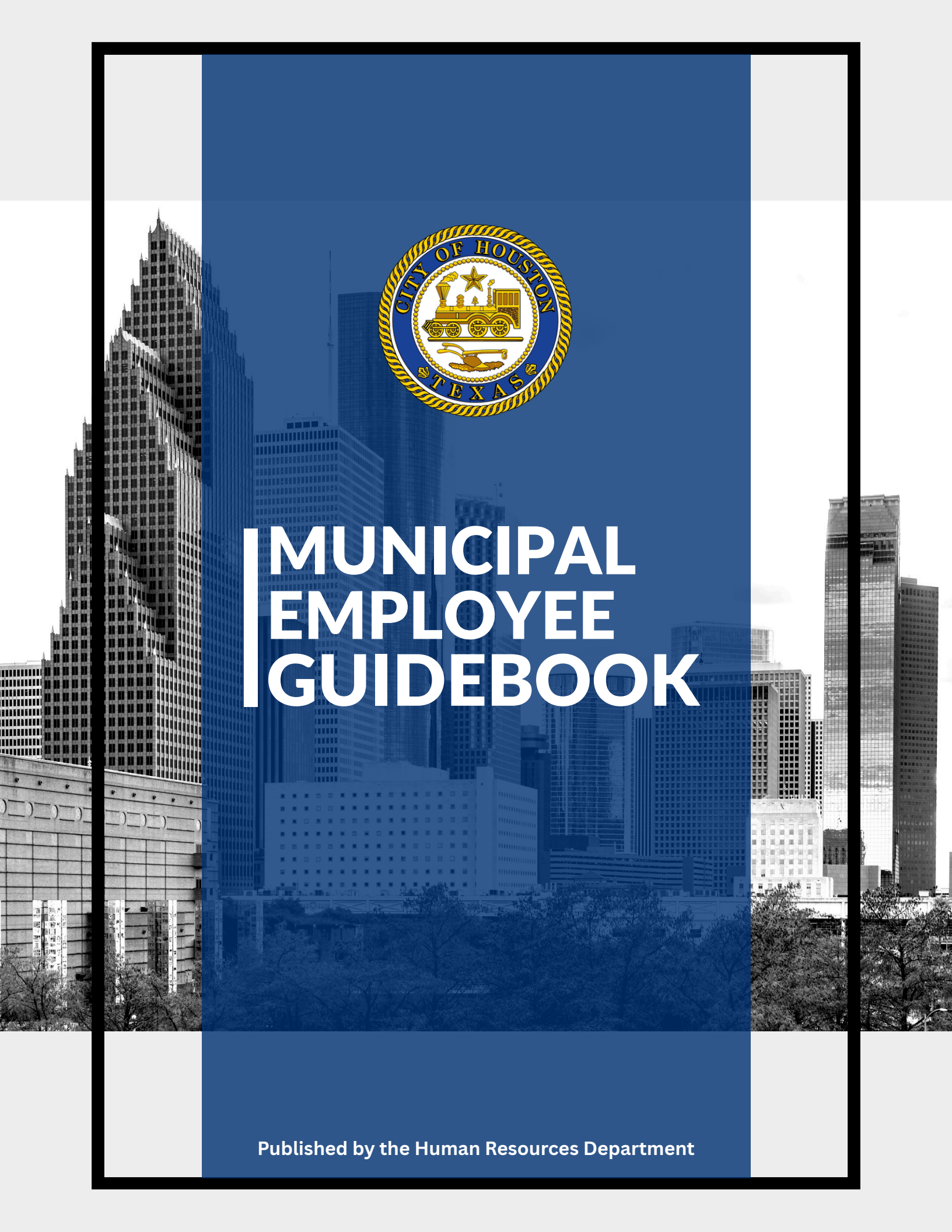


MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEE GUIDEBOOK

Published by the Human Resources Department

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Introduction

This Employee Guide is designed to familiarize you with the City of Houston's policies, procedures, benefits, and other information related to your employment. It outlines your responsibilities as an employee and provides and overview of programs and resources available to support you through your employment with the City.

Employees are encouraged to read this guide carefully and comply with all applicable policies and procedures. If you have questions regarding any information contained in this guide, please contact your supervisor, manager, or your department's Human Resources representative.

Much of the information contained in this guide is based Chapter 14 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances, as well as citywide policies and procedures issued through Executive Orders, Administrative Policies and/or Procedures, and Mayor's Policies. Current citywide policies and procedures are available on the City's website at https://www.houstontx.gov/policies/. Chapter 14 can be found on the City's website at http://www.houstontx.gov/codes/.

The provisions contained in this guide generally apply only to municipal employees and do not apply to police officers or firefighters, except where specifically stated.

In addition to citywide policies, departments may establish departmental policies and procedures that address operational or business needs unique to their department. Departmental policies may supplement but may not conflict with citywide policies and procedures. For information regarding your department's specific policies and procedures, consult your supervisor, manager, or your department's Human Resources representative.

Section I – Civil Service System

What is a Civil Service System?

A civil service system is a merit based system of public employment in public government in which positions are filled through competitive examination, qualifications or other objective selection processes.

The purpose of a civil service system is to promote fair and equitable employment practices and ensure that employment decisions are based on merit rather than political or personal considerations.

Civil service employees are afforded certain employment protections and due process rights. For example, City of Houston civil service employees may only be subject to corrective action for just cause and are entitled to specific appeal rights under applicable laws, ordinances, and civil service rules.

City of Houston's civil service employees have the right to appeal an indefinite suspension to the Civil Service Commission. In addition, civil service employees may utilize the grievance process to challenge certain employment actions, including written reprimands, Level I and Level II Positive Corrective Actions, Houston Employee Assessment and Review (HEAR) ratings of "Below Expectations" or lower, non-selection for a promotion to a referred position and other grievable matters described in Section III of this guide.

Who is Covered by Civil Service?

You may be a civil service employee under Article V(a) of the City Charter. However, not all City employees are covered by the civil service system. Generally, full-time employees who have successfully completed their twelve (12) month probationary period obtain civil service status and the protections associated with that status, unless they occupy a position specifically designated as exempt from civil service coverage.

The categories of positions that are not covered by the civil service system are identified below. Employees serving in these positions are considered non-civil service employees and are not entitled to the rights and protections afforded to civil service employees under the City Charter.

Who Does Not Have Civil Service Protection?

The following categories of employees are not covered by the City of Houston civil service system:

- Employees serving a probationary period during their first twelve (12) months of employment;
- Appointed officials, including department directors;
- Executive-level employees;
- Assistant City Attorneys and professional, non-clerical employees of the Legal Department;
- Part-time employees;
- Temporary employees, including seasonal employees hired for a limited duration, and employees hired without reasonable expectation of continued employment; and
- Emergency employees hired to address emergency situations without an expectation of continued employment.

Employees who are not covered by the civil service system generally serve at the will of the City and do not possess the civil service appeal and grievance rights afforded to civil service employees under the City Charter, Chapter 14 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances, or applicable civil service rules. Subject to applicable law and City policy, their employment status, position, compensation, duties, or employment relationship may be modified or terminated without the civil service review and appeal processes available to civil service employees.

Section II – Employment

Employment Status

Your eligibility for certain benefits, overtime, or compensatory time may depend on your employment status. Regardless of your civil service status, you may fall into one or more of the following categories:

Full Time – You are regularly scheduled to work 80 hours per pay period throughout the year.

Part Time – You are regularly scheduled to work fewer than 80 hours per pay period throughout the year.

Part-Time 30 (PT30) – You are regularly scheduled to work at least 30 hours per workweek throughout the year.

Exempt – Based on your job duties, you are exempt from overtime requirements and are not eligible for

overtime pay, regardless of the number of hours worked.

Nonexempt – Based on your job duties, you are eligible for overtime pay or compensatory time at one and one-half times your regular hourly rate for all hours worked in excess of 40 hours in a workweek.

Grant-Funded Positions – Grant-funded positions may or may not be civil service protected and may be full-time, part-time, exempt, or nonexempt. Even when a grant-funded position has civil service protection, continued employment is subject to the availability and continuation of grant funding for the position.

Classification

The City maintains a classification system that groups positions with similar duties, responsibilities, qualifications, and compensation into job classes and pay grades. Each job title within a job class is referred to as a classification. You have been hired to serve in a position within a specific classification, and your job duties, qualifications, and compensation are generally determined by that classification.

Financial Disclosure

Executive-level employees are required to sign an Executive-Level Employment Acknowledgement regarding their employment status and submit an annual financial disclosure statement. Additional information regarding these requirements can be found at Chapter 18 - Ethics and Financial Disclosure.

Job Postings

Job opportunities with the City of Houston are posted regularly throughout the year. Visit the City's current job opportunities page at https://www.houstontx.gov/hr/careers.html to view available positions and submit an application. If a position that interests you is not currently open for recruitment, you may sign up to receive email notifications when it becomes available by creating a Job Interest Card through the City's online careers system.

Transfers, Promotions, and Demotions

To be considered for a posted position you must submit an online application through the Human Resources Department's careers page at https://www.houstontx.gov/hr/careers.html. Hiring decisions are made by the hiring department, while compensation decisions are made collaboratively by the hiring department and the Human Resources Department.

The personnel actions associated with these opportunities are defined below:

- Lateral Transfer/Reclassification – A change in department, classification, or a position with no change in pay grade.
- Promotion – Movement to a higher classification or pay grade with or without a change in compensation.
- Demotion – Movement to a lower classification or pay grade with or without a change in compensation.

