# 

#### **A WIN FOR** RESILIENCE KASHMERE GARDENS TO RECEIVE A

PERMANET GENERATOR

# **RANSPORTATION**

TXDOT'S NEPA, I-10 AND -45 UPDATES

### SPARI EPORT

THE CITY OF HOUSTON RELEASES REPORT

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2024



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### FROM COUNCIL MEMBER LETITIA PLUMMER, AT-LARGE 4



Dear friends and neighbors,

As we approach the end of the year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the progress we've made together and express my gratitude for the privilege of serving you as your Council Member. It has been an honor to work alongside you to make Houston a better, more equitable city for all.

This edition of our newsletter includes several important updates about the City of Houston, including a summary of the recently released Disparity Report and how it is shaping muchneeded changes in the Office of Business Opportunity's purchasing processes. These updates reflect our ongoing commitment to fairness, transparency, and opportunity for everyone in our city. You'll also find other noteworthy City of Houston news that highlights how we are addressing critical issues and moving our city forward.

As we celebrate the holiday season, I want to wish you and your loved ones a joyful and peaceful time. May your holidays be filled with warmth, love, and hope for the future. Looking ahead to 2025, I am excited to share that my office has several transformative projects and initiatives planned. I am eager to continue collaborating with you to build a stronger, more resilient Houston.

Thank you for trusting me to represent and serve you. Together, we can achieve so much. Here's to a happy holiday season and a prosperous new year for everyone in our great city.

With gratitude,

Council Member Letitia Plummer, DDS At- Large 4

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# **KASHMERE GARDENS SECURES FUNDING** FOR PERMANENT **RESILIENCY HUB GENERATOR**

In a significant move towards bolstering infrastructure in one of Houston's most underserved neighborhoods, Center will soon be equipped with a permanent power generator. The announcement, made by city officials on Wednesday, marks a pivotal step in creating a fully functional resiliency hub designed to serve residents during events. The \$900,000 investment, is part of a larger initiative to fortify vulnerable communities against extreme weather.

Council Member At-Large Letitia Plummer, who championed the funding during the 2025 budget have left families in dire situations. meetings, highlighted the critical need for the generator. "Our Kashmere The Kashmere Gardens Multi-Service Gardens community has continuously struggled in many ways," Plummer

said. "Time and time again, they've raised their voices and shared their stories and demanded that resources the Kashmere Gardens Multi-Service be placed there. This community faces a 20% lower life expectancy rate than any other in Harris County. Their determination has brought us to this moment."

Plummer's efforts, alongside those of emergencies and severe weather local advocates and residents, reflect the urgent need for infrastructure approved by Houston City Council, upgrades in Kashmere Gardens. Historically, the neighborhood has endured severe weather events, including Hurricane Harvey in 2017, which left 44% of homes submerged. Repeated power outages, unbearable heat waves, and freezing conditions

> Center was declared Houston's first resiliency hub in 2023, but progress

toward its full functionality has been slow. To date, the center features a solar carport—damaged and only recently repaired—and a plaque designating it as a resiliency hub. The addition of a permanent generator marks a significant leap forward.

Angela Blanchard, Houston's Chief Recovery and Resiliency Officer, emphasized the importance of the generator. "Resilience hubs are meant to operate year-round, providing refuge and essential resources during emergencies," Blanchard explained. "But fundamentally, you can't deliver the rest of the programming or services if you can't guarantee that the power will stay on."

The generator, to be installed by Enchanted Rock Solutions, is expected to be operational within a year. While

the timeline raises concerns about readiness for the 2025 hurricane season, city leaders remain optimistic. "Now is not the time to be negative," said Mayor John Whitmire. "This is one step in fixing the entire city. It's a moment to celebrate the greatness of our city and the can-do attitude of my administration."

The initiative is part of a pilot program that aims to expand resiliency hubs to other underserved areas, including Alief, Sunnyside, and Acres Homes. Each hub will serve as a refuge during crises, offering power, cooling, and warming centers, as well as disaster preparedness resources.

Keith Downey, president of Gardens Super Kashmere

Neighborhood, the stressed importance of resident involvement. "Resilience is about planning for the future of our communities. We must always include input from residents to ensure these hubs truly meet their needs," Downey said.

