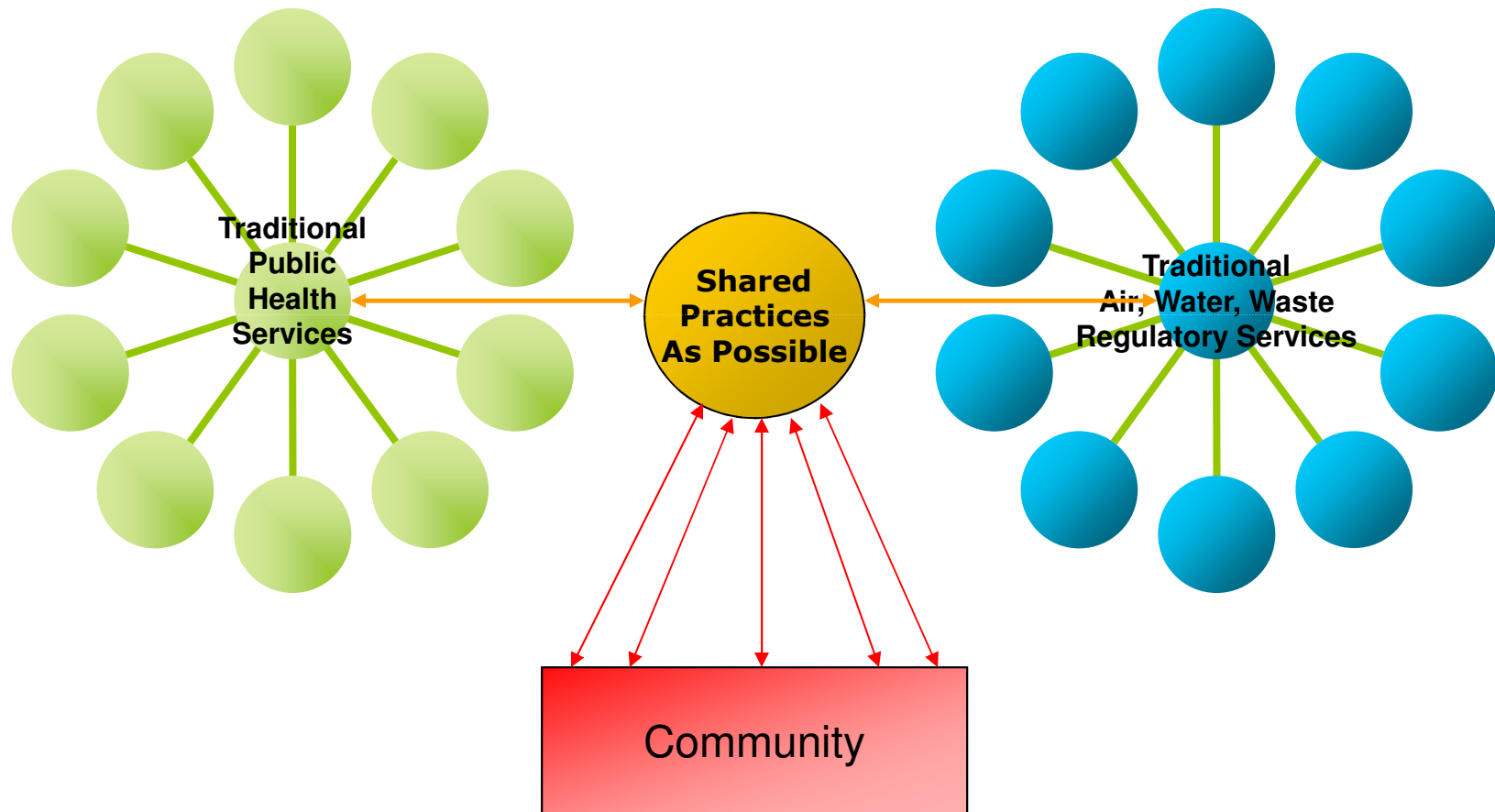
- Traditional public health functions and traditional environmental functions are structurally separated with respective separate and limited resources
  - *Collocated together would initiate a physical connection between previously distinct and separately treated services, giving truer meaning to health wellness*
- Areas of most needs usually involve higher poverty status with mixed zoning issues
  - *By threading together mutual exposure of program and disciplines may best channel human services and environmental help for citizens in need*
- Higher concern for food insecurity and basic quality of life services poses discernment barrier between basic trees and quality of the forest
  - *Working together joining vastly different disciplines that speak different languages, even when interpreting the word environment, would help overcome professional and lay language barriers, especially on environmental concerns tending to be widespread*
- If it can't be seen, smelled, or felt, it doesn't seem real; by contrast, if someone doesn't lose weight soon, the threat of diabetes is readily more obvious and urgent
  - *Frequent onsite interactions between public health and environmental health practitioners and scientists and citizens receiving services*



# Suggestions for Linkages

- Make space in public health services locations for limited/part-time environmental working presence;
- Establish environmental tangible tools, readily accessible by public health clientele, offering environmental how-to's of immediate public benefit;
- Set community wide open door expectation at designated times so walk-ins are exhorted where community presented pollution problems are listened to – help fade perception that only industry has open door access;
- Strategically participate in cross-program staff meetings for constructive exchange and cross-training between public health and pollution programs;
- Engage with and propose linkages to key community stakeholders for buy-in and figuring out details.

Linkages of practices between programs and disciplines quicken a shared vision & mission, help fade physical and program barriers, and if done right weave cross-discipline services for a truer EJ effect.



# Additional Linkages

- Engages the community to meet public health accreditation standards including environmental programs
- Pilot for engaging all local community systems to address quality of life
- Potential to be a national model