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## Mayor Turner Names "Recovery Czar"; Again Urges Landlords to Stop Victimizing Tenants

BY MEAGAN FLYNN  
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**Mayor Sylvester Turner announced Thursday that Marvin Odum, a former Shell CEO, has been appointed the so-called "recovery czar" to lead Houston's rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Harvey.**

Odum had been charged with rebuilding Shell's oil and gas facilities after Hurricane Katrina, and Turner commended his "extensive experience in large-scale crisis management." Odum will be tasked this time with not just rebuilding Houston, but trying to mitigate the chances that the same structures would be damaged or flooded again the next time a major rainstorm hits the city, based on how they are repaired in the near future.

"This is a defining moment for the city of Houston," Turner said. "It's not enough for us just to rebuild in the same way in the same place. If we do that, we will miss the mark, and quite frankly, we will miss the opportunity this storm has afforded us. We have to rebuild so that we will be better prepared and more resilient in the future."



*The road to recovery's going to be a long one. Photo by Joe Fanelli*

Odum, who has an engineering degree from the University of Texas, will work closely with the city's "flood czar," Steve Costello, who was appointed to help mitigate flooding problems following the Tax Day floods of 2016. Odum has agreed to take the position without a salary.

"This is an urgent situation for a lot of people," Odum said. "Those immediate needs won't be forgotten. That's the overarching element I think you'll see as we move forward."

Odum said he and the board of advisers he has yet to appoint will work with a sense of urgency, never failing to forget the thousands of flood victims counting on a speedy recovery.

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Right now, many of the city's flood victims are still in limbo, waiting on help.

Just over a thousand people remain at the George R. Brown Convention Center, Turner said at an earlier press conference Thursday — that one about the city's urgent housing needs. About one-third of them are homeless. On Wednesday, City Council approved a leasing and management agreement with New Hope Housing to open up a former Star of Hope shelter to 300 people displaced by Harvey or who are homeless.

Still, the top priority, Turner said, is getting people into apartments — and vacancies are limited. Turner said the Houston Housing and Community Development Department has identified 2,500 vacant apartment units that have been put on hold for flood victims. But he emphasized that the market was still strapped, and people with friends or family willing to temporarily take them in were encouraged to seek temporary housing there.

Others, he and other housing advocates said, are living in uninhabitable apartments — some with landlords who are threatening evictions. Faith leaders from **The Metropolitan Organization** again joined the mayor to describe situations in which landlords were taking rent — but then kicking out tenants or not doing any repairs. In which people have been told to remain in their moldy apartments lest they want to lose their deposit and illegally break their lease if they leave. And in which financially strapped flood victims who have not been working since the flood are unable to pay rent.

Turner had strong words for any landlord treating tenants in this way — saying that if he finds out about landlords taking people's money and leaving them in filthy conditions or evicting them,

he would not hesitate to contact the Harris County District Attorney's Office and publicly call the landlords out.

"We are not going to tolerate anybody in this city being victimized because they may be poor or because they may be undocumented or because they may not speak the language. We expect people to treat people right, with dignity and respect...This is not the time when we need to be insensitive to the needs of people within our city because of their socioeconomic status, because of the language they speak or because of where they may come from."

He stressed that undocumented immigrants should not be afraid to ask for assistance because of their status, saying they will not be asked for papers.