As the Kashmere Gardens community awaits the generator's completion, residents like loetta Stephens expressed gratitude. "We're tired of scrambling during storms. This permanent generator is what we need," she said.

With the installation of the generator and further plans to address food insecurity and disaster training, Kashmere Gardens is taking a crucial step toward building a safer, more resilient future.

## **OFFICE OF POLICING REFORM AND** ACCOUNTABILITY **REQUESTS PUBLIC INPUT**

Dear Community Member,

Your input is crucial for making Houston a safer place for everyone. We invite you to share your experiences and opinions about the Houston Police Department through our anonymous survey. Your feedback will guide us in improving policing strategies and fostering a stronger relationship between law enforcement and our community. Please click on the link or the QR code below to take the survey. Your honest feedback will help us understand what is working well and where we can make improvements.

Thank you,

Office of Policing Reform and Accountability

https://www.houstontx.gov/opra/survey.html

"Resilience is about planning for the future of our communities. We must always include input from residents to ensure these hubs truly meet their needs." Keith Downey, **Kashmere Gardens** 





# EXTREME WEATHER CONFERENCE

#### COUNCIL MEMBER LETITIA PLUMMER HOSTS SUCCESSFUL EXTREME WEATHER CONFERENCE

The Derecho and Hurricane Beryl brought significant challenges

to our city, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and creating new crises. Many neighborhoods

experienced damage and widespread property

destruction. In response to that



Council Member Letitia Plummer hosted an impactful Extreme Weather Conference in August, bringing together experts, community leaders, and residents to address the pressing challenges posed by Houston's increasingly unpredictable climate. The event, hailed as a resounding success, provided a platform for education, collaboration, and actionable solutions aimed at building a more resilient city.

A key highlight of the conference was Hershel Cooper's groundbreaking flood model presentation, which captivated the audience with its

innovative approach to predicting and mitigating flood risks. His clear and concise explanation demonstrated how data-driven models could empower communities to better prepare for extreme weather events, earning widespread praise from attendees.

importance of grassroots involvement in climate resiliency efforts. Through engaging panel discussions and workshops, participants explored solutions tailored to Houston's diverse neighborhoods, with a focus on empowering underserved communities most vulnerable to climate impacts.

Council Member Plummer's commitment to equity and sustainability shone throughout the event. She underscored the urgent need for Houston to adopt forwardthinking policies that address extreme weather challenges while ensuring no community is left behind. "Resiliency

starts at the community level," she stated, calling for collaborative efforts to safeguard the city's future.

The Extreme Weather Conference not only fostered critical conversations but also reinforced Council Member Plummer's dedication to building a The conference also emphasized the safer, more sustainable Houston. By connecting residents to resources and creating space for innovation, the event served as a pivotal step toward preparing Houston for the challenges ahead.





# HOUSTON'S OFFICE **OF BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY (OBO): BALANCING EQUITY AND CHALLENGES**

THE CITY OF HOUSTON'S OFFICE OF BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY (OBO) IS TASKED WITH PROMOTING EQUITY IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING BY SUPPORTING MINORITY, WOMEN, AND SMALL BUSINESS-OWNED ENTERPRISES (MWSBES).

Established in 1984, the program aims to level the playing field for historically marginalized businesses. Through the OBO, the city sets participation goals for disadvantaged businesses in contracts, such as allocating 35% of subcontracting work on construction projects to certified MWSBEs. In 2023 alone, the program directed \$614 million in city contracts to qualifying businesses.

Supporters argue that the OBO program is essential to fostering economicopportunityandgenerational wealth for minority and women-owned enterprises. For example, Hispanicowned businesses received 31.7% of the program's awards, while Black-owned firms earned 17.4%, according to the city's annual report. However, critics, emboldened by a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, challenge the program as discriminatory, leading to lawsuits and debates about its legality.

While the OBO has demonstrated success, gaps remain. City contractors Mayor John Whitmire has expressed often fail to meet subcontracting goals a commitment to overhauling the without facing significant penalties, program citing the completion of

as highlighted in recent cases. Some councilmembers, advocate for stricter enforcement and reforms to payment schedules to ensure fairness for subcontractors. Additionally, At-Large Councilmember Letitia Plummer has raised concerns about the lack of access for local minority firms to cooperative purchasing programs.



a long-delayed disparity study. As debates continue in courtrooms and council chambers, the program's future hangs in the balance, with potential reforms poised to shape equity in Houston's contracting landscape.



