

A word from Council Member  
Plummer

Special tribute to the Late  
Congresswoman, Sheila Jackson  
Lee

Updates on critical projects and  
constituent concerns

# THE QUARTERLY

July 2024



COUNCIL MEMBER LETITIA PLUMMER, AT-LARGE 4

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope this message finds you in good health. Since beginning my second term in January, significant events have occurred, prompting many constituents to seek updates. Although I have provided concise newsletters on specific topics, it is now time to offer a comprehensive update on the priority issues our office has been addressing.

Since January, Houston has experienced several extreme disasters. While Houstonians have shown remarkable resilience and community spirit, these storms have exposed vulnerabilities in our infrastructure and communities. In response to these challenges, I proposed an amendment to install a permanent generator at the Kashmere Gardens Multi-Service Center, the only Resilience Hub in Houston.

Multi-modal transportation remains a key concern for many Houstonians, particularly with ongoing TXDOT construction and its impact on communities. As TXDOT prepares for the I-45 rebuild and continues to gather input for I-10, Metro has decided to forgo a federal grant that would have significantly funded the University Line.

Housing affordability and safety are paramount issues for constituents who contact our office seeking assistance. In this newsletter, I will provide an update on the progress of Apartment Inspection Reform and its status.

There has also been notable progress regarding the Fifth Ward Cancer Cluster. Union Pacific and the EPA continue their testing efforts. Last year, during our Cancer Cluster Summit, several critical issues were brought to light. One of the most pressing concerns was the overwhelming lack of health clinics and access to healthcare in the area. Recognizing the urgency of this issue, my office has spent the past several months collaborating with various organizations to develop a comprehensive plan to address these healthcare deficiencies in the Fifth Ward.

I am also pleased to share positive news regarding the Federal Community Project Funding requests I made last year and this year.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement. Please reach out to my office for additional help.

Warm regards,



Council Member Letitia Plummer, DDS  
At-Large 4

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# A Tribute

Last week, we learned the heartbreaking news that our beloved Congresswoman, Sheila Jackson Lee passed away.

Houston lost an icon and a formidable force. Congresswoman Jackson Lee was more than an elected official; she was a tireless advocate, a zealous fighter for justice, and a source of profound inspiration. Her legacy is one of dedication to the causes she believed in, always fighting the good fight with courage and passion.

The Plummer family and the Jackson Lee family share a profound civil rights history. My father, Matthew Plummer Jr., knew the Congresswoman personally, and her influence resonated deeply within our home. Growing up, she was an inspiration to women from all backgrounds, especially Black women who saw her shatter glass ceilings. Her journey and accomplishments showed me that with determination, anything is possible.

Congresswoman Jackson Lee was a local, national, and international humanitarian, acknowledged worldwide for her courageous fights for racial justice, criminal justice, and

human rights, with a special emphasis on women and children.

Her legislative victories are numerous and impactful, from establishing the Juneteenth Federal Holiday to reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act. These accomplishments exemplify her dedication to justice and equality.

As a senior member of the House Committee on the Judiciary, Homeland Security, and the Budget Committee, Congresswoman Jackson Lee used her platform to advocate for policies aimed at uplifting and protecting the most vulnerable. Her voice was a powerful force in the ongoing fight for freedom, justice, and democracy.

Congresswoman Jackson Lee's passing is a profound loss for Houston and the nation. She will be dearly missed, but her legacy will continue to inspire all who believe in the principles she championed. Her life's work will forever guide those committed to making the world a better place.

Rest in power, Congresswoman.



Hurricane Beryl brought significant challenges to our city, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and creating new crises. Many neighborhoods experienced damage and widespread property destruction.

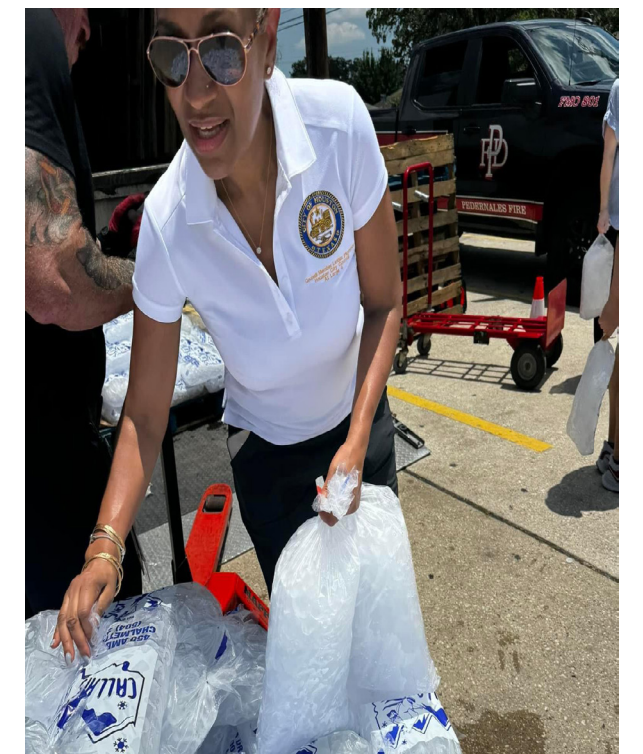
Power outages were a major concern during Hurricane Beryl. High winds and falling trees damaged power lines, leaving large swathes of the city without electricity for extended periods. This disruption affected both residential areas and critical infrastructure, including hospitals and water treatment facilities, complicating state, county and city response efforts. The lack of power also hindered communication, including internet and phone service outages, leaving many residents unable to receive timely updates or request assistance. To address this, my At-Large 4 office remained available during the disaster, providing crucial updates on cooling centers and distribution sites to help constituents navigate these challenges. I had meetings with CenterPoint representatives several times a day, every day, urging them to restore power in areas such as the Greater Fifth Ward and Northeast Houston that had not received any media attention and felt forgotten.

The impact on Houston's seniors and vulnerable populations was particularly severe, as these groups faced compounded hardships due to the storm. Amidst the devastation, a persistent heat advisory with temperatures soaring over 100°F worsened the situation. Many seniors and vulnerable individuals were left without air conditioning exposing them to dangerous heat levels and exacerbating health conditions.

# Beryl Updates

This lack of relief in sweltering conditions led to extreme frustration and distress among our constituents as they struggled to keep cool and to communicate with others. The combination of heat, power loss, and the inability to communicate underscored the urgent need for targeted support and resilient infrastructure to protect the most at-risk populations during such extreme weather.

