

# City CURRENTS



## **METRO's Five Year Plan**

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## **Dive-In Movie**

at Colonial Park Pool

Saturday, July 19

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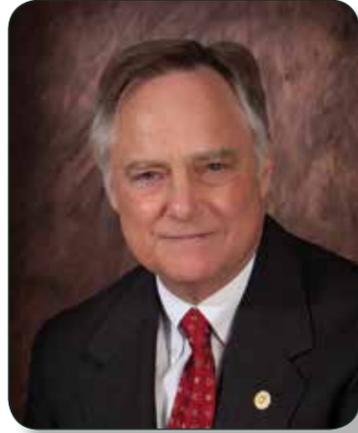
## **6 Summer Hazards for Dogs**

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**SUMMER 2014**

## From the Mayor's Desk



**M**ETRO recently introduced its “Five-Year Transit Service Plan” to the public in draft form. This is an aggressive initiative to radically improve bus service throughout Metro’s area of operation. The current system has been in place for years and is actually based on the old pre-World War II street car model. It obviously could use some radical re-thinking and Metro, to its credit, has done just that. While the initial planning process is complete and a draft plan has been introduced, it is still a work in progress. The current phase of the plan’s implementation is the solicitation of public input. The comments and suggestions gained from interested citizens during these public forums will provide the good ideas

and modifications not previously thought of. The final plan will incorporate the comments and suggestions that offer improvement over the draft. Once the plan is refined and finalized, it will be presented to the METRO board for adoption sometime in late 2014 or early 2015. The goal is to implement the new service model sometime during the second half of 2015.

Part of the new plan is renewed bus service on Wesleyan through West U. Old-timers may remember we had a bus route down Wesleyan as late as the 1980’s or early 1990’s. However, today numerous residents along and close to Wesleyan have concerns about the impact of increased bus transits on a street where traffic they believe is already too congested at certain times of the day. What can be done about that? First, let me say up front that the City has no control and little influence over METRO and its operations. However, I have found current METRO board members and senior leadership to be responsive to its customers and the small cities that support it.

Your City Council and city staff scheduled a public workshop in June to give our residents the opportunity to express their concerns directly to METRO board members and representatives of METRO staff. As with any initiative like this, the more public comments and letters we can generate the better our chances of influencing the final product. I urge you make your ideas and concerns known to Metro. I am sure that will have an impact on its final plan.

I am supportive of the overall plan METRO has presented and I think our citizens will find it superior to the service METRO now provides. While we have valid concerns of the traffic conditions on Wesleyan, I believe METRO will factor those issues into its final plan long before its implementation. We have time on our side. Any proposed changes will not begin until the second half of 2015 and will take years to fully implement. Please keep informed of the progress of this issue—Study the proposal and listen with an open mind. The plan is better than what we have, but it is not perfect. Let’s help Metro make it better.

*Bob Fry*



### City of West U Officials

#### City Council Members

- Mayor Bob Fry
- Mayor Pro-Tem Susan Sample
- Ed Heathcott
- Joan Johnson
- Dick Yehle

#### City Manager

Michael Ross

#### General Information

713.668.4441

#### City Website

[www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov)

## HAVE YOU HEARD?



**T**he city of West University Place has one of the lowest debt service tax rates in the Houston area, because of actions by the City Council to save more than \$4.7 million in future interests costs.

With a “AAA” bond rating from Standard and Poor’s, the city will be able to retire all of its general obligation debt in just 14 years.

This year, the city will pay \$8.1 million of debt service and fiscal agent fees, a decrease of \$177,600 from 2013.

Like most Texas cities, the city of West U uses bonds – or debt financing – to fund large capital improvements, such as streets, drainage, water and wastewater systems. The city’s debt service doesn’t pay for all of the bonds. The Water and Sewer Fund also provides money from user fees to repay debt.

Funding the 2014 debt service payments requires an ad valorem tax rate of 17.8 cents per \$100 of assessed value in tax year

2013, a decrease of 2.9 percent. This slight decrease is due to refinancing certain maturities of the city’s tax-supported debt. Previous West U City Councils decided to take advantage of historically low interest rates and refinanced the city’s debt.

Another factor in the City’s low debt service tax rate is a provision in the City Charter, which limits the City’s bonded debt to no more than five percent of the assessed property values. With the projected assessed value of \$4.34 billion, the current debt limit is \$216.8 million in fiscal year 2014.

As of December 31, 2013, the City will owe a total of \$74.1 million to bondholders for all existing outstanding principal. Of this total, the Debt Service Fund, using property taxes, will provide \$65.08 million. The funding for the remaining debt will be paid from user fees in the Water and Sewer Fund.

