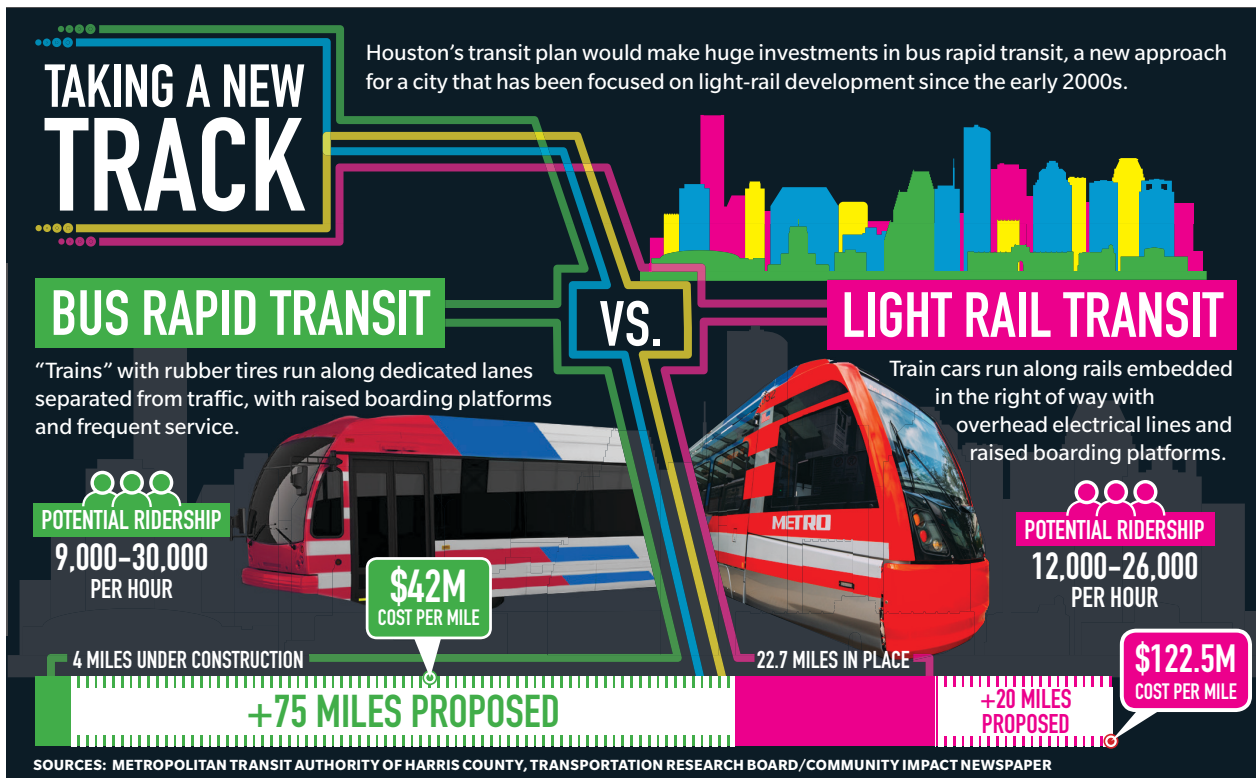




METRO envisions expanded Inner Loop rapid transit

Agency's \$7.5 billion 20-year plan shifts focus away from light rail as it grapples with growth

BY **MATT DULIN** AND **ALEX HOSEY**

A new vision for Houston's public transit system includes \$7.5 billion in investments that would bring 75 miles of rail-like service throughout the city—without the rail.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County's new plan, dubbed

METRONext and expected to go before voters in November, reflects a shift away from light rail, a favored approach in previous plans.

"It may not meet everyone's wish list. They may not agree with every part of the plan, but it's a compromise that's trying to serve the

greatest number of people and the transportation needs of our community," said Cindy Siegel, co-vice chair of METRO's board of directors.

In an average workweek in 2018, METRO transported 1.4 million people. That burden will grow, as the

CONTINUED ON 20

Brunt of pay parity costs could fall on firefighters

Fate of Prop. B lies in court case or union deal

BY **EMMA WHALEN** AND **MATT DULIN**

In a matter of days or weeks, the city of Houston could start sending out layoff notices as well as \$31 million in back pay as it implements pay parity for the city's firefighters under the voter-approved Proposition B.

What that could mean for local fire stations is unclear, as an agreement with the firefighters union has not been reached and a newly installed Harris County

CONTINUED ON 22

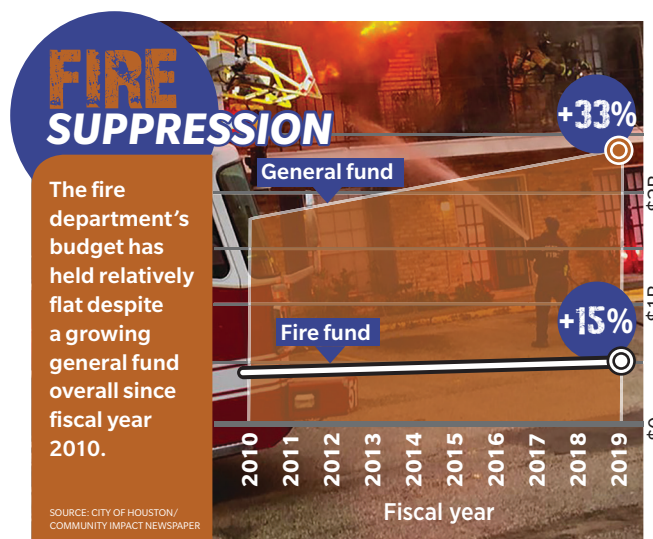


PHOTO COURTESY PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION



WHO WE ARE

Community Impact Newspaper owners John and Jennifer Garrett launched the first edition of the newspaper from the game room of their Pflugerville home in 2005.

The family-owned company has since expanded to offer hyperlocal newspapers throughout the Austin, Houston and Dallas metro areas as well as Phoenix and Nashville. This monthly edition will be distributed through the mail, free of charge, to every business, home and apartment across the Heights, River Oaks and Montrose areas. We strive to provide unbiased coverage of local business, transportation, development, city and county government, education and health care.

Take a peek inside to find out how our values translate to a uniquely local reading experience.

HOUSTON METHODIST MORE THAN A HOSPITAL



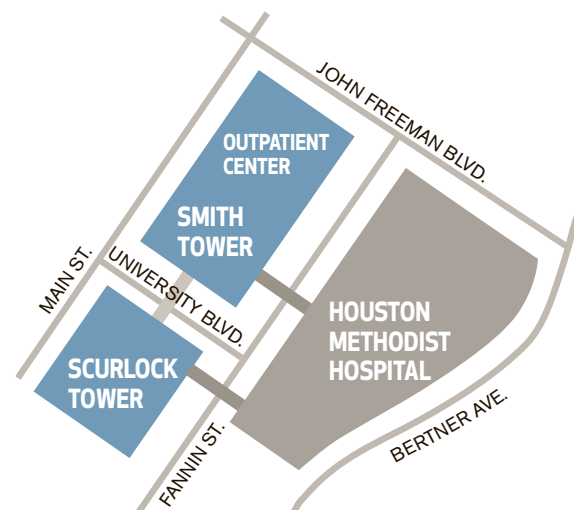
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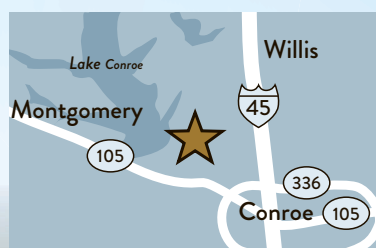
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John and Jennifer Garrett began *Community Impact Newspaper* in 2005 in Pflugerville, Texas. The company's mission is to build communities of informed citizens and thriving businesses through the collaboration of a passionate team.

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A new day for news in Houston's Inner Loop

On behalf of the entire *Community Impact Newspaper* team, I am excited to welcome you to our inaugural issue for the Heights, River Oaks, and Montrose—our first Inner Loop publication in Houston.

This edition is direct-mailed the first week of each month to over 100,000 homes, apartments and businesses in 77006, 77007, 77008, 77019, 77027, 77046, and 77098 ZIP codes, helping us build communities of informed citizens and thriving businesses. We have been a trusted source for community news in markets throughout Texas, including Austin, Dallas and Houston's suburbs for more than 14 years. We are also an emerging

national brand with a presence in Phoenix and Nashville.

This month, we focused on new transit plans and how it could connect our communities over the next 20 years, as well as in-depth Proposition B coverage to help you understand the political and practical sides of the issue. Between monthly print editions, you can find daily web coverage to help keep you informed about breaking news. Sign up for updates at www.communityimpact.com/hrm and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

I look forward to serving the community and delivering hyperlocal news to your mailbox.



Nicole Ray

Nicole Ray
GENERAL MANAGER
nray@communityimpact.com

ASK THE EDITOR



Matt Dulin

Matt Dulin
EDITOR
mdulin@communityimpact.com

Do you have a question about how local government works or something going on in town? Send it to hrmfeedback@communityimpact.com.

What can we expect from this paper?

You live in Houston's most coveted areas, home to arguably the best dining scene as well as the most creative, historic and eclectic parts of the city.

You also have a feast of media options to choose from. But who would have thought that 2019 would be the year for a print news revival in Houston's Inner Loop?

Month after month, we will bring you engaging journalism that offers a bird's eye view and a street-level approach on the news around you, from City Hall politics to pothole repairs. Our regular "Impacts" listings and other features make each edition a keeper. Our print editions will be deeply sourced, data-informed and thoughtfully packaged. Our daily digital coverage will keep a pulse on developments and breaking news.

As a third-generation Houstonian, I may be a little biased in one regard: I know we have a great city, rich in history and innovation alike, profound in diversity and unlimited in potential. It is a privilege to be able to share some of its stories.

FEATURED STORIES

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Take a Ride on the Healthier Side!

Biking is a fun and easy way to fit exercise into your daily schedule. Sign up today for our 5-Day Health Challenge and receive a Houston BCycle membership promo code to assist you in your first challenge.

