



Harris County, Texas

1001 Preston St., Suite 934
Houston, Texas 77002

Staff Report

File #: 21-4084

Agenda Date: 8/10/2021

Agenda #: 13.

		YES	NO	ABSTAIN
To:	Harris County Commissioners Court	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Through:	David Berry, County Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepared By:	David Berry, County Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subject:	Office of County Administration Transition Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Project ID (If applicable):		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Purpose and Request:

Request for approval of the Office of County Administration Transition Plan, including proposed departmental organizational structure and rights and responsibilities of the County Administrator.

Background and Discussion:

On June 29, 2021, Commissioners Court created the position of County Administrator and appointed David Berry to serve in that capacity. The position is charged with coordination and oversight of both the day-to-day operations and long-term strategic planning of County departments that report to Commissioners Court. The adopted order requested the County Administrator to return to Commissioners Court within 45 days for approval of a transition plan to include a new organizational and reporting structure.

Fiscal Impact:

The Office of County Administration (OCA) received an initial budget of \$2 million for fiscal year 2022. The OCA is not requesting additional budget at this time; however, there will be a fiscal impact for fiscal year 2023. The budget for fiscal year 2023 is shown below on an annualized basis. It would be subject to approval in the budget process.

Fiscal Summary (\$M)			
Expenditures	FY 21-22	FY 22-23 Projected	Future Years Projected [3 additional years]
Service Impacted:			
New positions	\$2.0	\$3.9	11.6
Transferred positions from	0.6	1.2	3.6
Total Expenditures	\$2.6	\$5.1	15.2
Funding Sources			
Existing Department Budget	\$2.0		
Transferred positions from	0.6	1.2	3.6
General Fund*		3.9	11.6
Total Sources	\$2.6	\$5.1	15.2

Alternatives:

Commissioners Court could request changes to the Transition Plan.

Alignment with Strategic Objective:

Governance and Customer Service: Harris County will exemplify high-quality, transparent, and accountable government by using data and best practices to invest taxpayer dollars wisely; by continually reviewing and improving the effectiveness of our policies, programs, and services; by recruiting and retaining a talented and diverse workforce; and by engaging with, and providing outstanding customer service to, all of our communities.

Attachments:

Office of County Administration Transition Plan

Presented to Commissioners Court

August 10, 2021

Approve: **G/E**

*See attached order

ORDER OF COMMISSIONERS COURT

Approving Office of County Administration Transition Plan, Including Proposed Departmental Organizational Structure and Rights and Responsibilities of Harris County Administrator

The Commissioners Court of Harris County, Texas, convened at a meeting of the Court at the Harris County Administration Building in the City of Houston, Texas, on August 10, 2021 with all members present.

A quorum was present. Among other business, the following was transacted:

ORDER APPROVING OFFICE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATION TRANSITION PLAN, INCLUDING PROPOSED DEPARTMENTAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF HARRIS COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Commissioner Garcia introduced an order and made a motion that the same be adopted. Commissioner Ellis seconded the motion for adoption of the order. The motion, carrying with it the adoption of the order, prevailed by the following vote:

Vote of the Court	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Abstain</u>
Judge Hidalgo	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Ellis	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Garcia	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Ramsey, P.E.	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Cagle	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>

The County Judge thereupon announced that the motion had duly and lawfully carried and that the order had been duly and lawfully adopted. The order thus adopted follows:

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The Office of County Administration Transition Plan, including proposed departmental organizational structure and rights and responsibilities of Harris County Administrator, is approved with the exception that footnote 1 is added to "Harris Count Toll Road Authority" on page 3 as follows:

The hiring and firing of HCTRA's Director by the County Administrator requires ratification by Commissioners Court.

2. All Harris County officials and employees are authorized to do any and all things necessary or convenient to accomplish the purpose of this Order.

Presented to Commissioners Court

August 10, 2021

Approve: G/E



Office of County Administration TRANSITION PLAN

SUMMARY

On June 29, 2021, Commissioners Court created the position of County Administrator and appointed David Berry to the position. This plan, submitted for Commissioners Court's consideration and approval, lays out the County Administrator's vision to effectively implement Court's policies and goals.

The plan is the result of extensive research and outreach. The County Administrator held meetings with his counterparts at other large counties, community leaders, and all department heads affected by the reorganization. Three employee workshops were also held, where nearly 60 Harris County employees from 27 departments provided input. The County Attorney's Office assigned a team to advise on and review the transition plan. Finally, the County Administrator held meetings to gather input from every Commissioners Court office.

The Office of County Administration exists to implement Commissioners Court's goals. Therefore, our proposed mission mirrors Commissioners Court's countywide goal: **to build a more dynamic, vibrant, and resilient community while being inclusive, equitable, and transparent in all that we do.**

We propose to accomplish our mission through five key principles, all of which were themes that emerged through our interviews and workshops.

- **Best workforce:** We will retain, recruit, and support talented employees who reflect our diverse community.
- **Exceptional services:** We will provide exceptional services to our constituents based on best practices, community feedback, and evidence of effectiveness.
- **One government:** All departments under the County Administrator will act as one government, collaborating with the County Judge, Commissioner Precincts, and other elected officials.
- **Clear success:** We will clearly define success and equity through goals, strategic plans, and performance metrics.
- **Efficient operations:** We will simplify internal processes, go paperless where possible, eliminate wasteful practices, and reinvest the savings in serving the public.

Effectively administrating Harris County government is a task which is much bigger than one person. **We propose the creation of three Deputy County Administrators (DCAs), each covering a key area of County government: Justice and Safety, Resiliency and Infrastructure, and Health and Opportunity.** Each DCA would be responsible for implementing Commissioners Court’s goals and achieving priority outcomes in their area of expertise. Establishing DCAs will create clear points of accountability and a manageable reporting structure.

Each DCA would manage some departments directly and would also have the explicit charge to coordinate with related departments and agencies that are managed by elected officials or separately-appointed officials. The DCAs would be chosen through a national search process, in which Commissioners Court will have the opportunity to provide input.