Employee Records

The Human Resources Department maintains the City's official personnel files for current and former employees. As an employee, you may review your personnel file through the Records Management Division located at 611 Walker Street. A department director or designee may also view your official personnel file if you are being considered for lateral transfer/reclassification, promotion, or demotion into that department. Your supervisor may also review your file when necessary for legitimate business purposes.

If you would like to view your official personnel file, please send an email to request an appointment to hremployeerecords@houstontx.gov. Records Management customer service hours are Monday through Friday, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., excluding City-declared holidays.

Union Membership

The City of Houston recognizes the Houston Organization of Public Employees (HOPE), as the Sole and Exclusive Bargaining Agent (SEBA) for eligible municipal employees. The City and HOPE are parties to an active Meet and Confer Agreement that governs wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment for bargaining unit members. The bargaining unit is defined as all municipal employees with the exception of department directors, elected officials and classified members of the Police and Fire Departments subject to Chapter 143 of the Texas Local Government Code.

Because Texas is a right-to-work state, municipal employees are not required to join HOPE or pay union dues in order to receive the wages, benefits and protections provided under the HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement. Employees interested in becoming members of HOPE may contact them directly at info@hopetx.org.

In accordance with the HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement, designated HOPE representatives may be granted paid excused absences from work to participate in authorized union activities and certain community projects.

For additional information regarding HOPE membership or activities, employees may contact HOPE directly by email at infor@hopetx.org or visit their website at www.hopetx.org.

Section III – Employee Relations

Employee Conduct and Performance Expectations

City of Houston employees represent the spirit, values, and commitment of the City in every interaction with residents, visitors, coworkers, and business partners. As a public servant, you are expected to demonstrate patience, courtesy, respect, professionalism, and understanding in all interactions with both internal and external customers. Every person should be treated as a valued customer, and services should be delivered efficiently, respectfully, and with a commitment to excellence.

The City of Houston Code of Ordinances, City policies, departmental procedures, and applicable rules establish the standards governing your employment. Employees are expected to perform their duties productively, comply with all applicable policies and procedures, and maintain a cooperative, constructive, and professional attitude toward the public and fellow employees. It is your responsibility to become familiar with these requirements and to seek guidance from your supervisor or manager whenever questions arise.

Employees are expected to maintain satisfactory job performance, regular attendance, and appropriate workplace conduct. You must report to work as scheduled, be prepared to perform your assigned duties, follow lawful management directives, and work collaboratively with supervisors and coworkers. Because policies and procedures may be revised from time to time, employees are responsible for staying informed of current requirements.

Failure to meet performance, attendance, conduct, or policy expectations may result in corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension or termination, consistent with applicable laws, ordinances, policies, procedures, and the HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement. Serious misconduct or repeated violations following prior corrective action may warrant more severe corrective action measures. The City reserves the right to take appropriate corrective action when necessary to maintain an effective, safe, and professional workplace.

Employee Grievance Procedure

Civil service-protected employees who believe they have been treated unfairly regarding one of the matters listed below may file a grievance and pursue resolution through the grievance process. The current grievance procedure established under Article 15 of HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement and consists of a three-step process.

The following matters are grievable:

- Non-selection for promotion to a referred position;
- Hazardous working conditions that are not intrinsic to the job;
- Employee performance evaluations with an overall rating of less than meets expectations, which may include complaints of violations of employee performance evaluation processes;
- Failure to receive a performance evaluation if delayed more than six months;
- Failure to be paid overtime or compensatory time or bilingual pay, if eligible, appropriate, and worked;
- Written Reprimand (Houston Police Department employees only);
- Positive Corrective Action Level I;
- Positive Corrective Action Level II;
- Decision Making Leave; or
- Temporary suspension up to 15 calendar days (Houston Police Department employees only).

Each department has a designated Grievance Coordinator who administers the grievance process. A listing of the department Grievance Coordinators is available on the Employee & Labor Relations Resource Page.

Employee Concerns

Workplace concerns that are not identified as grievable issues under an applicable City policy, ordinance, labor agreement, or other governing authority may be addressed through the City's Employee Concerns Resolution Program. The program provides employees with a structured process to raise workplace concerns and seek appropriate review and resolution.

Examples of matters that may be addressed through this program include, but are not limited to supervisor conflicts, Houston Employee Assessment and Review (HEAR) with an overall rating of meets expectations or above, work assignments and/or other issues.

Employees are encouraged to discuss concerns with their immediate supervisor or another appropriate member

of the department's management team when practicable. If the concern cannot be resolved at the department level, or the employee is not comfortable addressing it through the supervisory chain, the employee may submit an Employee Concern by visiting the Employee & Labor Relations Resource Page.

Classification Challenges

Employees who believe their assigned duties and responsibilities are not appropriately reflected in their current job classification may submit a classification challenge for review. A classification challenge evaluates the position and the work regularly assigned; it does not evaluate the employee's individual performance, qualifications, entitlement to a promotion or an increase in pay.

Before submitting a challenge, employees are encouraged to discuss their concern with their immediate supervisor or department management. If the concern is not resolved, the employee may submit a classification. Submitting a classification does not guarantee that the position will be reclassified or that the employee will receive a change in title or pay.

Non-Referral Complaints

A non-referral complaint may be submitted by an employee who believes they met the stated minimum qualifications requirements for a posted position but were not referred for further consideration.

Before filing a complaint, the employee should review the job posting, including the minimum qualification requirements, and any preferences, licenses, certification, or other screening criteria.

Filing a complaint does not guarantee an interview, placement on a referral list, selection, appointment or promotion. The review is limited to determining whether the referral decision was consistent with stated requirements and applicable City ordinances, policies and procedures.

Because filing deadlines apply to grievances, employee concerns, classification challenges, and non-referral complaints, employees are encouraged to act promptly and carefully observe all required timelines.

Employees seeking information about filing a grievance, employee concern, classification challenge, or a non-referral complaint should access the Employee & Labor Relations Resource Page, contact their department's Grievance Coordinator or the send an email to the Civil Service & EEO Division at civilserviceandeeo@houstontx.gov.

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Prohibition on Workplace Discrimination and Harassment

The City of Houston is committed to maintaining a workplace free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on race, color, national origin, marital status, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, military service, or other legally protected characteristic, is a violation of City Policy and will not be tolerated.

Employees who believe they have been subjected to discrimination, harassment, or retaliation, or who have witnessed conduct that may violate this policy, are encouraged to report their concerns promptly through one of the following channels:

Office of Inspector General (OIG)

- **Telephone:** (832) 394-5100
- **In Person:** City Hall Annex, 900 Bagby Street, 4th Floor, Houston, TX 77002
- **Online:** OIG Complaint Form

Human Resources Department

- Your department's assigned HR Employee Relations Specialist; or
- Department's Employee Relations Liaison

The City of Houston Code of Ordinances further provides that the City shall not discriminate in employment or employment opportunities based on race, color, national origin, marital status, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, military service, or other legally protected characteristic, except as otherwise permitted or required by federal or state law or court order.

Employees are encouraged to review Executive Order 1-50: Prohibition on Workplace Discrimination and Harassment and Chapter 2, Article XIV, Non-Discrimination in City Employment, City Services and Contracting Practices of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances, for additional information regarding employee rights and responsibilities.

Reassignment of Duties

To meet operational and business needs, a department director may reassign an employee to different duties, work locations, shifts, or schedules within the department when determined to be in the best interest of the City.

Department directors may also modify the employees' work shift, work hours, or days off as necessary to support departmental operations.

If a reassignment results in a reduction in pay grade or compensation, civil service-protected employees may have appeal rights under applicable civil service laws, ordinances, or rules. Employees with questions regarding their appeal rights should contact the Human Resources Department's Civil Service & EEO Division by email at civilserviceandeeo@houstontx.gov or contact their department's HR Employee Relations Specialist or liaison.

Resignation

Employees who choose to resign from City employment must submit a written resignation to their supervisor or department director. The resignation will be maintained as a part of the employee's official personnel record.

Once a written resignation has been submitted, it may be withdrawn only with the approval of the department director and prior to the effective date of the resignation.

For additional information regarding resignations and separation from employment, employees may contact their department HR Employee Relations Specialist or liaison or refer to the City of Houston's Code of Ordinances, Chapter 14 – Civil Service, Sections 14-150 and 14-153.

Section IV – Your Pay

Compensation

The City of Houston provides employees with a total compensation package consisting of both pay and benefits. Your base pay is a significant component of that package and is determined by the pay grade assigned to your job classification.

Each job classification is assigned to an established pay grade with a corresponding salary range. Your rate of pay is determined in accordance with applicable City ordinances, policies, and procedures.

Additional information regarding the City's compensation program can be found in the City of Houston's Code of Ordinances, Chapter 14 – Civil Service, Division 5. - Rule 5. Compensation Plan and Compensation's website at HR Compensation.

Longevity Pay

The City of Houston recognizes employees' years of dedicated service through a longevity pay program. Full-time permanent employees receive longevity pay at a rate of $3 per bi-weekly pay period for each complete year of qualifying service.

Longevity pay is reflected as a separate item on the employee's paycheck and increases automatically on the first pay period following the employee's service anniversary date.

There is no maximum limit or cap on longevity pay for eligible employees. As qualifying years of service increase, longevity pay will continue to accrue in accordance with applicable City ordinances, policies and the HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement.

Your Paycheck

Employees are paid on a bi-weekly basis. The City's workweek begins on Saturday and ends on Friday. Pay periods are two weeks in length, and paydays occur every other Friday. Employees are paid one week in arrears, meaning they receive pay on the Friday following the close of the applicable pay period.