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Medical Center**

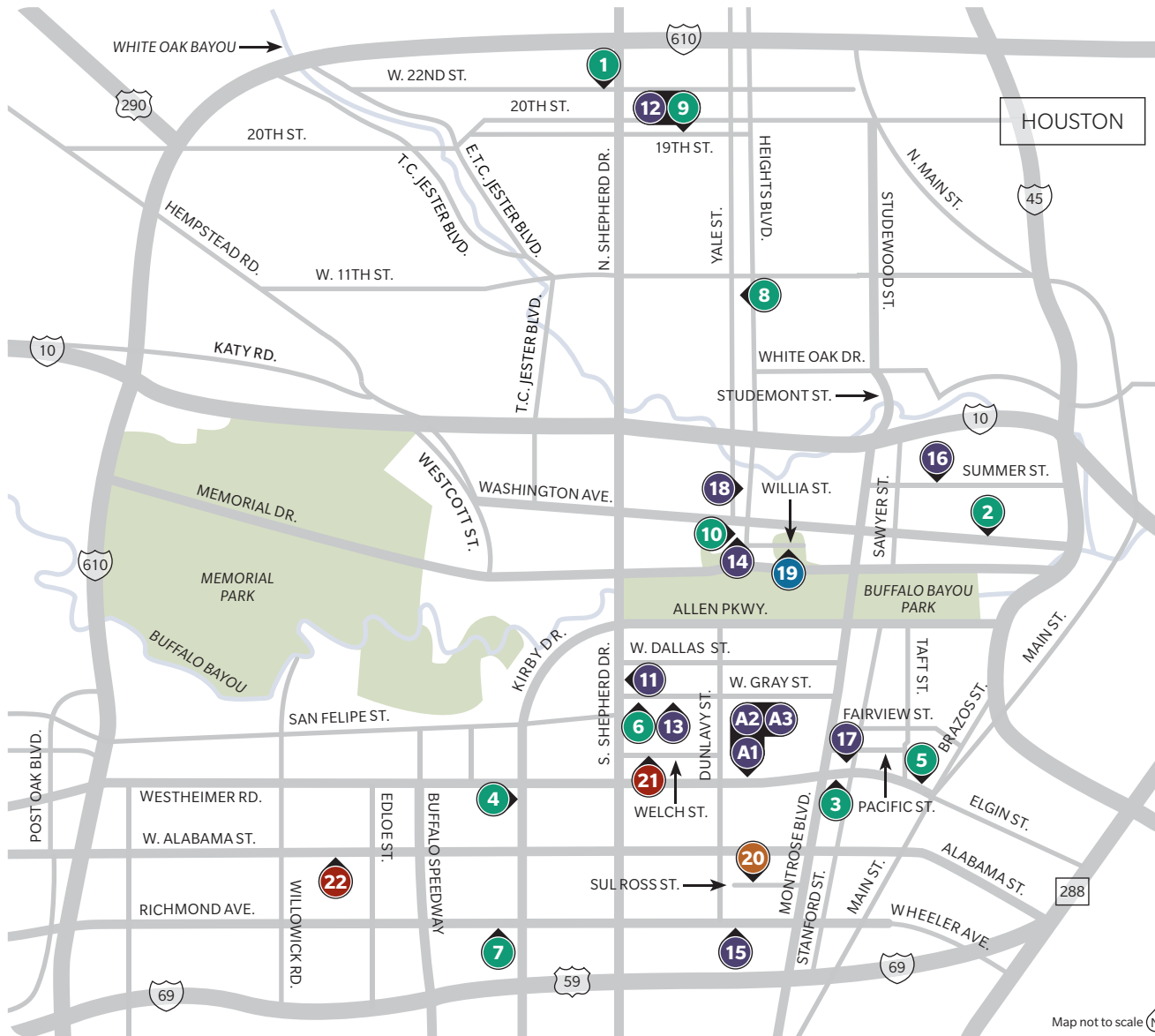
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Medicine

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IMPACTS

Businesses that have recently opened, are coming soon, relocating or expanding



NOW OPEN

1 Crew Fitness opened its Houston location at 715 W. 22nd St. on March 20. The Mobile, Alabama-based fitness center will offer indoor, high-energy rowing classes set to music with workouts designed to lessen joint impact and injury while offering a full-body workout. 650-483-1154. www.crew-fitness.com/crew-hou

2 Kubo's Sushi & Washoku had its soft opening March 20 at 1902 Washington Ave., Ste. C, Houston. The restaurant will serve sushi and Japanese cuisine and will only be open for dinner from 5:30-10:30 p.m. with a limited menu at first. 346-293-9948. www.kubo-sushi.net

3 Magical Dessert Bar opened March 9 at 907 Westheimer Road, Houston. The unicorn-themed dessert bar sells multicolored

cakes, milkshakes, lemonade, and other sweets and baked goods. 877-533-3773. www.facebook.com/unicorndessertbar

4 Blonde Pantry opened a new location March 2 at 2800 Kirby Drive, Ste. B232, Houston. The company delivers fully prepared local and gluten-free artisan meals to its customers on a weekly basis. It also provides nutrition and wellness consulting. www.theblondepantry.com

5 Tropical's Colombian Steak House opened its second location Feb. 22 at 212 Westheimer Road, Houston. The Latin American restaurant will offer a wide selection of steaks, drinks, patacones—or fried plantains—and other traditional Colombian food. The restaurant also provides vegan and vegetarian options. 713-893-8993. www.tropicalsrestaurant.com

6 Perry's Steakhouse & Grille opened a new restaurant Feb. 11 at 1997 W. Gray St., Houston. This two-story location is its first within Houston's Inner Loop and is known for its steaks, wines and happy hour. 346-293-8400. www.perryssteakhouse.com

7 Slowpokes opened its second restaurant Feb. 1 at 2925 Richmond Ave., Ste. 120, Houston. Slowpokes is a community coffee shop that partners with other local businesses for its decor and menu. Along with coffee, Slowpokes also sells tea, beer, wine, salads, sandwiches and desserts. 346-406-3985. www.slowpokeshtx.com

8 Dish Society opened a new location in the Heights on Jan. 28 at 1050 Yale St., Houston. The all-day diner has four other locations and prides itself on fresh and locally sourced ingredients. 713-861-3474. www.dishsociety.com

9 The Austin-based chain Hopdoddy Burger Bar opened a location Jan. 21 at the Heights Waterworks development, 449 W. 19th St., Ste. D-100, Houston. The restaurant, which also has a River Oaks location, serves a variety of creative hamburgers on handmade buns with vegetarian options as well as milkshakes and beer. 346-250-2100. www.hopdoddy.com

10 Truth BBQ opened a new location at 110 S. Heights Blvd., Houston, on Jan. 19. The restaurant began as a roadside barbecue outpost in Brenham and serves a variety of meats, sandwiches, sides and cakes. 832-835-0001. www.truthbbq.com

COMING SOON

11 The Rice Box is opening a new location in early April at 1111 S. Shepherd Drive, Houston. The Chinese-American takeout restaurant is known for its neon signs and self-described "edgy ambiance." The restaurant also offers craft beer and nitrogen-infused tea. www.riceboxed.com

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12 Verdine is opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant in early April at 449 W. 19th St., Ste. C-200, Houston. The vegan cafe began as a food truck and will now have a patio and serve beer and wine and have all plant-based food. www.eatverdine.com

13 Barry's Bootcamp is opening a new fitness center in late May at 1953 W. Gray St., Houston. The center is known for its high-intensity workouts consisting of weight lifting, cardio exercise and anaerobic exercise as well as its red indoor lighting. www.barrysbootcamp.com

14 Portland-based Voodoo Doughnuts is opening its second Texas location this summer at 3715 Washington Ave., Houston. The growing chain sells raised-yeast, cake and vegan doughnuts with a variety of creative toppings and tongue-in-cheek names. The shop will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week and will have the company's first drive-thru. www.voodoodoughnut.com

15 The Toasted Coconut will open this summer at 1617 Richmond Ave., Houston. The Tiki-themed restaurant and bar will have a large outdoor patio area and feature food and cocktails from the Caribbean, Pacific and Southeast Asian islands. The owners will host "Toasty Tuesdays" popups at Nobie's Restaurant before the official opening. www.facebook.com/toastedcoconuthtx

16 Buffalo Bayou Brewing Co. is building a new brewery and tap room set to open in late summer at 2101 Summer St., Houston. The Houston-based brewing company began in 2011 and has since produced and sold over 70 different types of craft beer. 713-750-9795. www.buffbrew.com

17 Postino will open a second Houston location at 805 Pacific St. this summer. The wine cafe started almost 20 years ago in Phoenix, Arizona and is known for its affordable wines and bruschettas. It opened a location in the Heights in April 2018. www.postinowinecafe.com

18 Chef Ronnie Killen plans to open his first Inner Loop restaurant in the former location of Hickory Hollow, 101 Heights Blvd., Houston. The new concept will be called **Killen's** and will feature comfort food and

COMPILED BY **MATT DULIN**
AND **ALEX HOSEY**

News or questions about Heights,
River Oaks or Montrose?
Email us at hmrnews@communityimpact.com.

"best bites" from his other restaurants, a spokesperson said. An opening timeline has not been announced.

RELOCATIONS

19 The Houston Endowment has purchased a site at 3683 Willia St., Houston, to build a permanent building, allowing it to eventually move from its offices in the Chase tower downtown. "It is an exciting time for our organization," said Ann Stern, president and CEO of The Houston Endowment. "Our goal is to better serve our partners by developing an office space that is more accessible, collaborative, and better suits the way we work today, and to do so in a way that complements the surrounding neighborhood and community." In 2017, the endowment supported over 130 organizations with \$79.4 million in grants. 713-238-8100. www.houstonendowment.org

EXPANSIONS

20 Rothko Chapel, 1409 Sul Ross St., Houston, a nondenominational refuge and meditation space adjacent to the Menil Collection, is closed through the end of 2019 as the site undergoes a renovation to begin the first phase of its "Opening Spaces" master plan and \$30 million capital campaign. 713-524-9839 www.rothkochapel.org

NAME CHANGES

21 Danton's Gulf Coast Seafood and Steaks, formerly located on Montrose Boulevard, has changed its name to **Eugene's Gulf Coast Cuisine** and is preparing to open at 1985 Welch St., Houston, in June. 713-807-8889. www.eugeneshouston.com

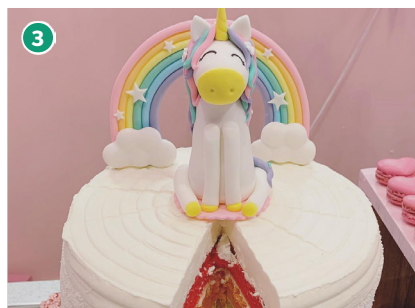
22 After three years, Borgo Food Station, 3641 W. Alabama St., Houston, closed in February and is undergoing a revamp to become **Mina Ristorante**, a new Italian eatery, in the same location. An opening date has not been announced. www.borgofoodstation.com