As with other weather events, the day after Beryl hit Houston, I mobilized volunteers and non-profit organizations as well as HEB to assist our seniors and most vulnerable. Through community leaders and my office's data from previous extreme weather events, we learned where they lived and made personal wellness visits and deliveries of essential items. We provided them with ice, water, coolers, and groceries. In some instance we found locations that did not have the ability to provide hot meals and worked with organizations to fulfill those needs.







## FY2025 Budget Amendment

### Background

The United States is experiencing an increase in extreme weather events, with 2024 marking the most active tornado season since 2011. Texas alone has witnessed 99 tornadoes, the highest in over a decade. Additionally, the summer is forecasted to be one of the hottest on record. Given the unreliability of the Texas power grid during extreme weather, which can result in rolling blackouts and downed power lines, it is imperative that the City of Houston takes proactive measures to protect its most vulnerable residents.

In response, the City of Houston has developed a plan for resilience hubs. However, Kashmere Gardens, the only fully developed resilience hub, was unable to function during the Derecho Storm and other extreme weather events due to a lack of electricity. To address this issue, the City will provide the Kashmere Gardens Resilience Hub with a generator capable of powering the entire facility during extreme weather events. This initiative will ensure the hub remains operational and can offer critical support to the community during emergencies.

### Amendment

To enhance the resilience of the City of Houston against extreme weather events, the City of Houston shall provide a generator for the Kashmere Gardens Resilience Hub to ensure continuous operation during such events.

**Cost:** \$899,289

**Funding Source:** General Fund Ending Fund Balance, unassigned

atlarge4@houston.tx.gov | 832.393.3012  
City Hall Annex • 900 Bagby, 1st Floor • Houston, Texas 77002

# FY25 Budget Amendment

After the Derecho storm, which also left many without power, and the ability to stay cool in sweltering temperatures, I proposed a budget amendment that would fund a permanent generator for Kashmere Gardens Multi Service Center, the only fully developed resilience hub in Houston.

A permanent generator for the Kashmere Gardens Resilience Hub is essential to ensure the facility remains fully operational during natural disasters. Kashmere Gardens, a historically underserved community, is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of hurricanes, floods, and severe weather events. The Resilience Hub was planned to be a critical lifeline for residents, providing shelter, medical assistance, and essential resources during emergencies. Without a reliable power source, the hub's ability to offer these services would be severely compromised, potentially leaving thousands without access to the support they need most during crises. Moreover, a permanent generator would enable the Resilience Hub to maintain crucial communication systems, refrigeration for perishable supplies and medications, and lighting and heating necessary for safety and comfort.



During natural disasters, power outages can last for days or even weeks, exacerbating the hardships faced by the community. By ensuring continuous power supply, the generator would bolster the resilience of Kashmere Gardens, ensuring that the hub can fulfill its mission of protecting and aiding residents, ultimately saving lives and reducing the long-term impacts of natural disasters on this vulnerable community.

The storms revealed that while the previous administration had created a reliance plan and created resilience hubs, none were operational during extreme weather events due to lacking all the components that would make them resilient. The Kashmere Gardens Community spoke to City Council after multiple weather events enquiring why the Kashmere Resilience Hub was never opened during severe weather. The passing of my budget amendment has given hope to the community that the Kashmere Garden Resilience Hub will be able to fulfil its purpose soon.

**The passing of my budget amendment has given hope to the community that the Kashmere Garden Resilience Hub will be able to fulfill its purpose soon.**



# Be Prepared

Hurricane Beryl's early arrival and intensity have raised concerns about the potential for an unusually active and severe hurricane season. Beryl made history as the earliest hurricane to form in the eastern tropical Atlantic and the strongest June storm on record. Its rapid intensification and ability to maintain strength well inland caught many by surprise. Dr. Costa Samras from Carnegie Mellon University noted that climate change is altering weather patterns and intensifying storms, emphasizing that "the era of nobody could have foreseen these conditions is over."

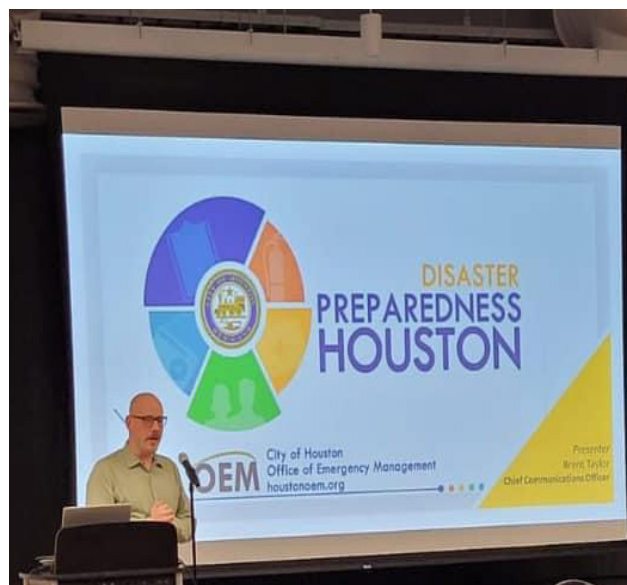
Experts warn that with Beryl striking in early July, barely a month into the official hurricane season, coastal and inland areas may need to brace for more frequent and powerful storms. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric



Administration (NOAA) had predicted an above-average hurricane season, but Beryl's impact suggests even those projections might be conservative. Warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures and potential La Niña conditions could fuel more intense hurricanes.

This early-season catastrophic event has sparked renewed discussions about the need for improved infrastructure resilience, robust emergency preparedness, and accelerated efforts to address climate change. State and local officials across the Gulf Coast are reassessing disaster response plans, while utility companies like CenterPoint Energy face mounting pressure to enhance grid resilience against increasingly severe weather events.

Hurricane Beryl has tested Texas's response capabilities. While state officials have coordinated resource deployment and the community's spirit of mutual aid has shone brightly, there are many who have felt forgotten. The storm's unprecedented strength underscores the urgent need for enhanced preparedness and infrastructure resilience as we face a potentially severe hurricane season.