The City encourages employees to receive their pay through direct deposit, which provides a convenient and secure method of payment. Employees may submit their authorization for direct deposit through HROne Connect or should contact their department payroll representative for assistance. A paper check may be issued to employees who are unable to utilize direct deposit.

Your pay statement provides a detailed summary of your earnings and deductions. It includes information such as regular and supplemental pay, federal income tax withholding, Social Security and Medicare taxes, benefit deductions, deferred compensation contributions, pension contributions, credit union deductions, and accrued leave balances, among other items.

To access or research your paycheck and view information about your pay, deductions, and leave accruals, go to HROne Connect to review your pay statement.

Holiday Pay

Because the City provides essential services to more than 2 million residents 24 hours a day, seven days a

week, many employees are required to work on holidays that they might otherwise spend with family and friends. To recognize and compensate employees for this service, the City provides holiday compensation in accordance with applicable ordinances, policies and the HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement.

The following explains how employees are compensated for City Council-declared holidays:

1. If a City Council-declared holiday falls on a day you are scheduled to work and you are not required to work, you will receive holiday pay at your regular rate for the hours you were scheduled to work.
2. If the holiday falls on your regularly scheduled day off and you are not required to work, you will either receive holiday pay or accrue holiday leave at your regular rate for the number of hours you would normally work.
3. If you are required to work on a holiday, regardless of whether it is a scheduled workday or day off, you will receive straight time pay for all hours worked. In addition, you will either receive holiday premium pay or accrue holiday leave equal to the number of hours worked. The value of each hour worked is the same whether it is paid or accrued.
4. If you are required to work on a holiday and are notified less than 24 hours before your reporting time (short notice call to duty), you will receive straight time pay for all hours worked. In addition, you will either receive short-notice premium pay or accrue accrued holiday leave at one and one-half (1.5) times the number of hours worked. Short notice premium pay also applies when you are held over into a holiday shift and received less than 24 hours' notice on the holdover. The value of each hour worked is the same whether it is paid or accrued.
5. Your department director or designee determines whether holiday hours worked will be compensated through holiday premium pay or accrued leave. Your supervisor should inform you at the time you are told you are assigned to work the holiday whether you will be paid or accrue leave for those hours.
6. Accrued holiday leave must be used within 180 days of accrual. Employees and supervisors should make every reasonable effort to schedule and use accrued holiday leave within this period. Any accrued holiday leave not used within the 180 days will be paid out in the first full pay period after the expiration of the 180 days. Unused accrued holiday leave is not paid upon separation from City employment.

Overtime Pay

Under federal law, nonexempt employees who work more than 40 hours in a workweek are entitled to overtime compensation at one and one-half (1.5) times their regular rate of pay for all hours worked in excess of 40. Overtime is calculated separately for each workweek.

At the discretion of the department, nonexempt employees may receive compensatory time in lieu of overtime pay. Compensatory time is accrued at the rate of one and one-half (1.5) hours for each overtime hour worked. Earned compensatory time may be accrued and used in accordance with applicable federal law, City ordinance, policies, procedures and the HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement.

In limited and extraordinary circumstances, exempt employees may be granted compensatory time off for hours worked beyond their customary schedules. Such compensatory time is accrued on an hour-for-hour basis. Request for compensatory time for exempt employees must be submitted in writing by the department director and approved in advance by the Human Resources Director in accordance with Chapter 14. Section 14-168 of the Code of Ordinances and the HOPE Meet and Confer Agreement.

Compensatory time for exempt employees must be used within 180 days of its accrual, subject to certain conditions, or it shall be paid in cash. Unused compensatory time for exempt employees is not paid upon separation from City employment.

If you have questions regarding the accrual, scheduling and/or the use of compensatory time off, please check with your supervisor or department payroll representative.

Other Compensation

Employees may be eligible for other compensation such as shift differential, bilingual pay, etc., based on job assignment and/or special skills needed to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the position.

Section V – Your Benefits

Medical Benefits

The City offers a comprehensive benefits program designed to support the health, well-being, and financial security of its employees. Regular full-time employees and designated PT30 employees may be eligible to participate in these programs, subject to the terms and conditions of each benefit plan.

Available benefits include:

- Medical, dental and vision coverage
- Basic and voluntary life insurance
- Health Flexible Spending Account (FSA)
- Dependent Care Reimbursement Account
- Long-term disability coverage (for eligible employees)
- Supplemental insurance programs
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Additional benefits and eligibility requirements may apply. For a complete description of available benefits, visit City of Houston Human Resources Department - Benefits or contact the Human Resources Benefits Division at (832) 393-6000.

Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a free, confidential employee benefit available to employees, their spouses, and dependents. EAP provides assessment, consultation, and short-term counseling services for personal and work-related concerns. Services are delivered by highly trained licensed clinicians who provide support, refer to counseling, and/or other community resources as needed. Counseling specialties and other resources include:

- Alcohol or other drug abuse
- Anger
- Career struggles/job burn-out
- Death, grief, and/or loss

- Depression
- Domestic violence
- Financial consultation (budgeting, saving for college)
- Health concerns
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Marriage or family problems
- Legal concerns (personal, non-employment related)
- Stress and anxiety
- Workplace conflicts
- Work-Life Issues

Counseling services through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) are generally limited to six (6) sessions per issue. If an EAP counselor determines that additional support is needed and refers you to external providers or community resources, those services may involve costs. EAP counselors will work with you to identify affordable resources and, when applicable, services that may be partially covered by your health insurance plan.

EAP services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Employees and their eligible family members may access the program by calling the toll-free number at **(833) 303-3750** or **TDD 919-341-7440**.

Additional online resources are available through Telus Health the City of Houston Web ID: **CityofHoustonVoya,** Password**: eap**.

Long-Term Disability

The City of Houston offers Long-Term Disability (LTD) benefits to eligible full-time municipal employees and classified firefighters. To qualify for coverage, employees must complete one year of continuous employment from their most recent hire date and satisfy all other plan eligibility requirements.

The LTD benefit provides eligible employees with a monthly payment to support them during periods of extended illness or injury that impairs their ability to work. Benefits may continue until you reach age 65, your disability ends, or your death occurs before age 65.

A 180-day elimination period applies from the date of disability. During this period, LTD benefits are not payable. To qualify for benefits, the Plan Administrator's Medical Director must determine that your medical condition meets the plan's definition of permanent and total disability.

Claims for LTD benefits must generally be filed within one year from the commencement of the total disability. Claims submitted after one year will not be considered unless the claimant lacked legal capacity during the filing period.

Eligible employees may receive a monthly benefit of up to 70 percent of their pre-disability salary after 180 consecutive days (approximately six months) of continuous absence from work due to a qualifying disability.

LTD benefits are also available for employees with work-related injuries. In most cases, employees receiving workers' compensation benefits will receive the plan's minimum LTD benefit of $50 per month until workers' compensation benefits end. Thereafter, the LTD benefit may increase and be calculated at 50 percent or 70 percent of the employee's pre-disability salary, depending on plan provisions and eligibility.

For additional information regarding Long-Term Disability benefits, please contact the Human Resources Department Benefits Division by email benefits@houstontx.gov or by phone at (832) 393-6000.

Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB)

The City may provide certain eligible retirees and their qualified dependents with benefits after the employee's separation from City employment. These benefits, commonly referred to as Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB), may include retiree medical, prescription drug, dental, vision, or other benefits authorized by the City.

The City reserves the right, to the extent permitted by law, to amend, modify, replace, suspend, or terminate any OPEB plan or benefit.

For additional information regarding OPEB, please visit City of Houston Human Resources Department - Benefits or call Benefits at 832-393-6000.

Retirement and Benefit Continuation

If you are considering retirement, you should contact the Houston Municipal Employee's Pension System (HMEPS) before submitting your retirement notification to your department director or supervisor and assigned Client Relations Manager. HMEPS will determine whether you are eligible for a retirement pension, identify the type of retirement for which you qualify, and when you will receive your first retirement pension payment.

Employees separating or retiring from the City of Houston who are enrolled in one or more City-sponsored benefit plans may be eligible to continue certain benefit coverages if they qualify under one of the following categories:

1. **Municipal Phase Down Program (MPDP)** - Employees who meet retirement eligibility requirements for an immediate retirement pension ***and*** are between the ages of 60 and 65.
2. **Service Retirement** - Employees who meet the requirements for an immediate retirement pension
3. **Deferred Retirement** - Employees who are within five years of retirement eligibility and may be eligible to continue certain City benefit plan coverages.
4. **COBRA Continuation Coverage** - Employees who do not fall into one of the above categories may be eligible to continue health plan coverage under COBRA.
5. **Medicare Advantage** - Retirees and eligible dependents who are enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B may be eligible to enroll in the City's Medicare Advantage plan upon meeting applicable eligibility requirements.

Eligibility for continued benefit coverage and the duration of such coverage vary depending on the employee's separation category and the specific benefit plan.

If you are enrolled in one or more City-sponsored benefit plans at the time of separation, you may be eligible to continue the benefits you carried as an active employee based on your separation category (e.g., COBRA Continuation Coverage, Municipal Phase Down Program (MPDP), Service Retirement, or Deferred Retirement).

Because retirement and benefit eligibility rules can be complex and may affect your pension, healthcare coverage, and other benefits, employees are strongly encouraged to consult with HMEPS first and the Human Resources Department Benefits Division before making any final retirement decisions. The Benefits division can be reached by email at retireebenefits@houstontx.gov or by phone at 832-393-6000.