FEATURED IMPACT—COMING SOON

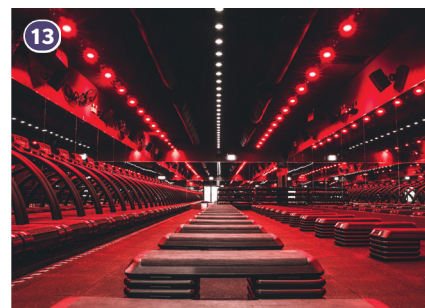


RENDERING COURTESY GOODNIGHT HOSPITALITY

A project by Goodnight Hospitality is bringing three new retail and dining concepts to the Montrose area this year. **A1 Montrose Cheese & Wine**, 1618 Westheimer Road, Houston, will be a 760-square-foot shop offering a rotating selection of cheese, wine, beer and cider as well as food and wine-related gifts and accessories. **A2 Rosie Cannonball**, 1620 Westheimer Road, will offer casual European dining, featuring a wood-burning grill and oven, a dedicated bread and pizza program as well as selected wines and cocktails. Both are slated to open in June. **A3 March**, located at 1624 Westheimer Road, is slated to open later this year, offering an intimate, 28-seat dining experience with a menu drawing on a cross-section of Mediterranean cuisine and a wine program boasting rare vintages. www.goodnighthospitality.com



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SUN, APR 21 @ 9a • 11a • 5p

Cypress Campus

SUN, APR 21 @ 8a • 9:30a • 11a

Downtown Campus

SUN, APR 21 @ 9a • 11a

Español Campus

SUN, APR 21 @ 9:30a

Sienna Campus

SAT, APR 20 @ 5p
SUN, APR 21 @ 8a • 9:30a • 11a

Text **FIRST** to **41411** for addresses and more about our plans to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and His victory over death — and what that means for all of us.

HOW CAN WE PRAY FOR YOU?

The Bible says to "pray constantly" and that prayers should "be made for everyone." At Houston's First, it's our joy and honor to pray for those in our community! So, how can we pray for you?

To share your requests ...



Text **FIRST** to **41411** for a link



Email Prayer@HoustonsFirst.org



Visit us on Sundays!

SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING?

Besides colorful candy-filled eggs, what are you searching for this Easter? Whether it's community, purpose, hope, or something else, we invite you to visit Houston's First Baptist Church on Easter weekend or any Sunday. We don't have all the answers, but God does and we would love to introduce you.

Speaking of searching, here's a puzzle to enjoy!
Can you find them all?

BASKET
BUNNY
BURIAL
BUTTERFLY
CANDY
CELEBRATION
CHOCOLATE
CROSS
CRUCIFIXION
DYED
EASTER

EGG HUNT
EGGS
EMPTY TOMB
FAMILY
FIND
FORGIVE
FRIENDS
GOSPEL
JELLY BEANS
JESUS
LAMB

LILIES
MIRACLE
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Easter

at Houston's First

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S B I F K O U J E
P B D E A E C J P N S
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COURTESY VISIT HOUSTON

APRIL 11-14 Catch the Art Car Parade

Watch over 250 cars transformed into works of art drive through Houston's streets. The parade, in its 32nd year, is free, but bleacher seating can be purchased for \$30 or \$150 for a VIP experience. The parade begins at 2 p.m. at the corner of Allen Parkway and Sabine Street and runs along Allen Parkway. www.thehoustonartcarparade.com



COURTESY JAPAN AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HOUSTON

APRIL 13-14 Attend Japan Festival Houston

Enjoy the cultural heritage of Japan with this two-day festival in the park. Entertainment acts, Japanese food and merchandise can be found throughout the festival. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. (Sat. and Sun.). Free. Molly Ann Smith Plaza at Hermann Park, 6001 Fannin St. 713-963-0121. www.houstonjapanfest.org



COURTESY BUFFALO BAYOU PARTNERSHIP

APRIL 7-13 National Volunteer Week

4 WAYS TO GET INVOLVED IN A LOCAL CAUSE

This year, consider spending some time volunteering or donating to some charitable nonprofit organizations around town.

BUFFALO BAYOU PARTNERSHIP

Buffalo Bayou Partnership is dedicated to revitalizing one of Houston's most significant natural resources. Volunteers are needed to help restore and protect its trails and parks. 713-752-0314 ext. 206. 1019 Commerce St., Ste. 200. www.buffalobayou.org

COVENANT HOUSE

Covenant House provides support services and housing for at-risk youth facing homelessness in metropolitan areas. Covenant House has helped more than 1 million boys and girls by providing short-term housing and longer-term transitional housing to combat homelessness. 713-523-2231. 1111 Lovett Blvd. www.covenanthouse.org

GIRLS INC. OF GREATER HOUSTON

Girls Inc. of Greater Houston helps empower and inspire young girls to grow up to be healthy, educated and independent with its mentoring programs, outreach and research. 713-802-2260. 2190 North Loop West, Ste. 105. www.girlsinc-houston.org

INTERFAITH MINISTRIES

Interfaith Ministries, which marks 50 years of service in the city this month, brings people of all faiths together to make a positive impact on their communities through dialogue and service. Through IM's Volunteer Houston, over 100,000 Houstonians have registered to help different organizations in a variety of charitable works. 713-533-4900. 3303 Main St. www.imgh.org

APRIL

5-7 Take a home and garden tour in the Heights

Beginning with a candlelight dinner and auction on Friday evening, the Houston Heights Association will host a tour of five gardens and homes of the Heights area, ranging from historic to newly built. Bus shuttles will be available for transport to all of the homes on the tour. \$20. 107 W. 12th St. 713-861-4002. www.houstonheights.org

14 Visit Bayou Bend and the Rienzi house museum

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston is hosting a family day at two of its off-site properties. At the Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, guests can learn about architecture and the craftsmanship behind home construction. At the Rienzi, a house museum for European decorative arts, guests can view rarely seen rooms and other features, along with performances and art activities. Attendees may arrive at either location; transportation between the two is provided. Free. 1-5 p.m. Bayou Bend: 6003 Memorial Drive, Houston. Rienzi: 1406 Kirby Drive, Houston. 713-639-7300. www.mfah.org

WEDNESDAYS AND SATURDAYS

The Urban Harvest Farmers Market sells locally produced vegetables, fruits, dairy products, flowers, plants and more. The farmers market is held twice a week at different locations. Wednesdays from 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. at 901 Bagby St., and Saturdays from 8 a.m.-noon at 2752 Buffalo Speedway, Houston. 713-880-5540. www.urbanharvest.org

18 Get to know author C.S. Lewis on stage

The Texas Repertory Theatre Company and Red Bird Productions present a one-time performance of "God's Megaphone, An Evening with C.S. Lewis" at The Church at 1548 Heights. \$20. 1548 Heights Blvd., Houston. 281-583-7575. www.redbirdproductions.org

20 Shop local art, crafts and food at Sawyer Flea

On the third Saturday of each month, dozens of vendors pack a warehouse near Silver Street Studios, offering a variety of home goods, gifts, food, beverages and other locally sourced items. The event is pet-friendly and family-friendly, and free parking is provided. 2313 Edwards St., Houston. 832-356-3274. www.sawyerflea.com

24 Sample good food for a good cause

The Way Home Adoption, Inc. hosts the "H-Town Dine Around" to raise funds in support of Houston's foster youth at risk of being emancipated with no stable or safe environment. Participating restaurants include BCK, Mastrantos, Mia Bella Trattoria and Light Years Wine Bar + Store and others. \$50-\$75. 6:30-9 p.m. Life HTX, 2515 Morse St., Houston. 832-283-4146. www.thewayhomeadoption.org

26 Be a superhero and watch 'Wonder Woman'

Levy Park is hosting a Friday family movie night sponsored by Texas Children's Hospital. "Wonder Woman" (2017) will be shown at the Levy Park Pavilion. Costumes are encouraged. Free. 7:30-9:30 p.m. 3801 Eastside St. 713-522-7275. www.levyparkhouston.org

27 Admire some elite autos

Post Oak Power, a drivers club for supercar and exotic car owners and collectors, hosts its "Exotics on Post Oak" public event at The Post Oak Hotel. Personal photography is allowed, but drone cameras are not. Free. 9:30-11:30 a.m. 713-850-1530. www.postoakpower.org

27 Indulge in street food

The Greater Heights Chamber of Commerce hosts its third annual food truck festival, featuring dozens of trucks, including Breaking Bao, Mobile Mai's, Houston Gypsy Wagon and Southern Slider Company of Texas. \$5 in advance, \$10 at the gate. Children under 12 free admission. 713-861-6735. www.heightschamber.org

APR. 26 - MAY 4

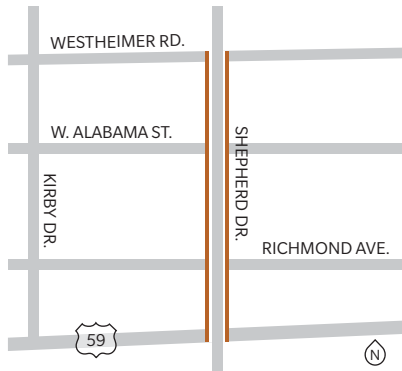
Watch Opera in the Heights' production of 'Madama Butterfly'

A bilingual production of Puccini's famous opera Madama Butterfly, a tale about a U.S. naval officer and a young Japanese geisha, will be shown on four separate occasions: 7:30 p.m. April 26; 2 p.m. April 28; 7:30 p.m. May 2; and 7:30 p.m. May 4. Ticket prices range from \$40.50-\$94.50. 1703 Heights Blvd. 713-861-5303. www.operaintheheights.org

MAY

3 Join Annise Parker for a discussion on LGBTQ+ issues

Houston's former mayor will be at Contemporary Arts Museum for a discussion on the Stonewall 50 exhibition and the state of LGBTQ+ issues in Houston. The discussion will be followed by a light lunch. Admission to the event is free. noon-1 p.m. 5216 Montrose Blvd., Houston. www.camh.org



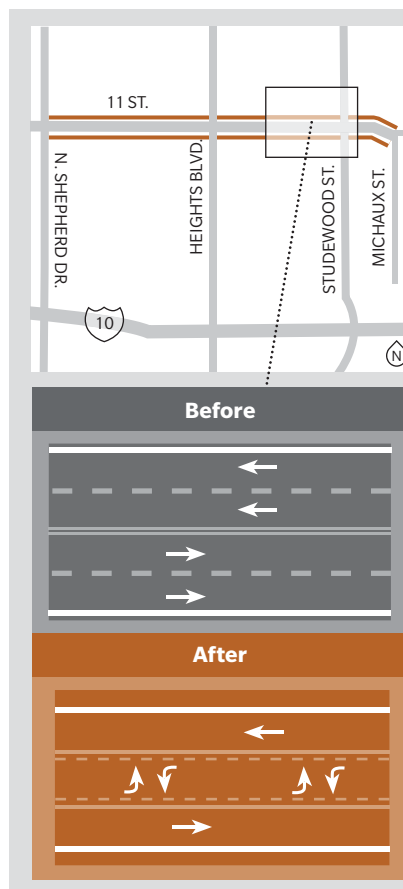
Shepherd Drive reconstruction

An effort to improve Shepherd Drive from Westheimer Road to Hwy. 59 is in the design phase and should be complete by early April after a year of review, Upper Kirby Projects Director Lee Cisneros said. A construction contract is expected to go out to bids in June with construction starting soon after under the direction of the Upper Kirby Redevelopment Authority. Improvements will include concrete pavement, sidewalks and drainage.

