

City CURRENTS

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WINTER 2012



A NEIGHBORHOOD
CITY INCORPORATED
IN 1925

DirectLink: The 21st Century Bat Phone

Back in the 1960s, when Commissioner Gordon needed to summon Batman to help rid Gotham City of bad guys, he would simply pick up the Bat Phone. Next thing you knew, Batman and Robin were speeding to the rescue.

West University Place is one of a few cities in the United States that can connect a resident's security alarm directly to the police and fire departments ... just like a Bat Phone. But West U is the first—and only—city that connects through a system called DirectLink. "DirectLink is a special security program only available to West U residents," said Michael Ross, West University Place City Manager.

How does it work? DirectLink sends an alarm signal from a residence or business directly to the City's Emergency Dispatch Center, which forwards it to the correct responder—the West U Fire or Police Department. Without DirectLink, the security alarm signal notifies a third-party company that sends it on, and dispatch is delayed by critical seconds. Or longer.

Most third-party alarm services follow a time-consuming procedure called Enhanced Call Verification (ECV)

for police dispatches. ECV reduces false alarms by as much as 25-50%, but it takes time. "ECV burns up precious time and keeps us from

responding instantly, the way we do with DirectLink," said West University Place Police Chief Ken Walker.

ECV requires the alarm service to verify the alarm activation by making a minimum of two phone calls to two different responsible parties' telephone numbers before contacting the police or fire department. The first verification call goes to the location where the alarm originated. If contact cannot be made, the service has to make a second call to a different number.

"DirectLink removes those time-consuming extra steps. Would you drive from Houston to Dallas by way of El Paso?" asked Fire Chief Steve Ralls. "DirectLink is the shortest route to our Emergency Dispatch Center."

West U Mayor Bob Fry believes that the full participation of all households in DirectLink is the next best step for improved public safety. "DirectLink is like a Bat Phone," said Fry. "Every house has a hotline to the dispatcher."

A subscription to DirectLink includes a yard sign and window decals to warn potential criminals that your alarm has a DirectLink to the West University Place Police and Fire Departments.

The cost is about a dollar a day, and it's added to your monthly utility bill. A contract is not required for a subscription to DirectLink.

"Full participation in DirectLink makes everybody safer," said Fry.

Getting DirectLink is simple—just call Trish Cormier at (713) 662-5860.



From The Mayor's Desk

by Mayor Bob Fry

One of the most important roles of your City Council is to pass a budget each fall for the upcoming year. The fiscal year 2012 budget was completed and recently approved by a unanimous vote of the City Council (the fiscal year runs from January 1 to December 31, 2012). A well-constructed budget is the tool that tells the City's professional staff what goals and priorities your elected leaders have set for the year, and it provides the metrics to gauge staff performance.

The annual budget development process begins during the summer, when each department reviews its prior performance and future needs. After the Harris County Appraisal District advises the City what its

tax base will be for the coming year, usually sometime in August, City Manager Michael Ross and his department directors conduct a series of meetings to develop a preliminary draft budget. Staff then presents this draft budget to the City Council in a daylong Saturday workshop that is open to the public.

The annual budget must reflect what the City Council believes its constituents reasonably expect to have happen. For instance, this year was an election year. Everyone on this year's Council ran on a platform of "no tax increase," and City staff took this message seriously. As a result, the tax rate for the City of West

University Place remains unchanged for 2012. In fact, the actual property tax paid for a home of median value will be slightly less!

This fiscal year, we were lucky. Actions addressing pension liabilities taken by the previous City Council and the Texas Legislature last spring worked in the City's favor. While we held the line this year, we will be hard-pressed to do it again. However, residents can be assured both this Council and our City staff will strive to keep costs, and therefore taxes, as low as practicable, while maintaining the level and quality of services this community has come to expect.



From Council Member Joan Johnson



As a newly elected City Council member for West University Place, I have learned a great deal in the last five months. I always knew that we lived in a wonderful city with great services, but I now realize that more than ever. We are very fortunate to have our City staff and services.