Municipal Phase Down Program (MPDP)

The Municipal Phase Down Program (MPDP) is available to employees who are eligible for an immediate retirement pension, are between the ages of 60 and 65, and are not eligible for Medicare. The program allows eligible retirees to continue certain City-sponsored benefit coverages at the same premium contribution rates paid by active employees until they reach age 65. Upon reaching age 65, retirees may become eligible for Medicare and other retiree benefit options.

Employees participating in MPDP are responsible for paying the applicable premium contributions for the coverages they elect through pension deductions or direct bill to be identified at the time of elections

Service Retirement

Employees who qualify for Service Retirement may discontinue participation or re-enroll in any City-sponsored eligible benefit plan during the annual Open Enrollment period or following a qualifying life event, such as marriage, birth or adoption of a child, or the loss of other health insurance coverage.

If coverage under another insurance carrier is lost, the retiree will be required to provide documentation, such as a Certificate of Creditable Coverage or other proof of loss of coverage, to support the enrollment request.

A Service Retiree may elect to discontinue and subsequently re-enroll in eligible City-sponsored benefit coverages, provided the Retiree maintained continuous coverage during the opted-out period and enrollment changes are made during Open Enrollment or is supported by a qualifying life event.

Deferred Retirement

Deferred retirees are employees who are vested in the Houston Municipal Employees Pension System (HMEPS) and separate from City employment within five years of becoming eligible for a retirement pension.

During the deferred retirement period, eligible retirees may continue coverage in the City-sponsored benefit plans in which they were enrolled at the time of separation, including medical, dental, vision, and life insurance coverage, by paying the applicable retiree premium contribution rates.

Deferred retirees must maintain continuous coverage throughout the deferred retirement period. Any lapse or termination of coverage will result in the permanent loss of eligibility for that specific benefit coverage. Premium payments must be made through the City's designated online benefits payment portal.

Unlike Service Retirees, Deferred Retirees are not eligible to utilize the Opt-Out/Opt-In feature available under the medical, dental, and vision plans. Once a Deferred Retiree becomes eligible to receive a retirement pension and transitions to Service Retirement status, the retiree may then become eligible to opt out of and subsequently re-enroll in eligible benefit plans in accordance with plan rules and enrollment requirements.

Medicare Advantage

All Medicare-eligible retirees must enroll in Medicare Parts A and B through the Social Security Administration. Retirees are encouraged to begin the Medicare enrollment process at least two to three months before retirement to ensure a smooth transition in coverage.

Because the City sponsors Medicare Advantage plans for Medicare-eligible retirees, enrollment in both Medicare Part A and Medicare Part B is required to maintain the City-sponsored Medicare Advantage retiree health coverage. Retirees who do not enroll in a City-sponsored Medicare Advantage plan when eligible may lose

coverage under their active or retiree health plan. In most cases, coverage under the active health plan will terminate at the end of the month in which the retiree becomes Medicare eligible.

To avoid interruptions in coverage, employees are strongly encouraged to contact the Human Resources Department Benefits Division at least one month before their retirement date to discuss Medicare enrollment requirements and retiree benefit options.

COBRA Continuation Coverage

Under COBRA, employees who separate from the City of Houston, regardless of the reason for separation, may be eligible to continue the health plan coverage they carried as active employees. Eligible dependents who were covered under the employee's health plan at the time of separation may also be eligible to continue coverage.

COBRA coverage may be continued for up to 18 to 36 months, depending on the qualifying event and the beneficiary's individual circumstances.

Employees electing COBRA coverage are responsible for paying the full cost of coverage, including both the employee and City portions of the premium, plus an additional 2 percent administrative fee.

Following separation, the City's COBRA third-party administrator will provide eligible individuals with a COBRA election notice containing information regarding available coverages, premium rates, enrollment procedures, and applicable deadlines.

City of Houston Benefits Division
Call: (832) 393-6000
Email: retireebenefits@houstontx.gov
Visit: 611 Walker St., 4th Floor, Houston TX 77002
Website: www.houstontx.gov/hr/benefits

Houston Municipal Employee Pension System
1201 Louisiana, Suite 900, Houston, Texas 77002
Main: 713.595.0100
Toll Free: 800.858.1450
Fax: 713.650.1961
Website: www.hmeps.org

Social Security Administration (SSA)
Call: (800) 772 1213
Website: www.ssa.gov/onlineservices/

Defined Contribution / 457 Savings Plan

The City of Houston offers eligible employees the opportunity to participate in a Section 457(b) Deferred Compensation Plan, a tax-advantaged retirement savings program available to employees of state and local governments. Similar to a 401(k) or 403(b) plan, the 457(b) Plan allows employees to save and invest for retirement through convenient payroll deductions.

Employees may elect to contribute a specified amount of their pay on a pre-tax basis. Contributions and any associated investment earnings grow tax-deferred until withdrawn. Upon distribution, withdrawals are generally subject to applicable income taxes.

Participants may choose from a variety of investment options and may be eligible to borrow against their account balance in accordance with plan provisions. Upon separation from City employment, eligible plan balances may be rolled over into an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or another qualified retirement plan, subject to applicable federal laws and plan rules.

Participation in the 457(b) Plan can be an effective way to supplement retirement income and build long-term financial security.

For additional information regarding the City's Deferred Compensation Plan, call (800) 343 – 0860 or visit the plan administrator's website at www.netbenefits.com.

Credit Union Membership

City of Houston employees are eligible to apply for membership with Priority Trust Credit Union. The credit union offers a variety of financial products and services, including savings accounts, checking accounts, payroll deduction services, Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), certificates of deposit, auto loans, home loans, personal loans, credit cards, and more.

Employees may be eligible to apply for certain loan products after completing one year of continuous service with the City, subject to the credit union's lending requirements and approval criteria.

Priority Trust Credit Union is an independent financial institution and is not owned, operated, or administered by the City of Houston.

For additional information regarding membership, products, and services, contact the credit union at (713) 970-6200 or visit its website at https://prioritytrustcu.org/.

Transportation Benefit

To help reduce traffic congestion and support employee commuting options, the City of Houston offers a variety of transportation-related benefits for many employees who work in the downtown area. Depending on an employee's work location and departmental eligibility, these benefits may include flexible work schedules, free parking, or subsidies for public transportation.

Transportation benefits and eligibility requirements may vary by department. Employees should contact their department's transportation representative for additional information regarding available transportation programs and commuting options.

Employee Recognition

The City of Houston values the dedication, professionalism, and commitment of its employees and recognizes the important contributions they make in serving the community. The City offers several programs to acknowledge employee achievements and years of service.

Mayor's Service Awards

The Mayor's Service Awards Program recognizes employees for significant service milestones and continued commitment to public service. Employees are recognized for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, and 50 or more years of continuous service with the City.

Departments typically present service awards to employees reaching 5 through 25 years of service. Employees with 30 or more years of service are recognized annually at a special event hosted by the Mayor's Office and the Human Resources Department.

Bravo Awards

The Bravo Awards represent the City's highest employee recognition program. These awards honor employees who demonstrate exceptional performance, innovation, leadership, customer service, and dedication to improving the quality of life for Houston residents and their communities.

For additional information regarding the Bravo Awards program, please visit the dedicated website at https://psrw.cohemployeenews.com/psrw/bravo-awards/.

Employee Communications

The Human Resources Department's Communication Division publishes two award-winning employee newsletters, and keeps employees up to date on benefits, wellness, safety and other initiatives. The newsletters are "Benefits Pulse," which helps you develop better health habits, understand your benefits and become better health care consumers; and "City Savvy," which keeps you abreast of City workplace news.

The division also coordinates Public Service Recognition events and the city's workplace giving drive, the Combined Municipal Campaign. Find links to newsletters and more at https://www.houstontx.gov/hr/communications.html

Section VI – Time Off

In addition to the benefits described above, the City of Houston provides eligible employees with various forms of paid time off, including holidays, vacation leave, sick leave, and other authorized leave programs. The use of paid leave is subject to applicable City policies, labor agreements, operational needs, and supervisory approval.

Vacation

Permanent full-time employees accrue vacation hours each pay period based on their completed years of service with the City. Vacation leave accrual rates are summarized below:

Completed Years of Service	Vacation Hours Earned Per Pay Period	Vacation Hours Earned Per Year
Years 1 through 4	3.07 hours	80 hours
Year 5	4.60 hours	120 hours
Years 6 and 7	4.92 hours	128 hours
Years 8 and 9	5.22 hours	136 hours

Years 10 and 11	5.53 hours	144 hours
Year 12	5.83 hours	152 hours
Year 13	6.15 hours	160 hours
Year 14	6.45 hours	168 hours
Year 15	6.77 hours	176 hours
Year 16	7.07 hours	184 hours
Year 17	7.37 hours	192 hours
Year 18 and beyond	7.68 hours	200 hours

You may use vacation leave immediately upon accrual. Upon termination, you are eligible to be paid for unused accrued vacation leave, as follows: (1) if you were hired prior to January 1, 2000, you may accrue and carry forward from year to year a maximum of 700 compensable vacation hours; and upon separation from the City of Houston, you can be paid up to 700 compensable accrued, unused hours; (2) if you were hired on or after January 1, 2000, you may accumulate and carry forward a maximum of 340 compensable vacation hours; and upon separation from the City of Houston, you can be paid up to 340 compensable accrued, unused hours.

Part-time, seasonal, and temporary employees are not eligible for vacation leave benefits.