Timeline: July 2019-July 2021

Cost: \$10 million

Funding sources: Upper Kirby Redevelopment Authority, city of Houston



11th Street bikeway and safety improvements

City planners are collecting public input on a proposed “road diet” for 11th Street from North Shepherd Drive to Michaux Street that would reconfigure the four-lane roadway into two travel lanes with a middle turn lane and bikeways on both sides of the street. These measures are intended to reduce accidents and improve safety under the Houston Bike Plan, officials said. According to data compiled by the city, this section of the roadway has had more than 500 crashes since 2010 and 94 traffic-related 311 calls in 2019 alone. Federal safety data indicates that road diets—limiting travel lanes and adding pedestrian-friendly features—can reduce crashes by up to 47 percent. If the plan moves forward, the road redesign would be added to a future capital improvement plan. Until then, cost and construction timelines are undetermined. Public comments and questions can be sent to bikeways@houstontx.gov.

Timeline: TBD

Cost: TBD

Funding sources: city of Houston



HOW IT WORKS

Drivers must move over or slow down to pass emergency vehicles

The Texas Department of Public Safety helps enforce the Move Over/Slow Down law to protect certain vehicles stopped on the side of the road.

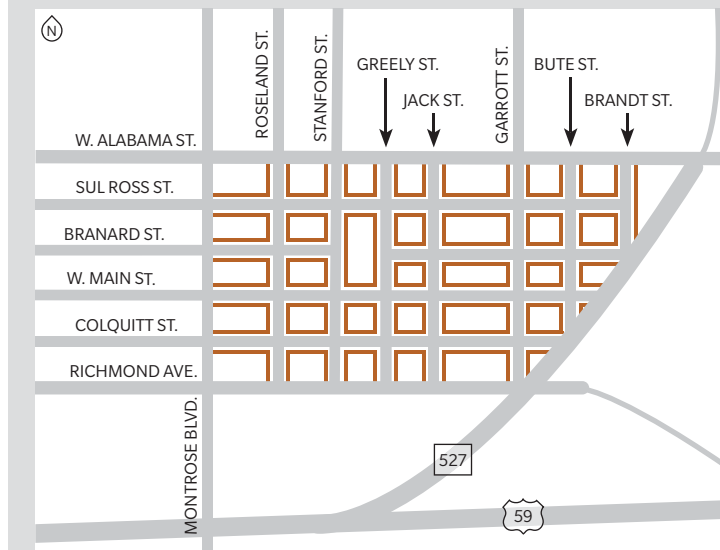
The law passed in 2003 requires drivers to either move over a lane or slow down for vehicles stopped on the side of the road with activated emergency lights. Those include police, fire, emergency medical services, DPS troopers and tow trucks, according to the law.

If the road has multiple lanes traveling in the same direction, drivers must vacate the lane closest to stopped vehicles. If drivers do not have an opportunity to change lanes, they must slow down to 20 mph below the speed limit when passing stopped vehicles, the law states.

Last year, more than 41,000 warnings and citations were issued for violations of the law, according to DPS.

Violations can result in a fine of up to \$200, or \$500 with property damage. The law includes more severe penalties, including jail time, if someone gets hurt.

All information on this page was updated as of 3/25/2019. News or questions about these or other local transportation projects? Email us at hrmnews@communityimpact.com.



Montrose streets and drainage

A multiyear project to reconstruct 11 neighborhood streets—Sul Ross, Branard, West Main, Colquitt, Roseland, Stanford, Greeley, Jack, Garrott, Bute and Brandt streets—in Montrose is almost complete, city officials said. The project installed new concrete pavement with curbs and sidewalks, storm sewers, water and sanitary sewer mains as well as improved stormwater drainage and utility lines. The neighborhood, First Montrose Commons, is a designated historic district. Almost 1,000 residents were directly affected during construction, according to city estimates.

Timeline: November 2016–late spring 2019

Cost: \$17.4 million

Funding sources: city of Houston

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Mixed-use project is underway near River Oaks

Novel River Oaks, an eight-story mixed-use project bringing 330 high-end housing units and 14,000 square feet of retail, broke ground in March. Built on the former location of The Georgian, a longstanding apartment community at Willowick Road and Westheimer Road, the project will focus on providing walkable and neighborhood-friendly retail, according to a news release.

“Taking into account the history of this property, we plan to create a residential experience that bridges a rich past with modern conveniences, and engages residents of the greater community, not only those who live on-site,” said Michael Blackwell, managing director for Crescent Communities, in the release.

The residential units will include a section of two-story townhomes, a health club, pet park, rooftop pool deck, and a dining terrace with views of the Houston skyline.

Ziegler Cooper Architects oversaw the design and interiors, and Hoar Construction is supervising the



Crescent Communities’ project, Novel at River Oaks, will offer 330 housing units, retail and restaurant space when it opens in 2020.



project, slated to finish in 2020. Novel is one of dozens of projects by Crescent Communities, which has 6,000 multifamily units under construction nationally.



Developer will revive 1930s laundry site with new office space, retail

Work to restore a former art deco laundry building to its original condition is underway at Montrose Boulevard and West Gray Street, with the shell to be completed by this summer and the first floor fully leased, according to a release.

“We are restoring the exterior of this building to its original Art Deco design,” Pejman “PJ” Jamea, principal of Oxberry Group said in the

statement. Oxberry Group obtained the site at 1110 West Gray in 2017. According to a brochure from Edge Realty, the 10,777 square feet on the first floor have been leased to a medical office. The site has a second story offering 6,600 square feet. Most residents of the area knew the site as Gibbs Boats, but prior to 1958 it was a Quality Laundry, built in 1932. During that time, the building’s art deco features were removed or obscured. Tipps Architecture and Arch-Con Corp. have partnered with Oxberry Group on the project, called Rêve at Montrose.



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- HCA Houston Healthcare Mainland
- HCA Houston Healthcare Medical Center
- HCA Houston Healthcare North Cypress
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Amid expanded investigation, TEA freezes district's superintendent search

HOUSTON ISD The district is not being allowed to proceed with its superintendent search process as the Texas Education Agency expands an investigation that has been underway since January.

The state-appointed conservator, who was assigned to monitor the district in 2016, notified the board of trustees March 25 that the TEA would be expanding the scope of its investigation to look into potential improprieties in the district's contracts and procurement process. In a separate notice the same day, the conservator directed the board to immediately halt its interviews and delay any further progress in hiring a new superintendent until the investigation is finalized. The board was scheduled to hold interviews March 25 and March 26 with its final candidates in anticipation of announcing a sole finalist that week, board President Diana Dávila told *Community Impact Newspaper*.

"The timing is horrible. We have candidates who have shown interest, and now there is a pause, and we

don't know when we will get the green light," Dávila said.

The board came under investigation after an attempt to oust interim Superintendent Grenita Latham in October came under scrutiny as board members were accused of improperly discussing the decision outside of board meetings, a potential violation of state open meetings law. That investigation has since uncovered other items of concern, Dávila said, leading to an expanded scope.

Both Houston ISD and the TEA declined requests to comment, citing the ongoing investigation.

According to the agency's own procedures document, the investigation "may be revised at any time, as new information is received." The investigation includes obtaining records, conducting interviews, and visiting on-site with officials and board members.

The investigation into the meetings law violation is reaching back three years, and officials are sifting through 12,000 emails as well as text messages,

phone records and interviews with district cabinet members, Dávila said.

A preliminary report is then produced for the state's education commissioner, which would contain the initial findings of fact, assessment of wrongdoing or lack thereof, and suggested corrective action. If violations are found, the district is notified and receives a copy of the preliminary report, and a final report is ultimately sent to the governor and relevant committees and agencies.

However, Dávila has not been provided a timetable for when the investigation could wrap up.

"It could be weeks or months," she said.

MEETINGS

The Houston ISD board of trustees

has an agenda review meeting at 4 p.m. April 4, a regular meeting at 9:30 a.m. April 11 and a workshop at 8:15 a.m. April 25. The board meets at 4400 W. 18th St., Houston. Live meeting video is available at www.houstonisd.org/livetv

HIGHLIGHTS

HOUSTON ISD The original campus of the Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, 4001 Stanford St., was officially vacated Jan. 7 with the opening of the school's new \$88.5 million downtown campus at 790 Austin St., Houston. No decisions have been made about the former building, according to a district statement.

RIVER OAKS BAPTIST SCHOOL

Construction is underway on a new middle school building for the River Oaks Baptist School at 3900 Westheimer Road, Houston, adjacent to its existing campus at 2300 Willowick Road. The school raised \$65 million to finance the project, including a \$10 million lead gift from parents Keith and Alice Mosing, who will be the building's namesakes, according to a news release. The project is expected to take 18 months.

HOUSTON ISD A groundbreaking ceremony was held March 26 for the reconstruction of Bellaire High School. The \$141 million project, funded by the 2012 bond, will build a three-story academic wing, two gyms, a dining hall, a natatorium, a 900-seat auditorium and other arts space. Construction is slated to finish in 2022.