#### SUMMARY OF THE 2023 CITY OF HOUSTON **DISPARITY STUDY**

The City of Houston commissioned MGT Consulting to conduct the Key Findings 2023 Disparity Study. The goal was to evaluate the representation and utilization of Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs) in City procurement processes market area, with the majority compared to their availability. The occurring inside city limits. study also assessed compliance with federal DBE and ACDBE programs and Disparity identified disparities in local private · Disparities were evident across most sector practices.

#### Study Scope

The study covered the City's (underutilization) procurement activities from July 2017 to June 2022, excluding exemptions such as COVID-related purchases. Key procurement categories analyzed were:

- Construction
- Professional Services
- Other Services
- Goods
- Airport Concessions

The focus was on identifying disparities in MWBEs, Physically Disabled Business Enterprises (PDBEs), Small Business Enterprises (SBEs), and Veteran-Owned Business

Relevant Geographic Market Area was defined to include nine counties in Texas.

- 1. Geographic Market Area
- Houston's procurement spending is concentrated within the defined
- 2. Utilization, Availability, and
- business categories for MWBEs, as shown by disparity indices: • Black Americans: Index 72.05
- Hispanic Americans: Index 95.49 (underutilization)
- Asian Americans: Index 93.05 (underutilization)
- Nonminority women also faced underutilization with an index of 76.05.
- 3. Private Sector Disparities • Minority- and women-owned firms earned significantly less than their nonminority counterparts in the private sector.
- 4. Qualitative Results
- MWBEs reported challenges like limited access to capital, discrimination, and lack of communication from the City. Some Enterprises (VOBEs). The City's expressed frustrations over the need to repeatedly prove qualifications.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhance Data Collection Improve tracking of subcontractor data and integrate better systems for compliance reporting.

2.Advertise Procurement Opportunities • Develop a 6-12 month forecast of informal procurement opportunities to help small businesses prepare.

3.Implement IDIQ Compliance Processes • Ensure equity in Indefinite Delivery/ Indefinite Quantity contracts with robust monitoring and reporting.

4. Forbid Exclusivity Agreements

· Prevent agreements between prime contractors and MWBE subcontractors that limit competition.

5. Expand the SBE Program

 Include more industries to foster economic mobility for all businesses regardless of ownership demographics.

6. Modify Graduation Criteria

 Adjust thresholds for MWBEs transitioning out of assistance programs to reflect local market conditions.

7. Expand the Office of Business Opportunity

• Hire additional staff to expedite certification processes and enhance outreach.

8. Program Reevaluation

· Conduct periodic reviews of the MWBE program to ensure its continued relevance and efficacy.

Link to Executive Summary

Link to Disparity Study Report



# **COUNCIL MEMBER** LETITIA PLUMMER **CHAMPIONS CHANGE IN** HOUSTON'S MWBE SUPPLY PURCHASING PROCESS

Houston has restructured its supply purchasing process to create more opportunities for minority- and women-owned businesses (MWBEs), thanks to the advocacy of Council Member Letitia Plummer. Previously, small MWBE suppliers faced significant hurdles, as they had to purchase goods from wholesalers, resell them to prime vendors at a markup, and only then could the city acquire those goods. This convoluted system limited MWBE participation and increased costs for For the first time, the city implemented all parties involved.

Council Member Plummer, At-Large Position 4, pushed for reforms to streamline the process. The changes now allow MWBEs to sell directly

to the city, cutting out unnecessary intermediaries. These adjustments not only strengthen MWBE participation but also save taxpayer money.

"This is a monumental step in ensuring small businesses have direct access to city contracts," Plummer said, highlighting that MWBE businesses now receive a defined percentage of contracts under the new rules.

an 8% goal for MWBE participation in supply contracts, a significant improvement from the previous system that often waived such requirements. Additionally, existing contracts were amended to include MWBE goals.



Prime vendors and MWBE suppliers alike applauded the changes. Ralph Walton of MSC Industrial Supply Company, a prime vendor, expressed his support for the new structure, noting its benefits for small business growth.

