



CITY OF HOUSTON

Council Member Letitia Plummer, At-Large 4

Interoffice

Correspondence

To: Chief Cynthia Wilson
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From: Council Member Letitia Plummer

Cc:

Date: 07/30/2025

Marta Crinejo, Agenda Director
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Subject:
Amendment:
Agenda item
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Background

Balancing recovery with prevention is one of the hardest choices we face as leaders responsible for disaster funds. We have watched Houstonians face immense damage to their property in the wake of the 2024 derecho and Hurricane Beryl, and we know that investing in people’s immediate recovery is a moral imperative. At the same time, HUD reminds us that mitigation activities are intended to “increase resilience to disasters” by reducing long-term risk of property damage and suffering. Our challenge is to honor both realities: to help our community pick up the pieces after a disaster while also building systems and infrastructure that lessen the impact of the next storm.

Amendment

I move to amend the City of Houston’s draft Action Plan for the 2024 CDBG-DR allocation to prioritize housing recovery. Under the current proposal the multifamily housing program is allocated \$30 million and the single-family program \$20 million. The city shall increase CDBG-DR24 funding for the single-family and multifamily housing programs to \$50 million each by reallocating available balances from the Emergency Response/Public Safety Program, the Debris Repository Acquisition/Development Program and the Vegetation Management/Debris Removal Program) in the following way:

Revised Proposed Budget

Activity Name	Original Amount	Proposed Change	Final Amount
Planning	\$200,000.00	No change	\$200,000.00
Administration	\$15,732,250.00	No change	\$15,732,250.00
Multifamily Housing Program	\$30,000,000.00	\$20,000,000	\$50,000,000
Single Family Housing Program	\$20,000,000.00	\$30,000,000.00	\$50,000,000
Power Generation Resilience Program	\$151,291,150.00	No change	\$151,291,150.00
Emergency Response / Public Safety Program	\$15,340,000.00	-\$15,340,000.00	\$0*

Homeless Services Program	\$41,040,600.00	No change	\$41,040,600.00
Debris Repository Acquisition / Development Program	\$32,791,000.00	-\$26,410,000.00	\$6,381,000*
Vegetation Management / Debris Removal Program	\$8,250,000.00	-\$8,250,000.00	\$0*
Total	\$314,645,000.00		\$314,645,000.00

***Addressing the Shortfall: Funding Alternatives and Recommendations**

To address the shortfall created by shifting CDBG-DR24 funds away from some of the programs, my recommendation is that the city should look first to other funding mechanisms that are designed to support emergency services in large municipalities. Below are several options drawn from state and federal programs as well as Public/Private Partnerships.

Emergency Response Public Safety

Federal emergency-services grants. FEMA’s Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program has, since 2001, provided fire departments and non-affiliated EMS organizations with critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles and other resources(fema.gov). The Department of Homeland Security’s First Responder Grants resources page also lists federal grants for firefighter and emergency medical service agencies, including pre-disaster mitigation grants (dhs.gov). These programs are explicitly designed to help cities purchase ambulances and other emergency vehicles.

State EMS funds. Texas’s Emergency Medical Services Allotment Fund allows licensed EMS providers that deliver 911 and emergency transfers to receive funding from the state’s EMS and trauma care accounts (dshs.texas.gov.) The EMS allotment funding streams can help support ambulance purchases in a large urban system if eligibility requirements are met.

Maximize cost-recovery from EMS billing. Medicare patients constitute a substantial share of ambulance users, and Medicaid reimbursement rates are often tied to Medicare rates (iaff.org). Ensuring that the city’s EMS billing practices fully capture allowable Medicare, Medicaid and private-insurance reimbursements can provide ongoing revenue for vehicle replacement, and collection of co-payments can help avoid reimbursement reductions (iaff.org). I also mentioned during the FY2025 Fire Department Budget committee meeting.

Vegetation Management / Debris Removal Program

FEMA Public Assistance (PA) – Category A (Debris Removal) This is FEMA’s primary disaster-recovery grant program. After a Presidentially declared disaster, it reimburses local governments for “demolition, clearance, removal, transport, temporary storage, segregation, reduction and disposal of debris” such as trees, sand, gravel, and building wreckage (usace.army.mil) Eligible debris removal must be a direct result of the declared event and must eliminate an immediate threat or ensure economic recovery (usace.army.mil) My recommendation is that Houston should continue to apply for Category A assistance after federally declared disasters.

TCEQ Regional Solid-Waste Grants The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality allocates one-third of state municipal solid-waste fees to regional councils of governments (COGs) for solid-waste management projects. Councils administer “pass-through” grants to local governments for municipal solid-waste projects (tceq.texas.gov), and eligible applicants include cities, counties and districts (tceq.texas.gov). My recommendation is that Houston apply through the Houston-Galveston Area Council for funding of debris-management programs.

Texas emergency funding for debris removal After Hurricane Beryl, Texas Governor Greg Abbott approved \$50 million in emergency funds to help Southeast Texas communities remove debris; the money is administered through the Texas Division of Emergency Management and TCEQ. This shows that the state can release funds for debris removal. My recommendation is that the mayor leverage his relationship with the State for future disasters.

Texas A&M Forest Service Community Forestry Grant These grants support urban forestry practices such as climate resiliency, municipal foresters, workforce development, tree planting and community greening (tfswweb.tamu.edu). Public entities and non-profits are eligible (tfswweb.tamu.edu). I recommend that the city pursue funding for tree-planting and canopy restoration which improves vegetation health that will in turn reduce debris.

Debris Repository Acquisition / Development Program

EPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) grants. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides \$275 million (FY 2022-2026) for SWIFR grants to “political subdivisions” such as cities ([epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov)). Eligible activities include building or expanding transfer stations and drop-off sites, purchasing waste-collection equipment and trucks, and constructing or upgrading material-processing facilities ([epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov)). These grants are for improving municipal solid-waste management and can be applied to the development of a debris repository and associated equipment.

FEMA Public Assistance (Category A) reimbursements. FEMA’s Public Assistance program reimburses local governments for “clearance, removal, transport, temporary storage, reduction and disposal of debris” after a federally declared disaster ([usace.army.mil](https://www.usace.army.mil)). This funding does not cover routine facility upgrades. It can, however, reimburse eligible costs of debris removal and temporary staging/processing of storm debris as part of disaster response

Partner with CenterPoint Energy CenterPoint’s Greater Houston Resiliency Initiative has nearly doubled its vegetation-management workforce (about 1 000 workers) and committed to removing vegetation from 2 000 distribution-line miles with high-risk vegetation ([centerpointenergy.com](https://www.centerpointenergy.com)). In 2022 the City and CenterPoint announced “Resilient Now,” a collaborative framework to develop a regional master energy plan; this partnership aims to optimize infrastructure investments and enhance resilience (sustainability.centerpointenergy.com). Given CenterPoint’s substantial investment in vegetation management and its existing cooperation, I recommend the city explore agreements to share equipment and debris-removal crews or co-develop repository sites. CenterPoint’s 2025 Systemwide Resiliency Plan also establishes a three-year vegetation-management cycle that clears hazardous vegetation from all power lines ([tdworld.com](https://www.tdworld.com)), indicating an ongoing need for staging and processing sites. Funding for this could be a good faith measure from CenterPoint.