

Houston is just moving its drug problem around - not solving it - by staging the well-publicized ``Death Valley'' apartments drug sweeps, Councilman John Goodner said Wednesday.

He told City Council the city is ``throwing money down a rat hole'' by giving advance warning of raids in the Link Valley apartments area, scene of heavy drug trafficking.

The area, called ``Death Valley'' by police, was the scene of six homicides and more than 100 drug-related arrests last year.

After a week of publicity, more than 100 officers sealed off the cluster of southwest Houston apartments for several hours Friday.

The crackdown focused on about 3,000 apartment units east of Stella Link and south of the South Loop.

Police allowed only rent-paying residents to enter the area and searched vacant apartments.

Not surprisingly, no arrests were made - a sign of the program's ineffectiveness, Goodner said.

But Councilmen Rodney Ellis and Vince Ryan lauded the program and said it should serve as a prototype for similar actions in other areas.

Mayor Kathy Whitmire also defended the program, saying, ``I don't think it's a waste of money. The good is to help the neighborhood.''

Once drug dealers have moved out of the area, the mayor said, police and the community must work to see that they stay out - then systematically use the same technique to rid other neighborhoods of drugs. Audit bid defeated

Councilman Jim Greenwood's effort to halt a \$155,000 audit of the city's Water Customer Service Operation was rebuffed Wednesday by eight council members who said the study is worthwhile.

Council hired Deloitte, Haskins & Sells on Jan. 11 in response to complaints such as overbilling, incorrect cutoffs and uncommunicative clerks.

A week later, Greenwood discovered a harsh report of the department prepared last year by Public Works Director Jon Vanden Bosch. The councilman said it would be a waste of money to pay for another audit.

Vanden Bosch said the report, which outlined 52 problems, was a rough draft that included errors taken out of a less-critical final draft.

Deloitte, Haskins & Sells is expected to issue its report in about 90 days. Golf course debate

Nearly a dozen golf enthusiasts were on hand Wednesday to speak out against the proposal to lease the Hermann Park golf course to a private company.

Speakers told City Council the move would effectively exclude the elderly on fixed incomes and low-income people from participating in the sport, saying green fees would be increased. Council members, however, noted that only they can raise the fees. Walter Wissel, a regular patron of the Hermann Park links, presented a 450-name petition opposing the proposal.

Council agreed to delay a vote for three weeks and scheduled a hearing for Feb. 15.

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