Plummer's advocacy reflects her commitment to equity and economic empowerment, with these reforms representing a meaningful step toward leveling the playing field for Houston's diverse business community.



# **HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL REJECTS PROPOSED TAX INCREASE AMID BUDGET CHALLENGES**



Council members to implement a 6% future obligations. property tax rate hike failed during a council vote, leaving the city to face to address a \$40 million budget shortfall and \$50 million in disaster recovery costs from this year's derecho and Hurricane Beryl.

over how to balance the city's budget the urgency of addressing Houston's recovery, the council ultimately voted

A proposal by four Houston City financial challenges and preparing for

"This proposal was never about nearly \$90 million in budget cuts. growing government or adding Council Members Sallie Alcorn, Letitia services," said Council Member Letitia Plummer, Joaquin Martinez, and Mario Plummer. "It was about meeting our Castillo had championed the increase basic obligations and recovering from disasters that impacted all Houstonians."

Houston's tax rate has decreased nine times in the past decade due to The failed proposal sparked debate a voter-imposed revenue cap, which city officials estimate has cost over while maintaining essential services. \$2 billion since 2015. While the cap Supporters of the increase emphasized includes an exemption for disaster

against the increase, leaving the city with tough financial decisions ahead.

"Raising taxes is never easy," said Council Member Sallie Alcorn. "But this proposal was an opportunity to highlight the seriousness of the city's financial condition and the importance of exploring all options—both cuts and new revenue."

Without the tax hike, the city must now cut \$90 million from its budget, raising concerns about how it will address current and future financial obligations, including an anticipated \$230 million shortfall in 2026.

### MAYOR WHITMIRE LAUNCHES BOLD PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

MAYOR JOHN WHITMIRE UNVEILED AN AMBITIOUS INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS STREET HOMELESSNESS IN HOUSTON, EMPHASIZING PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND DIGNITY FOR ALL. THE PLAN, WHICH SEEKS TO END HOMELESSNESS AND RESTORE PUBLIC SPACES, BUILDS ON THE CITY'S SUCCESS IN REDUCING HOMELESSNESS BY 60% SINCE 2011. IT INCORPORATES COLLABORATION WITH KEY ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS AND THE HARRIS CENTER.

million annual funding plan designed to provide pathways to permanent housing, enhance public safety, and address root causes of homelessness, The plan introduces policy changes philanthropic and private sectors. The

Central to the initiative is a \$70 Downtown Management District has already pledged \$1 million, a promising start to achieving sustainable funding.

including mental health and substance to reclaim public spaces and ensure use. Mayor Whitmire stressed the they are safe and accessible for all importance of local, state, and federal Houstonians. Mayor Whitmire aims support, as well as contributions from to expand and extend the city's civility

ordinance, currently in effect in 12 areas, to cover the entire city and include nighttime hours. He views recent Supreme Court rulings as an opportunity to enforce public sleeping bans compassionately while moving individuals toward recovery and stability.

Housing and Community Development Director Mike Nichols highlighted the initiative's dual focus on helping the unhoused access permanent housing and enhancing the public's enjoyment of shared spaces. "This is about building a Houston where everyone thrives," Director Nichols said, emphasizing the need for robust local funding and deeper partnerships with Harris County.



Kelly Young, CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless, praised the plan's

### COUNCIL MEMBER LETITIA PLUMMER **OPPOSES TXDOT'S NEPA ASSIGNMENT RENEWAL OVER ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**

Houston's Council Member Letitia Plummer is voicing strong opposition to the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) request for the renewal of its NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) assignment authority. Under this program, TxDOT has the power to conduct and approve its own environmental reviews for federally funded transportation projects, a practice Plummer contends undermines accountability and harms local communities.

The NEPA assignment, intended to expedite the review process, allows TxDOT to bypass federal oversight and self-certify compliance with environmental laws. Plummer argues this system is fundamentally flawed, likening it to "grading your own homework." By giving TxDOT full control, the program creates a conflict of interest, where the agency's priority to expedite projects often comes at the expense of thorough environmental and social impact evaluations.

