Velasco Incinerator, Houston
800 block of North Velasco Street (77003/Second Ward)

The Velasco site, located east of downtown Houston and south of Buffalo Bayou, was a former incinerator that operated in the 1950s and 1960s. It is adjacent to North Velasco Street and lies just north of a major east-west thoroughfare, Navigation Boulevard. It is only a mile east of Houston’s downtown core and the Central Business District.

A key future development in close proximity to the site is the Buffalo Bayou East Masterplan, a waterfront revitalization plan comprised of multimodal connections, small-scale parks and open spaces that will tie the larger destinations together to create a cohesive network of green spaces and attractions that will reinvigorate Buffalo Bayou East. The site has the potential to be aligned and well-integrated with the Buffalo Bayou Partnership’s Buffalo Bayou East Masterplan as an integral part in creating a safe, sustainable, and resilient waterfront.

The City sees this competition as an excellent opportunity for private actors to help the city develop climate action innovation, specifically in the field of storm and flood resilient infrastructure and buildings. Teams should explore solutions within the new energy economy area such as the provision of lab spaces and energy transition workforce development centers.

Plot Area:
Approximately 4.5 acres located at 800 block of North Velasco Street

Expected Land Use:
Houston is a city that is on a growth path. There has been a trend of densification inside the IH 610 loop. There are no specific zoning requirements in relation to the development of this site. However, constraints due to the former use of the site as an incinerator/landfill, contamination and possible pollution risks will need to be carefully examined.

The City of Houston believes the site to be an optimal location for context sensitive design and development that could help improve local environmental quality, provide mixed use development options including housing, retail and co-working spaces, neighborhood amenities such as parks, open spaces, bike and pedestrian infrastructure to improve access and connectivity to highlight the city’s sustainability efforts within a highly visible location.

Site Ownership:
The City of Houston owns this property.

Type of Property transfer intended:
Lease or possibility of other types of agreements.

Deadline for the submission of the Expression of Interest:
September 20, 2022 11:00 a.m. (local time - GMT-5).
Presentation of the site and development expectations

The proposed site is the Velasco Incinerator, which is located at the 800 Block of North Velasco Street. A municipal incineration facility operated on site in the 1950s and 1960s, where incinerator ash was likely placed on site. The site is currently vacant and unused, and is managed by the City of Houston General Services Department. The City’s Brownfields Redevelopment Program leveraged Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) funds to conduct a Phase II environmental site assessment. The project was tasked to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to assess the potential for environmental impact at this facility due to previous land use, site activity, or adjacent off-site activity. A lead reclamation facility is located immediately adjacent to the property to the south. The area immediately south of the incinerator site has been used for storage of lead-acid battery casings in the past, and runoff from this area may have impacted the site.

![Figure 1: Aerial view of site facing north-west from Velasco St.; showing the two chimneys, the spur of the railroad, and Buffalo Bayou in the background.](image)

The site is located less than a mile from METRORail Greenline, a high-capacity transit line that connects downtown to the Magnolia Transit Center via the East End. There is an abandoned heavy rail corridor adjoining the site to the east. The site is part of the historic Second Ward neighborhood in the East End community of Houston. It was one of the four original wards of the city in the 19th century. While this site is less than 2 miles from the Central Business District and Downtown Houston, it is part of a swath of historic industrial land uses developed to optimally serve the heavy rail freight network. Surrounding land uses include single family housing, with development pressures now converting some of those to high density townhomes.
The site has the potential to be aligned and well-integrated with the Buffalo Bayou Partnership's Buffalo Bayou East Masterplan as an integral part in creating a safe, sustainable, and resilient waterfront. The City sees this competition as an excellent opportunity for private actors to help the city develop climate action innovation, specifically in the field of storm and flood resilient infrastructure and buildings. Ideas that could be explored include elements of the new energy economy such as lab spaces, and energy transition workforce development centers.