One service I'm particularly proud of is our Senior Services program. In 2005, I decided that I needed to give back to our community and applied to become a member of the Senior Services Board. (You don't have to be over 65 years of age to be involved in this program.) In the last six years, this program has grown from organizing activities for "your mom and dad" to offering programs for all active adults, particularly baby boomers. When I think of seniors, I think of people my mother's age (she just turned 90!), not myself. But "seniors" here means anyone past 50. I currently participate in the Water Aerobics program coordinated by Senior Services, and it is definitely a workout for people in their 50s and 60s. The instructor conducts a full workout, but encourages attendees to work to their individual capability.

The Water Aerobics program is just one of many classes offered through Senior Services. Other classes include Early Risers Exercise,

Afternoon Aerobics, Tai Chi, Yoga, Watercolor Painting, and Bridge Lessons. Evening classes that have recently been added (Line Dancing, Yoga, Tai Chi, and Meditation) have been well received by working residents of 50-plus years of age. Check out the Winter/Spring 2012 "West U at Your Leisure" guide for more information on upcoming classes and programs. Please note that some of the programs charge fees, which go to pay for the instructors. If you would like to see a program or activity offered that is not currently available, please let Senior Services Manager Toby Brooks know, and she will be glad to look into the possibility of providing it. You can reach Toby at tbrooks@westutx.gov or at (713) 662-5895.

Residents of all ages can get involved with Senior Services through the Good Neighbor Team. The Good Neighbor Team is a group of caring and concerned neighbors who give back to their community by offering friendship and assistance to homebound senior residents. They serve as friends and good neighbors by making occasional telephone contacts or home visits and delivering seasonal gift bags or plants to homebound senior citizens. Additional volunteers are needed for this group. If you are interested in becoming a Good Neighbor Team volunteer, please call (713) 663-5895 for more information.

Whether you are a senior looking for something to do or a resident of any age looking

to volunteer, West U offers many activities through Senior Services. I encourage you to meet and join up with your neighbors through these great opportunities. Visit www.westutx.gov/seniors for more information.



A TIME FOR THANKS

The City Council wants to thank Chappel Jordan Clock Galleries for repairing the City's antique clock that hangs in the Council Chambers. The clock is over 100 years old and was donated to the City by Chappel Jordan in the early 1980's. We are honored and proud to have it hanging back in the Chambers where it belongs.

Community Message Board

Want to know what's going on in your city?

Get City News by Email
Get News Alerts by Email
SIGN UP FOR ALERTS!

Did you know that the City provides an easy way to keep up-to-date on the latest changes to City services? It is easy to use—just visit www.westutx.gov and click the link "E-Notify Me."

The best part of this service is that you can select the information you want to receive and you can unsubscribe at any time. By subscribing, you will be kept up-to-date on City emergencies, changes to services, such as garbage and recycling collection, and (if you desire) agendas for City Council and board meetings.

City Phone Numbers

Emergency – Police & Fire: 911

Police Dept. Non-emergency:

(713) 668-0330

General City Information:

(713) 668-4441

Building Permits: (713) 662-5833

Code Enforcement: (713) 662-5831

Colonial Park Pool: (713) 662-7460

Community Building:

(713) 662-5895

DirectLink Alarm Monitoring:

(713) 662-5860

Fire Dept. Non-emergency:

(713) 662-5835

Friends of West U Parks:

(713) 662-7430

Municipal Court: (713) 662-5825

Planning Department: (713) 662-5843

Police Dept. Crime Prevention:

(713) 662-5869

Public Works Information:

(713) 662-5839

Recreation Center: (713) 662-7420

Senior Services: (713) 662-5895

Urban Forestry: (713) 662-5313

Utility Billing: (713) 662-5824

2012 Garbage / Recycling Holiday Schedule

Good Friday, Friday, April 6:

No curbside collection; normal collection will resume on your next scheduled day.

Memorial Day, Monday, May 28:

No curbside collection; normal collection will resume on your next scheduled day.

Independence Day, Wednesday, July 4:

No curbside collection; normal collection will resume on your next scheduled day.

