



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Houston Land Bank and City of Houston Join Forces to Bank & Clean Up Former Velasco Incinerator Site

Houston, TX – October 18, 2023

The Houston Land Bank (HLB) and the City of Houston have established a strategic partnership to transform the former Velasco Incinerator site using innovative community development models to create lasting positive impacts for the Second Ward and surrounding area.

The Velasco Incinerator Site is 4.56 acres of vacant land on North Velasco Street along the south side of Buffalo Bayou. The City of Houston operated the site as a municipal incinerator facility from the 1920s through the late 1960s. All site buildings were removed by 1995, except for several incinerator stacks, a concrete building foundation, and a sanitary sewer lift station.

During the 40 years of incinerator operations, ash and fill materials were deposited on the property at a thickness of four (4) to 35 feet below the ground surface. Multiple environmental assessment activities conducted since 2006 have demonstrated that this waste contains elevated arsenic levels, lead, mercury, dioxins, and furans. The site is currently heavily covered in native grasses and trees and is bounded on all sides by chain-link fencing maintained by the City. The site has remained vacant and blighted for decades due to the complexities of cleaning up the environmental hazards on the property.

The Velasco Incinerator Site cleanup embodies the Mayor's Complete Communities mission of building a legacy of equitable development in Houston's most under-served and under-resourced neighborhoods. The site's revitalization has the potential to catalyze positive change within the Second Ward Complete Community. The effort directly responds to residents' call for adaptive reuse projects for "industrial properties along Buffalo Bayou" in the Second Ward Complete Communities Action Plan. It also addresses the Resilient Houston goal of mitigating the effects of environmental injustice by coordinating environmental justice actions with local partners.

"The Velasco Incinerator Site remediation project seeks to mitigate an historic inequity, which makes it about more than just cleaning up contaminated land," said Mayor Sylvester Turner. "This strategic partnership gives us the opportunity to revitalize this

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portion of our city while correcting a wrong and providing opportunities for our residents.” This collaboration with the Houston Land Bank is also a great example of Mayor Turner’s *Resilient Houston* goal of mitigating the effects of environmental injustice by coordinating environmental justice actions with local partners.

To allow for beneficial reuse for the community and apply for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding to clean up the site, the Houston Land Bank has entered a land banking agreement with the City of Houston. The agreement includes a requirement to work with strategic partners, local stakeholders, and the Second Ward community to create a green space and reuse plan for the site that promises tangible benefits for the local community.

The estimated clean-up costs are \$7 million. Clean-up activities include but are not limited to providing a protective covering or barrier strategically placed over contaminated soil or waste material to prevent the spread of pollutants, reduce exposure to harmful substances, and promote environmental safety and health.

"This project embodies the core values of the Houston Land Bank, actively transforming our communities for the better," remarked Christa Stoneham, CEO of HLB. "We believe in the power of collaboration and need for environmental justice, and by aligning with the City of Houston, we are taking a momentous step towards restoring not only the environmental integrity of the Velasco Incinerator Site but also rejuvenating the spirit of our local communities."

Community engagement, integrity of ethics and transparency, and meaningful partnerships with community stakeholders will be paramount to the success of this clean-up and revitalization project. Houston Land Bank has launched the www.bankingvelasco.org website to communicate project status updates, reports, and other critical information. The first phase of this project involves gathering public feedback on our EPA grant cleanup application and Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA) report. During the public comment period starting October 23, a grant application draft and an ABCA report draft can be viewed online at www.bankingvelasco.org. Physical copies of the application and draft ABCA report will also be available for viewing at the Flores Neighborhood Library, located at 110 N Milby St, 77003. There are two ways to submit written comments: 1) in the comments box on www.bankingvelasco.org and 2) on comment cards made available at a public meeting on October 26th. HLB will publicly post responses to questions we received regarding the ABCA and grant application to ensure transparency by November 8.

Public Meeting Details
October 26 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. at
Houston Community College – Felix Fraga Campus
301 N. Drennan St, Texas 77003

To keep the public informed and remain connected with our community partners, HLB will continue to host public meetings and post milestone activities and updates throughout the life of this project. Please visit www.bankingvelasco.org, call the HLB office at 281-655-4600, or email brownfields@houstonlandbank.org for more information.

For media inquiries, please contact:
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About Houston Land Bank:

The Houston Land Bank (HLB) is a local government corporation and a 501c-3 nonprofit organization dedicated to revitalizing and redeveloping underutilized and vacant properties in Houston. HLB collaborates with public and private stakeholders to strategically acquire, manage, and dispose of properties that foster community development and enhance the city's quality of life.