The site could be an optimal location for context sensitive design and development that could help improve local environmental quality, provide mixed use development options including housing, retail and co-working spaces, neighborhood amenities such as parks, open spaces, bike and pedestrian infrastructure to improve access and connectivity and highlight the city’s sustainability efforts at a highly visible location.
Specific planning rules and regulations

The City of Houston has no zoning requirements and is open to creative residential, commercial, or recreational proposals. However, the proposed location is the former Velasco Incinerator site; therefore, it is subject to specific regulations related to solid waste management.

Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), Subtitle D, addresses non-hazardous solid wastes, including municipal solid waste. Under Subtitle D, the state and local governments are the primary planning, permitting, regulating, implementing, and enforcement agencies for management and disposal of household and industrial or commercial non-hazardous solid wastes.

At a local level, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is the state designated planning agency for solid waste management issues in the region. The H-GAC Solid Waste Program reviews applications for landfill permits and solid waste grants. More information concerning the H-GAC can be found here.

Use of land over closed municipal solid waste landfills in Texas (including permitted municipal solid waste landfills that are no longer in post closure care, closed landfills that were developed before permitting requirements, and closed unauthorized landfills) is regulated under the rules for persons owning, leasing, or developing property or structures overlying a closed municipal solid waste landfill, in 30 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 330, Subchapter T. Regulation is handled at the State level and interested parties would have to do more research on this. [https://www.sos.texas.gov/tac/index.shtml](https://www.sos.texas.gov/tac/index.shtml)

Should Requests for Proposals be required, that process would be managed by the Finance Department's Strategic Procurement Division. Please visit [http://purchasing.houstontx.gov/guide.html](http://purchasing.houstontx.gov/guide.html) for more information.
City climate priorities and environmental issues

The City of Houston launched the [Houston Climate Action Plan](#) on April 22, 2020 to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, meet the Paris Agreement goal of carbon neutrality by 2050, and lead the global energy transition. The Houston Climate Action Plan sets out key goals within Transportation, Energy Transition, Building Optimization and Materials Management.

[Resilient Houston](#), the City’s resilience strategy was released on February 12, 2020 and provides a framework for collective action, to protect Houston against future disasters—from hurricanes to extreme heat waves—and chronic stresses such as aging infrastructure, poor air quality, and flooding.

Resilient Houston and the Houston Climate Action Plan identify investment in housing and neighborhood-serving uses - especially mixed-income housing and more compact, mixed-use development - as well as microgrids, solar, and battery storage as priorities for the redevelopment of under-used land.

The City expects innovative proposals to improve sustainability and resilience of the site to climate events (specifically storms and risk of flooding) through diverse solutions, that may include Nature-based-solutions, Sustainable Urban Drainage Solutions (SuDS), Green Infrastructure and risk prevention measures.

Proposals should also take into consideration the conditions of the soil as the site is a former incinerator site that contains toxic materials in certain areas. The results of the soil sampling indicate that soils on the site contain elevated concentrations of arsenic, lead, mercury, PCBs, dioxins and furans. All three metals exceed Tier 1 protective concentration levels (PCLs). Arsenic and lead concentrations exceeded both human health and soil leaching Tier 1 PCLs. Mercury exceeded only the soil leaching Tier 1 PCLs.

Lead, trichloroethene (TCE), and bis (2-ethylhexyl) phthalate were detected in groundwater samples at concentrations that exceed the groundwater-ingestion PCL. It should be noted that in accordance with [Chapter 26 of the Texas Water Code](#), upon confirmation of impact to groundwater, the owner/operator of the facility where impact was identified may have reporting requirements to the TCEQ and other agencies.

If the affected soil and/or groundwater are to be disturbed during future excavations, proper procedures should be followed with respect to worker health and safety, and any affected soil or groundwater encountered should be properly handled and disposed of in accordance with local and state regulations.

The site has overgrowth that prevents walking the site and is mostly inaccessible by foot. Any affected soil or groundwater encountered should be properly handled and disposed of in accordance with local state and federal regulations. Therefore, developers must consider the differential settlement of the landfill surface.

Provisional calendar

- Deadline for submitting Expressions of Interest: September 20, 2022
- Finalists announcement date: November 2022
- Deadline for submission of final proposals: April 2023
- Date of the announcement of the winning project: June 2023