Labor Day, Monday, September 3:

No curbside collection; normal collection will resume on your next scheduled day.

Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 22:

No curbside collection; garbage regularly scheduled for this day will be picked up on Friday (November 23). Please hold your recyclables until your next scheduled recycle day.

Day after Thanksgiving, Friday, November 23:

Normal collection of garbage and recyclables will be provided City offices will be closed.

Additional Christmas Holiday, Monday, December 24:

Normal collection of garbage and recyclables will be provided City offices will be closed.

Christmas Day, Monday, December 25:

No curbside collection; garbage regularly scheduled for this day will be picked up the day before (Monday, December 24). Please hold your recyclables until your next scheduled recycle day.

New Year's Day, Tuesday, January 1, 2013:

No curbside collection; garbage regularly scheduled for this day will be picked up the day before (Monday, December 31). Please hold your recyclables until your next scheduled recycle day.

QUIET HOURS

Weekdays (Mon – Fri), except holidays

Before 7:00 AM or after 8:00 PM

Saturdays, except holidays

Before 8:00 AM or after 8:00 PM

Sundays and on New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and the corresponding Friday or Monday on which the city observes that holiday
Before 12 Noon or after 8:00 PM

EGGStravaganza

The City of West University Place Parks & Recreation Department's big annual egg hunt will feature an "eggs-tra" special visit from the Easter Bunny and our very own Wally the Walrus. The egg hunt begins promptly at 10:00 AM, so make sure to arrive early with your basket, ready to hunt! Admission to the event is free and open to children up to 11 years old. For more information on the EGGStravaganza or any of our special events, please call (713) 662-7420 or go to www.westutx.gov/events.



When: Saturday, March 31

Time: 10:00 AM

Where: West University Place
Recreation Center Fields,
4210 Bellaire Blvd.



Second Saturday Concerts

Concerts are presented by the Houston Folklore & Folk Music Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of folklore and folk/acoustic music. Tickets are sold at the door: adults \$12, senior citizens (65+) \$8, and children under 12 free with adults. Visit www.houstonfolkmusic.org for more information.

When: Second Saturday of each month

Time: 7:30 PM

Where: West University Community
Building, 6104 Audent
(at Rice Blvd.)

January 14: Still on the Hill

February 11: Bill & Kate Isles

March 10: Stephanie Bettman
and Luke Halpin

Parks & Recreation

Friends of West U Parks

Friends of West U Park Shines the Spotlight on Direct Energy in 2012

Direct Energy is powering up its engagement with West U Parks as the first ever corporate title sponsor for the 2012 Friends events. Direct Energy is contributing \$50,000 to the Friends of West U Parks and will be the title sponsor for the Park Lovers' Ball in February, the Party on the Patio Concert Series in June and Fathers & Flashlights in October. Additionally, Direct Energy has extended a special friends and family offer to West U residents. For more information, please visit westuparks.org.



As Park Lovers' Ball co-chairs Courtney and Scott Archer and Anne and John Freeman prepare for the soirée at the Four Seasons Hotel on February 11, themed "A Walk in the Park," the excitement is building. Get ready for an all new Dining Experience Big Board and fabulous travel packages, including the highly anticipated yacht cruise on the *Pas de Deux* (an 1,800-square-foot balanced catamaran), an Argentinean high-volume dove hunt with lodging, three separate seven-night vacations in the Grenadines and Antigua, and a vacation stay at a house in Telluride, as well as other exciting bidding opportunities such as batting practice with the Astros. The live auction will also feature an adorable goldendoodle puppy, ready to move into your home.



Thanks go to the James Street Group for being the first to commit as a \$15,000 sponsor for the ball. Last but not least, the ball will honor longtime park supporters Vicki and Dana Grams. Individual ticket sales for the ball begin at \$250, and tables for 12 start at \$3,000. For more information on how to become an underwriter, auction donor or committee member, please visit the Friends website, www.westuparks.org, or call (713) 662-7430.