Annual debt payments on the current outstanding bonds will reach a maximum of \$8.5 million in 2020 when the outstanding bonds issued prior to 2009 will be retired.

Another factor in the City’s low debt service requirements is the city of West U’s excellent bond rating from Standards & Poor’s Investor Services. Long-term stability in assessed property values, the political stability of the community, and the underlying strength in the Houston Area economy have kept the City’s credit ratings high.

*Susan Sample*

## 2015 WEST U BUDGET PROCESS BEGINS



generally receive in November and the resulting revenue will fund the 2015 budget.

Much of the work on these items is conducted on a schedule to comply with the notice and hearing requirements of Texas Property Tax laws. The public generally only sees the final aspects of the work: the public hearings and the Council adoption of the budget and the tax rate.

**E**very summer, the West U City Council and staff begin working diligently on a new annual budget and property tax rate. This year, we are working on the 2015 budget that will take effect on January 1, 2015. The property rate being set, however, is the 2014 rate that is based on the property appraisals as of January 1, 2014. This rate will go into effect immediately after the city council passes it. The Harris County Tax Office will use that rate to generate the property tax bills that residents

The process is:

- June: department heads meet with their staff to determine the costs for which they must plan in the new budget.
- August: West U receives the 2014 property tax appraisal rolls from the Harris County Tax Office which begins the calculation of the property tax rate. Department heads meet with the City Manager and the Finance Director to prepare the proposed budget.
- September: the proposed budget will be presented in a public hearing on September 22 when all the work on the budget and tax rate culminates. Council also holds the first of several meetings related to the adoption of the budget and property tax rate.

The setting of the rate is followed by hearings only if the proposed rate is more than the effective rate. The effective rate calculation is a way to compare tax revenue from one year to the next with all things (property) being the same, an apples-to-apples comparison. Two public hearings on the tax rate are held if necessary: one on September 18 and the second at a special meeting called by Council on September 22. The public hearing on the budget is held at that same special meeting on September 22. On September 29, the Council adopts both the 2015 budget and the 2014 property tax rate. For more information about the budget process, visit the City of West University Place website at [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov).

City Currents is a quarterly publication and is printed on  recycled paper.



### Members Only Dive-In Movie

Colonial Park Pool will close at 7 p.m. on **Saturday, July 19** and reopen from 7:30 – 9:30 p.m. for special Colonial Park Pool members only dive-in movie. All attendees must have a current Colonial Park Pool membership in order to enter the facility. Like other Dive-In Movies, the whole family can enjoy the movie from either the grass or the pool, but unlike other dive-in movies, members have it all to themselves!

### Splash Blast to the Past

Missing that “two kids ago” spark? Join us on **Saturday, July 26** for a movie, dinner, swimming and more to help you relive that first date-night experience.

**Location:** Colonial Park Pool

**Time:** 7 – 11 p.m.

**Fee:** \$30 Colonial Park Pool members • \$40 Non-members

Don't have a sitter? Not a problem! We'll watch the kids too. We will entertain, feed and surprise your kids at the Recreation Center, while you enjoy the evening. Just plan on having a good time and we'll take care of the rest!

**Location:** West University Recreation Center

**Time:** drop off starts at 6:50 p.m.

**Ages:** 5 to 10

**Fee:** \$25 Colonial Park Pool members • \$35 non-members

### Dive-in Movie Series

Join us at Colonial Park Pool from 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. on **August 1 and 15\*** for this year's Dive-in Movie Series. Enjoy a family friendly movie from the grass or pool and grab a snack at the concessions. Admission to the movie will be complimentary, but if you or your children would like to enjoy the movie from the pool, regular pool admission fees do apply. For more information about scheduled movies, fees and event details please visit [www.westutx.gov/events](http://www.westutx.gov/events) or call at Colonial Park Pool 713.662.7460 or the West U Recreation Center at 713.662.7420.

*\* Note: The August 15 showing will be geared toward teens and may not be appropriate for children under the age of 13.*

### Biggest User Contest

Need motivation to stay fit this holiday season? Let us help you! Starting November 1 through January 3, we'll reward the person with the most dedication to staying fit. Earn credits each time you come in for a swim, run, weightlifting or personal training session, any West U fitness program, Jazzercise®, or make a tennis or racquetball reservation. The person with the most credits will get a prize!

To enter the contest, register starting August 5 through October 1. Must be a West U resident with an active Recreation Center membership. The winner will be announced on January 8, 2015.

### Fall 2014 Class Registration

Discover a new craft or polish a skill for great benefits without investing a lot of time or money. Most fall classes begin in September and include dance, tennis, Pilates, yoga for adults and kids, swimming, gymnastics, CPR and so much more!

