

SYLVESTER TURNER

ABOUT SYLVESTER TURNER

The Power of Vision, Collaboration, Resilience, and Transformation

The Honorable Sylvester Turner's story began in the Acres Homes community in northwest Houston where he was born and raised as one of nine children in a modest two-bedroom home.

Turner's mother worked as a maid in the old Rice Hotel in Houston. His father worked as a painter for Continental Enesco. On the weekends, he cut yards with his sons to make extra money. Tragically, the Turner family lost him to cancer when Turner was 13 years old.

As a kid in the 1960s, Turner often rode the Number 44 bus to downtown Houston, looking up at the tall buildings and dreaming of success.

Fifty years later, he became mayor of the nation's fourth largest city, serving two terms. Turner often says, "If you can dream it, you can do it," one of many axioms that have come to define his optimism over many years.

Turner's eight years as mayor of Houston – the nation's most diverse and inclusive city – were defined by his ability to formulate a shared vision, build bridges and relationships in every community, develop partnerships, and generate consensus – skills that resulted in a number of visionary and transformational initiatives.

The City of Houston became a national model on multiple platforms during his watch, lauded for achieving historic pension reform, reducing homelessness, leading the global

energy transition, supporting the growth of an innovative technology ecosystem, and investing in neighborhoods that have been underserved for decades through his signature equity initiative, Complete Communities.



While such accomplishments would be major by any measure, Mayor Turner simultaneously managed the city's response to seven federally declared disasters during his eight-year tenure. Along with 2017's Hurricane Harvey, the most punishing storm in the region's history, Turner oversaw the city's rebound from the Tax Day Flood of 2016, Tropical Storm Imelda in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricane Laura and the summer of national civil unrest in 2020, Winter Storm Uri in 2021, and tornadoes in

2023 across southeast Houston.

Turner introduced a number of transformational initiatives that are making the city a better, more equitable place for all of its citizens. Highlights include:

Financial Stability

- Landmark pension reforms that shaved more than \$6 billion from the city's pension systems liability, rescuing the city from the threat of bankruptcy, and creating a national model for comprehensively addressing retirement pensions
- Additional reforms that reduced the city's liability for other post-employment benefits by \$4.6 billion
- Eight balanced budgets during seven federally declared disasters without a single city employee being laid off

Public Safety

- One Safe Houston, a comprehensive, holistic, initiative to address violent crime by putting more officers on the ground, increasing funding for crisis intervention, domestic violence, mental/ behavioral issues, homelessness and substance abuse – resulting in an 11% drop in homicides, 9.4% drop in violent crime, and lower police response times of any major American city
- Strong and compassionate leadership in the wake of George Floyd’s murder – Houston was the only major U.S. city that did not need a curfew that summer – leading to substantial, community-driven reforms to policing and our criminal justice system
- Expansion of the Hire Houston Youth program from 450 summer jobs to 20,080 summer jobs for Houston youth

Homelessness & Housing

- The largest homeless housing initiative in Houston’s history, providing permanent, supportive housing to more than 14,000 people and decommissioning 113 homeless encampments, and reducing the number of people living on the streets by 38%
- Affordable Home Development program and related incentives that spurred the construction of 3,000 single-family affordable homes and 13,000 affordable multi-family housing units

Quality of Life

- Complete Communities – the mayor’s signature equity initiative to bring resources and investments to historically underserved and under-resourced neighborhoods
- Reinventing parks across the city, including partnerships with park conservancies, major donors, and Harris County

to transform Memorial Park, create Buffalo Bayou East, and complete the Houston Botanic Garden

- 50/50 Parks Initiative to improve park equity, securing corporate sponsors to make game-changing improvements to 22 neighborhood parks across the city.
- Improvements to the city’s arts programs to address bias

against Houston’s BIPOC, female, and Latino artists in grants awards, art collecting, and art commissioning; Investments to help the creative community recover and build resilience in the wake of disasters

Environment & Sustainability

- National leadership, including service as Chair of U.S. Climate Mayors, Inaugural Chair of Resilient Cities Networks, and a member of the C40 Cities Global Climate Leadership Group and the Environmental Protection Agency’s Local Government Advisory Committee
- City’s first Climate Action Plan, Resilient Houston Strategy, decarbonization policy for city buildings
- Sunnyside Landfill Solar Project, transforming the old Sunnyside Dump into the nation’s largest urban solar farm and addressing a 50-year environmental injustice
- 1.4 million trees planted and a new Tree Equity platform to encourage the

planting of trees where they are needed most.