Since the program's implementation, negative outcomes have surged. Residential displacements from highway expansions in Texas have skyrocketed, with the state now

accounting for nearly one-third of national displacements. Air quality has also deteriorated, as the number of Texas counties failing air guality standards has doubled. Plummer points to these alarming trends as evidence that TxDOT's unchecked authority is failing to protect Texans. Critics also highlight TxDOT's practice of segmenting projects to obscure their cumulative impacts, further diminishing the transparency of environmental assessments. For instance, the controversial I-35 expansion in Austin was split into three separate projects to downplay its overall environmental consequences.

Plummer insists that reinstating federal oversight is crucial to ensuring fairness, environmental stewardship, and equity. She contends that while federal reviews may take longer, they provide the necessary checks to prevent harm to vulnerable communities and the environment.

"Efficiency cannot come at the expense of our people or our planet," Plummer stated. "We need accountability, not shortcuts."

potential to reach "equilibrium," ensuring anyone who becomes homeless is rehoused within 30 days. "This is the next step in creating a lasting solution," Young remarked.

With a focus on action. Mayor Whitmire emphasized collaboration and accountability, urging all sectors to contribute to this transformative effort for Houston.

By opposing TxDOT's NEPA renewal Plummer hopes to bring federal oversight back to safeguard Houston's future.





### **EPA EXTENDS SOIL SAMPLING DEADLINE IN FIFTH WARD TO DECEMBER 20**

The Environmental Agency (EPA) has granted a second extension for Union Pacific to collect soil samples near its contaminated after persistent advocacy from Council Erica Lee Carter. This effort is part of ongoing investigations into potential cancer-causing chemicals in the area.

concern for decades, as creosote—a likely rates, prompting calls for thorough environmental testing and remediation.

Protection Union Pacific has faced challenges in obtaining homeowner consent for soil sampling. So far, 185 homeowners have signed access agreements. railyard in Houston's Fifth Ward. The Despite the company's extensive new deadline, December 20, comes outreach efforts, including door-todoor canvassing, mailers, and social Member Letitia Plummer and U.S. Rep. media campaigns, gaps remain in community engagement.

This extension offers a critical opportunity to overcome these barriers The railyard has been a focal point of and ensure comprehensive testing. "With this extension, we hope to human carcinogen—was engage every property owner to protect detected in nearby groundwater. our community and environment," Fifth Ward residents have long said Rep. Lee Carter, who continues reported abnormally high cancer the work initiated by her late mother, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee.

Previous studies have revealed alarming levels of lead and other toxins in Fifth Ward soil, including 41 creosoterelated chemicals. While officials maintain that current data does not indicate an immediate health risk, residents like activist Sandra Edwards argue for urgent compensation and cleanup.



# HOLIDAY CHEER LIGHTS **UP CLEME MANOR APARTMENTS**

The holiday spirit was alive and well at Cleme Manor Apartments during a festive celebration that brought joy and connection to the community. Thanks to the partnership with the NHP Foundation, tenants and their families enjoyed a hearty dinner and thoughtful gifts, making this holiday season truly memorable.

The NHP Foundation, which owns Cleme Manor Apartments, has been a steadfast supporter of its tenants, ensuring their needs are met in times of both celebration and hardship. Their commitment extends beyond holiday events, having worked closely with Council Member Letitia Plummer's At-Large 4 office to provide critical support during natural disasters, ensuring residents' safety and wellbeing.



## **CITY OF HOUSTON CONSIDERS REGULATIONS FOR SHORT-TERM RENTALS**

The City of Houston is considering new regulations for short-term rental (STR) properties listed on platforms like Airbnb and Vrbo. The proposed ordinance aims to balance community and introduces less stringent measures criminal activity by tenants. compared to other Texas cities.

Key provisions of the ordinance include mandatory registration for all STRs, with an annual fee of \$250-\$275. Owners must provide emergency contact details, proof of insurance, and documentation of paid hotel occupancy taxes. Rental units would also need to display information about occupancy limits, emergency contacts, noise restrictions, parking, and trash schedules.

Violations could result in fines ranging

from \$100 to \$500 per day, with the possibility of properties being removed from hosting platforms or losing registration after multiple infractions. concerns with property owners' rights STR owners could also face liability for



Supporters argue the regulations address community concerns about disturbances and safety. An East End resident, highlighted repeated issues with disruptive STRs in her

neighborhood, calling for stricter oversight. Meanwhile, some STR operators and platforms, like Airbnb, expressed concerns over insurance requirements and liability provisions. Expedia, however, supported most aspects of the ordinance, calling it a "good starting point."