**\*Priority Registration** (for those currently enrolled in classes within the past 30 days)

Tuesday, July 29 – Monday, August 4

*\*online registration is not available*

#### Resident Registration

Tuesday, August 5

#### Non-Resident Registration

Thursday, August 7

Complete your registration online at [www.westutx.gov/reg](http://www.westutx.gov/reg) or come by the Recreation Center, 4210 Bellaire, to sign up. Visa, MasterCard, Discover, personal checks and cash are accepted. To view a copy of the fall “West U at Your Leisure” guide, visit [www.westutx.gov/parks](http://www.westutx.gov/parks) or call 713.662.7420 for more information.



### Facility Maintenance

The West University Place Recreation Center will be closed August 25 through September 2 at noon for annual maintenance.

West U Recreation Center swimming pool users may use the UTHHealth Auxiliary Enterprises Recreation Center swimming pool, located 7779 Knight Road in Houston, during the closure, per our exchange agreement. You must show your valid West U Rec Center Membership Card for entry. Log onto [www.uthouston.edu/recreation-center](http://www.uthouston.edu/recreation-center), or call 713.500.8420 for hours and updated pool schedule information. Please note this exchange is for pool and locker room use and not valid for weight room, cardio room, racquetball membership or other areas of use.

During the closure, customers may call or visit Colonial Park Pool to sign up for classes, make tennis/racquetball/pavilion reservations, purchase memberships, or get general Parks and Recreation information. Recreation Center staff will be temporarily relocated on-site at Colonial Park Pool, 4130



Byron, to conduct day-to-day business during the closure week. The West University Place Recreation Center will resume normal operational schedule at 5 a.m. on August 30.

For more information, please visit [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov) or call:

- West U Rec Center: 713.662.7420 (this number will be rolled over to Colonial Park Pool during the closure week)
- Colonial Park Pool: 713.662.7460

### “55 and Up....”

We offer a wide variety of fun and stimulating programs ranging from exercise to adventurous day trips. Socialize and make new friends while embracing a healthy and active lifestyle. We encourage you to come and try a class, one time for free, to determine if it meets your needs.



**Gentle Yoga:** Improve stability and balance, while also building endurance. MWF, 9 a.m., \$40/month

**Senior Water Aerobics:** Build endurance and strength using cardio and weights in the water. MWF, 11:15 a.m., \$58.50/month

**Tai Chi:** Exercise that tones and strengthens while improving balance and posture. MWF, 8:30 a.m., \$45/month

**Line Dancing:** Come learn new moves in a social setting. It's so fun; you won't even know you're working out. Wednesdays, 1:15 p.m., \$17/month

**Evening Tai Chi:** Improve circulation, balance and posture. This class is geared for beginners. Thursdays, 5 p.m., \$23 for a six-week session.

**Bones for Life:** Building healthy bones while improving alignment creating harmonious coordination of movement. Thursdays, 11:30 a.m., \$30 for a six-week session.

Need more information? Please call us at 713.662.5895.

## FRIENDS OF WEST U PARKS:



September 27 and 28 is the weekend for the next highly anticipated fun family camp out “Fathers & Flashlights”. In its 8th year, the campout has become instrumental in raising funds for the continued improvement and development of West U parks. Campers can look forward to an afternoon of fun activities such as live catch and release fishing, pony rides, an obstacle course, the ever popular Camp Russo, and much more, including some new activities. Thank you to Friends 2012, 2013 and 2014 Corporate Sponsor, Direct Energy, and the other underwriters and sponsors who make this event possible. Judy and Comfort Cheng and Dee Dee and Jamie Gilder are the event co-chairs for F & F 2014.

“We are excited to have these two dynamic and hard working couples back for the second consecutive year to chair one of the neighborhoods’ most popular events,” says Friends Executive Director Donna LaMond.





### Watering Trees Impacted By Drought

Texas continues to experience effects from one of the worst droughts in recorded state history, and it's creating disastrous results for trees across the state. It's hard to say for sure just how many trees we might lose as a result of the record drought. It may be spring 2015 before we know whether some of our trees will overcome stress and secondary pathogens. Until then, the most important thing you can do is water, water and water!

If you have a tree in your yard, it's likely stressed from the drought and needs water. It's a small price to pay — literally just pennies per gallon — for all the benefits trees provide. Check with the city for possible restrictions on watering methods and frequency. If you can, avoid watering during the hottest part of the day — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mature trees need to be watered about once a week, while younger, newly-planted trees need to be watered about three times a week. You can use a screwdriver to determine if it's time to water; simply try to push it into the ground. If the ground is dry, you won't be able to. If the ground is wet, you will. If you can't get your screwdriver to easily go at least 6 to 8 inches into the ground, it's time to water.