A block of rooms (with Sunday brunch included) have been saved at the Four Seasons for the ball, so if you are interested in really making a night of it, reservations can be made directly by calling 1-800-734-4114. In order to obtain the special rate, please identify yourself as being part of the Park Lovers' Ball group. All reservations are based on availability and are subject to a 72-hour cancellation policy. In order to ensure availability, we recommend that reservations be made as soon as possible.

Thank you to Kristi Coffey and Hungry's on Rice Blvd. for hosting the November 2 Wine Harvest Party where delectable bottles of wine were collected for the Park Lovers' Ball wine pull. Hats off to Susie Boyce and Sue Jensen for organizing the party and coordinating the wine pull for the ball. Bottles of wine valued at \$25 or greater are still needed. If you can help by donating a bottle, please contact the Friends office at (713) 662-7430. The wine pull is always a big hit at the ball, so come early and be ready!

Have You Made Summer Camp Plans?

Summer will be here before you know it, and now is the time to start thinking about camp! West U offers a wide variety of programs for all interests and ages. Here are seven great ways to spend the summer:

- Building Brains Lego Camp
- Dance Camp
- iKids Camp
- Kidventure
- Manners Matter Camp
- Splish Splash Swim Camp
- Tennis & More Sports Camp

Visit www.westutx.gov for a complete listing of camp descriptions, dates and times.

Summer Camp Registration Information:

Priority Registration (for 2011 campers only) begins on Friday, February 3, at 8 AM and runs through Monday, February 6.

Resident Registration begins on Tuesday, February 7, at 8 AM.

Non-Resident Registration begins on Thursday, February 9, at 8 AM.

To register for Kidventure, please visit www.kidventure.com; registration begins Friday, February 3. To register for all other camps, come to the West University Place Recreation Center, 4210 Bellaire, or register online at www.westutx.gov/reg.

Hiring Lifeguards, Swim Instructors, and Recreation Attendants!

The Parks & Recreation Department is in need of professional, skilled, reliable and personable team members to assist in various part-time positions at the West University Place Recreation Center and Colonial Park Pool. Experience is preferred. Certifications are necessary for some positions, and customer service skills are a must for all positions! If you are interested, download an application at www.westutx.gov/application. Please drop off your application at 4210 Bellaire Blvd. For further information, email Julie Bickham at jbickham@westutx.gov or Justin Hagendorf at jhagendorf@westutx.gov, or call (713) 662-7420.

Public Safety



Often called the silent killer, carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, colorless gas created when fuels (such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil and methane) burn incompletely. In the home, heating and cooking equipment that burns fuel can be a source of carbon monoxide (CO).

CO alarms should be installed in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home, as well as in other locations where required by applicable laws, codes or standards. For the best protection, interconnect all CO alarms throughout the home, so when one sounds, they all sound. The West U Fire Department reminds you to take the following steps to prevent and properly address CO emissions in your home:

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding placement and mounting height for CO alarms.
- Choose a CO alarm that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Call the West U Fire Department at (713) 662-5835 to find out what number to call if the CO alarm sounds.
- Test CO alarms at least once a month, and replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- If the audible trouble signal sounds, check for low batteries. If the battery is low, replace it. If the trouble signal still sounds, call the West U Fire Department.
- If the CO alarm sounds, immediately move to a fresh air location, either outdoors or by an open window or door. Make sure everyone inside the home is accounted for. Call for help from that fresh air location and stay there until emergency personnel arrive.
- If you need to warm a vehicle, move it from the garage immediately after starting it. Do not run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor indoors, even if the garage doors are open.
- A generator should be used in a well-ventilated location outdoors away from windows, doors and vent openings.
- Gas or charcoal grills can produce CO—only use them outside.
- A small amount of CO over a longer period of time and a large amount of CO over a shorter period of time are equally dangerous.
- Have fuel-burning heating equipment and chimneys inspected by a professional every year before cold weather sets in. When using a fireplace, open the flue for adequate ventilation. Never use your oven to heat your home.

