

A PROPOSAL FOR THE EAST END

Rapid Response

Galveston already flies one aircraft, funded for catalytic converter theft. Rapid response needs its own: an upgraded aircraft, docked at a secure location on the East End, that reaches the whole east end and the water around it. What we do not have yet is that aircraft, a funded answer for what it costs to keep flying, or the policy that keeps this a response tool instead of a surveillance argument.

Three things to fix, and a way to pay for all three

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For the neighborhoods and the port.

Residents are not asking us to solve crime. They are asking why nobody gets there in time. The channel and the terminals need the same answer on the water.



Community benefit

Shots at night that nobody can place, and street racing that moves a block ahead of the patrol car. Callers on both give up on us.



Port security

Cruise terminals, cargo piers and the ship channel. An aircraft overhead can search for a swimmer, check a vessel or spot a drone that does not belong.

Both are problems of arrival time and of eyes, not of manpower alone. The same program that marks where shots came from can be over the channel in minutes, under the same written rules. **When minutes matter and a faster response costs this little, it belongs on the table.**

Near the port, every minute counts.

Downtown and the East End

Next door to the port

These blocks sit beside the cruise terminals and the ship channel. A threat to the port is a threat on their street.

First on scene

About two minutes

In a 2026 study of a California police drone program, the drone arrived in about two minutes on average. It beat patrol units to the scene on 73 percent of calls.

On the water

Twice as fast to a swimmer

In a beach trial, a drone dropped a life buoy 100 meters offshore in a median of 30 seconds. A rescue swimmer took 65 seconds.

Against a hostile drone

About 99 percent stopped

With detection and interceptors ready before the attack, Israel and its partners stopped about 99 percent of more than 300 drones and missiles in April 2024.

Sources: American Journal of Criminal Justice, 2026, a descriptive study of one California agency's drone program, October 2025 to January 2026; Backman and others, Air Medical Journal, 2018; Israeli military figures as reported by PBS NewsHour, April 2024. Results elsewhere are a guide, not a promise.

WHERE WE ALREADY ARE

The city has bought this already.

The Department already flies one aircraft. Its grant ties it to catalytic converter theft, so this program needs its own.

\$150,000

State grant from the Motor Vehicle Crime Prevention Authority for a Flock Aerodome system

\$25,000

The city's cash match, which is the twenty percent the program requires

60 seconds

What the Chief told council the aircraft can put over a scene

So the argument is no longer whether Galveston should fly. It is whether a drone funded for one crime is the whole answer for 911 and the port.

Purchase request and the sixty second figure as reported by [The Galveston County Daily News](#), grant and match figures from its [roundup of the state grant program](#). Note that \$25,000 is not twenty percent of \$150,000, so confirm the award amount, the match, whether council approved it, and the aircraft's home base with the Department before presenting this.

WHERE WE ALREADY ARE

Our drone is funded for one crime.



It is funded for catalytic converter theft

It came from the state catalytic converter theft grant. State law says that money is "to be used only for" catalytic converter theft. Any other 911 call needs the grant office's approval and city money.



It cannot reach the east end

Three miles from 54th Street stops around 14th Street. UTMB, Stewart Beach, Fish Village, the ferry landing, Beachtown and Bolivar Roads are outside it.



It cannot be in two places

One aircraft and one dock. When it is on a call, charging, grounded by weather or down for maintenance, nothing else is in the air.