Houston OEM: <https://www.houstonoem.org/>

Ready Harris: <https://ReadyHarris.org>

Stay Prepared: <https://www.houstonoem.org/pages/Prepare>

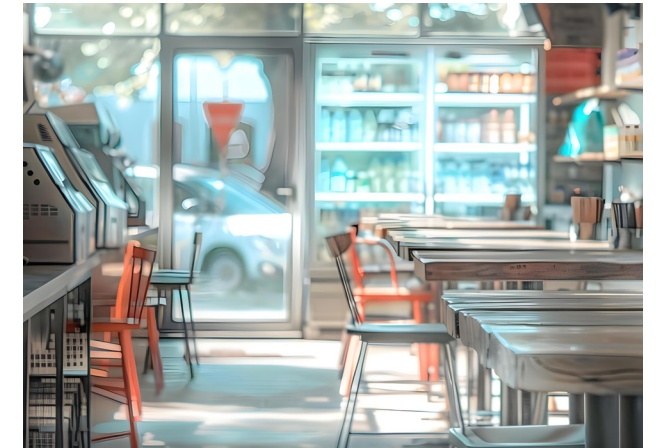
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## The Impact of Beryl on Small Businesses

The recent devastation caused by Hurricane Beryl has left a profound impact on small businesses, including mine. The widespread power outages rendered many of us unable to provide services to our customers, leading to significant financial losses and threatening our stability. Over the past two weeks, businesses have collectively lost millions of dollars, jeopardizing payroll, inventory payments, and overall sustainability.

In the aftermath, many small businesses faced days, if not weeks, without power. The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is encouraging affected business owners to take advantage of their disaster loan program. The SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program offers loans of up to \$2 million to small businesses unable to obtain credit elsewhere, repayable at a 4% interest rate over 30 years.

For Small Business Disaster loans, visit: <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/disaster-assistance/economic-injury-disaster-loans>



These loans can be used to cover payroll, vendor payments, rent or mortgage payments, and other debt repayments. The application process takes about 4-5 weeks, and the deadline to apply for a loan is 60 days after the disaster declaration.

Compounding the situation, many businesses have endured multiple disasters recently, including the May derecho followed by Hurricane Beryl which has left many of us frustrated.

As small business owners, we must act swiftly to secure our future and leverage available resources to navigate through these challenging times.

### UPCOMING EVENT

**Commissioner Adrian Garcia is hosting a series of disaster recovery town halls in collaboration with the SBA's Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience (ODRR).**

**Residents, homeowners, business owners, and local nonprofits impacted by recent storms are encouraged to attend.**

**Attendees will learn about various assistance programs, understand the application process, and ask specific questions about their situations.**

**REGISTER HERE: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/dO5Vgmt/SBATownHall>**







### APARTMENT INSPECTION REFORM

In FY2022, I first proposed Apartment Inspection Reform after witnessing the inhumane living conditions of renters while informing them about the COVID-19 CDC moratorium. The conditions I observed were shocking and highlighted the urgent need for change.

My proposal included a request for eight additional inspectors to ensure more comprehensive and frequent inspections of apartment complexes, those positions were granted the following year, marking a significant step forward in our efforts to protect renters.

Alongside increasing the number of inspectors, I began collaborating with the legal department to draft an ordinance aimed at addressing the issues of substandard housing. Unfortunately, under the previous administration, this ordinance did not progress beyond the legal department.

Under the current

administration, I have had multiple discussions with the Mayor's team about this crucial ordinance. They have requested that I complete a detailed outline with the legal department and engage additional stakeholders. This collaborative effort is essential to ensure that the ordinance addresses all necessary aspects and receives broad support. Once the outline is completed, it will be sent to a committee for council member input before being placed on the agenda for a vote.

Furthermore, I have asked our government relations team to explore tightening provisions under Chapter 92 of the Texas Property Code. Strengthening these provisions is critical to ensuring that landlords adhere to regulations designed to protect tenants' health and safety.

Our ultimate goal is to create a safe and healthy living environment for all renters in our community. By pushing for these reforms, we can hold landlords accountable and ensure that no one has to live in uninhabitable conditions.

# Quality of Life

## RENTERS RESOURCES

If you require assistance with contacting your landlord for repairs, my office has developed a tenant education program. Please visit : <https://www.houstontx.gov/council/4/tenant-education.html>



## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Persistently high interest rates are making homeownership increasingly difficult for many households in the Greater Houston area, according to recent data from the Houston Association of Realtors (HAR).

The HAR's Housing Affordability Index indicates that only 40 percent of households in the Houston area could afford a median-priced home in the first quarter of this year, a decrease from 42 percent in 2023. This decline highlights the growing challenges faced by potential homebuyers.

The median home price in the Houston area rose by 2.2 percent

to \$334,100 in the first quarter of this year. Consequently, the monthly mortgage payment for a 30-year fixed-rate loan, including taxes and insurance, increased to \$2,340 from \$2,230 a year ago. The average interest rate also rose to 6.75 percent from 6.37 percent during the same period in 2023. As a result, households needed 4.9 percent more annual income than they did a year ago to afford a median-priced home, requiring a minimum income of \$93,600. Rental home affordability slightly decreased, with 47 percent of households able to afford the median lease payment on a home, down from 48 percent in the first quarter of the previous year. To afford the median lease payment, households in the Houston area needed a minimum annual income of \$80,000, excluding the security deposit and utility costs.



Key Highlights from the Q1 2024 Housing & Rental Affordability Report:

- Only 40 percent of households in the Greater Houston area could afford a median-priced home, down from 42 percent in the first quarter of 2023.
- The median home price increased by 2.2 percent to \$334,100.
- The monthly mortgage payment for a 30-year fixed-rate loan, including taxes and insurance, rose by 4.9 percent to \$2,340.
- Households required 4.9 percent more annual income than the previous year to afford a median-priced home, with a minimum income of \$93,600.
- Housing affordability declined in seven tracked counties (Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Polk, and Walker) but increased

in six counties (Austin, Grimes, Matagorda, Montgomery, San Jacinto, and Wharton) and remained unchanged in two counties (Chambers and Waller).

- The median lease price increased by 2.6 percent year-over-year to \$2,000.
- Rental affordability declined in nine tracked counties but improved in Chambers and Waller Counties.

As an advocate for affordable housing, I am committed to supporting safe and affordable housing initiatives in Houston. My office actively collaborates with constituents to leverage the benefits of the Inflation Reduction Act, and I consistently advocate for and support city projects. I have engaged in numerous discussions with developers to expand Houston's affordable housing stock, including multifamily housing developments.

