

CITY OF  
HOUSTON



One **Clean** Houston  
INITIATIVE



## A Strategic Plan for A Cleaner City

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**Sylvester Turner, Mayor**

City of Houston

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Sylvester Turner Mayor  
City of Houston

## One **Clean** Houston

Illegal dumping is a pervasive problem that negatively impacts the health, safety, and quality of many communities throughout the City of Houston. The quality of life within our neighborhoods should not be compromised through the blights created by illegal dumping. Everyone deserves the right to live in a healthy and safe environment, and we are all responsible for keeping our communities clean and free of dumping and other environmental hazards. We must all work together to create **One Clean Houston**.

Through a working group of City departments and stakeholders, my Administration has developed a plan to address illegal dumping and cleanup our neighborhoods. This plan, the One Clean Houston program focuses on three key areas of impact:

- A. Rapid cleanup
- B. Better enforcement
- C. Prevention and education

The City is already underway with much of the work but it will take departments working in tandem with community members, non-profits, industry and other governmental organizations to make this vision of **One Clean Houston** a reality.



## RAPID CLEANUP

*The City of Houston recognizes that the most important and tangible way to reduce the impact of illegal dumping in our neighborhoods is to clean it up as quickly as possible while considering preventative solutions to reduce the chances of recurrence. The presence of dumping often leads to more dumping and chronic dumping in neighborhoods is tied directly to negative social outcomes. While the City's Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD) navigates through significant budgetary challenges related to the absence of a dedicated funding source, Mayor Turner has directed City departments to increase their efforts to quickly resolve these matters.*

### Increase funding for heavy trash, dumping and litter abatement

In September 2022, the Houston City Council approved the use of \$2.1 million in the General Fund to supplement the SWMD heavy trash and illegal dumping collections program. These funds were used to secure agreements with local private waste haulers to address 311 Service Requests related to illegal dumping. Since then, the City has abated more than 2,170 dumpsites totaling 28,057 tons.

Additional funds, in the amount of \$7.9M, were provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), to support the City's aggressive approach towards maintaining heavy trash collection schedules and illegal dumping removal efforts through fiscal year 2025. The One Clean Houston Program also creates provisions to address scattered litter and miscellaneous debris derived from illegal dumping and failure to properly secure items prior to collection. In January 2023, the SWMD invested \$1.3M to secure the services of a litter abatement contractor, Smartscaping, to remove scattered debris in various parts of the city, particularly areas severely impacted by unlawful dumping.

As a direct result of these investments, response times to 311 Service Requests for illegal dumping have decreased by 40% over the last year. Prior to this initiative, the average time to resolve these matters was approximately 40 days. The recent program enhancements reduced the average resolution time to 24 days. As continued improvements are adopted, the SWMD expects the average resolution time to decrease to 7 – 10 days.

**\$11.5 million for supplemental heavy trash, illegal dumping and litter control contracted collections.**



### Improve complaint routing and inter-departmental/agency coordination

The City of Houston is improving the way 311 service requests for illegal dumping and neighborhood nuisances are handled to ensure a quick and quality response. Each department's role has been clearly defined, and processes are being streamlined and automated to avoid errors and delays in the City's response. Service requests will only be closed once the department confirms that the issue has been resolved.

**No additional funds required.**

### Improve efficiency of collections equipment

Each year, the SWMD collects more than 250,000 tons of combined bulk waste and illegal dumping. The standard approach requires three separate operators working in tandem with three separate vehicles. This year, the department will repurpose employees and equipment to improve operational efficiencies by incorporating the use of self-loading single operating collection vehicles valued at approximately \$350,000 per unit. This proven strategy will reduce the environmental impacts and operating costs while expediting the removal of unlawful dumping in communities.

**\$3 million to purchase single-operator grapple trucks.**

### Attract and retain solid waste drivers

Employees and equipment are the two greatest resources of the SWMD. The department has been heavily impacted by the national driver shortage, causing an increase in vacancy rates to 17%. In an effort to address the driver shortage, the department is increasing recruiting efforts through job fairs and increased hiring incentives up to \$5,000 per person.

**\$200,000 for driver hiring incentives.**



## BETTER ENFORCEMENT

*Illegal dumping is a crime. It not only violates the law but also has many negative impacts on human health and the environment. Dumping has been shown to attract rodents and insects, make areas more susceptible to flooding by blocking stormwater drains and expose residents to harmful materials such as sharp objects or chemicals. Violators who dump illegally are endangering our communities and must be brought to justice. Camera surveillance plays a vital role in identifying and prosecuting individuals who dump illegally, and we must have adequate law enforcement officers to conduct investigations and arrest violators.*

### Expand HPD's Video Surveillance Program

SWMD has placed high visibility mobile surveillance cameras throughout the City to deter illegal dumping activity. The department will monitor footage to identify and prosecute individuals who dump illegally in key problematic locations. In addition, the Houston Police Department (HPD) Environmental Crimes Unit has acquired and installed covert cameras at chronic dumpsites throughout the City. Camera surveillance is an essential tool to help law enforcement investigate, arrest and ultimately convict violators.