We further propose restructuring the Budget Management Department. Human Resources & Risk Management would be split from the budget function, forming its own department that would report to the County Administrator. In addition, the Office of Boards and Commissions and the agenda preparation function would move to the Office of County Administration.

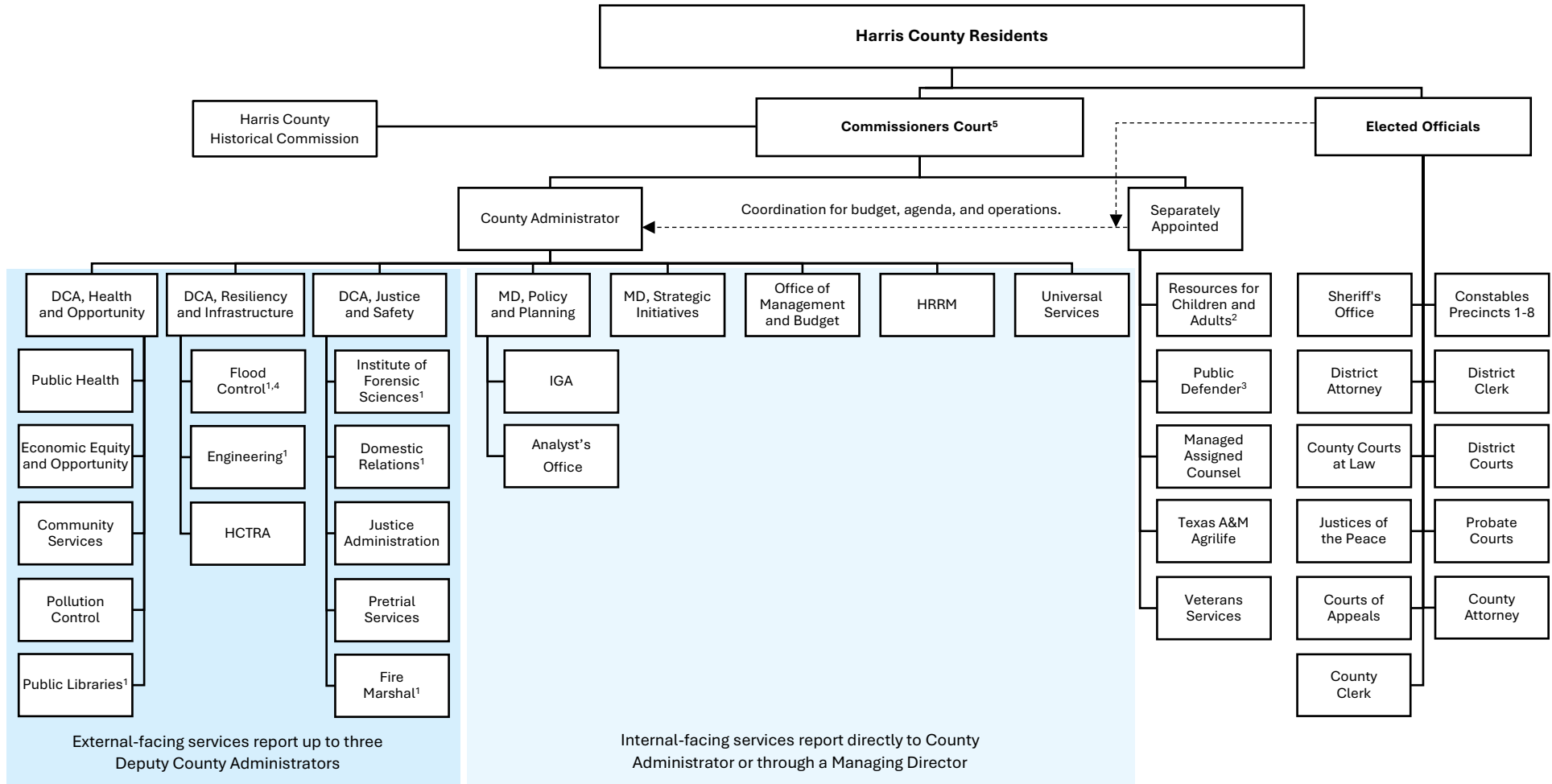
Commissioners Court’s June 29 order provides that, upon approval of this transition plan, the County Administrator would have the right to appoint and dismiss DCAs and department heads. The County Attorney’s Office has advised that personnel changes for a number of positions must be ratified by Commissioners Court. This is a typical practice at other large Texas counties.

The chart on page 3 summarizes the proposed organizational structure.

Full implementation of the new organizational structure including hiring the DCAs, a new budget director and a permanent director of the Flood Control District—will take many months. Fully accomplishing the mission and vision of the Office of County Administration will take several years. Patience will be asked and needed. **Nevertheless, a number of immediate initiatives are proposed, to make a significant down payment on organizational improvement and efficiency.** The work can begin right away to make County government better serve its constituents.

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Countywide Organizational Chart



Notes

- ¹Hiring and firing of department head by the County Administrator require ratification by Commissioners Court
- ²Hiring and firing of department head done by a board or group of elected officials other than Commissioners Court
- ³Hiring and firing of department head by Commissioners Court must take into account recommendation of a separate board
- ⁴County Administrator serves as the Flood Control Manager with the rights and responsibilities set forth in statute to provide oversight of the Flood Control District. A separate Executive Director, currently Alan Black, would retain the day-to-day operational duties and powers.
- ⁵County Judge oversees the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Other Departments

- **County Auditor** appointed by District Judges
- **Purchasing Agent** appointed by Purchasing Board
- **Juvenile Probation** director appointed by Juvenile Board
- **Office of Court Management** director appointed by County Criminal Courts at Law Judges
- **District Court Management** director appointed by District Judges
- **Children's Assessment Center** director appointed by a separate board
- **Civil Service Commission** appointed by Commissioners Court, Sheriff, and District Attorney
- **Law Library** director appointed by County Attorney
- **Elections Administrator** appointed by Elections Commission

BACKGROUND

On June 29, 2021, Harris County Commissioners Court created the position of County Administrator and appointed David Berry to serve in that capacity. The position is charged with coordination and oversight of both the day-to-day operations and long-term strategic planning of County departments that report to Commissioners Court. The County Administrator, and the Office of County Administration (OCA), will work to ensure successful implementation of policies and goals set by Commissioners Court.