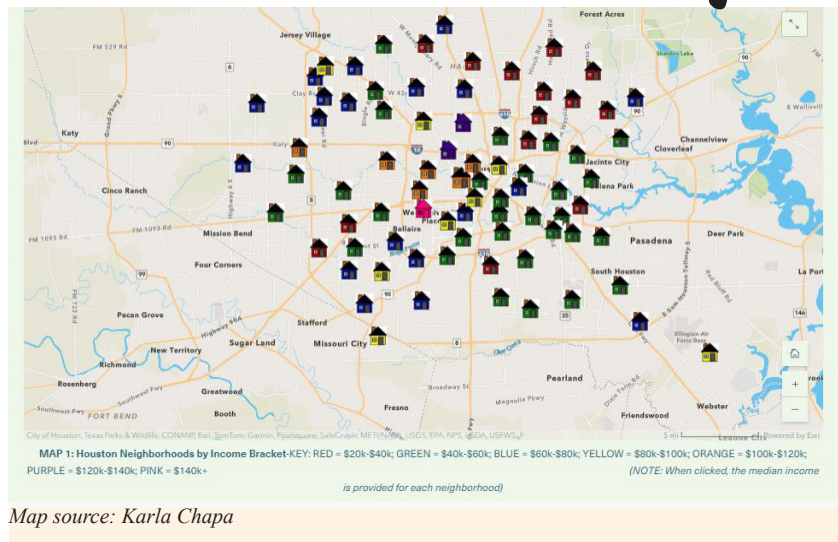




# Food Insecurity

**Houston's food deserts, like Sunnyside, Gulfton, Aldine, Third Ward, Fifth Ward, Acres Home, East End, Settegast, Homestead, and Southwest Houston, are mainly home to Black and Latino communities.**

**These areas are known as food swamps due to the abundance of fast-food outlets, convenience stores, and liquor stores.**



Map source: Karla Chapa

Large grocery stores are often several miles away, making it hard for residents to find nutritious food. This lack of access leads to meals high in empty calories, which increases the risk of chronic health issues such as heart disease, childhood obesity, diabetes, and other related conditions.

Non-profit organizations, the Houston Food Bank, and government officials have worked hard to address food insecurity. They have tried to create long-term solutions to reduce food insecurity. However, there is still a big difference in the availability of supermarkets between wealthy neighborhoods and those in food deserts. Grocery retailers, supermarket chains, and developers are hesitant to invest in low-income areas because of concerns about financial viability. They worry about inconsistent income sources among residents, dependence on food assistance programs, staffing challenges due to uncertain pay and fluctuating government benefits, and higher operational costs because of increased crime rates. This hesitation highlights the complex challenges of bringing food retail to economically disadvantaged communities, requiring innovative approaches to ensure everyone has access to healthy food options.

Understanding these challenges, I have spent the past few years working with urban farms to see how they can provide fresh produce to these communities. This collaboration has helped me learn more about the issues they face. After years of research, I have developed a plan to ensure that people in food deserts can get essential grocery items. I am currently partnering with several organizations to bring groceries to these areas. Stay tuned for some exciting news coming soon!

# Cancer Cluster

Last year, I held a three-day Cancer Cluster Summit. It was attended by elected officials, experts, local leaders and above all impacted constituents. The three-day summit aimed to listen to residents, understand the challenges they face and work together to develop a path forward.

On day one, residents of the city's Fifth Ward gathered for a town hall meeting to discuss a pressing issue in their community: environmental contamination and its potential link to a cluster of cancer cases.

The event featured a panel of experts from a range of disciplines, including Dr. Miles-Richardson, Stephen Williams, Dr. Grace Lewis, Amy King, Danielle Getsinger, and Reverend James Caldwell. Each speaker brought a unique perspective and expertise to the conversation, providing valuable insights into the complex issues at play in the Fifth Ward.

Residents had the opportunity to ask questions and provide comments to the panel. Many expressed their frustration and exhaustion with the slow pace of progress and the lack of solutions. The event highlighted the urgent need for action to address environmental contamination and its impact on public health, particularly in low-income communities of color where residents are often most affected. The Cancer Cluster Collaborative and its partners continue to work towards finding solutions and ensuring that the voices of affected communities are heard and represented in decision-making processes.

The next day, in the Summit's Breakout sessions, residents had the opportunity to tell their story, share their frustration and what they wanted.

While some residents expressed their desire to leave Fifth Ward and the contaminated area, there were others who wanted the area to be cleaned and made safe. This was their generational home, the only place they knew, and they did not want to leave. It was important to hear what solutions





the residents wanted.

The Breakout Session highlighted the importance of community engagement and the need for stakeholders to hear from residents directly. The event allowed residents to voice their concerns and frustrations and provided an opportunity for organizations to understand the impact of the contamination issue on the community.

The Cancer Cluster Collaborative has ensured that the voices of affected communities are heard and represented in decision-making processes. The Breakout Session was an important step towards achieving this goal.

In the survey cards that residents filled out, the threat of cancer was their biggest fear as well as adequately addressing their health care.



## Post Cancer Cluster Summit Analysis and Action

In January of this year, I joined The National Minority Quality Forum (NMQF) and CEO Roundtable on Cancer (CEORT) held in Washington D.C. in addition to representatives from the Biden administration's Cancer Moonshot cabinet, several notable expert and nonprofit organizations were in attendance.

The roundtable raised a national alarm about disparities in cancer risk, screening, prevalence, and mortality prevalent in medically underserved communities across the United States.

Racial and ethnic minorities constitute a staggering 56% of people living within three kilometers of a carcinogenic waste-producing site. This proximity increases cancer risk for these

communities, shedding light on an environmental justice issue that demands immediate attention. Black, Hispanic, Asian, and AIAN (American Indian and Alaska Native) populations face a lower overall rate of cancer screening due to systemic barriers. This has led to later-stage diagnoses, hindering timely access to care and treatment for these communities.

As the Fifth Ward faces a surge in cancers, often undetected until the final stages, I am heartened by the Biden Administration's commitment through the Moonshot program. It addresses not just cancer screening and testing, but the deep-seated issues of environmental injustice. I eagerly anticipate collaborating with the administration

to bring much-needed relief and support to the residents of the Fifth Ward.

The last seven months have been dedicated to putting a plan together to address the health disparity, cancer screening and health care needs

of the community. With the guidance of experts and healthcare professionals, we are working on

a plan to best address cancer screening, palliative care and wrap around services.

To ensure that personal stories and anecdotes are highlighted, I have been collaborating with a national documentary filmmaker. This collaboration aims to capture the human aspect and raise national awareness of the stories behind the statistics.