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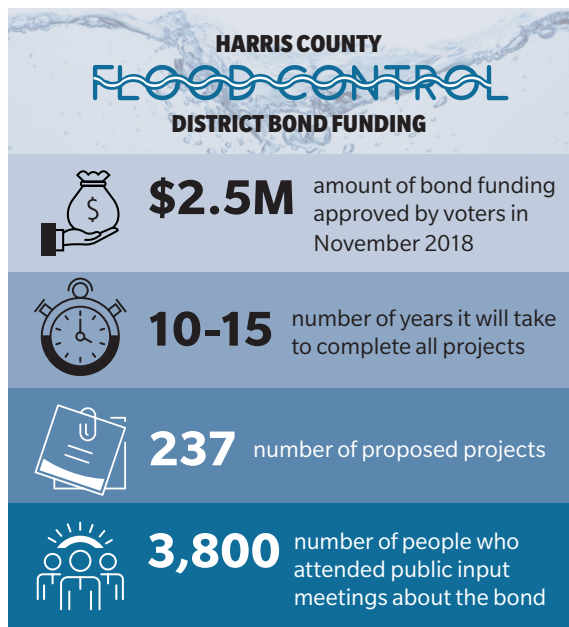
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SOURCE: HARRIS COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

Debate continues over prioritization of Harris County flood funds

HARRIS COUNTY Houston City Council Member Greg Travis issued an open letter March 8, stating he was concerned over recent discussions at Harris County Commissioner's Court about how to distribute bond funding for flood mitigation projects equitably within the county.

"If we are to talk equity, then flood every home in Harris County for 14 days with seven feet of sewer water so it is truly equitable," Travis stated in the letter to Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo. "After all, that is what a large portion of my district experienced during Harvey."

Several speakers urged Harris County Commissioners March 12 to prioritize low-income areas of the city for flood mitigation projects.

"Families who live in [low-income] neighborhoods are no more, no less deserving of flood

protection than anyone else and yet, insufficient infrastructure means that their cars and homes are flooding during intense rains ... like the deluges of [Hurricane] Harvey," said Zoe Middleton, an official with Texas Housers, a low-income housing information service.

Iris Gonzalez, director for the Coalition for Environment, Equity and Resilience, pointed out that bayous including Brays, Clear Creek, Hunting, White Oak and Greens have been left behind, according to a report from the Greater Houston Flood Mitigation Consortium.

"Today the level of flood protection across watersheds is not equitable," Gonzalez said. "I encourage you to analyze these disparities and to define equity as a Harris County where there are no pockets where we have a lower level of flood protection."

Houston adjusts ambulance fees to better recoup federal reimbursements

HOUSTON For the first time since 2012, City Council approved increasing the base rate for EMS transport.

Fees for emergency medical services will increase by about 70 percent in Houston so the city can better align with the federal government's reimbursement practices.

The approved base rate for EMS services increased from \$1,104.65 to \$1,876.40. Council also approved a new \$175 fee for EMS services provided without transport and a \$175 fee for providing lifting service for a fallen individual.

According to a council briefing, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services switched from providing reimbursement for services received during care to 80 percent of a regional flat fee which falls short of the EMS department's typical costs. Houston Fire Chief Sam Peña said the city's

current EMS fees are the lowest in the region. By adjusting the rates, Council Member Brenda Stardig said the city will receive a higher reimbursement rate for covering the costs of emergency services for individuals on Medicaid and Medicare plans— who make up 53 percent of EMS calls in Houston, Peña said— and will have to pull less from the general fund.

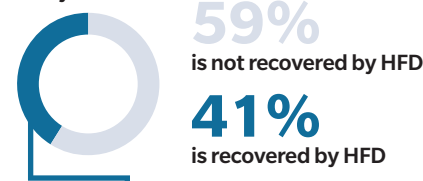
"By keeping the [EMS] rates arbitrarily low, we're not even recovering what it costs us to deliver the services and there is no incentive for Medicare and Medicaid services to re-calculate their rates to reimburse us at a higher rate," Peña said.

The new fees also aim to deter the number of unnecessary emergency calls received by the Fire Department however, Peña said residents should not hesitate to call 911 during an emergency.

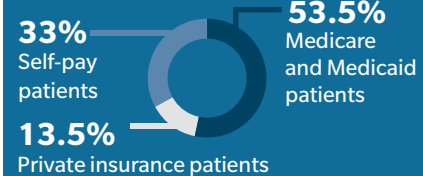
RECOVERING THE COSTS

Increased ambulance fees may result in higher reimbursement rates from the Center of Medicare and Medicaid Services to the Houston Fire Department

Of what is billed to Houston EMS users each year:



Of what is recovered:



SOURCES: CITY OF HOUSTON, HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

Rideshare users now have designated pick up areas downtown

HOUSTON Rideshare users will now be directed to "passenger pick up zones" when requesting a ride downtown, according to ParkHouston, a city division that coordinates parking management in Houston.

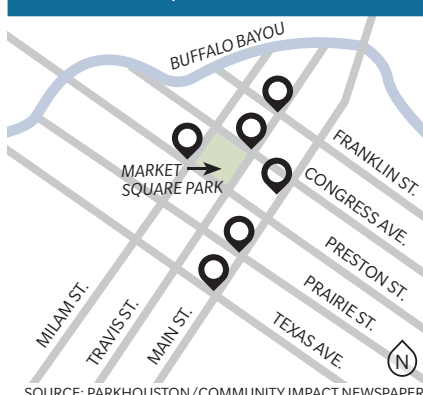
"This gives us another tool to manage the limited curbside that benefits everyone—customers, businesses and neighborhood residents, by providing

safe access," Maria Irshad, Assistant Director for ParkHouston said in a release.

The pick up zones that launched March 15 downtown are operated 24 hours per day and 7 days per week in collaboration with Yellow Cab and ride sharing companies Uber and Lyft.

"While there are still growth opportunities on the public transit side in Houston, we believe these new rideshare pick-up and drop-off zones will allow Lyft riders and drivers to navigate downtown with ease and convenience," said Kaleb Miller, General Manager of Lyft Gulf Coast.

IN THE ZONE
There are now seven designated rideshare pickup and drop-off areas downtown.



SOURCE: PARKHOUSTON/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

CITY HIGHLIGHTS

MARCH 20 Houston City Council approved a five-year, \$59.46 million contract with Cigna Health and Life Insurance to provide coverage for city employees effective May 1. The new contract represents a 5 percent cost savings, officials said.

MARCH 15 Mayor Sylvester Turner named Shannon Buggs as the first director of the Complete Communities program, tasked with revitalizing neighborhoods. The pilot program will focus on Acres Home, Gulfton, Near Northside, Second Ward, and Third Ward. The position is funded by a Houston Endowment grant.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"TAGGING EVERYTHING MAKES A MOCKERY OF THE PROCESS. ... IT'S INSULTING TO THE CITIZENS OF HOUSTON."

— HOUSTON MAYOR PRO TEM ELLEN COHEN, SPEAKING AGAINST COUNCIL MEMBER DWIGHT BOYKINS' EFFORTS ON MARCH 20 TO POSTPONE BUSINESS IN PROTEST OF NOT PROMOTING FIREFIGHTER CADETS.

MEETINGS

Houston City Council meets weekly at 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays for public comment and 9 a.m. Wednesdays for regular business at 901 Bagby St., Houston. www.houstontx.gov

Harris County Commissioners Court next meets April 9 and 30 at 1001 Preston St., Ste. 934, Houston. www.harriscountytexas.gov

For instant coverage of these meetings, follow us on Twitter: [@impactnews_hrm](https://twitter.com/impactnews_hrm)



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Leila and Carlos Peraza founded Space Montrose 10 years ago and have worked with over 200 artists.

Space Montrose

Couple's boutique supports Houston and Texas artists

BY ALEX HOSEY

Within the white and teal walls of Space Montrose hang a multitude of prints, paintings, T-shirts and gilded polyhedron frames, giving the store run by husband-and-wife duo Carlos and Leila Peraza the feeling of both a boutique and a museum.

"The feeling that the store gives is of a place of many different avenues and different artists, and we try to put them by themselves as much as we can so that every little available space is for that artist," Carlos said. "And that's how it started. We were very focused on allowing the artist to have their own space to do whatever they wanted."

"WE WERE VERY FOCUSED ON ALLOWING THE ARTIST TO HAVE THEIR OWN SPACE TO DO WHATEVER THEY WANTED."

— CARLOS PERAZA, OWNER OF SPACE MONTROSE

Space Montrose began 10 years ago when Carlos and Leila left their careers in hospice centers to focus on artistic creation. As Carlos put it, the store began with the question, "What could we do to stay away from the end of life and deal more with the creation and the spark and the beginning?"

The boutique began in a house on Dunlavy Street by Cafe Brasil and displayed the works of a handful of local artists that Carlos and Leila knew.

"It's a place where we can have people host their own work and we can help sell their work for them, and at the same time have our own jobs," Carlos said. "We had never run a business before, so we just started with a lot of passion and a lot of naiveté but we did it at the right time, in the right city, at the right place and with the right concept, and all those things came together beautifully."

Of the 220 artists who have work displayed for sale at Space Montrose, half of them are Texans, and about half of those are Houstonians, Carlos said.

Among the merchandise available are custom-made neckties, jewelry, paintings and candles.

Space Montrose has a team of six, giving Leila and Carlos more time to spend with their two young boys and to create art for the store, such as Paper Vibes—Space Montrose's line of greeting cards.

"By working at a store like this, you're exposed to creativity and art, and it's always coming in at every angle, so you just get inspired, and you want to create also," Carlos said.

Along with designing a card line, Leila and Carlos also help create some of the store's T-shirt, coffee mug and baby apparel designs.

"We jump into little pockets of creativity and sell them as part of the store," Carlos said. "It's part of our creative input to the store, and it's been very rewarding in that sense, too."

MADE IN TEXAS



Paper Vibes greeting cards (\$5-\$6): Many of these cards are designed by the owners of Space Montrose themselves and cover one of the walls of the store with original drawings ranging from wacky to heartfelt.



Without Remorse necklaces (\$55-\$56): Proceeds from Houston artist Paige Moran's jewelry go toward veterinary supplies for injured animals and conservation efforts.



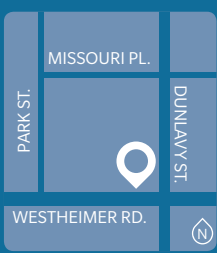
Prints by Tim Doyle (\$30-\$60): Austin artist Tim Doyle was one of the first to partner with Space Montrose and has prints inspired by movies, TV shows and musicians.



Illuminidol candles (1 for \$15, 2 for \$25): These 8 inch satirical prayer candles are made by the Illuminidol company in Austin and feature famous musicians, politicians, athletes and other celebrities.