**\$419,000 in additional illegal dumping surveillance cameras.**

### Improve enforcement of Heavy Trash violations

The City is transitioning responsibility for heavy trash enforcement from Department of Neighborhoods (DON) to SWMD to better align with functional areas, streamline processes and improve enforcement and outreach efforts. This new team of inspectors will be tasked with identifying and responding to violations of Chapter 39 of the City's Code of Ordinances, such as heavy trash on public rights-of-way. This move will also free up DON Code Enforcement Officers to focus on other neighborhood nuisances such as dangerous buildings, weeded lots and trash on private property.

**\$608,000 per year for six additional code enforcement officers.**

### Launch HPD Illegal Dumping Overtime Program

This overtime program will run through 2023 and is anticipated to result in over one-thousand illegal dumping investigations, a nearly 80% increase in investigations compared to 2022.

**\$100,000 in additional overtime for HPD Environmental Crimes Unit.**





### Make it easier to report illegal dumping and violators

Community members are a key asset in our fight against illegal dumping. Photos, videos and first-hand accounts from community members who witness illegal dumping can significantly improve law enforcement efforts. The City is launching an online form that will help community members report illegal dumping and aid HPD's investigation efforts. In addition to the new online form, the public can submit tips through 311, the City's Rat-on-a-Rat Line (713-525-A-RAT or 713-525-2728), Harris County's Environmental Crime Tipline (832-927-1567) or via Crimestoppers (713-222-TIPS), which possibly provides tipsters with a reward of up to \$5,000.

**No additional funding required.**

### Grow partnership with outside law enforcement agencies

The City of Houston is expanding its partnership with Harris County's primary environmental enforcement agency, Harris County Precinct One Environmental Crimes Unit (HCECU). The partnership will add six deputies to investigate illegal dumping violations over the next two years as well as 120 covert cameras to aid enforcement efforts.

**\$1.9M in additional cameras and contract services over two years.**

### Increase the number of successful prosecutions

For cases the Harris County District Attorney declines to accept, the City of Houston intends to proceed with prosecuting the lesser offense of a Class C misdemeanor. The City is also addressing a major obstacle to successful prosecutions or failure to identify defendants — by increasing attempts by inspectors or police officers to locate property owners. Additional efforts will include going to residences outside normal work hours, training of inspectors and police officers to cite, not only for the act of illegal dumping but also for allowing it to remain on the property and accessing DPS electronic system records drivers' license images.

**No additional funding required.**

### Target major repeat property owner offenders

The City will hold property owners accountable for failing to prevent illegal dumping on their properties by using civil remedies available under Local Government Code, Chapter 54. Additionally, the City will seek to foreclose on properties with outstanding liens under Chapter 342 of the Health and Safety Code.

**No additional funding required.**





## PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

*The best way to stop illegal dumping is to prevent it from occurring. This requires providing adequate alternatives to dispose of waste, educating the community on the consequences and impacts and improving areas prone to dumping.*

### Improve access to neighborhood depositories

In addition to offering residential curbside heavy trash services, SWMD operates six Neighborhood Depository Sites (NDS) throughout the City that accept bulky items and other recyclable materials free of charge for residents. In addition, the City will promote community cleanups with free landfill disposal in areas particularly impacted by dumping to bring waste disposal options even closer to those neighborhoods.

The steady growth of the city coupled with the increase in use of these NDS have created long waiting times and excessive delays for residents who utilize these facilities. Capital improvement projects to construct larger depositories are being considered to compliment the