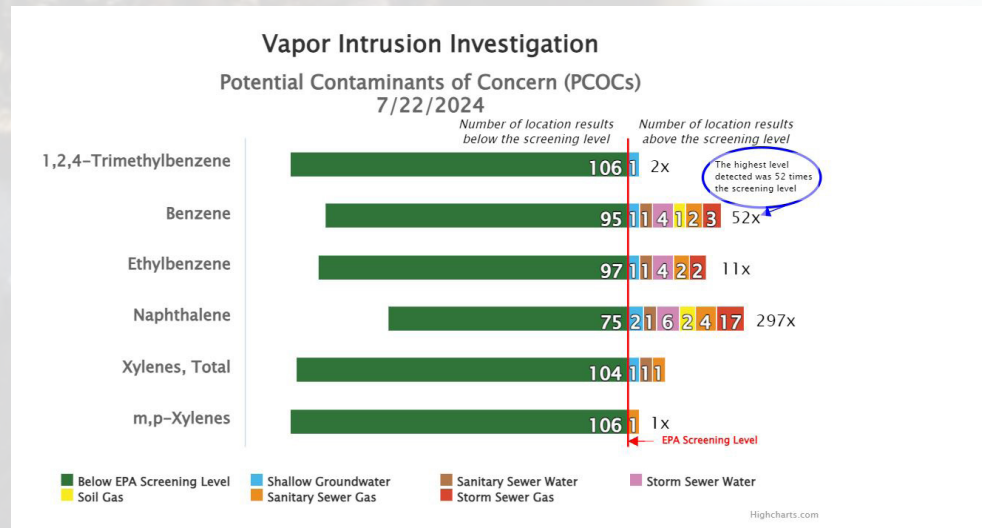
# EPA Update

The EPA has instructed UPRR to carry out a vapor intrusion investigation. This is to find out if dangerous vapors are moving from creosote-contaminated groundwater into homes and buildings. The first part of this investigation involved collecting samples from several places: the air beneath the ground (known as soil gas), shallow groundwater, sanitary sewers, and storm sewers.

So far, the EPA has reviewed the final results from 107 out of the 117 locations they aimed

to test. There were nine soil gas locations that were too wet to sample, but they will be tested once they dry out. Additionally, one storm sewer location couldn't be accessed through a manhole, so it wasn't sampled.

As of July 22, 2024, these are the findings from the vapor intrusion testing. We are now waiting for the EPA to share their analysis with the community and to explain what steps will be taken next.



## Fifth Ward/Kashmere Gardens UPRR Site EPA's Anticipated Schedule

Timing	Activity
September 2023-Ongoing	UPRR obtains access agreements for private property sampling
Nov 2023-Aug 2024	Field investigation activities and sampling. Validated sample results will be provided to property owners. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Phase 1 Vapor Sampling: Nov '23-March '24</li> <li>➢ Background Soil Sampling: March '24</li> <li>➢ Neighborhood Soil Sampling, Onsite Soil Sampling, Warm Weather Vapor Sampling: May '24-October '24</li> </ul>
Early 2025	EPA uses sampling data to determine if there is a risk from creosote contamination EPA produces human health risk assessment UPRR produces Removal Site Evaluation report EPA determines if cleanup is necessary based on risk to people's health

\*Updated 7/22/2024

## Montrose Boulevard Improvement Project

The Montrose Boulevard Improvement Project aims to enhance drainage, sidewalks, and overall safety in the area. This project, designed to strengthen the street's underground drainage system, is intended to make Montrose Boulevard safer and more accessible for pedestrians, cyclists, and mass transit users. Over the past two years, this plan has been thoroughly reviewed and discussed during five public engagement sessions with community members. Additionally, it has undergone most of the review process with the City of Houston. Although the city is not funding the project, it must approve the necessary construction permits.

The Montrose Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ), also known as the redevelopment authority, is responsible for this project. TIRZ collects a portion of local property tax revenue to

fund capital improvement projects like this one. According to Joe Webb, the chairperson of TIRZ, they applied for the required permits and sought the city's final approval in February. However, the \$14.7 million first phase is now indefinitely on hold because the new Houston Mayor, John Whitmire, who took office in January, is reviewing the initiative and has requested several changes.

I have expressed my strong support for this project to the Mayor and his administration. I believe it is crucial for the City of Houston to back this initiative. The Montrose area often experiences significant flooding during rain episodes, creating serious public safety concerns. Given the frequent flooding and the recent impact of Hurricane Beryl, I will continue to advocate for this essential project.

## Hazardous Facilities In Residential Areas

Hazardous facilities in residential areas can cause significant health and environmental impacts to the communities surrounding them. Houston, in particular, has numerous such facilities within its residential neighborhoods. These hazards can severely compromise the health of residents, sometimes leading to chronic or terminal illnesses.

Health impacts from these facilities include:

- Various types of cancer
- Physiological malfunctions such as reproductive impairment and kidney failure
- Breathing difficulties, including asthma

The environmental impacts are equally concerning. They include:

- Reduced air quality
  - Contaminated water sources
  - Risks of fire and explosions
  - Destruction of local organisms, plants, and animals
- One major issue is the release of particulate matter (PM), a harmful mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in the air. When inhaled, PM can cause serious health problems.

For many years, I have actively opposed the renewal of permits and the approval of new applications for hazardous facilities located in residential areas. The emissions from these facilities, such as PM 2.5, pose extreme dangers to both the environment and the health of local residents. Most

of these facilities are situated in underserved Black and Latino neighborhoods. To address this, I have submitted statements to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), written to Governor Abbott, and urged State Representatives to advocate for public meetings. This allows affected residents to voice their concerns.

I have repeatedly contested the application for a rock-crushing facility near the LBJ Hospital. These efforts are documented on the TCEQ website, where the public can access them by searching for the relevant permit or docket number.



# Transportation News

## Metro University Line

In late June, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) decided to forgo a \$1 billion grant from the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grant program. This decision has significant repercussions, particularly for underserved communities in Houston, worsening existing disparities in transit access, economic opportunities, and essential services.

Back in 2019, Houston-area voters showed strong support for improving public transit, approving a \$3.5 billion bond issue with a two-thirds majority. More than 328,000 voters, or 68%, voted in favor of this bond, which was meant to fund several transit projects, including the University Corridor Project. This project is crucial for promoting transit equity, aiming to provide essential connections to key urban hubs, jobs, education, and resources for underserved communities like Gulfton and Northeast Houston.

The University Corridor Project proposed a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, stretching 25 miles from the Westchase Park-and-Ride to the Tidwell Transit Center in Houston. This system would primarily use exclusive bus lanes, offering service seven days a week for about 20

hours per day. Buses would run every six minutes during peak periods in the morning, midday, and evening, and every 12 minutes during early mornings, late evenings, and weekends.