- “A” rating from the Carbon Disclosure Project, U.S. Green Building Council’s Gold certification in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Cities

Services and Infrastructure

- Alief Neighborhood Center and Park, which replaced a worn, 60-year-old recreation center with a model for



It matters not whether you are a Democrat or Republican or whether you’re black, brown, white or Asian. Whether you’re rich or poor or in between; whether you’re educated or uneducated.

What matters to me is that we are all Houston, and we will stand and work for Houston and for its future.”

– Sylvester Turner
Inauguration Speech
January 4, 2016

integrated community development – the first in Houston to offer services from three city departments under one roof

- Sunnyside Health & Multi-Service Center, which combined a health center and multi-service center to tackle disparities in this historically under-resourced community
- Northeast Water Purification Plant expansion, which meets the fast-growing regional population’s demand for clean drinking water and reduces Houston’s dependence on groundwater, a major cause of flood-inducing subsidence
- Strategic investments in airport infrastructure, technology, team members and an arts program, including \$3.2 billion in capital improvements projects

Civic Innovation

- Smart City initiative and Smart City digital alliance with Microsoft, bringing innovations in big data, artificial intelligence and the digital economy to city operations
- #Silicon Bayou initiative, fostering startups in collaboration with the Greater Houston Partnership, Central Houston, and major institutions
- Houston’s top pitchman and lead civic host for national and international sports championships in more than 30 types of competitions, from the Super Bowl to NCAA championships, to the U.S. Women’s Open, to the Bassmaster classic fishing tournament and more

The accomplishments above are just the highlights of a much broader set of accomplishments during Turner’s eight years as Mayor of Houston. During that time, Turner was recognized many times for his service:

- In 2017, Mayor Turner received the Ohtli Award, the Mexican government’s highest honor. In March 2020, the University of Houston’s Master of Public Administration Program honored Mayor Turner with the Pioneer of Public Service Award.
- In 2022, The United States Conference of Mayors, Americans for the Arts presented Local Arts Leadership Award to him. He also received Rice Kinder Institute’s 2023 Stephen L. Klineberg Award.

■ Also in 2023, Mayor Turner was honored with the President’s Award at the National Urban League Conference Whitney M. Young, Jr. Awards Gala, the Legacy of Leadership Award in honor of Turner’s unwavering support of The Ensemble Theatre, and the President Bush Medal for the Empowerment of People with Disabilities.

- Throughout his tenure, numerous publications and news outlets such as 60 Minutes, MSNBC, CNN, CNBC, and FOX News have recognized Mayor Turner as a thought leader.
- The Wall Street Journal, Black Enterprise Magazine, Cuba Today Magazine, Ebony, New York Times, Washington Post, Bloomberg, and USA Today have also featured Mayor Turner for his leadership and accomplishments.

Prior to serving as mayor, Turner represented the people of House District 139 in the Texas House of Representatives for 27 years. A Democrat skilled at building consensus across party lines, he led a number of influential committees and supported legislation to broaden public access to doctors, mental healthcare, and legal aid.

Turner worked on the House Appropriations Committee for 21 years and served as Speaker Pro Tem for three terms. He was appointed to several Budget Conference Committees to balance the state’s budget and served on the Legislative Budget Board.

In his final term in the Texas House of Representatives, Texas Monthly named Turner (again) one of Texas’ Ten Best Legislators. The magazine described Turner as “eloquent” and “never compromising his values” and called his desk on the House floor “a gravitational force, drawing lawmakers to him for advice and strategy.”

Before his service in the state legislature, Turner co-founded the law firm of Barnes and Turner, after working as a corporate and business defense trial attorney at Fulbright & Jaworski.

Turner is a graduate of Harvard Law School and the University of Houston. The pride of his life is his daughter Ashley Turner, who lives in Houston.