The adopted order requests the County Administrator to return to Commissioners Court within 45 days for approval of a transition plan to include a new organizational and reporting structure. The new structure will not apply to elected officials or to the employees and functions of the offices of members of Commissioners Court.

The order grants the County Administrator appointment and dismissal authority for all OCA employees and all department heads reporting directly to the OCA, effective upon Commissioners Court approval of the transition plan. Certain appointments and dismissals, as described above, will require ratification by Commissioners Court. Commissioners Court directed the Harris County Attorney to assign a team to conduct a review of the proposed organizational structure and transition plan to ensure compliance with all legal requirements.

Precedent within Harris County

While formally appointing an Administrator is new, Commissioners Court has on many occasions consolidated reporting and delegated day-to-day oversight to an appointed executive. From 1974-2011, Richard Raycraft served as Harris County's Court Coordinator, Budget Officer, and Director of the Management Services Department. Over this period, Raycraft assumed many of the duties typically associated with a County Administrator. These included compiling the bi-weekly agenda for Commissioners Court, overseeing department processes, settling disputes between department heads, guiding policy initiatives, and providing policy reports, as well as preparing the budget and the management of county debt.

With Raycraft's retirement in 2011, the Management Services Department was dissolved and replaced by the Budget Management Department (BMD). William Jackson became County Budget Officer and assumed many of the administrative and budget responsibilities that had been carried out by Raycraft. During Jackson's tenure, BMD included the functions that are currently part of Intergovernmental and Global Affairs, the Justice Administrative Department, Human Resources & Risk Management, and Economic Equity and Opportunity departments. BMD also exerted significant oversight over infrastructure spending through the budget process. The central role of BMD in overseeing different County operations continued when David Berry was appointed Director in 2020.

In addition to administration and budget, Harris County previously managed infrastructure-related departments through the Public Infrastructure Department until the retirement of Art Storey in 2014. The Public Infrastructure Department included the Harris County Engineering Department, the Harris County Flood Control District, and the Harris County Toll Road Authority.

External recommendations

Creating a County Administrator in Harris County is not a new idea. Two separate independent reviews of Harris County’s organizational structure in the past 25 years have both recommended transitioning to a more streamlined model of governance. Though conducted over twenty years apart, reports by KPMG Peat Marwick, LLP, in 1997 and by PFM Consulting Group, Inc., in 2020 identified similar challenges and recommend similar solutions to improve Harris County’s operations.

In 1997, KPMG’s Re-Organization Review Report noted that the structure of Commissioners Court managing 25 direct departmental reports “significantly impairs communications and accountability.” Similarly, PFM’s Organizational and Operational Review of Harris County Government advised in 2020 that “the fact that there are so many different departments directly reporting to the Harris County Commissioners Court creates a highly-siloed approach that does not encourage coordination or collaboration.”

In its 2020 countywide review, the consulting firm PFM recommended that Harris County designate a County Administrator, with four Deputy County Administrators to whom the County’s non-elected departments would report. They further made recommendations falling in to five broad categories:

- Restructuring to increase administrative efficiency
- Fostering strategic and outcomes-based government
- Focusing on coordination and collaboration
- Increasing transparency and accountability
- Advancing equity

Both the KPMG and PFM reports relied on in-depth reviews of Harris County government as well as the experience of other county governments in Texas and around the nation who chose to adopt more coordinated models of governance.

Precedent outside of Harris County

Overall, 43% of the nation’s counties have an appointed County Administrator, according to the National Association of Counties. The percentage is much higher for larger counties with more complex operations. By 2021, nearly all of the Counties typically used as benchmarks for Harris County have implemented a County Administrator or similar governance model. All five other counties in the United States with populations over 3 million – Los Angeles County (CA), Cook County (IL), Maricopa County (AZ), San Diego County (CA), and Orange County (CA), have County Administrators or a similar position. Within Texas, Dallas County, Tarrant County, Bexar County, and El Paso County all have a County Administrator or Manager. **Up until this point, Harris County was the most populous county in the nation to not employ a County Administrator or similar position. It was also, along with Travis County, an exception among large Texas counties.**

In preparing this plan, we conducted research on and interviewed the county administrators in Bexar, Tarrant, Dallas, and El Paso County. **While Harris County’s operations and budget are dramatically larger and more complex than these other counties, there is a body of common practices on which Harris County can draw:**

1. All the peer counties within Texas grant their administrators substantial authority to make personnel decisions, though somewhat less in Dallas County than in Tarrant, Bexar and El Paso.
2. The county administrator's office is charged with preparing the Commissioners Court agenda and assuring items are complete and appropriate for Court action.
3. County administrators conduct regular briefings with Court members.
4. Commissioners Court offices and members regularly interact with department heads. The administrator has in place a protocol for department heads to notify the administrator when needed.
5. County administrators have a written contract or delegation of authority that articulates their duties and powers.

This transition plan reflects all of these practices.

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STAKEHOLDER INPUT

This transition plan has benefitted from advice and input from department directors, front line employees, and select external stakeholders. Since being appointed, the County Administrator has met with every appointed department director affected by the transition. The meetings were primarily to listen and obtain the input of others. In addition to department meetings, three collaborative employee workshops took place in July 2021 to further inform the development of the Office of County Administration. Fifty-nine employees representing twenty-seven departments participated in a series of input exercises to discuss their priorities and how the OCA can support the success of Harris County.

In the interviews and workshops, we sought input on the topics of increased department coordination, human resources and employee recognition, clarifying the County's objectives, and improving business practices. While there was by no means uniformity, there was a strong level of consistency in suggestions.