Space Montrose

1706 Westheimer Road,
Houston
832-649-5743
www.spacemontrose.com
Hours: Mon.-Fri. 11 a.m.-9 p.m.,
Sat. 10 a.m.-7 p.m.,
Sun. 11 a.m.-9 p.m.





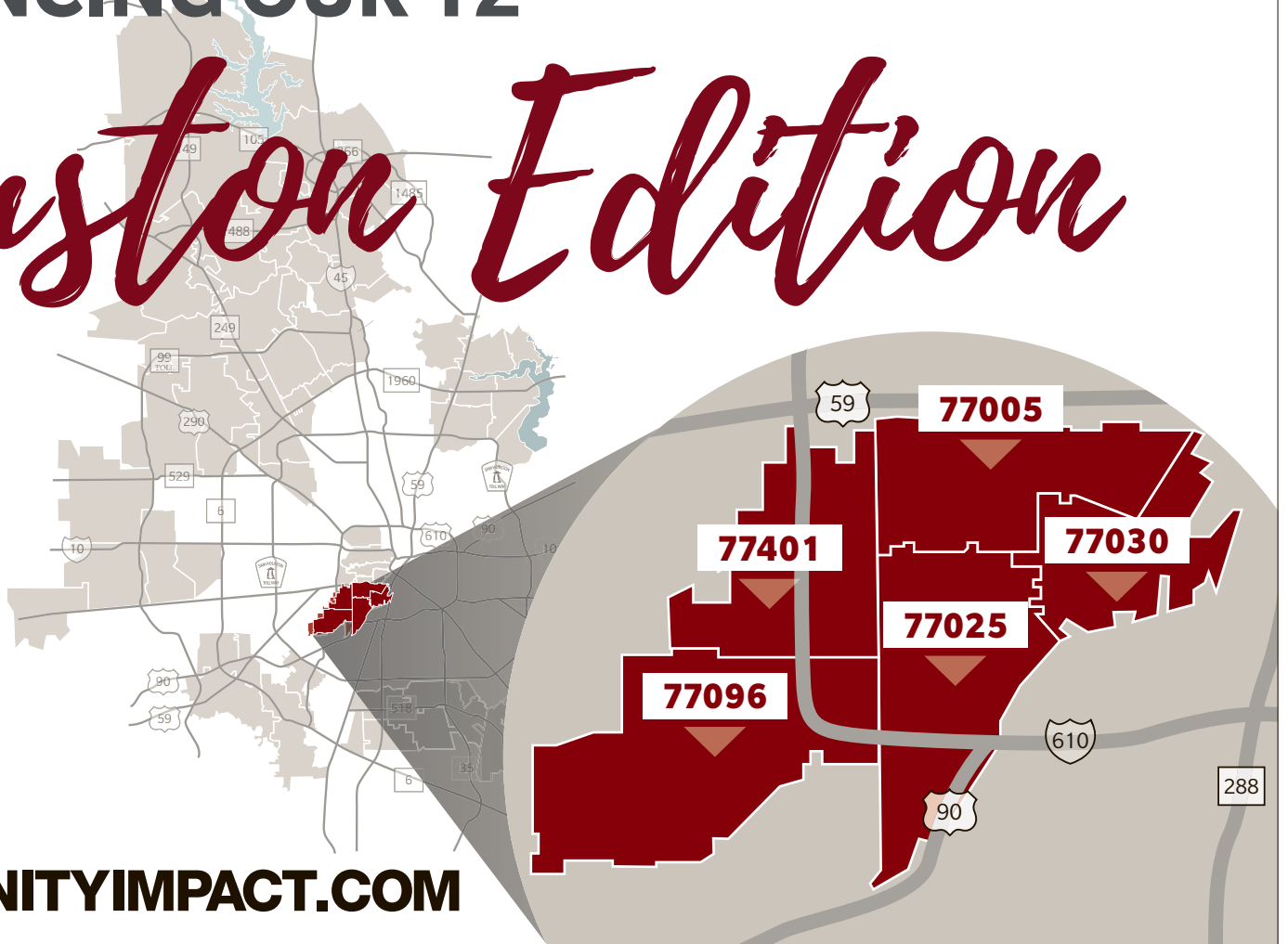
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Backstreet Cafe

Renowned H-Town Restaurant Group got its start in River Oaks

When Tracy Vaught left her career as a geologist for Conoco in 1983, she decided to take a risk and break into the restaurant industry.

"I started thinking, 'Do I really want to do this anymore? Do I want to do something else?' And I'd always been interested in food," Vaught said.

As she began to look for locations to open a restaurant, she spotted a house for sale across the street from her tailor. Her uncle, Jack Blalock, a Korean War veteran, helped her get started.

"I was scared that it wouldn't work out, and I was naive in that I had never worked at a restaurant before or anything like that," Vaught said. "It was a slow process at first. ... It took four or five months to even get a paycheck."

The restaurant started as a spot for soups, salads and sandwiches but has transformed over 35 years into one the most awarded restaurants in Houston. Its evolving chef-driven menu draws on multiple cultures and prides itself on elegant presentation and fresh ingredients. Take its duck egg rolls—Asian-inspired but somehow look and taste like no egg roll diners may be used to.

Decorated staff have come through its kitchen, but one who came and never really left was Hugo Ortega, first hired as a dishwasher in 1987.

"I didn't know it at the time, but he was homeless when we hired him," Vaught said.

After working as a dishwasher and a busboy, Ortega expressed an interest in the kitchen. Vaught put him through Houston Community College's culinary program and he was mentored by Prego's chef John Watt.

Vaught and Ortega, who married in 1994, have grown their influence with the H-Town Restaurant Group, which operates Hugo's, Xochi and Caracol, among other venerated restaurants.

"Backstreet was the turning point of my life," Ortega said. "There have been many triumphs, and of course they started when I got there, and it gave me the opportunity to learn my vocation."

"IT TOOK FOUR OR FIVE MONTHS TO EVEN GET A PAYCHECK."

TRACY VAUGHT, RESTAURATEUR

"BACKSTREET WAS THE TURNING POINT OF MY LIFE."

HUGO ORTEGA, CHEF

PHOTO BY ALEX HOSEY/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

3 DISHES TO TRY

3 small dishes from the restaurant that gave rise to some of Houston's top restaurants:



The Red Pear Salad (\$12) is made with red lettuce, blue cheese, sun-dried cranberries, candied walnuts and balsamic vinaigrette.



The Duck Spring Rolls (\$10) are served with ginger-scallion soy sauce.



Baked Oysters (\$14) are made with crispy potato, leeks and spinach.

1983:
Backstreet
Cafe opens



1988:
Vaught
manages
Prego
restaurant

1987: Ortega
hired as a
dishwasher
at Backstreet
Cafe

1994: Vaught
and Ortega
marry. Vaught
becomes sole
owner of Back-
street Cafe.

2002: Vaught
and Ortega
open Hugo's
restaurant



2003:
Vaught named
Restaurateur
of the Year,
Houston Culi-
nary Awards

2002:
Ortega
wins Chef
of the Year,
Houston
Culinary
Awards

2014:
Vaught named
Restaurateur
of the Year,
Houston Culi-
nary Awards

2012: Ortega
wins Chef of the
Year, Houston
Culinary Awards



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Awards

2017: Ortega
named Best
Chef: South-
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Beard Awards

SOURCE: BACKSTREET
KITCHEN: SEASONAL
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✈ George Bush Intercontinental Airport

★ University of Houston/ Texas Southern U.

● Northwest Transit Center

||||| Uptown BRT under construction

— Existing light rail

2 I-10 BRT:

This would connect the Northwest Transit Center and high-speed rail terminal with downtown. By connecting to the Uptown BRT, Heights residents could feasibly get to the Galleria without driving a car.

Length: 22 miles
Stops/stations: 4
Projected daily ridership: 7,400
Cost: \$242 million

Length: 7.6 miles
Stops/stations: 4
Projected daily ridership: 32,300
Cost: \$448 million

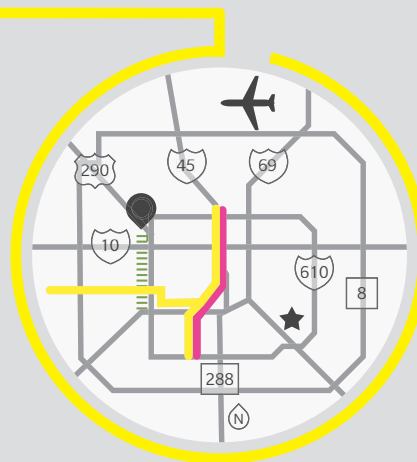
Length: 25.3 miles
Stops/stations: 41
Projected daily ridership: 56,000
Cost: \$1.56 billion

1 I-45 BRT:

Timed to coincide with the redesign of this interstate, this bus-rapid transit line would tie into George Bush Intercontinental Airport from downtown Houston.

BRT LINES UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR BRT:

This would be the longest BRT route in the city, connecting the University of Houston, Greenway Plaza and Uptown, as well as the proposed high-speed rail terminal and all three light-rail lines.



SIGNATURE BUS SERVICE:

The heavily used Westheimer corridor would get significant upgrades. Buses will connect to LRT and BRT lines, with more frequent buses, dedicated lanes and traffic signal priority.

Length: 19.5 miles
Projected daily ridership: 37,500
Cost: \$76 million



HOT LANES:

The Regional Express Network would expand high-occupancy express lanes to operate as two-way lanes seven days a week, allowing Inner Loop residents potentially quicker routes along major highways.

Length: 110 miles
New park and rides: 8
Projected daily ridership: 64,450
Cost: \$1.37 billion

SOURCE: METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY OF HARRIS COUNTY/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

Greater Houston area is expected to add another 4 million people in the next 20 years, according to METRO projections.

"The decisions we make now could stagnate us tomorrow. We can't be a city that stagnates because we didn't invest," said Houston City Council Member Amanda Edwards, who also sits on the Houston-Galveston Area Council's High Capacity Transit Task Force.

THE PLAN

Last year METRO officials started with a list of about \$35 billion in potential improvements, including 100 miles of light rail, 90 miles of bus rapid transit, or BRT, and 200 miles of high-occupancy vehicle lanes.

From there, \$7.5 billion made the cut in the final plan under the agency's financial constraints. In its 2019 fiscal year, METRO is budgeted to bring in about \$1.4 billion—over half of which comes from a 1 cent sales tax approved in 1978—and spend roughly \$1.2 billion.