Adapted from an article by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA),
www.nfpa.org

West U Neighborhood Watch: Neighbors Helping Neighbors

The West University Place Police Department believes that organized neighbors make safer neighborhoods. Neighbors of all ages and back-grounds can prevent crime and make their neighborhoods safer when they are looking out for each other's families and property in a systematic and sustained way. The Police Department is committed to working together with our great community to build a safe, healthy neighborhood that is prepared to respond. The Neighborhood Watch program provides a tremendous opportunity for the police and community to develop meaningful partnerships that will help accomplish this goal.

This program supports the department's policing strategy—policing for prevention—which works to prevent crime through problem-solving part-nerships among community, police and other City agencies. Neighborhood Watch strengthens important community relationships through education while mitigating the risk of crimes of opportunity, including burglary and thefts from parked autos, among others.

Residents must also be prepared for the possibility of a natural disaster or emergency. In addition to crime prevention, Neighborhood Watch helps support the City's emergency preparedness and response efforts. The organization effort to set up a Neighborhood Watch team can assist you and your neighbors in developing emergency plans that could save lives and assist first responder agencies in providing immediate relief. Organizing a Neighborhood Watch can strengthen your community as a whole. The West University Place Police Department is deeply committed to our community policing strategy and to fostering neighborhood partnerships. Visit www.westutx.gov/neighborhood-watch for more information.

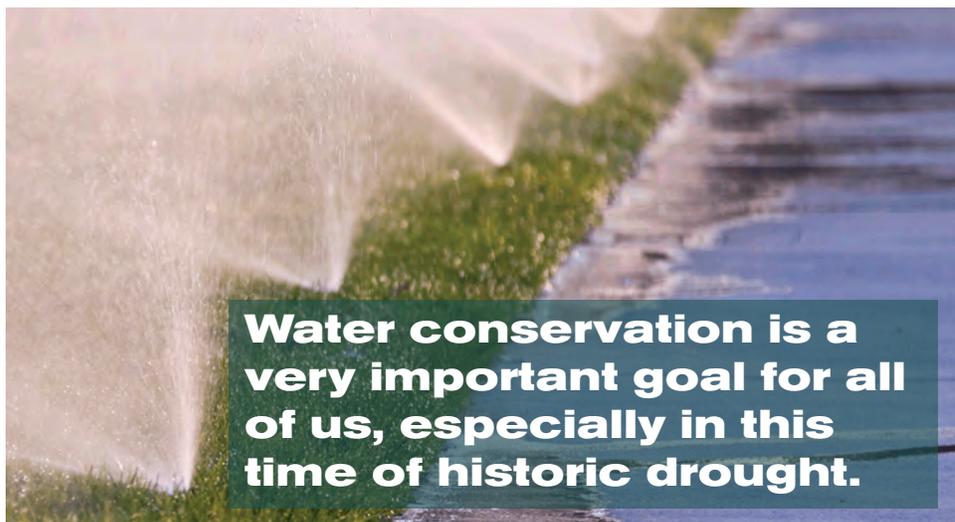
Public Works

Water Conservation at Home

Water conservation is a very important goal for all of us, especially in this time of historic drought. It is important to conserve water for the sake of future residents, to control individual water bills and to maintain the rates charged by the City for water at their current low levels. Here are some water conservation methods we can apply to our daily lives:

- Turn off the water while brushing your teeth or shaving. Run the water only when needed.
- Keep a container of water in the refrigerator for drinking.
- When washing your car, use a nozzle that has a spring-loaded valve so you can turn off the water when it is not needed.
- Yard and garden watering tips:
 - Use soaker hoses buried under mulch to water garden areas.
 - Set sprinkler timers to allow for the equivalent of ¼ inch of rain twice a week. Determine the time by setting a pie pan in the sprinkler zone and measuring how long it takes to accumulate ¼ inch in the pie pan.
 - Do not allow automatic sprinklers to run when it has been raining. Turn the sprinkler controls off, and then turn them back on after three days of no rain.
 - If possible, avoid using sprinklers on windy days. The wind will blow the water away from the lawn and increase water evaporation.
- Only run the dishwasher with full loads. Scrape and rinse food particles from the dishes after use to reduce the extra washing that may be required to remove hardened food.
- Only run the clothes washer with full loads or use load settings for small sized loads.