Opportunities for increased coordination:

- The **elimination of departmental silos** was mentioned by multiple workgroups in every employee workshop. In particular, there is an urgent need for departments in the justice system to continue to improve collaboration. Working relationships can be strengthened at the director and at the staff level. The OCA can provide a less political forum to share ideas and coordinate.
- **Data sharing between departments should increase**, with an emphasis on securing sensitive information. This opportunity includes data on services and performance metrics, as well as data on customers and clients.
- **Countywide internal communications can be improved.** Employees see the OCA as a potential asset in terms of communicating policies, what happens at Commissioners Court, and the strategic direction of the county.

Human resources and employee recognition:

- Standardized policies and procedures are especially important to smaller departments.
- There is strong interest in a shared services model for human resources.
- Compensation is a key issue to increase employee retention across departments. There is particular interest in increased transparency and pay equity.
- Employees should be recognized not just for their tenure but their impact on the lives of Harris County citizens.
- Finding the right people to fill key roles is a challenge felt across departments. The County can improve its branding and prestige among potential employees.

Defining objectives and success:

Over half of all participants in the employee workshops voted that their single highest priority for the OCA is to **clearly identify, prioritize, and align goals and objectives countywide**. As employees in two of the workshops independently remarked, “when everything is a priority, nothing is *the* priority.” There is a strong need for long-term strategic planning on issues that cross departments, including facilities and information technology

- Existing initiatives--such as the Countywide Transportation Plan and the Infrastructure Resilience Team--need to clarify their outputs, timeline, and link to Commissioners Court’s goals.
- The OCA can assist Commissioners Court in formally writing down its objectives along with realistic timelines.
- The County needs a strategic plan for facilities and information technology, with an emphasis on resiliency.

Business practices:

- **There is strong interest in more shared services**, across IT, data management, human resources, financial management, and grants management.
- The procure-to-contract-to-pay process takes too long, is often frustrating, and sometimes even jeopardizes grants.
- More processes need to be automated.

The lack of documented policies and procedures is detrimental to employees’ ability to collaborate. Policies and procedures that do exist can be hard to locate and hard to understand.

Input from department heads and employees has proved invaluable in defining the OCA’s mission and vision, developing the organizational structure, and defining immediate initiatives.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND REPORTING STRUCTURE

Creating a County Administrator provides a unique opportunity to recast the organizational structure in Harris County government. But change should have a purpose. The structure proposed here has three primary objectives:

1. **Collaboration** – County employees working to serve the public will work as one team. Strategic plans, programs, services, and data will be coordinated across departments.
2. **Accountability** – For each of Commissioners Court’s goals areas and priority outcomes, there should be a leader with clear responsibility.
3. **Efficiency** – There should be no more layers of reporting than needed. Over time, the organizational structure should create the opportunity to consolidate services and reduce costs.

We have carefully followed Commissioners Court’s motion from June 29, 2021 creating the County Administrator. We have also carefully reviewed PFM’s recommendations in their countywide review, though we have taken a different direction in several respects. We have also gathered input on this proposed structure from other counties and cities, from outside experts, and from county employees.

Authority of the County Administrator

The June 29 Commissioners Court order creating the position of County Administrator set forth the initial authority of the office. Consistent with that order, it is recommended that the County Administrator be granted the following rights and responsibilities:

- To provide oversight of all County Departments reporting to the County Administrator.
- To appoint and dismiss department heads and other employees reporting to the County Administrator, whether directly or indirectly through one or more managers, except where not permitted by law. Where not permitted by law, the County Administrator will recommend appointments or dismissals for ratification by Commissioners Court.
- To realign the organizational structure of the County to advance coordination and the goals of Commissioners Court.
- To serve as the County Budget Officer with the rights and responsibilities set forth in statute

In addition, it is recommended that the following be added to the County Administrator’s rights and responsibilities:

- To implement and enforce internal policies
- To perform any other duties or tasks specifically authorized by Commissioners Court
- To serve as the Flood Control Manager with the rights and responsibilities set forth in statute to provide oversight of the Flood Control District. (A separate Executive Director, currently Alan Black, would retain the day-to-day operational duties and powers).

The County Attorney's Office has undertaken a thorough review of the proposed organizational structure, the authority delegated in the Court's previous action, and the recommendations contained in this transition plan.

In addition to the above, **the County Administrator will be responsible for implementing the countywide vision and the OCA's mission of "building a more dynamic, vibrant, and resilient community while being inclusive, equitable, and transparent in all that we do."** The County Administrator will also have primary responsibility for Commissioners Court's goals and priority outcomes in the area of Governance and Customer Service.

Deputy County Administrators

Nearly 20 department heads, plus the OCA staff, would be too many direct reports for the County Administrator to directly oversee. **Nearly all large governments with an appointed County Administrator or manager have several deputies or assistants, and we believe Harris County should follow this best practice.** We propose three Deputy County Administrators (DCAs) to oversee the departments under Commissioners Court's direction that provide public-facing services. Each DCA would manage a group of related departments, with the charge of serving the public in a more data-driven, customer-friendly, and strategic way.

Each DCA should have the explicit charge to coordinate the work of departments under their direct supervision with the work from other departments and agencies, including those led by elected officials. While independent agencies and elected officials will retain their autonomy, each DCA (together with the County Administrator) should find common ground where possible.

Each DCA would be responsible for implementing Commissioners Court's goals and priority outcomes in one or more of the eight goal areas. When the County develops a strategic plan, each DCA will have the responsibility for a set of initiatives. The DCA's job, in turn, will be to translate Commissioners Court's goals, priority outcomes, and strategic plans into a work plan and performance metrics for the departments, programs, and services under their purview.