Holidays

The City observes 13 paid holidays each year: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King's birthday, President's Day, City Holiday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans' Day, two days at Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day. The City also provides eligible employees with one floating holiday. Specific holiday dates are subject to approval by City Council.

Eligible employees receive floating-holiday hours equal to the number of hours in their regularly scheduled workday. The floating holiday must be requested and approved in advance by the employee's supervisor and used within calendar year in which it is awarded. The floating holiday hours shall be taken as a full workday and is not eligible for use in increment hours. Floating holiday hours do not accrue or carry over to the following year. Employees hired on or before June 30 are eligible to use the floating holiday during that calendar year. Employees hired on or after July 1 become eligible for the floating holiday in the following calendar year.

A calendar of approved City holidays is available at http://houstontx.gov/hr/holidays.html.

Sick Leave

The City provides paid sick leave for eligible employees. Sick leave may be used when an employee's medical or health condition prevents the employee from working, for appointments with a healthcare provider, or to care for an immediate family member who is ill.

Employees hired after 1985 participate in the Compensable Sick Leave (CSL) Plan.

CSL participants who are actively at work receive 2.5 hours of sick leave each biweekly pay period, up to a maximum of 65 hours during the benefit year, which runs from September 1 through August 31.

To encourage good attendance and help employees build leave for future medical needs, the City matches, at the end of each full benefit year, the sick-leave hours accrued but not used during that year. The matching hours are added to the employee's sick-leave balance until the balance reaches 1,040 hours. After reaching 1,040

hours, the employee may continue to accrue up to 65 hours of unused sick leave each benefit year; however, the City will no longer provide matching hours.

The 1,040-hour balance is intended to provide approximately six months of paid leave during an extended illness before long-term disability benefits may begin, as explained in Section V.

Upon separation from City employment, an employee whose CSL balance exceeds 1,040 hours will be paid for all unused sick-leave hours above 1,040 at the employee's current rate of pay.

Sick leave absences exceeding 80 hours during a single benefit year require certification from a healthcare provider for the employee to receive payment from accrued leave balances, when authorized. Additionally, a supervisor may require certification from a healthcare provider at any time an employee requests to use sick leave. The employee must provide the required certification to the supervisor promptly upon returning to work.

Personal Leave Hours

During the first full pay period in October of each year, eligible employees receive 24 hours of personal leave. Personal leave must be requested and approved in advance by the employee's supervisor and used by August 31. Unused personal leave does not carry over and are not paid upon separation from the City.

Wellness Leave

Employees enrolled in the Compensable Sick Leave (CSL) Plan are eligible to use up to eight hours of wellness leave during the benefit year in which their employment begins and up to eight hours during each benefit year thereafter. Unused wellness leave hours do not carry over to the next benefit year and are not paid upon separation from the City.

Wellness leave may be used for preventive health services, including physical examinations, annual checkups, health screenings, and other prospective medical testing. The purpose of wellness leave is to support employees in maintaining good health and to encourage the early detection of potentially debilitating or life-threatening illnesses or diseases that might otherwise go undetected.

Family and Medical Leave

The City complies with the requirements of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), as amended. An eligible employee may be entitled to up to 12 workweeks of job-protected family and medical leave during the applicable 12-month period for one or more of the following qualifying reasons:

- The employee's own serious health condition that prevents the employee from performing the essential functions of the employee's position;
- The need to care for the employee's spouse, child, or parent who has a serious health condition;
- The birth of the employee's child and the need to care for the child during the 12-month period following the birth;
- The placement of a child with the employee for adoption or foster care and the need to care for the newly placed child during the 12-month period following the placement; or
- A qualifying exigency arising from the employee's spouse, child, or parent being on, or called to, covered active military duty.

An eligible employee may also be entitled to up to 26 workweeks of military caregiver leave during a single 12-month period to care for a covered servicemember with a qualifying serious injury or illness. The employee must be the covered service member's spouse, child, parent, or next of kin. A covered servicemember may include a current member of the Armed Forces or an eligible veteran, as defined by the FMLA.

To be eligible for FMLA leave, an employee must:

1. Have been employed by the City for at least 12 months, which need not be consecutive; and
2. Have completed at least 1,250 hours of service during the 12-month period immediately preceding the start of the leave.

Meeting these eligibility requirements does not automatically qualify an absence for FMLA protection. The requested leave must be for an FMLA-qualifying reason, and the employee must comply with all applicable notice, documentation, and certification requirements. Eligibility and leave designation will be determined in accordance with the FMLA, its implementing regulations, and applicable City policies.

For additional information about FMLA, please review Administrative Procedure 3-2: Family and Medical Leave, speak with your supervisor or contact your department's FMLA coordinator.

Prenatal, Parental and Infant Wellness Leave

The City provides eligible employees with paid prenatal, parental, and infant wellness (PPI) leave. These benefits are available without regard to gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. If both parents are employed by the City and independently satisfy the eligibility requirements, each may receive the applicable leave benefits.

To be eligible for PPI leave, an employee must:

1. Be employed by the City in a full-time position; and
2. Have completed at least six continuous months of full-time employment with the City before initially using the leave.

Part-time, PT30, and temporary employees are not eligible.

Eligible employees may receive the following:

- **Paid Prenatal Leave:** Up to 160 hours for prenatal wellness healthcare appointments and other qualifying absences related to the pregnancy. Paid prenatal leave is separate from other accrued leave and is not required to run concurrently with leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- **Paid Parental Leave:** Up to 480 hours to bond with and care for a child following the child's birth or placement with the employee for adoption or foster care. The leave must be used within the first 12 months following the birth or placement. Paid parental leave will run concurrently with FMLA leave when the employee is eligible for FMLA.
- **Paid Infant Wellness Leave:** Up to 40 hours to take an infant to a healthcare provider for physical examinations, immunizations, checkups, health screenings, or other prospective medical testing during the infant's first year after birth.

Paid parental leave may be taken continuously or intermittently. When taken intermittently, it must be used in increments of one workweek, and the employee must make a reasonable effort to schedule the leave in a manner that does not unduly disrupt departmental operations. Required authorization must be obtained for each intermittent use.

Employees must notify their immediate supervisor of their intent to apply, provide as much advance notice as feasible, and submit the required application, certification, and supporting documentation through the designated PPI Portal. An employee's eligibility and leave request are not approved until reviewed and approved by the PPI Coordinator.

Unused PPI leave is not compensable and will be forfeited upon the applicable expiration date, separation from City employment, or movement to a part-time, PT30, or temporary position. Employees may use other appropriate accrued leave to cover qualifying absences in accordance with applicable City and departmental policies.

Eligibility, approval, and use of PPI leave will be administered in accordance with Administrative Procedure 3-16: Prenatal, Parental and Infant Wellness Leaves and other applicable City policies.

Meals and Rest Breaks

Employees are provided time for a meal period and permitted up to two paid 15-minute rest breaks during the workday. The timing, frequency, and scheduling of meal and rest breaks may vary based on work schedules, staffing requirements, departmental procedures, and operational needs.

Rest breaks should be scheduled in coordination with the employee's supervisor and may not be combined, used to extend a meal period, or used to arrive late or leave work early. Unused rest breaks may not be accumulated or carried forward.

Death in Family (Bereavement Leave)

In the event of the death of an immediate family member, an employee may be granted up to three paid workdays of bereavement leave, subject to the approval of the department director or designee.

For purposes of bereavement leave, immediate family includes the employee's:

- Father or mother;
- Sister or brother;
- Spouse;
- Child;
- Grandparent or grandchild;
- Father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, or brother-in-law; and
- Spouse's grandparent or grandchild.

Other relatives by blood or marriage may be considered immediate family when the department director determines that the employee's attendance or presence is appropriate based on the nature of the relationship.

The department director or designee may approve additional time when warranted by extenuating circumstances or significant travel requirements. Any additional approved time will be documented as a separate form of excused absence and will not be designated as bereavement leave.

Voting Leave

The City encourages employees to participate in municipal, county, state, and federal elections for which they are eligible. Employees are strongly encouraged to use available early voting periods whenever practicable to minimize disruptions to City operations.

If an employee's work schedule does not provide sufficient time to vote while the polls are open, the employee may request up to two hours of time off to vote. The request should be submitted to the employee's supervisor in advance and will be administered in accordance with applicable law.

Court Related Absence

Employees will be paid for court-related absences when the appearance is in response to a jury-duty summons or is otherwise directly or indirectly related to City business or the employee's official City duties.

An employee summoned for jury duty must provide a copy of the summons and official documentation verifying the time spent in court. The employee will be paid for the verified time in court, including up to 60 minutes of travel time following release from court.

Court appearances unrelated to City business or the employee's City duties will be treated as personal matters, and the employee will be responsible for covering the resulting absence with appropriate accrued leave or unpaid time, as applicable.

Community, Civic, and Professional Activities

The City encourages employees to participate in charitable, civic, service, trade, and professional organizations. These activities should ordinarily occur outside the employee's scheduled work hours and are not considered hours worked.

Participation during scheduled work hours requires prior approval and must be covered by appropriate accrued leave or another authorized absence. Activities performed at the City's request or under the City's direction or control may be considered City business.

Eligible HOPE members participating in an approved HOPE community project may receive paid leave through the HOPE Community Action Leave Pool in accordance with the applicable Meet and Confer Agreement and established approval procedures.

Employees may not represent or imply that their personal views or activities are endorsed by the City unless specifically authorized.

For additional information regarding meal and rest breaks, death in family, voting, court related absences, and other absences, please review Administrative Policy 3-11: Absences.