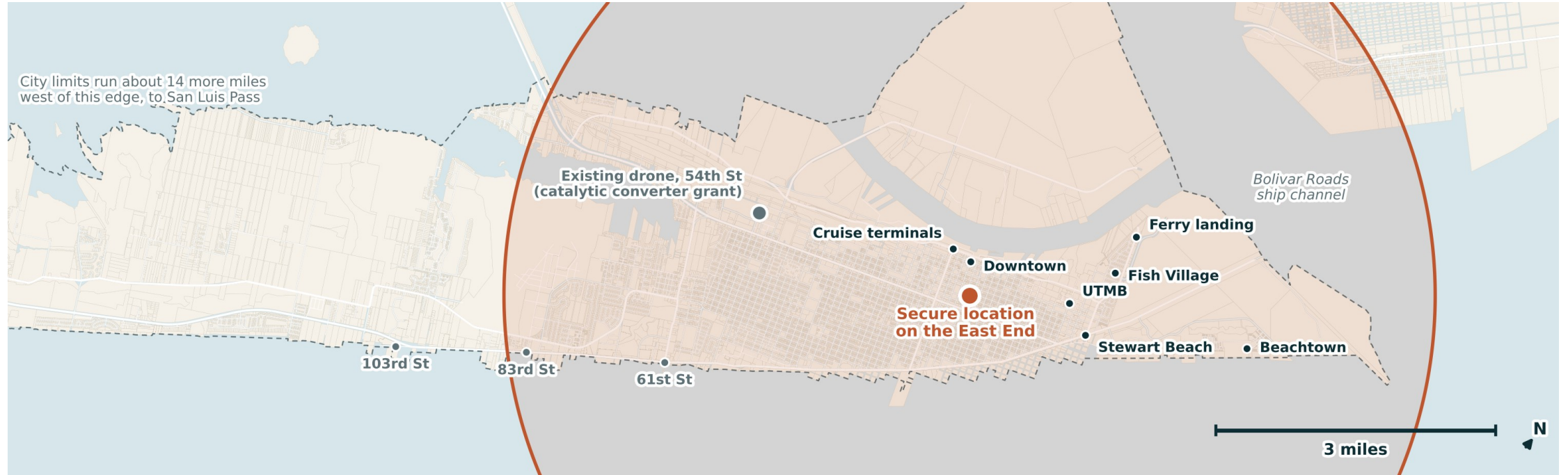
It cannot stop a hostile drone

It is a camera, not a countermeasure. Detecting or disabling a drone takes approved equipment and FBI-certified officers under federal law.

City of Galveston grant no. 608-26-0840400C, "GPD Catalytic Converter Theft Reduction Program," \$533,212 (MVCPA FY2026 grant listing). Transportation Code section 1006.153(e); MVCPA Grant Administrative Manual section 3.3.2.1 on changes in use. Range is the three-mile working assumption. Counter-drone authority: 6 U.S.C. 124n.

WHAT EACH LAUNCH POINT BUYS

Drawn to scale from parcel maps.



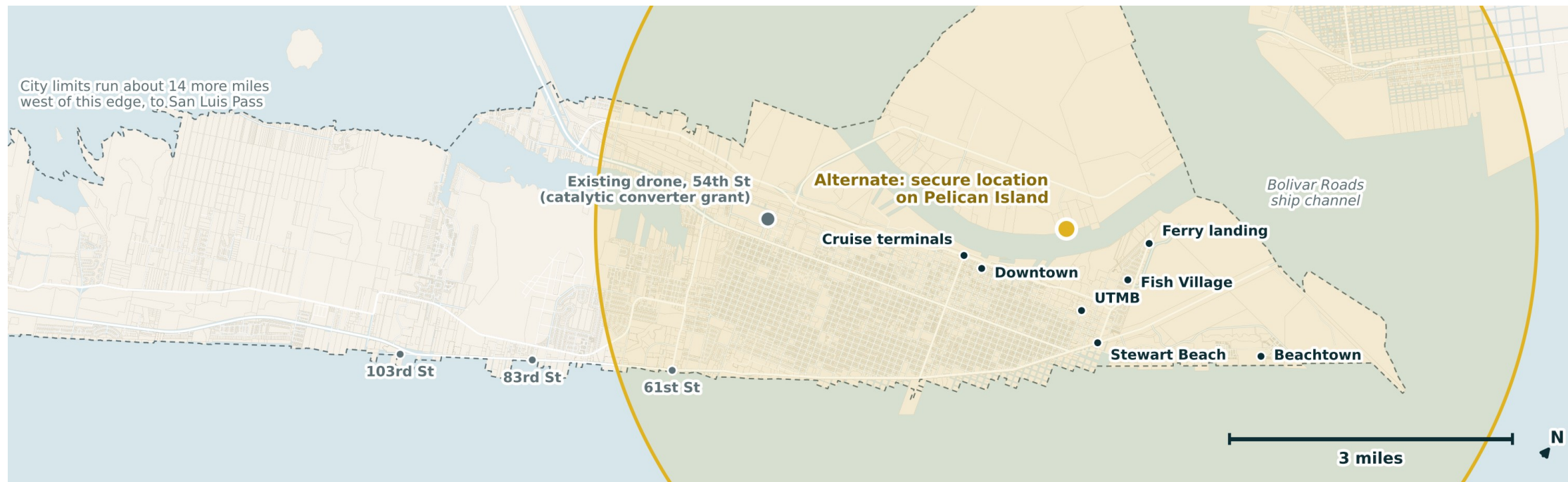
The new aircraft is an upgraded five-mile model. From either location it reaches downtown, the cruise terminals, UTMB, Stewart Beach, Fish Village, the ferry landing, Beachtown, the channel and Bolivar Roads.