The main goal of this project was to introduce a high-capacity, high-frequency BRT service to the residents of Houston. The corridor was designed to pass through communities where three-quarters of the population face historical disadvantages, persistent poverty, and environmental challenges. The project aimed to improve these areas by increasing residents' access to education, employment, and essential services. Importantly, three universities and three community colleges are located within half a mile of the proposed stations, with a fourth university accessible via a connection to the Red Line light rail. The planned route was expected to provide a vital east-west link to METRO's transit centers, Park and Rides, and light rail, integrating

the city's transit network, boosting overall ridership, and stimulating economic opportunities across the region.

The project was particularly important for underserved and minority communities, who stood to benefit the most from improved transit options. The communities impacted by the lack of this project include:

- Westchase:
  - Total Population: 34,093
  - Black Population: 11,719
  - Hispanic Population: 12,451
  - Households below poverty: 13,445
- Gulfton
  - Total Population: 47,756
  - Black Population: 5,867
  - Hispanic Population: 35,998
  - Households below poverty: 12,016
- Sharpstown
  - Total Population: 77,519
  - Black Population: 8,598
  - Hispanic Population: 50,648
  - Households below poverty: 21,078

**METRO decided to forgo a \$1 billion grant from the Federal Transit Administration that would have transformed Houston.**

2/5/2024

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
 Governor of Texas  
 P.O. Box 12428  
 Austin, Texas 78711

RE: TCEQ Docket No. 2024-0138-AIR

Dear Governor Abbott,

I am reaching out to earnestly solicit your intervention in the matter concerning Standard Air Quality Permit 173296, which has been approved for Texas Coastal Materials. In my capacity as the City of Houston Council Member At-Large 4, I advocate for the constituents directly affected by the prospective establishment of a rock and concrete crushing facility.

It has come to my attention that the issuance of this permit would authorize the construction of a concrete and rock crusher in close proximity to the LBJ Hospital—a renowned public hospital, Level 3 trauma center, and a pivotal emergency facility in our state. It is imperative to note that the residents of Harris County, who rely on LBJ Hospital, seek comprehensive healthcare services that extend beyond emergency interventions. The particulate emissions from the proposed facility pose a significant risk, potentially exacerbating respiratory ailments among the patient population and healthcare staff alike. Furthermore, this project has encountered staunch opposition from the local community, esteemed health professionals affiliated with UT Health, and various stakeholders who are united in their concern for public health and wellbeing.

Additionally, I would like to draw your attention to the state regulations that explicitly prohibit the establishment of such facilities within 440 yards of educational institutions or places of worship. It is noteworthy that the LBJ Hospital, which encompasses a school and a chapel actively holding regular services, falls within this restricted perimeter.

During the informational session convened by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) on December 7, 2023, a diverse coalition comprising UTHealth, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Harris Health, elected officials, and community organizations, articulated their collective dissent against this project. Despite these substantial concerns, the permit was ratified by the TCEQ's Executive Director on January 11 without adequately addressing the critical proximity of the school and chapel to the proposed site.

It is also crucial to recognize the recent mandate by Harris County voters, who overwhelmingly endorsed a \$2.5 billion bond aimed at the enhancement and expansion of LBJ Hospital, including the establishment of a new Level 1 trauma center. This clear demonstration of public trust and investment in healthcare infrastructure should not be undermined by the perils posed by the proposed crushing facility.

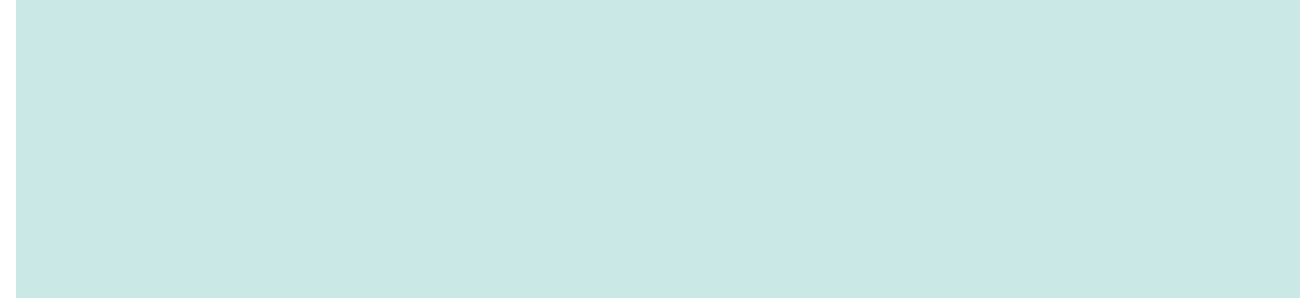
In light of these pressing concerns, I respectfully urge you to direct the TCEQ Commissioners to grant the Motion to Overturn the decision of the executive director and facilitate a thorough reconsideration of the permit in question. Your timely intervention in this matter is crucial to safeguarding the health and welfare of our community.

I extend my sincere thanks for your attention to this significant issue and anticipate your supportive response.

Sincerely,  
  
 Council Member Letitia Plummer, DDS  
 At-Large 4

atlarge4@houstontx.gov | 832.393.3012  
 City Hall Annex • 900 Bagby, 1st Floor • Houston, Texas 77002

*One of several letters sent to the state officials and TCEQ regarding the proposed construction of the concrete and rock crushing facility. Letters submitted to the TCEQ are public record and can be found using the permit or docket number.*





Greater Uptown

- Total Population: 55,938
- Black Population: 4,858
- Hispanic Population: 10,419
- Households below poverty: 27,637

Greater Fifth Ward

- Total Population: 19,152.00
- Black Population: 8,073.00
- Hispanic Population: 9,441.00
- Households below poverty: 5,090.00

Kashmere Gardens

- Total Population: 8,831.00
- Black Population: 5,790.00
- Hispanic Population: 2,475.00
- Households below poverty: 2,463.00

Trinity/Houston Gardens

- Total Population: 17,277.00
- Black Population: 9,198.00
- Hispanic Population: 7,557.00
- Households below poverty: 4,263.00

Eastex-Jensen Area

- Total Population: 27,777.00
- Black Population: 5,485.00
- Hispanic Population: 20,574.00
- Households below poverty: 5,498.00

When METRO decided to forgo the grant, I expressed my disappointment directly to the Metro Board at their public meeting. I emphasized that implementing a shorter segment of the University Corridor first, from Westchase to Wheeler Transit Center, could have demonstrated the project's feasibility and paved the way for future expansion. Abandoning this project undermines years of community input and planning, breaking the promises made to residents who voted for a comprehensive transit overhaul.