Military Leave

The City complies with the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA), which protects eligible employees from discrimination based on military service and provides employment and reemployment rights following qualifying service in the uniformed services.

Eligible employees are entitled to up to 15 paid workdays of military leave during each federal fiscal year, October 1 through September 30, to fulfill qualifying military duties. Employees should provide their supervisor with advance oral or written notice of the need for military leave and submit applicable military orders as soon as practicable. Advance notice is not required when it is impossible or unreasonable to provide or is prohibited by military necessity.

After exhausting the initial 15 paid workdays of military leave, an eligible employee whose military compensation is less than the employee's regular City compensation may receive military differential pay. Military differential pay provides the difference between the employee's qualifying military compensation and City compensation. The differential-pay period may not exceed 90 days for each qualifying event, inclusive of the initial 15 paid workdays, unless an extension is approved by City Council.

Employees on active military duty may also be authorized to use eligible accrued leave in accordance with City policy. Total City compensation, including military differential pay and accrued leave used, may not exceed 100% of the employee's applicable regular biweekly pay.

Employees returning from military service must timely report to work or apply for reemployment as required by USERRA. Eligibility, compensation, benefits, and reemployment rights will be administered in accordance with applicable law and City policy. For additional information regarding Military Leaves, please review Chapter 14, Article IV - Military Leaves of the City's Code of Ordinances.

Leave of Absence Without Pay

Under certain circumstances, an employee may request a leave of absence without pay. The request must be submitted in writing as soon as practicable and is subject to the following approval requirements:

- The department director may approve a leave of absence without pay for up to 14 calendar days.
- The Civil Service Commission must approve leave exceeding 14 calendar days. Such leave may be approved in increments of up to 90 calendar days.
- Leave without pay may not exceed a total of 180 calendar days within a 12-month period unless an extension is authorized by City Council.

Approval is not automatic and will be based on the circumstances of the request, operational needs, and applicable City policies and procedures.

For additional information regarding Leave of Absences Without Pay, please review Chapter 14, Article II - Rules,

Division 14, Section 172 of the City's Code of Ordinances.

Section VII – While You Are at Work

Reporting to Work

Employees are expected to report to work promptly and remain at work for their entire scheduled workday. If an employee anticipates being late or unable to report for work, the employee must notify their supervisor as soon as reasonably possible by direct telephone call, unless another method of notification has been authorized in writing or established by departmental policy.

When the supervisor is unavailable, the employee should contact the designated alternate supervisor or point of contact and make reasonable efforts to follow up with the supervisor as soon as practicable. In an emergency, another person may provide notice on the employee's behalf.

An unexcused absence may be unpaid even when the employee has accrued leave available. Leave requests are subject to supervisory approval, applicable laws, City policies, and departmental procedures.

Patterns of tardiness, absenteeism, extended meal or rest breaks, failure to provide proper notice, or other attendance concerns may result in corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension or termination.
For additional information regarding absences, please review Administrative Procedure 3-11: Absences and/or your departmental policy.

Houston Employee Assessment and Review (HEAR) Process

The Houston Employee Assessment and Review (HEAR) Process provides a consistent performance-management process for municipal employees and supports a culture of high performance by establishing clear expectations, recognizing accomplishments, and promoting employee development.

A HEAR Plan consists of two primary components:

- **SMART goals and objectives** that are directly related to the employee's job responsibilities and aligned with departmental and City goals; and
- **Behavioral competencies** that identify the workplace behaviors and performance standards expected of the employee.

HEAR Plan Requirements

A HEAR Plan must be created within 30 days after an employee's hire, rehire, or promotion. A new HEAR Plan may also be required when the employee's SMART goals and/or behavioral competencies changes as the result of a transfer or supervisory change.

- **Probationary HEAR Plan:** An employee who is newly hired or rehired by the City and has not previously completed a HEAR probationary period will receive a Probationary HEAR Plan.

- **Promotion/Transfer HEAR Plan:** An employee who has completed a 365-day HEAR probationary period and is subsequently promoted or transferred will receive a Promotion/Transfer HEAR Plan.

The employee's supervisor will meet with the employee to establish the applicable HEAR Plan and discuss performance expectations, SMART goals, behavioral competencies, and applicable review periods.

Progress Reviews and Assessments

Newly hired and rehired employees with a Probationary HEAR Plan will participate in one or more work progress meetings prior to the being administered the fifth- and eleventh-month assessments during their probationary period. Employees with a Promotion/Transfer HEAR Plan will participate in one or more work progress meetings prior to being administered the fifth-month assessment for newly promoted employees and transfer employees prior to their annual assessment.

After completing the applicable probationary or promotion/transfer review period, the employee will transition into the Citywide annual HEAR cycle, which includes:

- Creation of the annual HEAR Plan;
- Periodic work-progress meetings; and
- Completion of the annual performance assessment.

Employees are expected to participate in the HEAR process and work with their supervisors to understand performance expectations, monitor progress, address development needs, and achieve established goals.

The HEAR Process cycle runs July 1 to June 30 with assessments occurring in June for non-supervisory employees and July 1 to August 31 with assessments occurring in August for supervisory employees.

Fore additional information regarding the HEAR Process, please review Administrative Procedure 3-20: Houston Employee and Review (HEAR) Process.

Drug-Free Workplace

The City is committed to maintaining a safe, healthy, and drug-free work environment for employees and the public. Employees are required to report to work in an appropriate mental and physical condition and remain capable of performing their duties safely and satisfactorily throughout the workday.

Offers of City employment are conditional upon the applicant successfully completing all required pre-employment screenings, including a controlled-substance test and medical assessment, when applicable.

Employees and applicants may be required to undergo controlled-substance testing under the following circumstances:

- Pre-employment;
- Random selection;
- Following a workplace accident;
- Reasonable suspicion; or
- Follow-up testing.

An employee seeking a promotion, transfer, or demotion into a designated safety-impact position must successfully complete a controlled-substance test and, when required, a medical assessment before assuming the position.

Safety-impact positions are those in which an employee's duties may affect the health or safety of coworkers, City residents, or the public. Employees occupying designated safety-impact positions are subject to random controlled-substance testing.

Commercial Driver's License Requirements

Employees who are required to maintain a commercial driver's license (CDL) as a condition of City employment are subject to alcohol and controlled-substance testing in accordance with applicable U.S. Department of Transportation regulations, City policies, and departmental procedures.

Employees are responsible for maintaining a current and valid CDL with all endorsements required for their position. An employee must immediately notify their supervisor of any change in the status of their CDL, including a suspension, revocation, restriction, disqualification, expiration, or other action resulting from an alcohol-related incident, controlled-substance violation, traffic offense, or other motor-vehicle violation.

Employees must also comply with all applicable CDL reporting, testing, documentation, and return-to-duty requirements.

Noncompliance

A confirmed positive test result, refusal or failure to submit timely to required testing, failure to maintain or report a required license status, or an attempt to alter, substitute, or otherwise compromise a test sample may result in corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension or termination, in accordance with applicable City policies, departmental procedures, labor agreements, and law.

If you possess a commercial driver's license (CDL) as a requirement of your City employment, you are subject to alcohol and controlled substance testing pursuant to U.S. Department of Transportation regulations. You are expected to keep such license current and immediately advise your supervisor of any change in the status of your license whether due to an alcohol related incident or to any other vehicle violation as required by your CDL and departmental policies.

For additional information regarding the City's Controlled Substance and Alcohol testing procedures, please review Executive Order 1-12: Amended Controlled Substance and Alcohol Abuse Policy or Executive Order 1-32: CDL Drivers Alcohol and Controlled Substances Testing Procedures, whichever is applicable.

Workplace Safety and Risk Management

The primary responsibility of the Human Resources Department's Occupational Risk Management (HR-ORM) Division is to promote a robust occupational safety culture throughout all twenty-four (24) City departments. HR-ORM is the steward of Administrative Procedure 2-21, Employee Safety and Health, and oversees the Citywide Safety Committee.

HR-ORM establishes Citywide safety standards designed to proactively identify and mitigate unsafe working conditions, unsafe work practices, and compromises to workplace safety. These efforts help prevent workplace accidents, occupational injuries and illnesses, motor-vehicle collisions, and damage to property.

Each City department is assigned at least one safety professional to provide consultative services that include but are not limited to:

- Providing guidance on regulatory compliance and industry best practices concerning safety-related matters;
- Investigating safety complaints and workplace incidents;
- Inspecting City facilities and worksites for hazard identification and assessment; and
- Providing safety awareness training on various occupational matters

Employees are expected to follow established safety requirements and promptly report unsafe conditions or work practices to their supervisor, assigned safety professional, or anonymously using the posted QR code for the citywide Safety Management System.

Workers' Compensation

Workers' compensation provides medical and/or income benefits to eligible employees who sustain an occupational injury or illness arising out of and in the course and scope of their City employment.

Any injury or illness occurring while an employee is on duty must be reported immediately to the employee's supervisor, regardless of severity, and as required by Executive Order 1-33. Prompt reporting allows the HR-ORM Team to respond swiftly, document the incident, and facilitate the obtainment of necessary medical care for the employee and/or other workers' compensation benefits for their eligible beneficiaries.

The HR-ORM Division includes workers' compensation case management professionals and contracted partners who assist injured employees throughout the claims and recovery process. Injured employees may be contacted by one or more members of the workers' compensation team at various stages of recovery to:

- Confirm incident details and obtain required documentation;
- Facilitate connection with an appropriate medical care provider;
- Monitor the employee's recovery and work status; and
- Help to create a medically appropriate and safe return to work pathway for the injured employee

Recovering employees are expected to remain available, regardless of their work status, to cooperate with reasonable requests for information throughout the claim and recovery process.