Deputy County Administrator for Justice and Safety

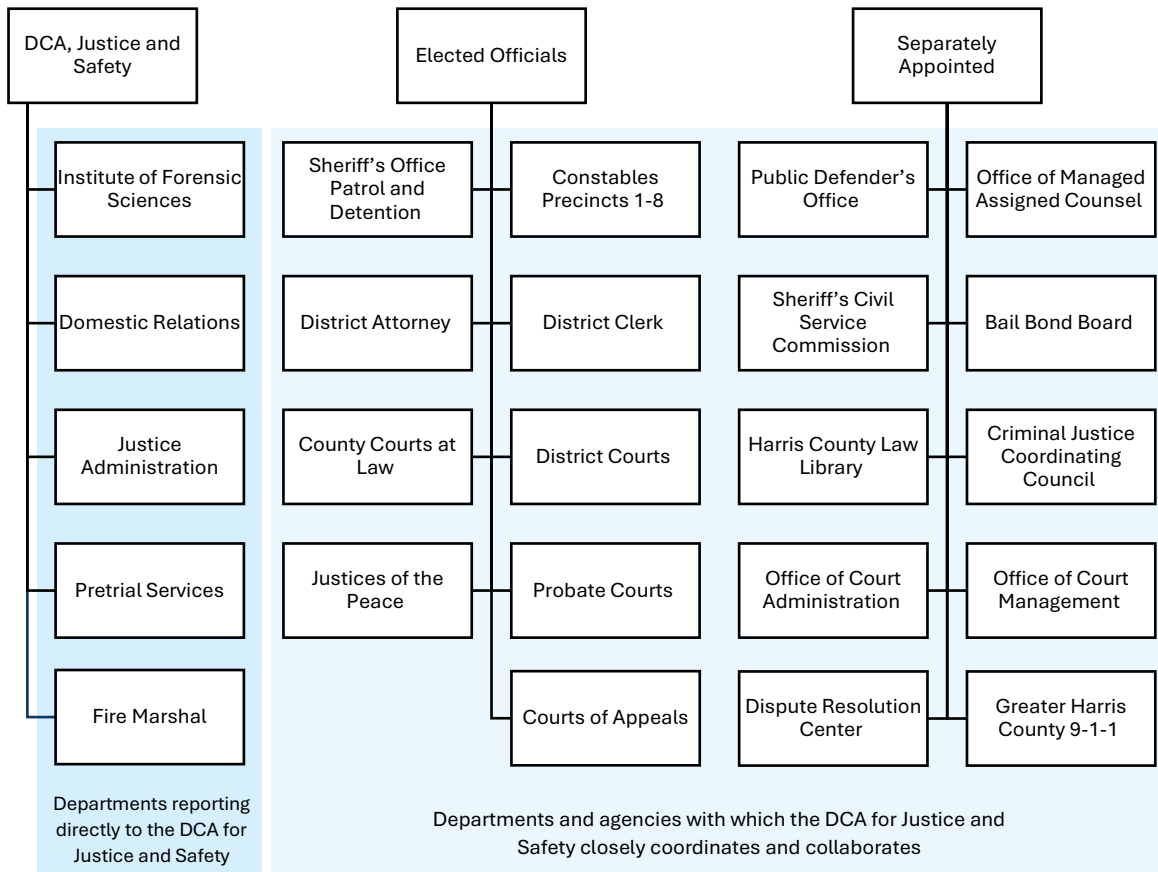
The **DCA for Justice and Safety** will be responsible for implementing Commissioners Court's goals, priority outcomes, and strategic plan in that area.

Elected officials play a vital role in the Harris County criminal justice system. **A key part of the DCA for Justice and Safety's job will be to coordinate and collaborate with the Sheriff, the Constables, the District Attorney, elected judges, and others.** Solving major operational challenges, such as the current criminal case backlog, requires the coordination of many parties and departments, each of which has significant legal autonomy. The DCA for Justice and Safety can drive the required collaboration and work with Commissioners Court to bring financial resources to where they can be most impactful.

The DCA for Justice and Safety can also coordinate in achieving policy objectives shared by elected officials throughout the justice system. The DCA for Justice and Safety will work closely with and build upon the work

of the Justice Administration Department to look across the Harris County criminal justice system to review equity issues and system-wide outcomes. **There is also a tremendous opportunity to standardize and share data throughout the justice system, all within the context of a strong commitment to cybersecurity.**

DCA for Justice and Safety Department and Agency Responsibilities



Deputy County Administrator for Resiliency and Infrastructure

The **DCA for Resiliency and Infrastructure** will be responsible for implementing Commissioners Court's goals, priority outcomes, and strategic plan in the areas of flooding and transportation, as well as (together with the DCA for Health and Opportunity) housing and environment.

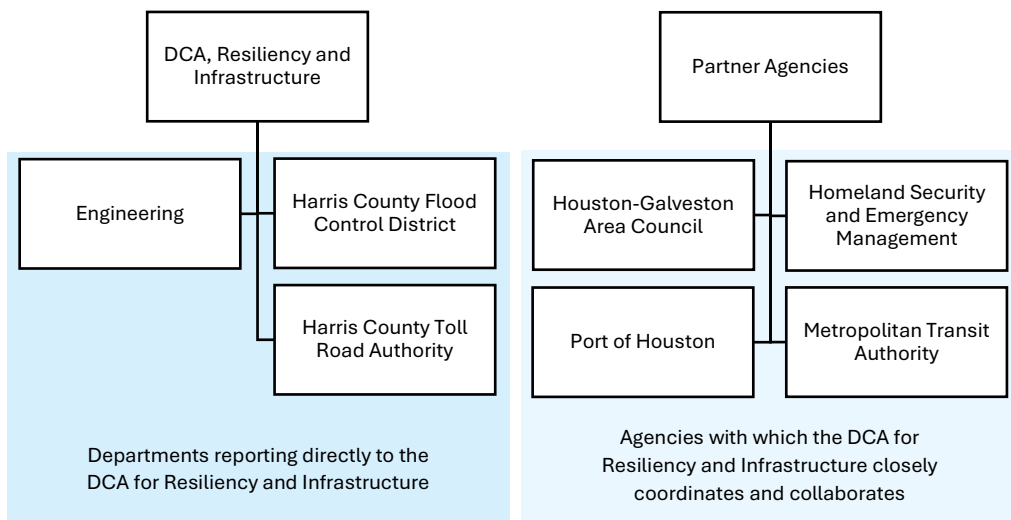
Under the direction and authority of Commissioners Court, Harris County government has long been the major driver of infrastructure investment in the region, a role which can and should continue. Each Commissioner Precinct has played a special role in the construction and maintenance of roads. Commissioners Court's motion creating the Office of County Administration was clear that the leading role of Commissioner Precincts in transportation will not change. **A key role of the DCA for Resiliency and Infrastructure is to provide the coordination, financial, and execution resources needed for Precinct-based road and trail operations which accomplish the County's objectives.**

