



The City of West University Place

A Neighborhood City

CITY COUNCIL

Bob Higley, Mayor
Kevin Trautner, Mayor Pro Tem
John P. Barnes, Councilmember
Lauri Lankford, Councilmember
Ed Sobash, Councilmember

STAFF

David J. Beach, City Manager
Alan Petrov, City Attorney
Thelma Gilliam, City Secretary

CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

The City Council of the City of West University Place, Texas, **met via audio/video conferencing** in a workshop and regular session on **Monday, November 9, 2020**, beginning at **6:00 p.m.** due to social distancing guidelines suggested by the CDC in light of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19).

Agenda items were as follows:

WORKSHOP (6:00 P.M.)

1. Call Meeting to Order (Remotely)

Mayor Higley called the Workshop to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner, Councilmembers Barnes, Sobash and Lankford were present remotely.

Also attending remotely were: City Attorney Petrov and Fire Chief Taylor

Staff attending remotely from the Council Chambers: City Manager Beach, City Secretary Gilliam, HR Director Urban, Assistant to the City Manager Thompson, and Police Chief Walker.

3. HomeSecure Concept

Matters related to a service to assist seniors and potentially other residents in monitoring their properties during an extended period of absence. *Recommended Action: Discuss and take any desired action. Mr. Dave Beach, City Manager and Mr. Will Thompson, Assistant to the City Manager*

City Manager Beach presented and said at recent meetings Council discussed a program that initially started as a program to assist seniors who would be away from their homes for an extensive period of time. He said over the course of discussions the concept expanded to include homes from builders, semi-vacant homes, etc., so the goal of this workshop is for Council to discuss and provide direction on the concept or decide whether or not staff should move forward with establishing a program.

City Manager Beach said after conversations with the City Attorney and involved staff, it is his recommendation not to proceed with the program due to the City's potential liability and exposure.

Councilmember Lankford said she originally suggested this idea and she and Councilmember Barnes expanded on the concept. She said she appreciates staff taking the time to look into it.

Councilmember Lankford said it seems like it is a forgone conclusion that the program will not proceed because there are some problems although she doesn't think those problems are insurmountable.

She said she is a disappointed that the program would not go forward, but understands some of the issues that were pointed out.

Councilmember Lankford confirmed with City Manager Beach that the City Attorney and staff are concerned about the issues pointed out.

Councilmember Lankford asked City Manager Beach if after going through this effort he found a small portion of this idea that he thinks would be an advantage to help problems with vacant homes in general. City Manager Beach said vacant homes are still required to meet the minimum code and so what one can see from the public right-of-way would still have to comply through enforcement. He said the issue with the vacant homes will be something in the rear yard where it can't be seen from the public right-of-way.

Councilmember Sobash interjected to say that there are companies that offer this type of service. He said his thought is that with a new communications person coming on board maybe there is a way for staff to look for private services and utilize the communications person to broadly communicate those services to residents.

In response to Councilmember Lankford's question as to whether there were some merits to the program, City Manager Beach said, yes, the initial concept had merit because it was just a "drive-by and look" program that would keep the City from having to take ownership or responsibility for the home.

Councilmember Lankford said she thinks the program ties in with Council's conversation the previous week regarding code enforcement because when homes are vacant for a period of time there are issues such as overgrown weeds, debris, mosquitoes from standing water, and dangerous situations due to the deterioration of homes, etc. She said this ties into the City's ability to do enforcement in that it helps identify problems in advance and at the time it could be discovered that the homeowner is having a hard time and the City could then provide that person a list of services.

City Manager Beach said unfortunately from the bureaucracy side of it, as well as the liability and exposure to the City, he doesn't think it is beneficial because while it's a great thing to residents who utilize the service, there is only exposure to the other taxpayers.

Councilmember Barnes said Councilmember Lankford pretty much addressed his concern about whether any thought had occurred to staff about measures that can be taken or tweaks that can be made to address the targeted issues.

City Manager Beach said regarding semi-permanent vacant homes staff will work on trying to develop a thorough list of those homes known to be vacant. He said the Code Enforcement Officer already knows a majority of them and so the City can map them out and see if there are issues. Councilmember Barnes said those properties can also be checked regularly to be sure the conditions that staff can see are where they need to be.

City Manager Beach said from this discussion, he will get a complete list of all the vacant homes of which staff is aware and then pull the complaint history on those properties. Councilmember Lankford said that would be helpful and a step in the right direction.

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner confirmed with City Manager Beach that what he takes from the workshop is that the City Manager will compile the list of vacant homes otherwise this is off his list.

Councilmember Sobash added that he thinks this lines up with one of Council's priorities, which is to keep West U one of the best places to live and said in addition to the list he thinks staff should look into options and communicate those options to homeowners.

City Manager Beach said with the communications coordinator starting the week of Thanksgiving, next year one of Council's priorities is to get community feedback on how the City is doing and one of the items on the survey will be issues on code enforcement.

Councilmember Barnes noted that any service the City wants to communicate to residents can be included in the "Hi Neighbor" publication published by the Senior Services Board.

Councilmember Lankford thanked staff for the work put into this and said the workshop was a good outcome as she thinks that the discussion led to things that can be improved upon.

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner moved to adjourn the workshop at 6:21 p.m. Councilmember Barnes seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED.**

Ayes: Higley, Trautner, Barnes, Lankford, Sobash
Noes: None
Absent: None

4. Call Workshop to Order

REGULAR MEETING (6:30 PM)

5. Call Regular Meeting to Order

Mayor Higley called the regular meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

6. Roll Call

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner, Councilmembers Barnes, Sobash and Lankford attended remotely.