From the East End location it reaches about 62 percent of the city's property parcels, west to about 86th Street. From the Pelican Island location it reaches about 57 percent, west to about 70th Street.

Galveston Central Appraisal District parcel, street and city limit data, April 14, 2026. The new aircraft is drawn at five miles, a range to confirm with the vendor, the Department and the FAA. The existing drone at 54th Street is shown for location only; it is funded for catalytic converter theft. Either location needs the owner's agreement.

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WHAT WOULD MAKE IT A PROGRAM

An idea is like a table.

Every table needs at least three legs to stand on. An aircraft is not a program. These three things have to be true at once, and each one pays for a weakness in the others.

I

Its own launch point

An upgraded five-mile aircraft at a secure location on the East End, with a secure location on Pelican Island as the alternate, funded and flown for this program and not borrowed from another.

2

A funded second year

The grant buys hardware. Pilots, batteries, software and the replacement airframe come out of the general fund. Price that through year six before we order anything.

3

Rules in writing, first

A published use and retention policy and a public report, adopted before the new aircraft flies rather than after somebody sues.

Fund one and you have a gadget. Fund all three and you have something that survives a budget cycle and a public hearing.

LEG ONE

Where it launches from.

The drone at 54th Street is funded for catalytic converter theft. This program needs its own: an upgraded five-mile aircraft at a secure location on the East End, or at the alternate, a secure location on Pelican Island, covering the whole east end and the water around it.



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A launch point of its own.



It is a rooftop, not a building

A docked aircraft needs a secure roof, power and connectivity. The first site to price is a secure location on the East End. A secure location on Pelican Island is the alternate.



It covers the east end and the water

From either location, five miles takes in downtown, the cruise terminals, UTMB, Stewart Beach, Fish Village, the ferry landing, Beachtown, the channel and Bolivar Roads.



It is its own program

The existing drone is funded for catalytic converter theft. This aircraft is funded and flown for 911 response and threats on the water, under its own written rules.