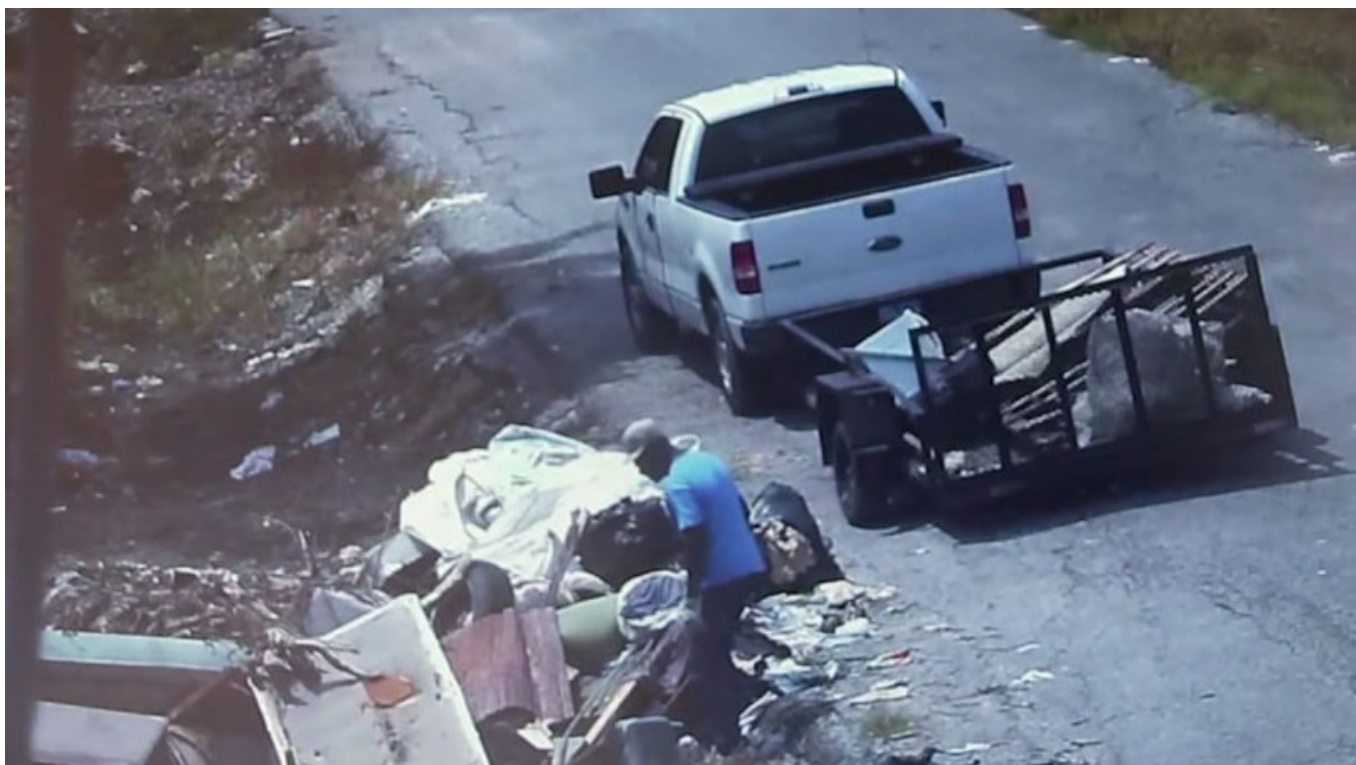
growth of neighborhoods and demand in use for these facilities. While these projects remain under consideration, provisions will be made to increase the operating hours and equipment required to facilitate increased disposal demands.

**\$50,400 to pilot a neighborhood drop-off Program.**

### Establish a dumpsite maintenance and control program

SWMD is instituting processes and training staff to identify opportunities to maintain and control chronic dumpsites using proven strategies such as barricades, signage, and improved landscaping and lighting. Once a location has been identified and integrated into GIS technology to monitor, collect and record historical information on chronic illegal dumpsites, SWMD will provide recommendations to mitigate the activity.

**Funding allocated on a project-by-project basis.**



### Improve community engagement

Community members can play an important role in helping the City address illegal dumping by improving awareness of local regulations, reporting violators to authorities, or aiding in community beautification efforts. All Houstonians must get involved to make the vision of One Clean Houston a reality. The City of Houston is engaging community groups through the Mayor's Office of Complete Communities and other agencies to expand illegal dumping education and neighborhood cleanup efforts, particularly in areas severely impacted by dumping. SWMD, DON and local partners will assist in neighborhood beautification by organizing volunteers, tools and equipment, and other resources.

**No additional funding required.**

## COST AND PROJECTIONS

### OneClean Houston - Project Cost Breakdown

PROJECT	ADDITIONAL CITY FUNDING
<b>Rapid Clean-up</b>	
Heavy Trash & Illegal Dumping Abatement Services	\$11,474,933
Efficient Collection Vehicles	\$3,000,000
Hiring Incentives for Drivers	\$200,000
<b>Better Enforcement</b>	
Heavy Trash Violation Enforcement	\$607,791
Camera Surveillance Program	\$419,467
HPD Overtime Program	\$100,000
Partnerships with other Law Enforcement Agencies	\$1,930,800
<b>Dumping Prevention</b>	
Neighborhood Drop-Off Pilot	\$50,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$17,783,391</b>