I understand that while the majority support the project, some oppose it due to concerns about its impact on their neighborhoods. This situation presented an ideal opportunity to re-engage all stakeholders and find a compromise. Unfortunately, METRO's decision has

halted a transformative project that could have significantly enhanced transit equity in Houston.



**I hope that history is more forgiving of the decision-makers for the missed opportunity than I am.**



Statement from Council Member Letitia Plummer on Metro's Decision

I am deeply disappointed by Metro's decision to forgo pursuing the nearly \$1 billion Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Grant. This funding represented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to significantly enhance transportation equity in Houston, particularly for our underserved communities.

By turning away this crucial investment, we are not only missing out on substantial financial support but also failing to address the pressing needs of those who rely most heavily on public transportation. This decision undermines our efforts to create a more equitable transit system that connects all Houstonians to essential services, educational institutions, and economic opportunities.

This is a catastrophic mistake with far-reaching implications for our city's future. The potential improvements in transit access, reliability, and frequency that could have been achieved with this grant would have transformed the lives of countless residents, particularly in historically disadvantaged areas.

I hope that history is more forgiving of the decision-makers responsible for this missed opportunity than I am. Our city deserves better, and we must continue to advocate for equitable transportation solutions that serve all members of our community.



*One of several statements made about the Metro's decision.*



# I-45 Expansion: Sale of White Oak Bayou Greenway



Since 2019, I have been a strong advocate for a better design for Interstate 45. My goal is to protect green spaces like White Oak Bayou, prevent the displacement of communities, ensure essential drainage and flood mitigation, and preserve historic areas such as Independence Heights.

In 2020, I proposed that White Oak Bayou Park be designated as an official park under the Federal Highway 23 U.S. Code § 138 Preservation of parklands and 49 U.S. Code § 303 - Policy on lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites, specifically Section 4(f). This official park designation would have provided stronger protections for the area. Unfortunately, my proposal did not receive the necessary support from the previous administration.

A few months ago, an agenda item was presented to the Council, involving the sale of three acres of land along the White Oak Bayou Greenway to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). This land sale was intended to facilitate the realignment of Interstate 45. Alongside me, several council members, residents, and environmental

advocacy groups such as Save Buffalo Bayou and STOP I-45 expressed strong opposition to this sale.

During public meetings hosted by TxDOT in 2023, opponents raised significant concerns about the potential impact on the green space along White Oak Bayou, especially near the University of Houston-Downtown campus, where I-45 lanes would be rerouted. These concerns included the risk of increased flooding, pollution, displacement of residents, and the reduction of green spaces.

Since 2019, I have shared these concerns with residents and advocacy groups, with whom I have met on many occasions. This is why I was one of the four council members who voted against the sale of the three acres of land along the White Oak Bayou Greenway to TxDOT.

Despite overwhelming pressure from residents to cancel a recent meeting following Hurricane Beryl, TxDOT proceeded with it. As someone who supports the voices of the community and equitable projects, I continue to stand by the residents and advocate for their concerns and the protection of our green spaces and for keeping communities together.



# I-10 Expansion: Dividing Neighborhoods

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has new plans for Interstate 10, aiming to expand the freeway from Voss Road to Interstate 45. This expansion would extend existing managed lanes into downtown Houston. TxDOT has proposed two options: widening the freeway or elevating the managed lanes. However, neither option is favorable to the local residents.

I have had numerous meetings with residents from the affected area. Just as I opposed the I-45 expansion due to its potential to displace Black and Latino residents and negatively impact small and local businesses, I have been against TxDOT's plans for I-10 since 2020.

The proposed widening of I-10 would necessitate the demolition of more than 80 homes and businesses to make room for managed lanes for the proposed Metro bus rapid transit, known as the Inner Katy line. This potential loss has understandably caused significant concern among the community.

A review by Houston Landing of public

feedback from over 250 residents revealed that a vast majority oppose the I-10 project, with more than 77% expressing their disapproval. The community's voice is clear and unified in its opposition.

In response, residents have proposed an alternative plan known as "No Higher, No Wider." This plan suggests widening the freeway at its current grade and creating managed lanes within the existing right-of-way of I-10. This approach aims to mitigate the impact on homes and businesses while addressing the transportation needs.

Cities across the country and within Texas are exploring ways to build more multimodal connectivity. The residents' proposal aligns with these innovative approaches. Having reviewed the plans and attended TxDOT's public meetings, I believe that the residents should have a significant say in projects that will impact their neighborhoods and green spaces. I continue to stay engaged with developments and resident concerns.





# The Shepherd and Durham Major Investment Project

The Shepherd and Durham Major Investment Project aims to rejuvenate the aging roadways, improve stormwater drainage, enhance safety by reducing fatal crashes, and better accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and mass transit users. This project is crucial for the community, providing much-needed infrastructure improvements.

The first phase of the project, spanning from North Loop 610 to West 15th Street, is nearly complete. It involved reducing vehicle lanes from four to three on both Shepherd and Durham, while adding 10-foot-wide, shared-use paths alongside each north-south street. This phase also included upgrading underground drainage systems and planting new trees, funded by a \$25 million federal grant.

The second phase, extending from West 15th Street to Interstate 10, follows a similar plan. It has been allocated \$40 million in federal funds. This phase also reduces the number of lanes from four to three and adds shared-use paths. These changes aim to make the streets safer and more accessible for all users.

Initially, Mayor Whitmire paused the project, causing concern among residents who recognized its importance. The pause also risked losing the \$40 million grant funding. Responding to an invitation from the Memorial Heights Redevelopment Authority, a city government arm leading the initiative, I met with residents and toured the area. I assured them of my support for the project, emphasizing my commitment to multimodal transportation, drainage improvements, and pedestrian and cyclist safety. I promised to advocate on their behalf.

Shortly afterward, Mayor Whitmire approved the project with some modifications. The updated plan maintains all general-purpose lanes at 11 feet and reduces the lanes on Shepherd and Durham from four to three, while preserving some strategically placed left turn



lanes. Bike lanes will be retained, but the sidewalk width will be reduced from the originally planned 10 feet to 6 feet.