For large, valuable yard trees, you can water with a garden hose or soaker hose — both preferred methods, especially under water usage restrictions — or a sprinkler, which is the fastest way to water large areas. A 5-gallon bucket with holes drilled into the bottom can be used to water smaller trees. Don't apply high salt, quick-release fertilizers or dig under the canopy of a tree that has been impacted by drought or recent construction impacts. It's also not a good idea to prune live branches off young trees. They may need these branches once the rains return. For more information or any other questions related to trees, contact the Urban Forester at 713.662.5313.

### Six Common Summer Hazards for Dogs

Now that summer is upon us and the temperatures are beginning to warm up significantly, pet owners may want to consider the following in dealing with the outdoors:

- 1. Dehydration** - One of the best ways to keep dogs safe in the summertime is by providing lots of cool, clean and fresh water.
- 2. Burned Pads** - Asphalt on sidewalks and streets can heat to a temperature that can burn a dog's paws. To avoid scorched paws, walk your dog very early in the morning or in the late evening when the streets have cooled off.
- 3. Parasites** - Summer is the season for fleas, ticks and mosquitoes; pests that can present a minor discomfort to your dog at best and at worst may be life threatening or cause self-mutilating behaviors. Cleaning your house and dog areas frequently and keeping your dog well groomed will reduce the risk of parasite infestation.
- 4. Heat Stroke** - Heat stroke is a serious risk to dog's health - in worst-case scenarios, it can be fatal. You can prevent heat stroke by restricting your pet's exercise during the hottest hours of the day (early morning or late evening are the best times for exercise during the summer), by making sure he is well hydrated, providing cool places for him to relax, providing opportunities to swim, cooling mats, and by never leaving your dog unattended in the car during summer heat.
- 5. Leptospirosis** - Leptospirosis is contracted through bodily fluids or tissue and can be transmitted through direct (as in the case of a bite or ingestion of flesh) or indirect contact (through water sources, food, etc.) with an infected animal. Stagnant waters are a common source of leptospirosis bacteria
- 6. Seasonal Allergies** - Your dog may be allergic to one or more seasonal items, which may include fleas, grass and various plants, and mold. If you suspect your dog may have seasonal allergies, is scratching and perhaps losing fur, a visit to your vet is recommended.

Let's keep our furry friends as healthy as we can. Also remember to vaccinate and register your dogs and cats, and keep all dogs on a leash or in a secured enclosure at all times. If you have any questions or need more information, contact Animal Control at 713.662.5831.



## YARD WASTE RECYCLING CONSIDERATIONS

### BY THE RECYCLING AND SOLID WASTE REDUCTION BOARD

In the Winter 2014 Currents, the Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction Board discussed their proposal for the City resuming separate yard waste collection which was stopped in 2006. The Board's mission is to look for ways the City can reduce solid waste, as well as increase recycling. Instead of the City sending the estimated 1,500 tons of yard waste currently collected to the landfill, the City would recycle the yard waste with a local composter for mulch and compost.

Today more Texas communities are diverting yard waste from landfills, viewing yard waste not as waste requiring disposal, but as a reusable product. The attached table describes reasons why the Board believes separate yard waste recycling should now be considered. During last year's discussion, the City Council had some concerns including the additional cost to residents and the viability of the compostable bags that may be required by most composters.



City staff has estimated that restarting a yard waste recycling program will cost the city approximately \$125,000 more per year (or \$2 more per month with a reduced rate for seniors). Even though the city will pay less to dispose of yard waste with a composter, the increased cost is due to additional staffing, operating, and transportation costs to run a separate yard waste recycling truck.

In order to recycle yard waste, the composter would require city residents to use compostable bags. Two types of bags are available to use — the paper lawn bag (which the city required its residents to use prior to May 2006 when the prior program was stopped) and the plastic compostable bag. The preferred bag by the composter is the plastic compostable bag made from a resin derived from plant starches, vegetable oils and compostable polymers using renewable crops. These bags readily compost when mixed with other organic material at composting facilities. They come in a variety of sizes up to 33 gallon capacity, are typically gathered at the bottom for extra strength, and sized to meet standard lift tests up to 45 pounds. The compostable bags are available locally at most stores and range in cost between 38 cents to 65 cents per bag (depending on your preference.) Initially the plastic compostable bag received a bad reputation because they would decompose too quickly and break when residents tried to move the bags. The board recently discussed these issues with representatives from