Since Hurricane Harvey, there has been a renewed and deserved focus on flood protection, mitigation, and resiliency. It is increasingly clear that road standards, building permit codes, flood detention, channels, and other related infrastructure **comprise one system that must be managed to protect Harris County residents from flooding. The DCA for Resiliency and Infrastructure will be able to look across this interconnected system to build a more resilient community.** The County’s representation at METRO provides another opportunity to execute on Commissioners Court’s transportation goals in a more coordinated way.

There has been some progress toward more integrated flood control and transportation planning at the County. However, these efforts have encountered challenges in the lack of coordination between departments and a lack of a clear link to Commissioners Court’s goals. **The DCA for Resiliency and Infrastructure can drive multidisciplinary, multi-strategy flood resiliency and transportation plans that reflect:**

1. Commissioners Court’s commitment to equity;
2. Commissioners Court’s policy priorities and key outcomes; and
3. The historical role of Commissioner Precincts.

DCA for Resiliency and Infrastructure Department and Agency Responsibilities



Deputy County Administrator for Health and Opportunity

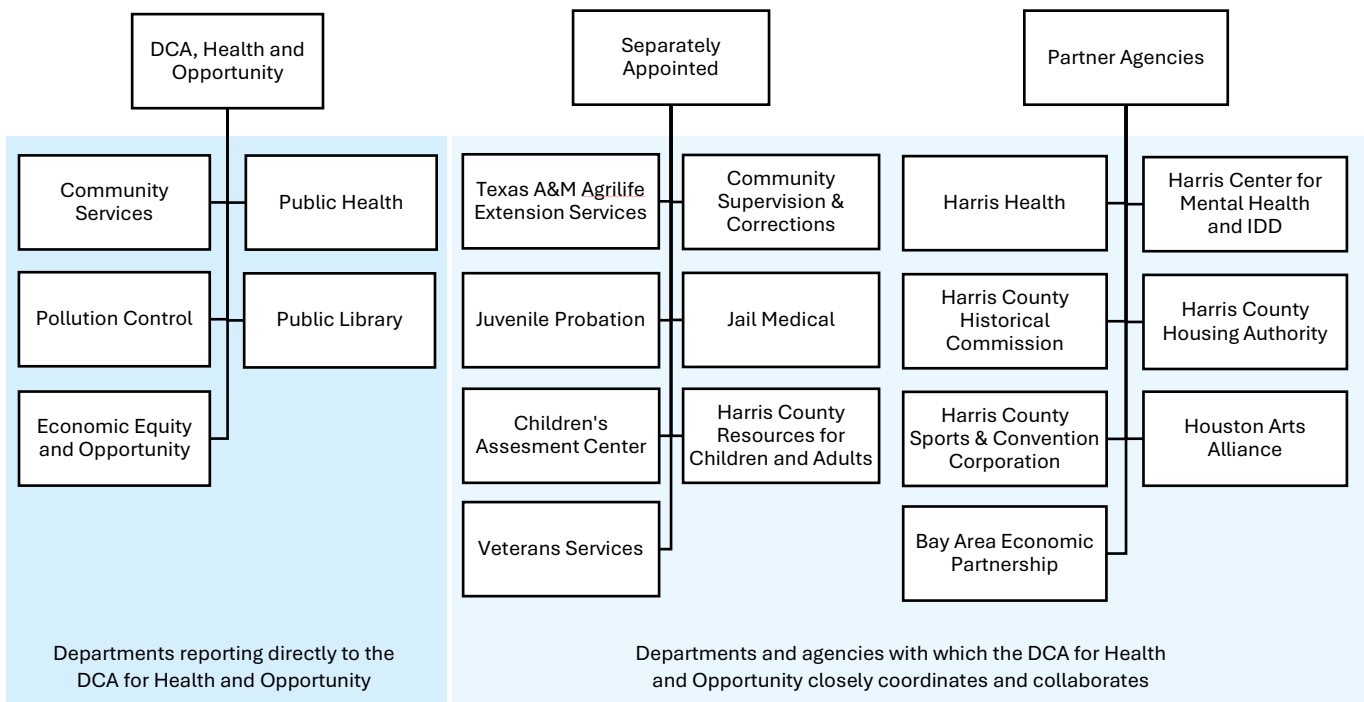
The **DCA for Health and Opportunity** will be responsible for implementing Commissioners Court’s goals, priority outcomes, and strategic plan in the areas of Public Health and Economic Opportunity, as well as (together with the DCA for Resiliency and Infrastructure) Housing and Environment. These goal areas have historically received less investment than criminal justice and infrastructure but, in recent years, Commissioners Court has made clear its desire to bring comparable focus on health and opportunity.

Commissioners Court has noted **there is a tremendous opportunity to improve collaboration between the County’s Public Health Department, the Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, Harris Health, the City of Houston’s public health system and other health entities in the region.** While recent strides have been made, the DCA for Health and Opportunity, together with the Public Health director, should drive improved coordination of information, services, and client communications, including the possibility of forming an official coordination council or agency, or joint appointments to multiple agencies.

The DCA’s oversight of other social services allows for a broad view of the social determinants of health and facilitates a comprehensive approach to serving clients. **The DCA for Health and Opportunity will be well-situated to evaluate which combination and levels of health and social services yield the best outcomes for clients.** There will also be important opportunities to coordinate client intake, call centers, and other interactions.

