

# Chapter 8 changes to towing ordinances

Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee Presentation

June 17, 2021

# Houston Police Department's Auto Dealers Detail

- The Houston Police Department's Auto Dealers Detail (ADD) oversees the Automotive Industry in the City of Houston. This includes:
  - Licensing and inspecting of all automotive businesses
  - Regulating and licensing of all wrecker service providers and storage lots in the City (incident management and private property)
  - Auctioning of vehicles abandoned in private storage lots pursuant to 683 of the Transportation Code

# Towing in the City of Houston

- Any wrecker service wishing to conduct incident management tows in the City of Houston are required to have a police authorized tow service agreement (PATSA)
- The Houston Police Department's Auto Dealers Detail (ADD) is responsible for regulating and licensing all wrecker service providers in the city (incident management and private property).
- There are currently 214 active PATSAs, 56 private property companies and 891 wrecker drivers

# Purpose of ordinance changes

- Over 10 years since last major update
- Updating the PATSA and Chapter 8 will improve traffic incident management, scene clearance, and reduce safety risks to our citizens and first responders.
- The changes also reflect the current practices of the Auto Dealers Detail

## Section 8-101: Definitions

- The TDLR definition of Lawfully Hooked Up has been added for purposes of the half-price drop fee
  - lawfully hooked up means and refers to a vehicle a wrecker driver has attached to an auto wrecker, is lifted in the tow position and, if required, placed on a dolly in a raised position, with tow lights and safety chains attached and is fully prepared for transport.

## Section 8-111: Auto wrecker requirements

- Subsection (g): A medallion replacement fee was added
  - Includes an offense report requirement
- Subsection (h): A medallion transfer fee was added
  - For transferring a truck to another tow zone

## Section 8-123: Towing charges

- Subsection (a) revised to simplify the definition of “without the consent of the owner” to include all nonconsent tows
- Subsection (e) was amended to clarify that the collection of the release fee is for all vehicles released, regardless of the origin of the tow and clarifies the reasoning for the fee

## Section 8-126: PATSA

- Subsection (b) was changed to allow the Chief of Police to refuse to enter into a PATSA with individuals or entities with a documented history of misconduct
- Subsection (e) was changed to remove insurance amounts, which are found in the PATSA
- Subsections (h-k) was added to require background checks for tow company owners



## Section 8-131: Wrecker Driver & Trainee Qualifications

- Subsection (f) was added to state that drivers may only drive for the company for which they have submitted an application

## Section 8-133: Fees

- Language was included to describe the PATSA driver processing fee
  - This is not a new fee, but language was added to clarify why a PATSA license fee is higher than a private property license fee

## Section 8-136: Term; Renewal; Transfer; Replacement of Lost/Destroyed License

- Subsection (a) was amended to reflect the current Auto Dealers practice of license expiration at the end of the birth month rather than the birthday
- Subsection (c) adds a license transfer fee for drivers wishing to switch companies

## Section 8-137: Revocation, Suspension & Refusal to Renew

- Subsection (a) was amended to add violations of state laws or regulations regarding nonconsent towing as a reason to suspend or revoke a license

# Industry meetings

- Youtube videos created to explain the changes
- Redline copies of the PATSA and ordinance changes were posted on our website
- Auto dealers hosted five (5) Microsoft TEAMS meetings with the industry in March 2021
- Discussed at March 2021 Automotive Board meeting
- Discussed at March 2021 Tow and Go vendor meeting

# City Council Agenda

- HPD anticipates the fee study to be completed and presented to City Council during the first quarter of FY22.
- If approved, any new fees will be included in the Administration and Regulatory Affairs (ARA) City-Wide Fee Schedule.

## Final steps:

- Once ordinance revisions are approved by city council, auto dealers will:
  - Notify industry stakeholders of changes to ordinance
  - Create a video presentation to assist in completing new PATSA
  - Facilitate the signing of new PATSAs for all tow companies
  - Conduct inspections to ensure equipment compliance

# Public Resources

- To locate your towed vehicle at:
  - Findmytowedcar.com
- To schedule a tow hearing call:
  - 713-747-3553
- To report a complaint to HPD Auto Dealers:
  - 832-394-4800
  - [hpd.autodealers@houstonpolice.org](mailto:hpd.autodealers@houstonpolice.org)
- Additional Information regarding licensing, auctions, and motorist rights can be found on the Auto Dealers Website:
  - [https://www.houstontx.gov/police/auto\\_dealers\\_detail](https://www.houstontx.gov/police/auto_dealers_detail)