Christof Spieler, former METRO board member and author of the book "Trains, Buses, People: An Opinionated Atlas of US Transit," said the plan delivers on the highest-value projects.

"In general, the resources we have are inadequate to the need. And so any plan you put out there inevitably includes a lot of things where, if we had more money you could do this or that," Spieler said.

The plan calls for about 20 miles of light-rail extensions at a cost of \$2.45 billion that would connect existing downtown lines to Hobby Airport to the south and North Shepherd Park and Ride to the north.



THE DECISIONS WE MAKE NOW COULD STAGNATE US TOMORROW. WE CAN'T BE A CITY THAT STAGNATES BECAUSE WE DIDN'T INVEST.

—AMANDA EDWARDS, HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

At a cost of almost \$1.37 billion, the plan also calls for upgrading the agency's park-and-ride network, which brings some 15,000-20,000 commuters in and out of the city every day. The network would operate continuously seven days a week with two-way service, making it more accessible to Inner Loop residents.

"That means that if you live in the

city and work in a suburb like Clear Lake, that becomes equally useful. It means if you are commuter and have to leave the office midday or later in the day, it's more useful," Spieler said. "And it means you can use it for a lot of things other than work—see an Astros game, visit the museums."

In contrast to METRO Solutions, the agency's long-range plan approved in 2003 that called for about 63.5 miles of light rail—of which about 22 were

built—METRONext puts an emphasis on BRT. The city's first BRT segment is set to begin service this year on Post Oak Boulevard.

GETTING ON BOARD

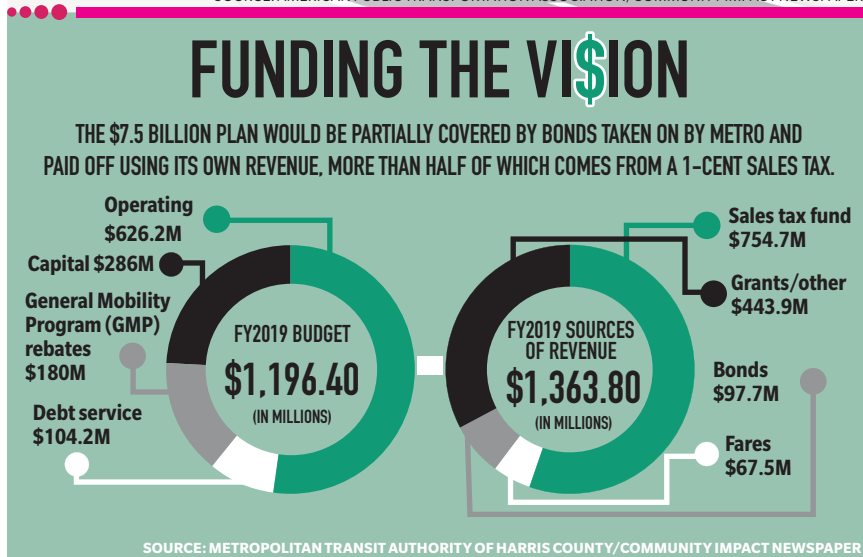
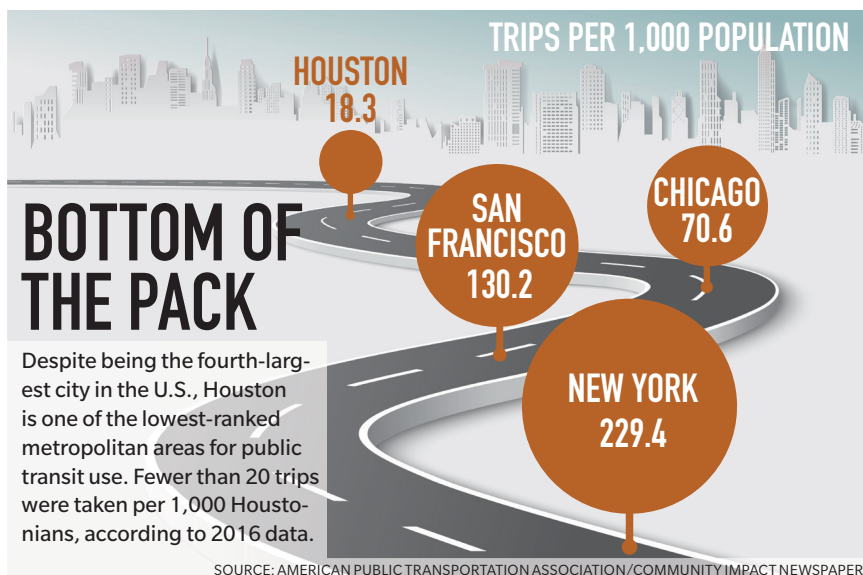
Up to this point, Houston has not seen this kind of option, which functions like rail but with rubber tires instead of rail tracks.

"People have not experienced BRT," Spieler said. "Done well, it is a rider experience that is quite similar to rail—you buy tickets at a platform, you have level boarding, you have dedicated lanes."

Previous attempts to build out light rail were divisive. A rail line that would have gone down Richmond Avenue was sidelined after protests from businesses and lack of support from then-Rep. John Culberson, R-Houston, who added provisions to transportation funding bills to ensure a Richmond rail line would never get built.

METRONext opts for BRT in place of some former light-rail routes, including the Richmond corridor connecting downtown to the Galleria area. Though an exact corridor is yet to be determined, this route has the support of community members who originally backed the light rail vision.

"We have seen that BRT does offer some advantages in terms of how quickly it could be built and that it could be done incrementally," said Kay Warhol, who was a volunteer with a pro-Richmond rail effort in the Montrose area. "It's much longer than originally planned, so there would be even



greater connectivity.”

Designed well, BRT lines can be re-engineered to hold light rail tracks if there is enough demand to support it, Spieler said, though that is not mentioned as part of the METRONext plan. Such an effort is underway in Ottawa, Canada, which built out BRT decades ago, he said.

FEDERAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

If final drafts of the plan are approved by METRO’s board of directors this July and the bond election is passed by voters this November, projects will take shape over the next two decades, with all aspects of the plan to be finished by 2040. Until then, projects, routes and designs are subject to change, and public input is still being factored in, officials said.

“I would tell the voters and the people in the metro area, think about sitting in rush-hour traffic. ... Think about the impact in your community and the current transportation gridlock that we see. Imagine if the population doubles,” Spiegel said.

As METRO works to shore up local support, the agency has a new ally in Congress in U.S. Rep. Lizzie Fletcher,

D-Houston, whose backing it will need to help garner about \$4 billion in federal funding to make METRONext a feasible plan.

“I have the ability to be an advocate for the transit projects that we want to do here in the region, whether it be [the] METRONext plan or other projects emerging in our region that need federal dollars,” said Fletcher, who has been appointed to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Meanwhile, H-GAC’s high-capacity transit task force is close to finalizing a framework for directing state and federal dollars toward rail and bus projects. Edwards said Los Angeles, where voters in 2016 approved \$120 billion for a massive transit overhaul, offers an important lesson.

“The transit system has got to benefit everyone, not just one footprint inside the city where no one else has access to connect to it,” Edwards said. “That’s not going to get the buy-in you need for a paradigm shift in funding. If you’re going to get people to buy in, they are going to have to see a benefit.”

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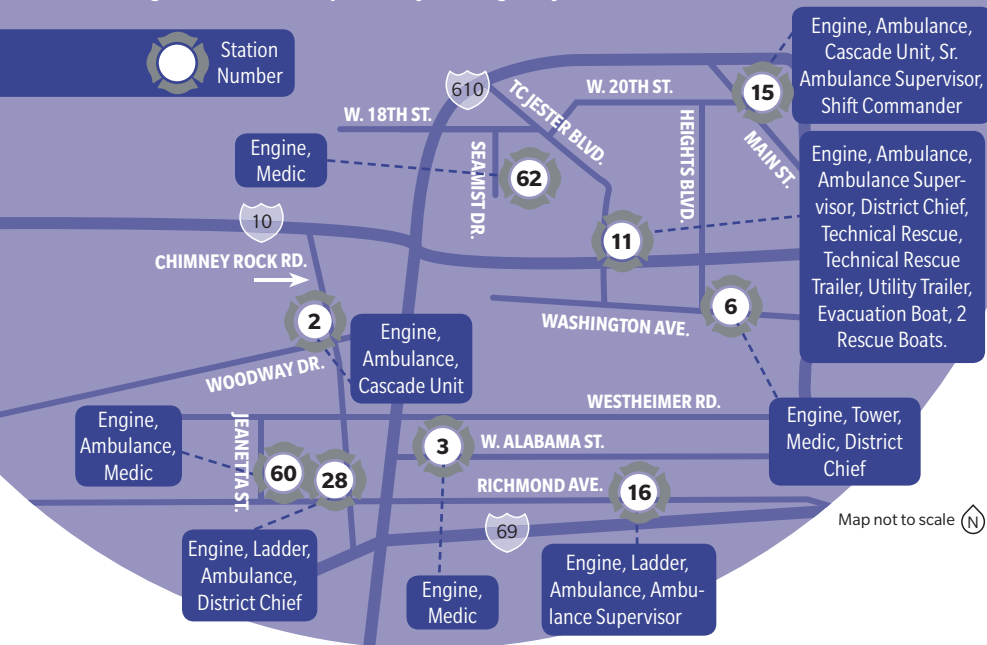
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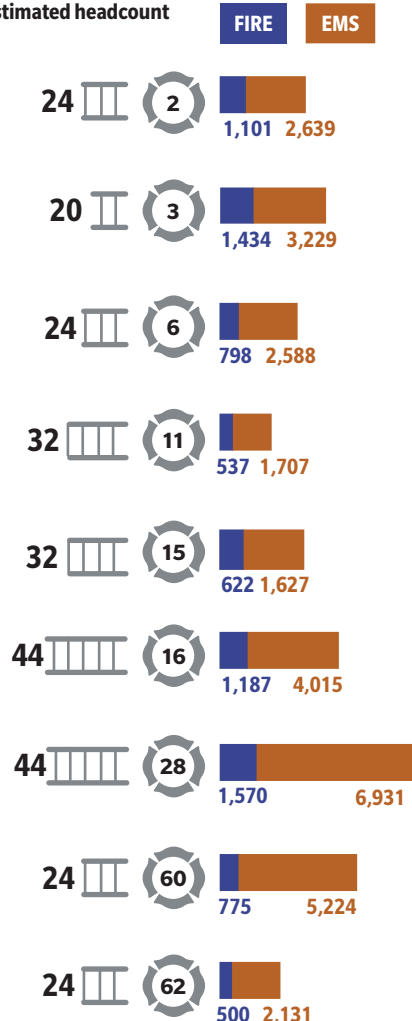
If forced to lay off an estimated 378 firefighters, the department would have to cut engine or ladder units, potentially affecting every station, Fire Chief Sam Peña said.