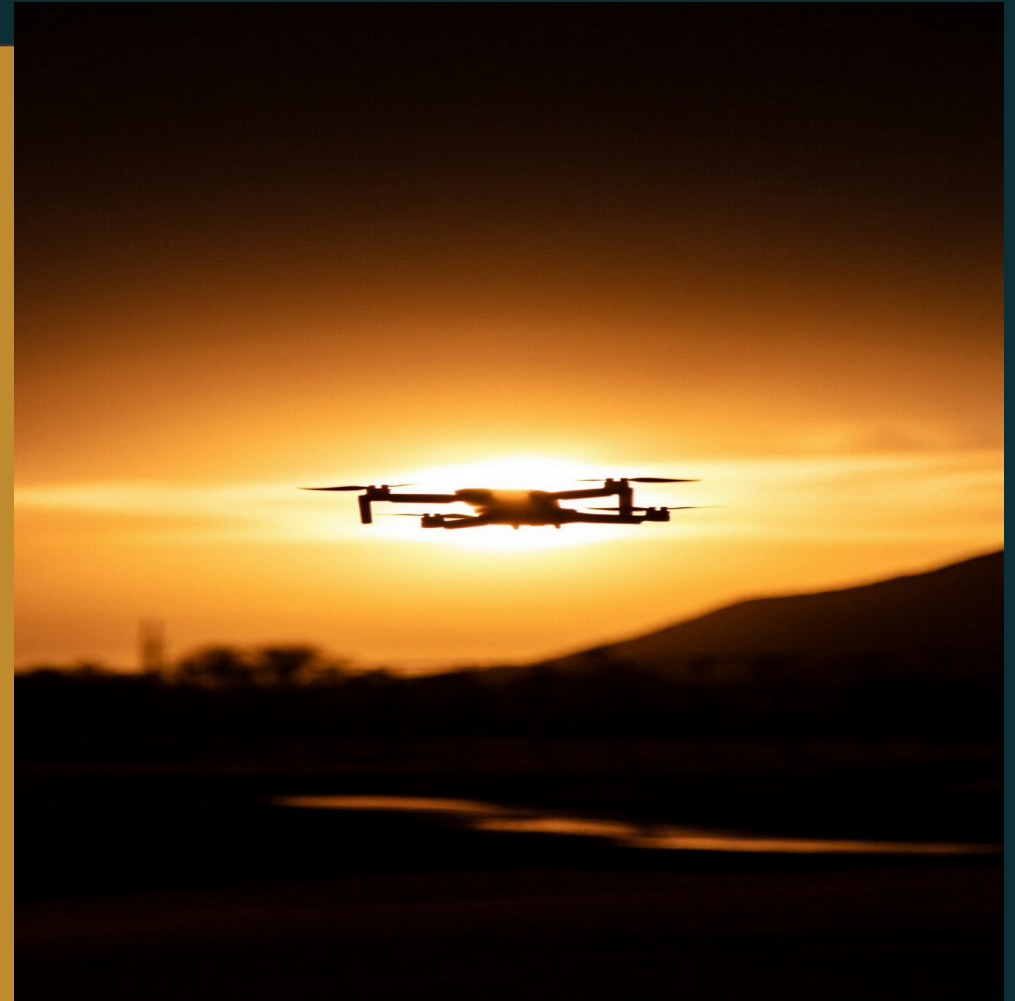
It is the cheap half of the program

The aircraft and the dock are the one time cost. What recurs is software, training and pilots, and that is the part leg two is about.

LEG TWO

What it costs to keep it flying.

The grant is the easy part. The bill that arrives every year after is the one that decides whether this program survives.



LEG TWO

The grant buys it. The city keeps it.

Most grants buy equipment for a year or two. Pilots, batteries, licenses and the airframe that wears out in year four fall to the city.

What grants cover

The aircraft, the dock, detection equipment and training, within each grant's period and match.

What they do not promise

Pilot hours, batteries, connectivity and software renewals year after year, and the replacement cycle.

What that runs elsewhere

Schenectady, a city of 69,471, pays \$694,994 over six years for a single launch point.

So we name our number first

Price years two through six, publish it, and adopt it before the new aircraft is ordered.

This is the leg that decides whether we are still flying in year four.

LEG THREE

The rules, in writing, first.

Adopted before the new aircraft flies, not after somebody has to sue to find out what they were.



LEG THREE

Write the rules before it flies.

Launch on a call, not on a hunch

The aircraft goes up because a call came in. No patrol patterns, no orbiting a neighborhood, no flights looking for something to find.

A retention clock in writing

Footage that is not evidence gets deleted on a stated schedule, and the schedule is published rather than left to the vendor's default.

Say who else can see it

Name every agency and every vendor the data touches. The Police Department flies it, so the list starts with one department.

Report it the way big cities must

Every flight, why it launched, what it assisted, what it swept up incidentally, and what it cost. Published, not filed.

None of this is exotic. The last card is the report the Legislature already requires of police in cities and counties over 150,000. We would adopt it by choice in a city of about 53,000 because it is the right way to run the thing.

HOW FAR I WOULD GO

Publish the flight log, not the video.

Two cities already let anyone open this without filing a request. Both are worth copying. One thing is not.

Lewisville, Texas

A public dashboard that updates on a short delay while flights are up. Map pins are randomized on purpose, so it never publishes the caller's address.