Additional water conservation information and a copy of the city's Water Conservation and Drought Contingency Plan are available at www.westutx.gov/water-conservation. You may contact the Public Works Operations Division at (713) 662-5839 or by email at pwalters@westutx.gov to get responses to any water-related questions or needs. The Operations Division maintains the city's infrastructure, including drinking water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer pipes, as well as streets, sidewalks and right-of-way maintenance. If you need urgent assistance after hours, please contact the Police Department dispatcher at (713) 668-0330.



Help Lost Pets Get Home Safely

The City's website now has lost-and-found pages where residents can post information about pets in need: one page is dedicated to missing pets, and the other is dedicated to unidentified pets that have been found by a resident. Visit www.westutx.gov/animalcontrol for more details.

West U Animal Control offers the following reminders to residents with pets:

- Dogs must be kept in a secured enclosure or leashed at all times. City ordinance prohibits them from running at large.
- Dogs and cats must be registered with the city. Owners must present a proof of vaccination and pay a onetime \$20 fee.
- A single household is limited to three dogs or three cats. Households with a combination of dogs and cats should not exceed four pets total.
- At no time are dogs allowed in a city park, whether leashed or running at large.
- The best way to recover a lost pet is to keep an identification tag on the pet's collar. ID microchips are also helpful.



Public Works

Recycling Aluminum

Aluminum is a sustainable metal: it can be recycled infinitely with no loss in quality. It is possible to turn a can into a new can and have it back on the store shelf within 60 days, saving great quantities of energy and emissions in the process. Unlike many recyclables—such as plastic bottles and cardboard boxes, which are rarely reused to create the same product—aluminum can be repeatedly recycled back into new cans. For this reason, approximately 31% of all aluminum produced in the United States comes from recycled scrap, and 75% of all aluminum produced since 1888 is still in use today.

Recycling aluminum uses about 5% of the energy required to create aluminum from the mining and processing of bauxite. Additionally, 95% of the greenhouse emissions from primary aluminum production are avoided when recycling aluminum products.

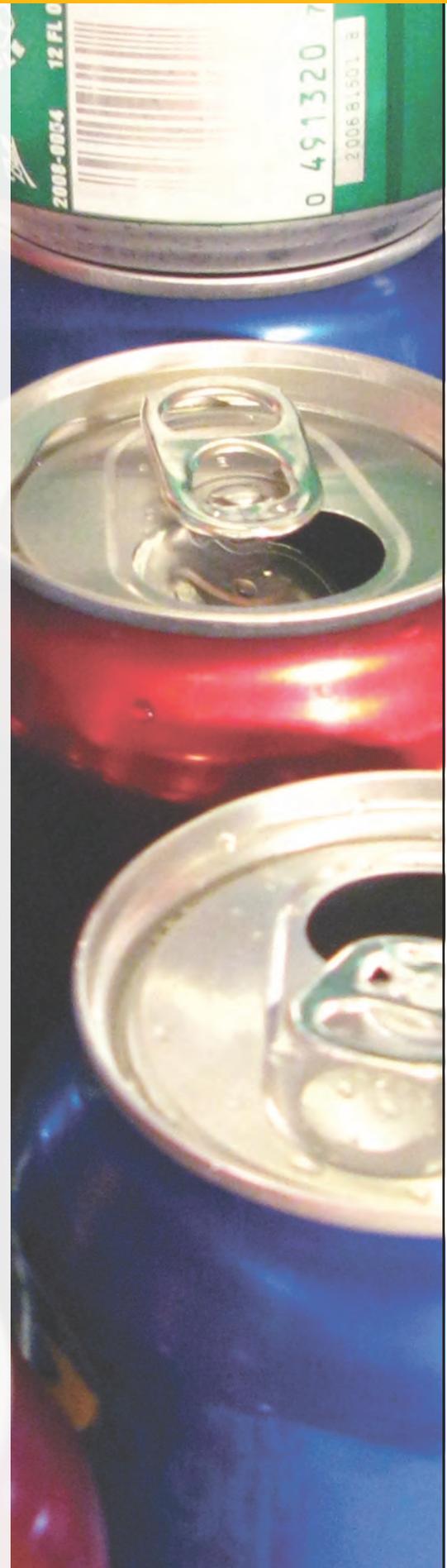
Aluminum is used in the manufacture of aircraft, automobiles, bicycles, boats, computers, cookware, gutters, siding, wire and any other product that requires a strong, lightweight material or high thermal conductivity.