The northwest side of the Inner Loop is served by nine stations and two fire districts, which combined received about 10 percent of all incident calls in 2018.

FIREFIGHTERS 2018 CALLS

Estimated headcount



SOURCE: HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

CONTINUED FROM 1

district judge could reverse her predecessor's ruling by invalidating the proposition, meaning both raises and layoffs could be taken off the table. A hearing in the case is set for April 18, and a ruling come days or weeks after.

The city is also facing a \$198 million deficit for FY 2020 and calls from state lawmakers to implement even stricter revenue caps than the city already has.

Mayor Sylvester Turner is planning to issue raises by dipping into the city's fund balance for fiscal year 2019, but has said layoffs of as many as 400 firefighters and 100 city workers could be needed for the next year, which would be the city's biggest job cut since 2011. The exact number has not been made clear, but all departments except police could have to cut as much as 5 percent, according to city officials.

"It's all about dollars and cents," Turner said. "It's about trying to balance the budget."

For firefighters and their families, however, a reduction in staff presents concerns no matter who gets laid off.

"It affects our mortgage, our grocery bill, everything, and it's not just the firefighters," Houston resident and wife of a firefighter Sarah Guzman said. "It's affecting all of us in a lot of ways that people don't know about."

PAYING FOR PARITY

Losing that many firefighters—about 10 percent of the force—would affect staffing levels across the entire system and reduce its capacity to respond, Fire

ANSWERING THE CALL

Despite flat budgets and staffing year over year, the Houston Fire Department responded to 27 percent more calls in 2017 than it did in 2010—the vast majority of which are emergency medical service incidents, not fires.



Chief Sam Peña said.

"If you look at [layoffs] systemwide, it may not make a huge difference, but if you look at the particular areas that we're taking those units out, then you will see an increase in response times," he said.

Such a cut would be a setback for a budget that is already stretched thin, said Peña, who took the job in 2016 after leading El Paso's fire department.

"Stop at any of the stations, and you'll see that they're bursting at the seams," Peña said.

"THE NEXT MAYOR, WHETHER IT IS TURNER OR NOT, WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH BELT-TIGHTENING. THIS WILL BE AN ISSUE FOR SEVERAL DECADES."

— BRANDON ROTTINGHAUS, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR

Since fiscal year 2009-10, the overall city budget, including special funds and enterprise accounts, has grown 45 percent, and the general fund, which pays for police and fire, has grown by almost 33 percent. In the same period, the fire budget grew by 15 percent.

Some city leaders say budget needs should be guided by what is most efficient regardless of total funding.

"If we're just increasing the budget to increase the budget, I don't know why we would do that," said City Council Member Greg Travis, whose district includes part of River Oaks. "I wouldn't do that for any department. ... If adding one more [firefighter] makes us more efficient and effective, so be it. If it doesn't, it doesn't."

Even if Proposition B is tossed out by the judge or is phased in, Peña said the department needs even more help.

"The tight financial constraints that the city is working under, if we keep status quo, I don't see us growing the

department any time soon," he said. "I think it's going to be starved in place."

ABSORBING THE LOSSES

Peña is proposing to change the department's shift schedule to avoid some layoffs and free up resources to be reinvested, but only if he can phase it in over three years. However, even if forced to lay off the estimated 378 needed to fund raises across the board, a shift change could soften the blow to public safety, he said.

The plan requires changing the department's schedule from four shifts per day to three shifts per day. The department is required to have 845 firefighters on duty on any given shift, per its labor agreement.

Reducing 378 firefighters on a four-shift model will mean 25 fire apparatuses or 94 firefighters out of service per day, whereas a shift change would result in 11 to 13 apparatuses out per day, according to Peña.

"I think it makes even more sense to go to a different shift pattern in light of this," he said.

In either schedule, firefighters would not be required to work more than 46.7 hours per week on average, after which overtime pay kicks in, per state law.

A three-shift schedule would assign more firefighters per shift and have extra coverage to offset the days off each firefighter would get to stay under the hour limit, Peña said. With this added redundancy, the department could absorb the 150 to 160 staffers it loses each year through attrition that otherwise would be cut through a layoff, he said.

The department adopted the four-shift model in 1993 as part of a federal mandate to increase opportunities for minorities. Peña said city attorneys have advised him the department can still meet the requirements of that decree in

Lancton has said layoffs should not be necessary. Instead, the union has proposed phasing in raises with a retro-active start date in July 2018, but the city

“[Pension funding] will be a problem, but that will be a problem when the rest of us are out of office,” Travis said. “If somebody stands up and has the guts to tackle it now, then they get vilified, and if they kick it down the road, their successors get vilified.”

SOURCE: HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT/COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

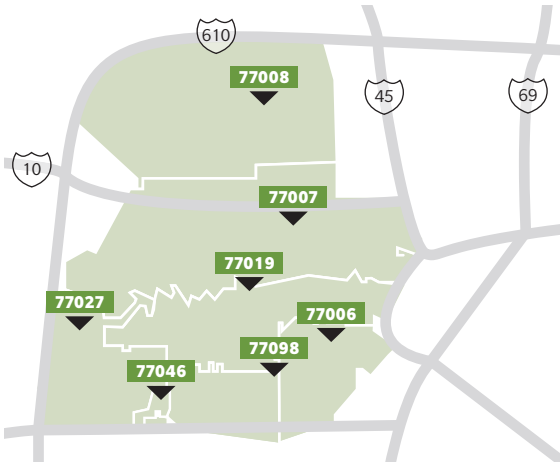
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FEBRUARY MARKET DATA

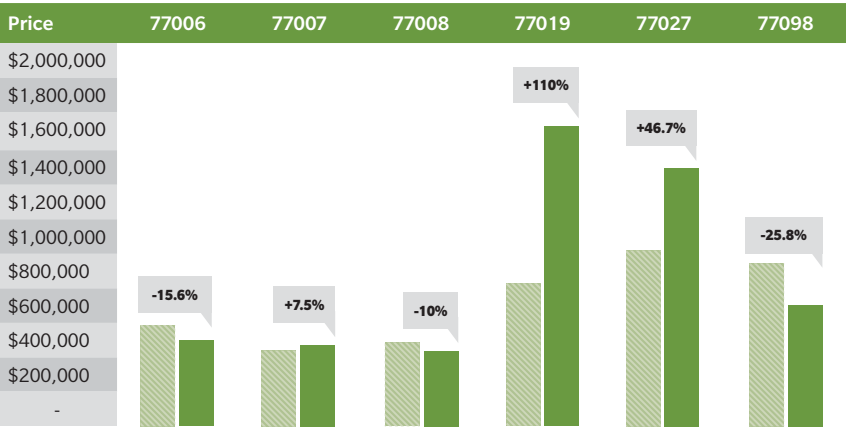
HOMES ON THE MARKET

77006	77019
2019: 107	2019: 123
2018: 101	2018: 103
77007	77027
2019: 357	2019: 71
2018: 320	2018: 63
77008	77098
2019: 311	2019: 54
2018: 303	2018: 47

NOTE: NO MARKET ACTIVITY WAS REPORTED FOR 77046.



MEDIAN PRICE OF HOMES SOLD



HOMES SOLD

Number of homes sold / Average days on the market						
Price range	77006	77007	77008	77019	77027	77098
\$199,999 or less	-	1/185	0/0	-	-	-
\$200,000-\$299,999	-	1/37	2/62	-	-	-
\$300,000-\$399,999	2/343	12/100	25/105	2/174	-	1/13
\$400,000-\$499,999	4/144	24/196	13/76	0/0	1/340	-
\$500,000-\$599,999	1/207	10/13	8/76	1/79	0/0	1/12
\$600,000-\$799,999	1/406	4/72	5/240	1/69	0/0	2/19
\$800,000-\$999,999	2/428	2/5	5/19	0/0	1/122	-
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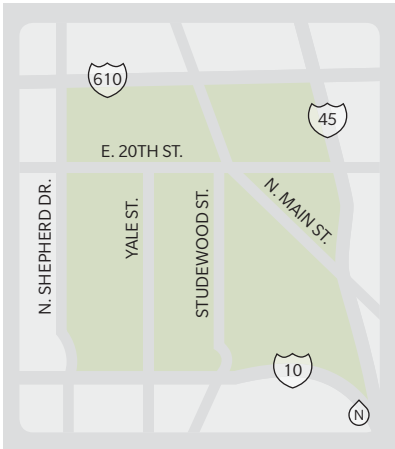
Square footage: 574-4,491

Home values (sold): \$207,000-\$1,650,000

Median price per square foot: \$307.76

Homes sold within the past year: 288

Median days on the market: 23



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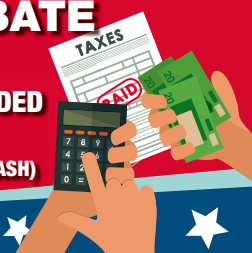
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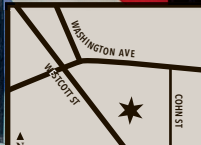
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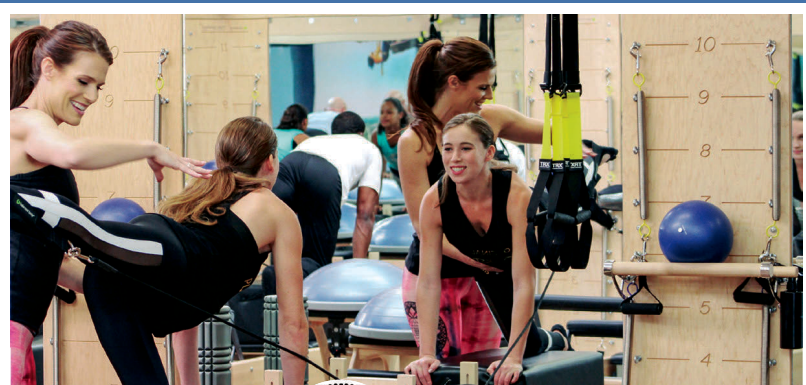
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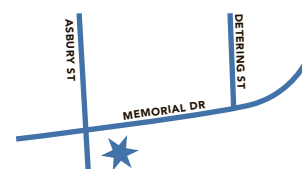
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