The city's analysis revealed STR properties generate more 911 and 311 calls than other properties, though most calls are low-priority.

Houston City Council is expected to vote on the ordinance in early 2025, with implementation planned for midyear. Public feedback remains open as the city continues refining the proposal. Click here to provide input or comment.



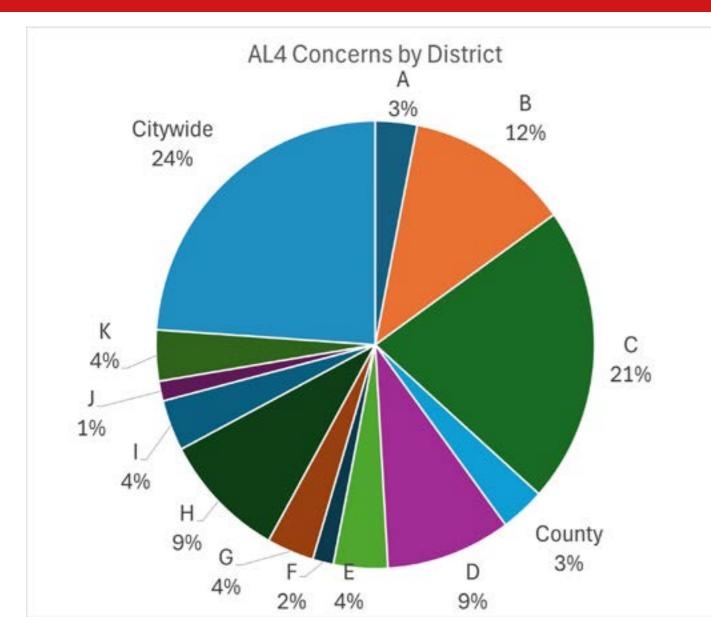
This year's Christmas event was another example of collaboration at its best. Council Member Plummer and the At-Large 4 team played a key role in organizing the celebration, ensuring every detail was executed flawlessly.

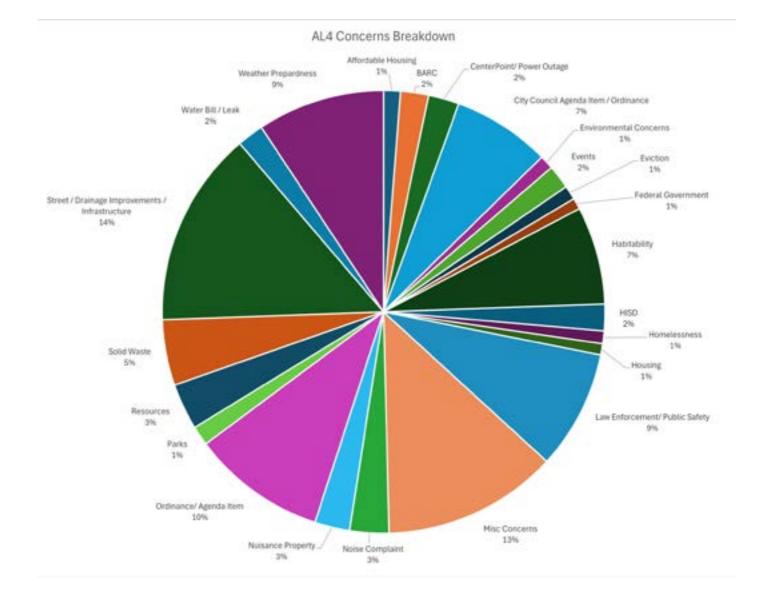
The evening was made even more special by the presence of Houston Police Department Chief Noe Diaz. His humility and warmth were evident as he engaged with the children and families, even helping to serve meals. His visit left a lasting impression, with children particularly inspired by his kindness and approachability.

The event showcased the power of partnership and the importance of building stronger, connected communities.

# CONSTITUENT







Constituents call the At-Large 4 office with concerns and service request from across all eleven districts in the City of Houston. This data is from January 2nd through December 16th, 2024.

#### Top Concerns

- Drainage and infrastructure ٠
- Public safety •
- Habitability

# **SERVICES**







Council Member Letitia Plummer



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