Facts about Aluminum:

- The US recycling rate for aluminum beverage cans in 2010 was 58.1%
- The amount of energy saved from aluminum can recycling in 2010 was equal to the energy of 17 million barrels of crude oil, or nearly two days of all oil imports to the United States
- Discovered in the 1820s, aluminum is the most abundant metal on earth
- Every minute, on average, 113,204 aluminum cans are recycled
- Making new aluminum cans from used cans takes 95% less energy than using virgin materials
- Twenty recycled cans can be made with the energy needed to produce one can using virgin ore
- Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to keep a 100-watt bulb burning for almost four hours or to run your television for three hours
- Tossing away an aluminum can wastes as much energy as pouring out half of that can's volume in gasoline
- In 1972, one pound of aluminum cans was equivalent to about 22 empty cans; in 2002, that number of empties rose to 34 due to advanced technology, the use of less material in each can and aluminum's increased durability
- In 2010, the City of West University Place recycled 42.5 tons of aluminum (the equivalent of almost 3 million cans!), generating over \$30,000 in revenue; so far in 2011, the City has recycled 30 tons, generating approximately \$23,000 in revenue

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle — Doing Your Part:

Place all aluminum cans, bottles, pie tins, food serving pieces and foil—rinsed and clean—into your recycling bin.



City CURRENTS

A Newsletter for
the citizens of
West University Place
Winter 2012

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 (713) 662-5810
or mross@westutx.gov

GENERAL INFORMATION (713) 668-4441

CITY WEBSITE www.westutx.gov
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and is printed on recycled paper.

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3800 University Boulevard
West University Place, Texas 77005

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We Need Your Numbers!

One thing that has become very apparent since the conversion of West U's financial software is the need to update resident records for utility billing. With so many residents today using the computer for business transactions and bill paying, the demand for documents online has become stronger than ever before.

Many utility billing documents previously were available to residents only by mail or through a personal visit. Now, in a matter of minutes, we can provide these documents directly to your home or office. For those of you who were plagued by water leaks due to drought conditions, emailing the form required for a billing adjustment makes your application process easier. Need to set up an automatic bill-paying account? In no time, you'll be sending back the completed online form with a scanned image of your voided check attached. Life can be so much easier and faster with technology.

However, situations have arisen that magnify the need for updated resident records. Recently, a resident paid their utility bill two days before the bill was due by dropping their check into the collection box on Amherst Street. Unfortunately the check was not signed. We could not call the resident because there was no phone number on the check, and the phone number on their account was no longer in service. We had no email address on file either, so our only option was to put the check back in the mail to the resident and ask for a signature. By the time the check was returned to us, the payment was late. If we had had a working phone number or an email address, a message to the resident could have been quickly sent and the issue easily resolved.

So take a minute when you get your next utility statement and look carefully at ALL the information on the bill. Check the spelling of your name to ensure it converted correctly in the new billing system. Make sure we

have your correct mailing address displayed on your bill. Then write your phone number and email address on the payment slip and enclose it with your check in the envelope provided in the statement. After you return it to us, we will update your account. As a result, when you need to contact us, we will be able to respond in whatever manner you choose! The same holds if we need to contact you.

As a reminder, you can pay your utility bill by mail, by using the drop box, by bank draft, by credit card (Visa or MasterCard), online with a third party, in the Municipal Building or by using your bank's online bill-pay process. We ask you to please put your check and the payment slip in an envelope if using the drop box; the humidity in the box can literally soak your check with water if it is not in an envelope. And please do not write on the back of your check; that space is reserved for the payee (West U) and the bank only. Thank you for your assistance in ensuring the timely posting of your payment.