The inclusion of the Juvenile Probation Department and Jail Medical operation in the coordination portfolio of the DCA for Health and Opportunity underlines the opportunity to frame these services in a non-carceral way. It is a choice to emphasize that there is **“no wrong door” to enter into County services which improve health and opportunity.**

DCA for Health and Opportunity Department and Agency Responsibilities



Other functions in the Office of County Administration

Office of Sustainability

As approved on July 20, 2021, the Harris County Office of Sustainability would be located within the Office of County Administration. The Office of Sustainability will function as a “matrix” department. Rather than building a large initial staff, it will bring together staff from different departments and Commissioner Precincts who are best situated to act on sustainability initiatives. Initially, the Office of Sustainability will have a single staff member leading the work to benchmark internal emissions, set targets, and launch preparation of a Climate Justice and Action Plan.

Office of Boards and Commissions

We recommend that the Office of Boards and Commissions be moved from the Budget Management Department to the Office of County Administration. County Administration is the logical place to track and source potential candidates for boards and agencies whose members are appointed by Commissioners Court.

Agenda

We recommend that management of the Commissioners Court agenda, along with the associated staff, be moved from the Budget Management Department to the Office of County Administration. This is a natural location for a function that spans all County departments. This will help make agenda items more complete, including a clear request for action and fiscal notes, if appropriate. The management of the agenda by the Office of County Administration follows the practice of Bexar County, Tarrant County, Dallas County, and El Paso County.

Strategic Initiatives

In the absence of a County Administrator, the Budget Management Department has historically managed many cross-cutting strategic initiatives. Given the centrality of finances, performance data, and human resources to most strategic initiatives, the future Office of Management and Budget and the Human Resources & Risk Management department should remain involved. But leadership should come from the Office of County Administration.

We recommend the transfer of Leah Barton’s position from BMD to the Office of County Administration to work on strategic initiatives. This includes the Project Management Office (PMO) currently working on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. Her title would change to Managing Director of Strategic Initiatives.

We recommend adding one position under the MD, Strategic Initiatives to focus on operational improvement in County business processes, such as purchasing, contracting, and payment timing (the need for which was a consistent theme identified in our interviews). Despite employees’ hard work, it has become too hard, and it takes too long, to get many things done at Harris County. We believe this is an opportunity for the Office of County Administration to improve Harris County government - one that can pay for itself many times over.

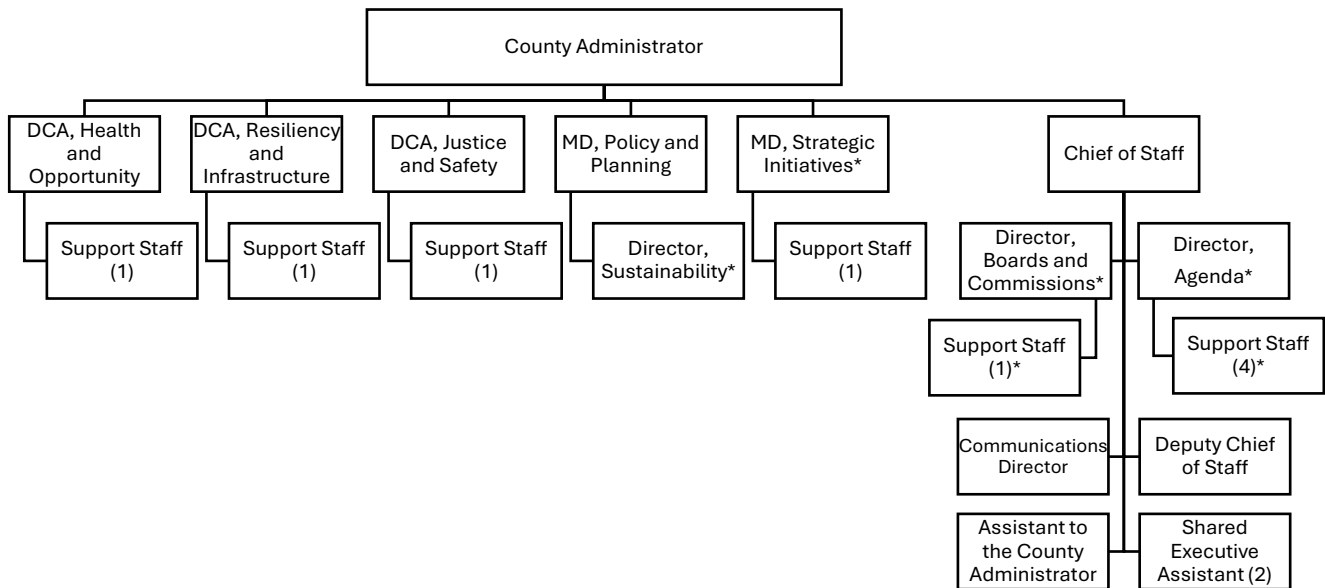
Policy and Planning

We recommend that a Managing Director for Policy and Planning oversee and manage the Commissioners Court Analyst’s Office and Intergovernmental and Global Affairs. This grouping would allow Analyst’s Office members to support IGA’s work with briefing materials and legislative research, while still providing policy reports requested by Commissioners Court.

In addition, this Managing Director would have responsibility for developing an overall strategic plan for the County. A strategic plan is a vital step forward for more accountable and effective government. Staff from the Analyst’s Office could support this planning effort.

The County Administrator, Deputy County Administrators, and Managing Directors will be considered Department Heads for the purposes of Harris County Personnel Policies & Procedures.

Organizational Chart – Office of County Administration



Notes

*Office or positions previously approved by Commissioners Court.

Other Changes in County Departments

Human Resources & Risk Management

We recommend that Human Resources & Risk Management (HRRM) should become its own department separate from the Budget Management Department. Given the centrality of workforce and talent issues to the County, HRRM should report directly to the County Administrator. HRRM sitting within BMD was a result the County Budget Officer fulfilling many of the broad management duties which would now be filled by the County Administrator.