The Memorial Heights TIRZ will help cover construction costs not funded by federal grants, and the city of Houston will allocate funds for water and wastewater improvements. The entire street reconstruction project, with a total cost of \$100 million covering both phases, will bring significant benefits to the residents and the community.



# Federal Partnership Updates

The U.S. House Appropriations Committee oversees the allocation of more than \$1.7 trillion in federal discretionary spending each year. This committee's responsibilities span across various government efforts, including agriculture, defense, veterans' affairs, science, energy, the environment, justice, homeland security, labor, health and human services, education, transportation, housing, and foreign affairs.

In 2021, the House of Representatives introduced a submissions process for Community Project Funding (CPF) requests. These requests are submitted by individual Members of Congress for specific projects and purposes. CPF is subject to stringent limitations to prevent misuse. Requests can only be directed to governments or non-profit organizations, not to for-profit businesses or individuals. They must demonstrate clear community support and are subject to audits by the independent Government Accountability Office. Additionally, the number of CPF requests is limited, and the total amount for all approved CPFs cannot exceed 0.5% of all appropriations for the year. Members of Congress can submit up to 15 projects each, but there is no guarantee that any or all of their requests will be approved, either in full or in part.

## FY24 Community Project Funding

At the start of 2023, the City Council heard from several bar owners about crimes targeting their businesses. These owners reported numerous break-ins, resulting in significant inventory losses. Some owners even resorted to sleeping at their businesses to protect their livelihoods.

These alarming stories required immediate attention. I visited several businesses and spoke with the owners to fully understand their concerns. After hearing their harrowing experiences, I collaborated with the Houston



Police Department to develop a proposal for federal funding for a business watch program. The proposal, due to federal policy and public safety concerns, cannot be discussed in detail. However, I am pleased to announce that the late honorable Sheila Jackson Lee saw the merit in our proposal and advocated for its approval. Recently, the city's Government Relations team informed me that the Federal Appropriations Committee has approved our project. This is fantastic news for our business community and for enhancing public safety.

## FY2025 Community Project Funding



In 2020, following the tragic murder of George Floyd, I proposed several police reforms, including the establishment of Mental Health Crisis Intervention Teams for the City of Houston. This initiative received overwhelming public support and was included in the recommendations of the Police Reform Task Force.

In 2021, I proposed the creation and funding of twenty Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams (MCOT) and six additional Crisis Intervention Response Teams (CIRT). MCOT Rapid Response Teams provide a non-law enforcement alternative for nonviolent, non-criminal mental health 911 calls that cannot be diverted by the Crisis Call Diversion (CCD) program.

Each MCOT Rapid Response Team includes a licensed clinician or a master's level clinician paired with a bachelor's level clinician. CIRT, on the other hand, pairs a Crisis Intervention

Trained deputy with a master's level clinician and responds to serious mental health crises.

Despite having a reasonable fund balance, the previous administration funded these teams through the American Rescue Plan, which only provided funding for three years, ending in June 2025. To ensure the continuation of these crucial teams, I worked with the Houston Police Department to apply for FY2025 Community Project Funding. Our goal is to secure temporary funding while we develop a permanent funding plan.

I am pleased to share that Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher has selected this project to submit to the Federal Appropriations Committee for review. While it will take several months to learn the outcome of the proposal, I will keep you updated on any developments.

# Government Operations Committee

In May, I formally communicated my concerns regarding the dredge dump sites for Project 11 to the Port of Houston and the City's Government Relations team. Additionally, I raised other related issues and requested that the Port of Houston present their plans in a public forum before the City Council. As the chair of the Government Operations Committee, I am pleased to announce that the Port of Houston has agreed to facilitate a tour of the site for Council members and to present their plans in a joint committee meeting

with the Resilience Committee.

This joint meeting will allow the Port of Houston to provide transparency about its operations and address the concerns I have raised. Committee meetings are open to the public, and citizens are encouraged to participate and share their views. For updates and to sign up to speak, please visit: [Houston City Council - Committees and Agendas - Government Operations Committee \(houstontx.gov\)](https://houstontx.gov/committees).



May 28th, 2024

111 East Loop North  
Houston, Texas USA 77029

RE: Request for Project 11 update for City Council

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to request an update on the ongoing developments of Project 11, a significant expansion of the Houston Ship Channel. As you are aware, this project is critical for both the economic vitality of our region and for the improvement of the Ship Channel's infrastructure to accommodate larger vessels and enhance operational safety.

However, significant concerns have been raised by the communities living in proximity to the project area, particularly regarding the environmental and health impacts of the dredging process involved in the expansion. Residents and environmental groups have expressed alarm over the deposition of dredge spoils, which are known to contain harmful contaminants such as heavy metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons at concentrations posing cancer risks. These concerns are compounded by the historical and ongoing environmental justice issues faced by these communities, including those in Pleasantville and Galena Park, which have been disproportionately burdened by industrial pollution and associated health risks.

It is imperative that we address these concerns proactively by ensuring that all necessary precautions are taken to minimize environmental harm and protect public health. This includes transparent communication with the affected communities to keep them informed and engaged in the decision-making process.

I would appreciate a presentation from a representative of the Port to Houston City Council, either at a council meeting or through a committee meeting on the current status of Project 11, including any measures being implemented to address community and environmental concerns. Furthermore, I request that Port Houston consider organizing additional public forums or town hall meetings to ensure that community members have the opportunity to voice their concerns, receive updates, and contribute to the project planning process.

Thank you for your attention to these critical matters. I look forward to your prompt response and to working together to ensure that Project 11 progresses in a manner that is beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

Sincerely,

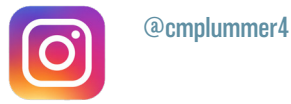
Council Member Letitia Plummer, DDS  
At-Large 4

## At-Large 4 Upcoming Events

This is a city-wide event aimed at improving resident preparedness and resiliency during extreme weather throughout. If you or your organization works in this space and would like a free booth at the event, please contact Veronica Xiloj at [Veronica.Xiloj@houstontx.gov](mailto:Veronica.Xiloj@houstontx.gov) or 832-393-3321. We look to seeing you at the event. Look out for more updates.







**Contact us**

Email: [atlarge4@houstontx.gov](mailto:atlarge4@houstontx.gov)  
Phone: 832.393.3012



*Munira Bangee*  
**Chief of Staff**



*Veronica Xiloj*  
**Deputy Chief**



*Katherine Washington*  
**Executive Assistant**



*Cece Scott*  
**Director of  
Constituent Services**



*Kevin Chen*  
**Research Assistant**