Transitional Duty

The City may provide transitional duty to an employee who is medically released to return to work with temporary restrictions following an accepted occupational injury or illness. Transitional duty is a temporary work assignment that allows a recovering employee to perform productive work within established medical restrictions while retaining their pre-injury wages, as applicable.

Recovering employees working a transitional duty assignment must comply with all medical restrictions and promptly provide updated work-status documentation to their supervisor, their assigned HR-Workers'

Compensation professional and to their assigned claims examiner. Employees recovering from an occupational injury and receiving workers' compensation benefits are prohibited from working a second job, a part-time job, and/or working in a self-employed capacity during their regularly scheduled work hours, in accordance with applicable City policies.

For additional information regarding an injured employee's rights and responsibilities and other helpful information by visiting https://www.tdi.texas.gov/wc/employee/guide.html or the Occupational Risk Management website.

Injured employees may also contact the HR-Occupational Risk Management Hotline at **832-393-SAFE (7233)**.

Learning and Development Opportunities

The Center for Public Leadership & Learning is comprised of talented and passionate learning leaders seeking to become the premier leader in government training by cultivating public service professionals and organizations through transformational learning solutions. We are committed to igniting passion, empowering people, and advancing performance through partnerships and learning. This commitment has led to CPLL being nationally recognized.

CPLL offers employees a variety of learning opportunities available in-person at our state-of-the art Learning Center, online via MS Teams, or in a blended learning environment via HR's Learning Management System. Our learning opportunities are designed to support your career through L.E.A.D. pathways:

- **Learn**: The foundational phase where employees acquire key skills and knowledge of departmental and organizational policies, processes, and people.
- **Execute**: Focuses on helping learners put plans and ideas into action by taking ownership of projects, delivering results, and demonstrating accountability in their work.
- **Advance**: For employees ready to progress to more challenging roles, these programs are designed to advance their mindset, competencies, and strategies.
- **Deliver**: In this pathway, learners will prepare to lead teams and departments while delivering on organizational performance and achieving community outcomes.

The Organizational Development and Learning Design teams also partner with department leaders to design customized learning solutions. These services help departments identify and address learning needs related to productivity, team cohesion, organizational effectiveness, nd leadership development, and more

To access upcoming courses or course catalog, please access the City of Houston - Talent Management System and/or look for CPLL city-wide email newsletter and communications.

Outside Employment

Your employment with the City is your primary employment responsibility. Outside employment must not interfere with your City duties, work schedule, productivity, attendance, ability to work required overtime, or physical and mental readiness to perform your job.

Outside employment includes any second job, self-employment, or non-City work for which you receive monetary or nonmonetary compensation. U.S. military reserve assignments and duties are not considered outside employment under City policy.

Before accepting or performing any outside employment, you must obtain written authorization from your department director or designee. You must submit a separate Outside Employment Authorization Request form to your immediate supervisor or manager for each outside work assignment:

- Before beginning the outside employment;
- Annually during the City's July authorization period; and
- Whenever there is a change in your supervisor, manager, job assignment, position, department, or outside employment.

Outside employment may not create an actual or apparent conflict of interest with the City, negatively affect City operations, or interfere with your ability to perform your City responsibilities. Employees may not use paid or unpaid sick leave, Family and Medical Leave, wellness leave, or donated leave to engage in outside employment, except as specifically permitted by City policy.

You must immediately notify your department director in writing of any overlap between City leave and outside employment, any actual or potential conflict of interest, or any injury sustained while performing outside employment that may affect your City employment.

Outside-employment authorization may be denied or rescinded at any time by the department director. Reasons may include attendance or tardiness concerns, reduced job performance or productivity, inability to work required overtime, loss of physical or mental readiness for City work, an injury sustained during outside employment, a policy violation, or another valid operational reason.

An employee may not simultaneously hold an additional full-time or part-time City position when doing so would deprive another person of regular employment. Violations may result in corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension or termination.

For additional information regarding outside employment, please review Administrative Policy 3-10: Outside Employment.

Seeking Elective Office

The City respects an employee's right to seek or hold public elective office. Employees will not be subject to retaliation or corrective action solely because they become a candidate for, or are elected to, public office. However, employees must continue to fulfill all duties and responsibilities associated with their City employment and comply with applicable laws and City policies.

A public elective office includes any federal, state, county, district, or City office, whether paid or unpaid, that requires a public election. Positions such as precinct judge, political-party delegate or convention chair, and county political-party chair are not considered public elective offices for purposes of this policy.

An employee planning to become a candidate for public elective office must:

- Notify the Human Resources Director in writing at least 14 calendar days before announcing or otherwise becoming a candidate;
- Provide a copy of the written notice to the employee's department director;
- Complete and return the Candidacy for Elective Office Questionnaire within seven calendar days after receiving it, unless an extension is approved; and
- Cooperate with requests for information needed to evaluate the candidacy.

The Human Resources Director will review the proposed candidacy to determine whether it creates an actual or potential conflict of interest with the employee's City duties. The employee will be notified of the final determination. If the employee is subsequently elected, an additional review will be conducted to determine whether holding the office creates a conflict with the employee's City employment.

The federal Hatch Act and other applicable federal, state, and local laws will be considered when determining whether restrictions apply to an employee's candidacy or political activity.

Campaign Activities and City Resources

Employees may not participate in election or campaign activities while on duty, except for voting as permitted by City or departmental policy. Employees may not use or authorize the use of City funds, personnel, work time, facilities, equipment, email systems, computers, social-media accounts, employment privileges, or other City resources for campaign or election-related purposes.

Employees may not participate in campaign activities while wearing a City uniform or displaying identification or other items that could reasonably suggest they are acting on behalf of the City.

If a conflict of interest is identified, appropriate action may be recommended to resolve the conflict. Violations of this policy, including the misuse of City resources or employment privileges, may result in corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension or termination.
For additional information regarding seeking elective office, please review Administrative Policy 3-35: Seeking Elective Office.

Work Attire and Personal Appearance

Since City employees perform a wide range of duties and serve a diverse community, employees are expected to maintain a clean, neat, professional appearance appropriate to their position and work environment.

Clothing, footwear, grooming, and personal protective equipment should be suitable for the employee's:

- Job duties and responsibilities;
- Level of interaction with the public;
- Work location and environmental conditions;
- Departmental requirements; and
- Applicable health and safety standards.

Employees must comply with uniform, protective equipment, and departmental dress requirements applicable to their positions. Clothing displaying messages, images, or statements that are offensive, disruptive, discriminatory, political, or otherwise inappropriate for the workplace is prohibited unless the item is part of an approved City uniform or is otherwise authorized.

Because no dress standard can address every work assignment or circumstance, employees should exercise sound professional judgment. Management may address attire or grooming that does not meet safety, operational, or professional standards. Employees with questions about appropriate workplace attire should consult their supervisor.

The City will consider reasonable exceptions or modifications when required by applicable law or approved as a reasonable workplace accommodation.

Identification Badges and Workplace Visitors

To support workplace safety and security, employees must wear and visibly display their City-issued identification badge while on duty or in nonpublic City work areas, in accordance with departmental and facility requirements. Employees may not lend, transfer, alter, or permit another person to use their City identification badge.

Visitors to most City worksites must check in as required and visibly display a City-issued visitor pass. Different procedures may apply at public-facing facilities, including libraries, airports, health clinics, courts, parks, and other locations routinely accessed by the public.

Employees should remain alert to unidentified or unescorted individuals in nonpublic or restricted work areas. When appropriate, employees should direct visitors to the designated reception or information area. Employees should not confront or personally escort an individual if doing so could create a safety concern. Suspicious activity, unauthorized access, or security concerns should be reported promptly to a supervisor, facility security personnel, or the appropriate emergency authority.

Section VIII – Policies

City Policies and Procedures

Chapter 14 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances establishes many of the primary requirements governing City employment. Mayor's policies, executive orders, administrative policies and procedures, and other Citywide directives provide additional guidance for implementing these requirements.

Departments may establish supplemental policies and procedures to address their specific operational needs, provided those requirements are consistent with applicable laws, ordinances, labor agreements, and Citywide policies. If a departmental policy conflicts with a controlling City ordinance or other higher legal authority, the controlling authority will prevail.

Many topics summarized in this guidebook are addressed more fully in City policies and procedures. This guidebook provides general information and does not replace or supersede any applicable law, ordinance, policy, executive order, labor agreement, civil service rule, or departmental procedure.

City policies may be revised periodically. Employees are responsible for reviewing and complying with the requirements applicable to their employment. Current Mayor's policies, executive orders, and administrative

policies and procedures are available at http://www.houstontx.gov/policies/.

Ethics

City employees are expected to perform their duties honestly, impartially, professionally, and in a manner that maintains the public's trust. Employees must comply with all applicable ethical standards and avoid conduct that creates an actual or apparent conflict between their personal interests and their City responsibilities.

Employees are responsible for understanding and complying with requirements concerning conflicts of interest, gifts, outside financial interests, confidential information, use of City property and resources, and required financial disclosures.

Employees who are uncertain whether an action or situation presents an ethical concern should seek guidance before proceeding. Questions may be directed to the employee's supervisor, department human resources representative, the Office of Inspector General, or another appropriate City authority.

If you have any questions as to the ethical nature of a situation, contact your department's Employee Relations representative.