Also attending remotely were: City Attorney Alan Petrov, IT Director Davenport, Fire Chief Taylor, HR and HR Director White

Staff attending remotely from the Council Chambers: City Manager Beach, City Secretary Gilliam, Assistant to the City Manager Thompson, HR Director Urban, and Police Chief Walker

7. Pledge of Allegiance

RECESS REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL TO CONVENE A MEETING OF THE CITY OF WEST UNIVERSITY PLACE EMPLOYEE BENEFITS TRUST (EBT) FOR WHICH A SEPARATE EBT AGENDA HAS BEEN POSTED.

Mayor Higley recessed the regular meeting at 6:32 p.m. and convened the meeting of the Employee Benefits Trust.

ADJOURN EBT MEETING AND RESUME REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING

The Employee Benefits Meeting adjourned at 6:34 p.m. and the City Council meeting resumed.

8. Public Comments

This is an opportunity for citizens to speak to the Council relating to agenda and non-agenda items.

The following comments were made from the public:

Regina Nolan, spoke regarding her and her neighbors safety concerns with the speeding and volume of traffic on Wesleyan. She requested that the City conduct a speed a traffic study on Wesleyan.

Fred Mitro, 3018 Nottingham, spoke regarding the basketball courts at Wier Park. He thanked the City for removing the rims from basketball goal at the beginning of COVID and requested that Council consider (1) not installing the rim on the basketball court during the pandemic; and (2) once the pandemic has ended repurpose the basketball area so that it becomes green space and used more often by families and residents of West University Place.

9. **COVID-19 Update**

Matters related to COVID-19. *Recommended Action: Discuss and take any desired action.* **Mr. Aaron Taylor, Fire Chief and Emergency Management Coordinator**

Chief Taylor reported:

- The numbers in Texas are increasing. The numbers are coming from outside the region, particularly from far west Texas and up north in the panhandle.
- Positivity rate in Texas has increased to 11.24 percent.
- Harris County Public Health reported an 8.3 percent positivity rate.
- The Texas Medical Center reported a 4.5 percent positivity rate.
- There is a small uptick within Harris County, but not as much as the rest of the state.
- The hospital ICU is 87% full and is still at Phase I capacity. He said it has been at the Phase I capacity since August.
- West U is has 165 confirmed cases – 23 are active, 142 recovered and 0 deaths.
- West U operations – A City employee within the Fire Department tested positive for COVID which required 8 other members of the fire department to be tested. Those individuals are quarantined and will not return to work until their test results are received.

Councilmember Barnes asked Chief Taylor if the City received any guidance that might be useful in terms of determining the City's disposition in respect to basketball courts and other play features in City parks.

Chief Taylor responded that staff reached out to Harris County Public Health and the Harris County precincts before the parks were reopened to see what park services were being offered, specifically on the issue of basketball. He said 3 of the 4 precincts has basketball courts open. Chief Taylor said because Harris County's Public Health Department is the City's public health authority, staff looks at the data within its precincts when making decisions for the City.

Mayor Higley asked Chief Taylor given the information he has now would he support the decision of to keep the basketball courts free of any rims during this period. Chief Taylor said in his opinion he thinks that any services that the City offers, if residents can follow the rules in place such as wearing masks, social distancing, and not gathering in large crowds, which are all orders from the Governor, then there may be more services the City can offer. He said if the Governor's orders can't be adhered to, then it's reasonable to pull back services.

10. **Consent Agenda**

All Consent Agenda items listed are considered to be routine by the City Council and will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Council member requests

in which event the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.

A. City Council Minutes

Approve Minutes of the October 26, 2020 City Council Meeting and October 29, 2020 Special Meeting. *Recommended Action: Approve City Council Minutes of October 26, 2020 and Special Meeting Minutes of October 29, 2020. Ms. Thelma Gilliam, City Secretary*

B. Appointment of Member to the Friends of West U Parks Fund (FWUPF) Board

Matters related to the appointment of Christina Kuhl to the Friends of West U Parks Fund Board. *Recommended Action: Appoint Ms. Christina Kuhl to Position 7 on the FWUPF Board with an expiring term of August 31, 2023. Ms. Susan White, Parks and Recreation Director and Ms. Donna LaMond, Executive Director of FWUPF.*

Mayor Higley requested that Item B be removed for comments.

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner moved to approve the Item A, as presented. Councilmember Lankford seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED.**

Ayes: Higley, Trautner, Barnes, Lankford, Sobash
Noes: None
Absent: None

Regard Item B, on behalf of Council, Mayor Higley commented to thank the Friends Board for their dedication and delivery of a high-quality service to the City of West University Place.

Councilmember Barnes moved to approve Item B. Mayor Pro Tem Trautner seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED.**

Ayes: Higley, Trautner, Barnes, Lankford, Sobash
Noes: None
Absent: None

11. Adjourn Meeting

With no other matter before the council, the meeting will adjourn.

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner moved to adjourn the regular meeting at approximately 6:54 p.m. Councilmember Barnes seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED.**

Ayes: Higley, Trautner, Barnes, Lankford, Sobash
Noes: None
Absent: None

Audio of the workshop and regular meeting is available on the City's website. You can also contact the City Secretary's office for a copy of the audio and/or for copies of any presentations/handouts.

Prepared by: City Secretary Thelma A. Gilliam

Approved by City Council on: November 16, 2020