the city of Houston and one of the local composting companies since the city of Houston has been using the plastic compostable bags for some time. Both the city of Houston representatives and the local composting company confirmed that the manufacturers have increased the thickness, changed the resin mixes to make the bags more durable to meet the Houston climate and have improved distribution of the bags to reduce transit time and their exposure to the elements. Typically, from when you use the compostable plastic bags, you will have one to two weeks to move the bags, but environmental conditions can accelerate the decomposition of the bags. A good rule of thumb is to place the bag for collection within a week of using. As a green alternative, until such time as the city decides to adopt a yard waste recycling program, please consider leaving grass clippings on your lawn that will decompose and release valuable nutrients back to the soil (also known as grasscycling) or composting your yard waste.

The board believes the increased monthly cost is small when compared to the benefits derived from recycling yard waste and making the city a leader again in recycling.

**Remember West U is the City That Recycles and the board wants to hear from you. Please let us know your thoughts on recycling yard waste by August 15, 2014. Please send your comments to [recycle@westutx.gov](mailto:recycle@westutx.gov).**

### Comparison Chart of Proposed Yard Waste Recycling for West U

Options	Status Quo (Yard waste included with normal trash and sent to landfill)	Yard Waste collected and sent for recycling separately
Tonnage of trash to landfill	Remains the same	Decreases by 1,500 tons/yr
Yard Waste Disposal Costs	\$32/ton (as part of normal trash disposal)	\$12/ton
% of waste residents can recycle curbside	55%	80%
West U's Recycling Rate	25%	40+%
Utility Rates + cost of biodegradable yard waste bags	No change	\$2/month + (cost of compostable bags)
Who benefits and how	5,300 households avoid \$2/month rate increase & cost of yard waste disposal bags	Meets community's needs while not jeopardizing the needs of future generations
Creates new product (compost & mulch) plus associated economic activity	No	Yes
Landfill life expectancy	Decreased	Increases
Natural Resources	Consumed	Conserves

### Temporary Construction Fencing

For each pre-development or major development activity, the city's regulations require that a temporary construction fence enclose a building site on at least three of the four sides of the site and must be at least 5.5 feet high. These fences are allowed forward of the front setback line, on a temporary basis, so that the building site can be secured. This fencing is often erected in combination with required tree protection fencing that may include trees located in the unimproved street area between the public walkway and the street curb. It is not unusual in most instances for pre-development activity (demolition) to be closely followed by major development (new home). In these cases, the fencing is erected to serve both phases of the project and it must be left in place until the completion of the development. For more information regarding temporary construction fencing or any questions regarding any type of fencing, please contact the City of West University Development Services Division at 713.662.5893.



## CODE RED AND CITY EMAIL ALERTS: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

**H**ow do you receive alerts about emergencies in West U? If you get a phone call, a text and an email from the emergency notification system, you are one of more than nine thousand West U residents signed up to receive a Code RED notice in an emergency.

Through Code RED, you will be added to a local database used by city officials to communicate emergencies like severe weather alerts, crime threats, etc. The system's emergency list is only used for true emergency situations. There is also a general list for information such as road closures, garbage and solid waste collection date changes and others.

**Signing up is easy:** residents may add up to two phone numbers and one email address. In case of an emergency,

you will receive a phone call that identifies the message as an emergency notification. You may also receive text messages and emails with the same emergency message.

Another tool the city of West U uses to communicate important non-emergency information is the city's email notification system. Through this system, the city will notify residents of city happenings, news releases, City Council agendas, upcoming events and changes to the solid waste and recycling pick up. To sign up to receive email alerts, visit [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov) and click on the 'E-Notify' link. If you have not signed up for the Code RED emergency notification system, visit [www.westutx.gov/codered](http://www.westutx.gov/codered).

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

	DATE	EVENT	TIME	LOCATION
JUL	14	City Council Meeting	6:30 p.m.	Municipal Building
	19	Members Only Movie Night	7:30 p.m.	Colonial Park Pool
	26	Splash Blast to the Past	7 - 11 p.m.	Colonial Park Pool
	28	City Council Meeting	6:30 p.m.	Municipal Building
AUG	1	Dive-In Movie Series	7:30 p.m.	Colonial Park Pool
	11	City Council Meeting	6:30 p.m.	Municipal Building
	15	Dive-In Movie Series	7:30 p.m.	Colonial Park Pool
	25	City Council Meeting	6:30 p.m.	Municipal Building
SEP	22	Budget Hearing		Municipal Building
	27, 28	Fathers & Flashlights		West U Elementary School

**Mark your calendars for February 7, 2015, for Park Lover's Ball at the Omni Hotel.**