Severe Weather and Other Emergency Situations

Every City employee plays an important role in providing essential services to Houstonians before, during, and after an emergency. Unless otherwise directed by the Mayor, the City remains open for business, and employees are expected to report for and remain at work as scheduled.

During severe weather or another emergency, employees may be required to work a modified schedule, work overtime, report to an alternate location, perform different duties, or accept a temporary assignment in another division or department.
Each department director or designee assigns employees a Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III designation based on their duties and responsibilities:

- **Tier I:** Employees who are essential to the continued operation of critical City functions before, during, and after an emergency. Tier I employees must report when and where directed and remain on duty for the required period unless excused by the department director or designee.
- **Tier II:** Employees who do not have an immediate, specific emergency assignment but may be needed to perform City duties under certain circumstances. Tier II employees must remain available and be prepared to report when and where directed.
- **Tier III:** Employees who are not designated as Tier I or Tier II. Tier III employees must follow official emergency instructions, remain available for recall, and report to work when directed. Once the emergency has ended, Tier III employees must return to their regular assignments and work locations unless otherwise instructed.

Employees are responsible for knowing their Tier designation and the duties associated with it. During an emergency, employees should monitor official City and departmental communications, local news reports, City-issued devices, work email, and emergency-alert systems. Employees who are uncertain about their reporting responsibilities must contact their supervisor or another designated person in their chain of command.

An employee who is physically unable to report because of circumstances beyond their control must notify their supervisor immediately and follow departmental reporting procedures. Failure to report, remain available, or perform assigned emergency duties without prior approval may result in corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension.

The Mayor may suspend nonessential City services, designate an employee's residence as a temporary work location, or establish special pay conditions for employees who serve before, during, or immediately after an emergency. Compensation will be administered in accordance with applicable law, City policy, and any emergency-specific instructions.

For additional information regarding severe weather and other emergency conditions, please review Administrative Policy 2-3: Severe Weather and Other Emergency Conditions and applicable departmental emergency procedures.

Use of City Communication and Information Technology Resources

City communication and information technology resources are provided primarily to support official City business. These resources include, but are not limited to, telephones, mobile devices, computers, email, internet access, messaging platforms, printers, scanners, fax machines, networks, software, data systems, and mail services. Employees must use City resources responsibly, securely, and in accordance with applicable City policies. Employees are responsible for safeguarding City equipment, data, account credentials, passwords, and confidential or sensitive information from loss, damage, unauthorized access, or disclosure.

Limited Personal Use

Secure and incidental personal use of City communication and information technology resources is permitted when the use:

- Is limited in frequency and duration;
- Results in no or minimal cost to the City;
- Does not interfere with the employee's duties or productivity;
- Does not disrupt City operations or network performance;
- Results in minimal wear on City equipment;
- Does not negatively reflect on the City; and
- Otherwise complies with City policies and applicable law.

Personal use is a privilege and may be limited or withdrawn at any time.

Ownership, Monitoring, and Privacy

City communication systems, information technology resources, and City information are the property of the City. This includes records of use and information created, received, accessed, transmitted, processed, or stored through City systems or equipment.

Employees have no right to or reasonable expectation of privacy when using City communication or information technology resources, including for permitted personal use. Subject to applicable law, the City may monitor, access, audit, inspect, record, retrieve, preserve, or disclose information maintained on or transmitted through its systems without prior notice. City information may also be subject to disclosure under the Texas Public Information Act, subpoena, discovery request, or other legal process.

Prohibited Uses

City communication and information technology resources may not be used for:

- Commercial activities, private financial gain, or outside employment;
- Campaign or political activities;
- Unauthorized religious, charitable, fundraising, or other non-City activities;
- Illegal, discriminatory, harassing, offensive, or inappropriate activities;
- Accessing or distributing prohibited content;
- Sending unauthorized mass communications or chain messages;
- Storing or transmitting City information through unauthorized personal email, cloud-storage, or third-party services;
- Installing unauthorized software or applications; or
- Circumventing or compromising City cybersecurity controls.

Employees must promptly report suspected phishing attempts, security incidents, and lost, stolen, or compromised City equipment or information in accordance with City procedures.

Violations may result in restricted or removed access to City resources, reimbursement obligations, corrective action up to and including indefinite suspension or termination, and applicable civil or criminal penalties.

For additional information regarding use of City communication and information technology resources, please review Administrative Policy 8-1: Acceptable Use of City Data, Information Systems and Executive Order 1-48: Information Technology Security, as applicable.

Operation of City Vehicles

Employees who operate a City-owned, leased, rented, or privately owned vehicle while conducting City business must comply with Administrative Policy 2-2, all departmental vehicle requirements, and applicable federal, state, and local laws.

Employees authorized to drive on City business must:

- Possess and carry a current, valid driver's license, permit, or commercial driver's license, including any endorsements required for the vehicle or position;
- Complete required driver-safety training;
- Operate the vehicle safely, courteously, and responsibly;
- Use required occupant-restraint systems and ensure passengers comply with applicable safety requirements;

- Carry only authorized passengers;
- Use the vehicle only for authorized City business;
- Keep the vehicle reasonably clean and secure; and
- Promptly report unsafe conditions, mechanical problems, damage, loss, or theft.

City vehicles may not be used for personal errands or unauthorized transportation. Smoking and vaping are prohibited in City vehicles. Employees must comply with restrictions on mobile phones, tablets, messaging devices, headphones, and other electronic equipment while driving.

An employee may not operate a vehicle on City business while impaired by alcohol, a controlled substance, medication, a medical condition, fatigue, or any other condition that could interfere with safe driving. Any such condition must be reported to the employee's supervisor immediately.

Motor-vehicle incidents occurring while an employee is driving on City business must be reported to the employee's supervisor immediately. The employee must complete all required reports and cooperate with applicable post-incident procedures, which may include alcohol and controlled-substance testing.

Employees who drive on City business must also report changes affecting their driving eligibility, including license suspension, revocation, cancellation, restriction, expiration, disqualification, applicable moving-violation convictions, and other potentially disqualifying events.

Assignment of a City vehicle is not an employee entitlement and may be denied, limited, or withdrawn when determined to be in the City's or department's best interest. Violations may result in removal of City driving privileges and corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension or termination.

For additional information regarding operating a City vehicle, please review Administrative Policy 2-2: Motor Vehicle Use.

Solicitation and Distribution

To maintain a safe, productive, and orderly work environment, employees and outside individuals generally may not solicit City employees who are on duty or distribute non-business materials in City facilities without authorization.

Solicitation includes, but is not limited to:

- Requesting contributions, gifts, or donations;
- Selling products, services, memberships, or other items;
- Requesting financial or other support for an organization, charity, business, or individual;
- Requesting signatures on petitions;
- Advocating for or against a candidate, proposition, cause, organization, program, or interest; and
- Posting or distributing nonwork-related literature or electronic communications.

Limited solicitation may be permitted in designated areas with the department director's written approval and must be conducted in accordance with Executive Order 1-51. Approved solicitation must be professional,

minimally disruptive, and discontinued if the person being solicited objects or expresses disinterest.

City equipment and resources, including email, mail services, telephones, computers, internet access, copiers, fax machines, and postage, may not be used for solicitation. These restrictions do not apply to City-sponsored or City-approved programs, such as the Combined Municipal Campaign.

For additional information regarding solicitation within the workplace, please review Executive Order 1-51: Employment Solicitation.

Gifts

Employees may not directly or indirectly accept a gift or other benefit under circumstances that create an appearance of impropriety or suggest an intent to influence City business.

A gift or benefit includes food, goods, services, money, lodging, transportation, discounts, rebates, privileges, or anything else of value or economic advantage. Restrictions apply particularly when the person or organization offering the benefit:

- Conducts or seeks to conduct business with the City;
- Holds or seeks a City contract or purchase order;
- Is subject to City permitting, licensing, inspection, or regulation;
- Represents interests before the City;
- Has a claim or pending litigation involving the City; or
- May benefit personally or professionally from City action.

Limited exceptions may apply when participation substantially benefits the City and advance authorization is obtained. Employees who are uncertain whether a gift or benefit may be accepted should consult their supervisor, department human resources representative, department director, or the appropriate ethics authority before accepting it.

For additional information regarding accepting gifts, please review Executive Order 1-28: Executive Order Regarding Gifts and Chapter 18 of the City Code.

Smoking and Tobacco Use

Smoking is prohibited in enclosed areas owned, leased, or controlled by the City, including City vehicles. Smoking is also prohibited within 25 feet of a public building's entrance or exit.

Smoking is permitted only in designated outdoor areas and must comply with all posted restrictions, departmental requirements, and applicable law. The use of electronic cigarettes, vaping devices, and similar products is subject to the same restrictions where required by City policy or ordinance.

Employment of Relatives

The City's nepotism policy is intended to prevent actual or perceived favoritism, conflicts of interest, and inappropriate influence involving relatives in the workplace.

Employees generally may not:

- Directly or indirectly supervise a relative;
- Give administrative direction to a relative;
- Be supervised by a relative; or
- Report to the same immediate supervisor as a relative when prohibited by City policy.

For purposes of this policy, a relative includes family members identified in Mayor's Policy 104. Employees must disclose a relationship that may create a prohibited supervisory or reporting arrangement and cooperate with any steps necessary to resolve the conflict.

Questions concerning the hiring, promotion, transfer, supervision, or assignment of relatives should be directed to the department human resources representative before the personnel action occurs.

For additional information regarding hiring of relatives, please review Mayor's Policy 104: Hiring of Relatives.

NOTE: Revisions or updates of these rules and/or procedures will be provided by the Human Resources Department periodically.