Office of Management and Budget

We recommend that a simplified Budget Management Department, without the HRRM or agenda functions, be renamed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and report directly to the County Administrator. OMB can refocus on the core vital disciplines of budgeting, capital planning, finance, and performance data analysis.

Universal Services Department

We recommend that the Universal Services Department report directly to the County Administrator to best provide technical support to all departments.

OCA BUDGET

Altogether the Office of County Administration as described above would include 25 positions, of which 9 are already funded with existing budget, 4 are new positions and 2 have already been approved by Commissioners Court as part of the Office of Boards and Commissions. The Office of County Administration received an initial budget of \$2 million for fiscal year 2022. We are not requesting additional budget at this time, though this could change if the pace of hiring is faster than expected. However, there will be a fiscal impact for fiscal year 2023. The budget for fiscal year 2023 is shown below on an annualized basis. It would be subject to approval in the budget process.

	FY 2022	FY 2023
Transfers of Existing Budget		
Labor	626,860	1,086,557
Non-labor	3,920	108,752
Total Transfers	630,780	1,195,309
Projected Incremental Expenses		
Labor		3,528,768
Non-labor		333,540
Total Incremental Expenses		3,862,308
Existing Budget	2,000,000	
Total	\$2,630,780	\$5,057,616

Table 1

The incremental expense of the OCA for the fiscal year 2023 represents approximately 0.1% of the budget, including CIP that would be managed by the OCA under the direction of Commissioners Court.

NEXT STEPS

The vision of the Office of County Administration is to support accountable government which meets clearly defined goals set by Commissioners. The vision builds on the talent and commitment of the Harris County workforce as well as the current leadership of departments. But the vision will not be implemented overnight.

In particular, hiring will be critical. This transition plan calls for three Deputy County Administrators, two Managing Directors and a new Budget Director, in addition to the ongoing search for a new Executive Director of the Flood Control District.

The Office of County Administration’s ability to oversee and manage departments will be limited until these key hires are in place. Nevertheless, the reporting structure can be implemented immediately with the understanding that the County Administrator’s management of departments will have a much lighter touch until roles are filled.

The Office of County Administration will provide Commissioners Court a report after 60 days on the progress in hiring the Deputy County Administrators, Managing Directors, and Budget and Flood Control Directors.

The need for change, however, is sufficiently urgent that the Office of County Administration proposes to implement some immediate initiatives to begin accomplishing its vision. With approval of this plan, the Office of County Administration will immediately begin to execute these initiatives.

Key Principle	Early Initiative
<p>Best workforce We will recruit, retain, and support talented employees who reflect our diverse community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement countywide employee recognition programs, highlighting the impact of their public service.
<p>Exceptional services We will provide exceptional services based on best practices, community feedback and evidence of effectiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a County Business Operations workgroup charged with reducing paper and manual labor for County employees, reducing contracting periods, and making it easier for entities to do business with the County.
<p>One government All departments under the County Administrator will act as one government, collaborating with the County Judge, Commissioner Precincts, and other elected officials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an Open Data Policy • Create an Open Data Portal which provides a “one stop shop” for publicly available information at the County. Develop a Services Portal where constituents can find a central repository of links to County services to create a more unified experience for constituents.

<p>Clear success, clear accountability We will create accountability by defining success and equity through clear goals, strategic plans, and performance metrics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translate Commissioners Court’s goals into a set of proposed Priority Outcomes, which will form the basis of the upcoming budgeting process and Countywide performance management. • Work with Commissioners Court to develop a definition of equity.
<p>Efficient operations We will simplify internal processes, go paperless where possible, eliminate wasteful practices, and reinvest the savings in serving the public.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify an initial round of cost savings from wasteful practices, duplicative licenses, conflicting services, and unnecessary bureaucracy. Savings can be reinvested in public-facing services.

These initiatives provide the opportunity for the Office of County Administration to demonstrate its value proposition and help Commissioners Court accomplish its goals.

APPENDIX: Harris County Goals and Definitions

Justice and Safety

Harris County will promote safe, healthy, thriving communities through restorative and evidence-based strategies that foster public trust, prevent violence and trauma, reduce racial and economic disparities, and minimize criminal justice system exposure where at all possible.

Economic Opportunity

Harris County will promote an inclusive and resilient local economy by working aggressively to remain competitive over time and expand opportunities for workers, small businesses, and community-driven investments while addressing historical and current economic inequities in doing so.

Housing

Harris County will increase access to, incentivize, and invest in quality, affordable, and flood resilient housing that is widely accessible throughout the county, build safe and healthy neighborhoods, facilitate economic opportunity, and provide access to recreational green spaces for all residents.

Public Health

Harris County will improve overall health and quality of life by implementing preventative and responsive public health strategies, providing access to affordable and high-quality health care, and addressing the social determinants of health to eliminate disparities and achieve health equity.

Transportation

Harris County will promote accessible, affordable, equitable, reliable, safe and sustainable transportation options and networks to facilitate efficient movement of people and goods throughout the region.

Flooding

Harris County will reduce flood risk and strengthen resiliency through holistic, equitable, and effective prevention, mitigation, and response strategies.

Environment

Harris County will combat the underlying causes and disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities by making community-driven improvements to air, water, and soil quality, committing to the use of clean energy, improving flood resiliency with natural infrastructure practices, reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions, and providing every resident access to quality green spaces.

Governance and Customer Service

Harris County will exemplify high-quality, transparent, and accountable government by using data and best practices to invest taxpayer dollars wisely; by continually reviewing and improving the effectiveness of our policies, programs, and services; by recruiting and retaining a talented and diverse workforce; and by engaging with, and providing outstanding customer service to, all of our communities.

VERSION CONTROL

Date	Version	Section	Comment
8/6/2021	1	-	Initial release
			<i>Elected Officials</i> box location adjusted
8/9/2021	2	Countywide Org Chart	Departments separately appointed by bodies other than Commissioners Court moved to the text box titled <i>Other Departments</i> ; no changes to departments reporting to the County Administrator