Chula Vista

Every flight afterward: date, time, case number, block address, call type and the path on a map, archived back years.

What we do not copy

Live video to the public. It broadcasts a stranger's worst afternoon and it is one bad link away from something worse.

The vendors already collect this data. Publishing it is a policy decision, not a purchase.

Dashboards operated by the [Lewisville Police Department](#) and the [Chula Vista Police Department](#). On the third card: in June 2026 researchers found five San Francisco Police drone feeds, color and thermal, on the open internet behind a passwordless sharing link for six months, with thousands of GPS coordinates and the pilots' names, [as reported by DroneXL](#).

The state's report, filed by choice.

Government Code Chapter 423

- Section 423.008 has police post a public report on every drone flight, every two years
- It applies only to police in cities and counties over 150,000 people. Ours is about 53,000
- So for our Police Department the report is optional. Senate Bill 2569 put it online in 2025
- Section 423.007 leaves drone rules to DPS. Our written rules are our own proposal

Optional is the opportunity

● It costs nothing to adopt

The statute already lists what goes in: when, where, why, what it helped with and what it cost.

● It is the answer to the objection

The strongest answer to a worry about surveillance is a report anyone can read.

● It is ready for the next change

The Legislature changed this report in 2025. A program built to the full standard now does not get rebuilt when it changes again.

Local police can now stop drones.

SAFER SKIES Act

- Codified at 6 U.S.C. 124n, it opened counter-drone authority to local police on July 1, 2026
- Detect, track and warn: officers certify through an online FBI course
- Disable or seize a drone: in-person FBI training, an approved system and notice to the FAA
- Mitigations are reported to DOJ and DHS within 48 hours. Authority ends December 31, 2031.

What it means on the water

- **Detection is the first step**
Sensors that watch for drones over the terminals and the channel need only the online certification. They watch aircraft, not people.
- **Stopping one takes certified officers**
Only trained agency officers may disable a drone, and contractors may not. That staffing belongs in the leg two budget.
- **It fits money already on the table**
The FEMA counter-drone grant pays for detection and mitigation, and ports, cities and counties can apply under the state.

THE OBJECTION WE WILL GET

This town is already having this fight.

The camera contracts drew an ACLU of Texas objection, a Daily News editorial asking council to slow down, and a non binding ballot question up the road in League City. Pretending otherwise is how you lose the room.

A camera watches a place

- It is always on and nobody called it
- It collects everyone who passes, all day
- The argument is about what it keeps and who it is shared with

This answers a call

- It launches because a person dialed 911
- It goes to one address and comes home
- It can be logged flight by flight, which a fixed camera cannot

That distinction only holds if we write it down and hold ourselves to it. That is leg three, and it is why leg three is not optional.

The [Daily News editorial board asked council to defer the vote](#) and let residents see the proposal first. That is a process argument, and it is one we can meet.

TIMING

The FAA has to say yes first.

It flies miles to a call, past where the pilot can see. That takes FAA permission.

TODAY

Case by case

Police may fly beyond the pilot's sight only with FAA permission granted to that agency. It takes months to get.

IN FRONT OF US

Part 108

One standing FAA rule for these flights. Proposed in August 2025, and in final White House review since July 10, 2026.

AFTER THAT

Phased in

The final rule will set its own start dates. Departments that already hold FAA permission will be ready first.

Do not wait for the rule. FAA permission and the interlocal agreement both take months, so both should start now.

Part 108 proposed rule, 90 Federal Register 38212, August 7, 2025; under White House review since July 10, 2026, and not published as of late September 2026. Today agencies fly beyond sight under an FAA certificate of authorization or a public safety waiver.

WHAT THE FAA CHECKS

Height is not the only FAA rule.



Height is not sight

A drone must stay under 400 feet and in its pilot's sight. They are separate rules. A flight miles out to a call breaks the sight rule at any height.



Low is how the waiver works

The FAA's public safety waiver allows flights beyond sight at or below 200 feet, close to buildings and trees. Up to 400 feet takes approved gear that detects other aircraft.



The airport's airspace

Scholes airport's controlled airspace reaches 4.1 miles out, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. It covers about 60 percent of the parcels the new aircraft reaches, from about 31st Street west. Flights there need FAA approval.



Crowds and darkness

Flying over crowds at the terminals or Stewart Beach needs an approved aircraft type, prop guards or a parachute, except to save a life. Night flights are allowed with lighting and training.

14 CFR 107.29, 107.31, 107.39, 107.41 and 107.51; FAA public safety Part 91 BVLOS waiver checklists, 200-foot and detect-and-avoid, 2025; Galveston Class D, Federal Register Doc. 05-23847, December 9, 2005; tower hours per FAA airport data. Overlap computed from appraisal district parcels.

Buy an aircraft the grant can pay for.



Federal money has a list

The American Security Drone Act bars federal funds from buying covered foreign unmanned aircraft. A grant that pays for the wrong airframe is a grant that gets clawed back.



The supply side already moved

The review Congress set for the largest foreign manufacturer was not completed by its December 2025 deadline, and the consequence was a new equipment authorization freeze rather than a flight ban.



Austin tried this in Texas

House Bill 41 in the 89th session would have restricted governmental entities from acquiring covered foreign equipment. It did not reach the floor. It will be back.



So buy for the worst case

An airframe that satisfies the federal list keeps every funding door open and cannot be grounded by the next session. Anything else is a bet on a legislature.

This is research, not a legal opinion or a procurement recommendation. Purchasing under Local Government Code Chapter 252 still applies and the City Attorney and Purchasing should verify the current federal list before any award.

Next in line, and coming back around.

FEMA Counter-UAS Grant Program

Next round: \$250 million

Pays to detect, track and stop hostile drones, with no local match. It runs through the Governor’s office, and the FY2027 notice is expected but not yet posted.

FEMA Port Security Grant Program

Next round expected mid-2027

The Port applies, with a 25 percent match. Drones and drone detection are allowed. The FY2026 round closed July 24, 2026, and the program returns every year.

Closed or closing before we can act, and back every cycle

DOJ Byrne JAG, local award. Due October 9, 2026, before our next meeting. About \$35,000 to the City and the County, with no match, and drones are now allowed with prior federal approval.

FEMA Homeland Security Grant Program, Houston area. Closed July 24, 2026. Galveston County is inside the Houston urban area; projects need a terrorism-prevention link.

DOJ COPS Community Policing Development microgrants. Closed August 24, 2026. Up to \$200,000 with no match, and the 2026 notice named drones.

BJA FY2026 JAG Local solicitation; FEMA C-UAS, Port Security and Homeland Security grant notices; COPS FY2026 microgrant notice. Dates and amounts change each cycle and should be checked against the current notice.

THE ASK

Four things, none of them a purchase.

WHAT I AM ASKING FOR

A first step

- Seek an interlocal agreement among the City, the County and the Port
- Ask whether the County would help fund the program and help find a secure home for the dock on the East End
- Price the five-mile aircraft and its running cost through year six
- Adopt written flight rules and the state's public flight report, by choice

WHAT I AM NOT ASKING FOR

No money tonight

- No purchase, no contract and no budget amendment
- No new authority over anybody's data
- Nothing that cannot be undone at the next meeting

The last item is the one to lead with. It costs nothing, it answers the loudest objection in the room, and it is the reason the others get a hearing.

WHERE THIS LEAVES US

The money exists. Here is the work.

WHAT IS AVAILABLE

Money and authority

- FEMA counter-drone money, about \$250 million, opening next
- Port security grant, next round expected mid-2027
- Homeland security and federal JAG grants, back every year
- State law already lists port security as a lawful drone use

WHAT WE HAVE TO OVERCOME

The work before the money

- An interlocal agreement, a roof, and the County's help with funding
- A use policy that ties every flight to a lawful use under Chapter 423
- An aircraft on the federal approved list, and FAA approval to fly beyond sight
- Certified officers for any drone takedown, and a local share of the cost

None of it is out of reach. All of it moves faster when the City, the County and the Port work from the same calendar.



We live on an island.

There are only so many ways off it. That is a strategic advantage and we are not using it.

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