

City Currents

Autumn 2019



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And More Helpful Information About Your City!

City Council approves lower tax rate for first time in three years

A combination of “fresh eyes” and a consistently increasing tax roll has led West University property owners to their first tax rate decrease in three years. At the same time, they are funding a \$41.6 million operating budget that provides for infrastructure upgrades, improvements to attract and retain first responders, and changes in City staff to meet the community’s needs while maximizing tax dollars and resources.

West University’s taxable value now stands at \$6.522 billion – \$52.6 million of that in new home value.

“The goal is always to maintain the quality of life and the high level of services that our residents expect, while also keeping West U a desirable place to work and serve,” said Mayor Bob Higley. “All of this must be achieved while managing taxpayers’ money as responsibly as we do our own family budgets. We were proud to meet those goals.”

The new rate, adopted by the City Council in October, is 30.9 cents for each \$100 in assessed property value, down from 31.68 cents the previous year. Rising property values help hold the line on rate increases, but still mean that the average taxpayer will be paying 2.37 percent more, even with the lower rate. This amounts to approximately an extra \$7 a month increase (equating to an \$85 a year increase) on the West U portion of the property owners’ tax bill. West U’s tax rate makes up about 17 percent of the taxpaying homeowner’s entire tax bill.

“This isn’t just last year’s budget repurposed ...”

There are two parts to West University’s tax rate. The 18.969-cent maintenance and operation (M&O) portion funds the majority of City services, with about 65 percent of the general fund allocated for personnel costs. An 11.952-cent portion pays down the City’s bond debt.

About 60 percent of West University’s general fund revenue stream is derived from property taxes; other revenue sources include sales taxes, franchise fees, and service charges.

The new budget also calls for about a \$3.60 monthly increase for water and sewer, and a \$1.70 monthly increase for solid waste service.

City Manager Dave Beach came on board in January, and a new Mayor and City Council — all first-timers in their jobs — were seated in June. An established year-round fiscal review process, multiple workshops, and a sequence of public hearings leading to the adoption of West U’s budget and setting of the tax rate all guaranteed a seamless transition.

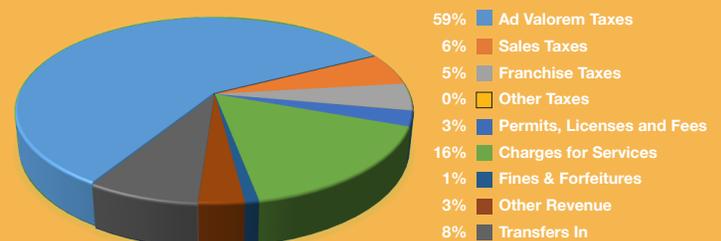
“This isn’t just last year’s budget repurposed with adjustments here and there,” said Mayor Higley. “Each department and request were carefully reviewed, and tough decisions were made.”

These decisions included:

- Increasing the base pay for police officers and 911 dispatchers in an effort to fill longstanding vacancies.
- Funding a position to actively seek grant funding for future City projects and to centralize purchasing to extend the City’s buying power
- Increasing annual maintenance to the City’s infrastructure (storm drainage, water, sewer, roads, and sidewalks)
- Funding projects to replace aging equipment at the Recreation Center and Colonial Park Pool, renovating pedestrian bridges over Poor Farm Ditch, and looking at alternatives to stormwater detention
- Continuing funding for Buffalo Speedway replacement and drainage improvements, and for Phase I and Phase II of the Virtual Gate project

To learn more about the budget, please visit our “Transparency in Government” web page: westutx.gov/247/Transparency-in-Government

2020 PROJECTED GENERAL FUND REVENUE



From the Mayor's Office



Mayor Bob Higley

Dear Neighbors,

As we all know, West U is a gem, our gem, our little slice of heaven inside the nation's fourth largest metropolitan area. In order to maintain or slice of heaven, Councils both past and present have to consider a myriad of issues that are staring us in the face and some that may not materialize years down the road, which are the toughest ones to address.

Decisions that we make to address those issues staring us in the face are the easiest to justify, because we can point to it and say we did this. The ones down the road are the tougher to justify because we can't point to it and say there. We are basing decisions of today on issues of tomorrow. An example of long-term decision was done in the 1990's, the City Council had the for-sight to undertake the Infrastructure Program which relocated water and sewer lines out of the rear yards to the front and replaced the majority of the City's streets. Back in the 1990's the \$120 million spent of this project was a huge investment in the City's future and it was also a major hit to tht foresight and investment paid itself back and then some, because of the condition of the infrastructure, services West U has become a city of choice for families looking to establish roots. Additionally, the improved infrastructure has helped us weather storms over the years, most notably with Hurricane Harvey where we had 102 properties flood.

A good example is to look at our neighboring cities to the west and south. Bellaire experienced approximately 2,300 flooded properties, while the Houston neighborhood of Breaswood Place experienced significant flooding. I believe the biggest difference in our experience during Harvey as compared to our neighbors is the resolve of the West U to reinvest in its infrastructure and services to maintain that infrastructure.

This brings me to the present day. In 2021, the large majority debt from the 1990's will be paid off and this City Council finds itself in a very tough but enviable spot. We have the opportunity to invest in West U's future with minimal impact to our debt portion of the tax rate or allow the tax rate to lower. Over the next few months the City Council and staff will be discussing improvements to our infrastructure, namely drainage improvements and what we can expect from those improvements and most notably how to pay for these improvements.

I would be remiss if I did not say, that I am proud to be working with this hard-working Council and staff and the recently approved 2020 Annual Budget. This budget lowers the tax rate for the first time in 3 years while continuing to invest in our infrastructure and services to improve the overall quality of life for our residents.

— MAYOR BOB HIGLEY



A Message from Mayor Pro Tem Kevin Trautner



Kevin Trautner

A great community like West U does not exist without our hard-working team of the city's staff, resident volunteers and council. I have enjoyed working with my fellow council members; we share a passion for West U, and we strive for collaborative solutions. I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve the community and to get to know more of my fellow residents.

The biggest challenges that we face are the changes that are imposed upon our city. Change is a part of life. Rather than passively accept change, this council prefers to be proactive in order to shape change to meet our quality of life expectations. Some examples of these challenges include security, drainage, and traffic. Although West U is statistically safe, the urban area that surrounds our city is not as safe, and a greater number of people who have been arrested for crimes are released on their own personal recognizance while awaiting trial. To enhance security in our city, we are pursuing the virtual gate project and are also approving a pay raise for our police officers to attract additional quality officers to fill vacant openings.

Another challenge imposed upon us is more frequent heavy rains; to address this issue, we will be considering improvements to the city's drainage system and evaluating alternatives to stormwater detention. Over the last 30 years, the population of Harris County has increased by approximately two million people, which has created more traffic. We have also seen an increase in distracted driving with cell phones and in the rerouting of traffic from major roads into our city by navigation systems. As a result of conversations with residents saying that the current speed limit is too fast, the city will be conducting a traffic study to evaluate this issue and possibly lower the speed limit on our side streets to protect our residents. When we address issues like these, we are shaping the ongoing change imposed upon us to enhance the high quality of life and residential character of our city.

Before taking office, I walked door to door to speak with residents, and I promised to be a good steward of your tax dollars. This council has just completed its first budget cycle. I'm proud to say that we have enhanced city services, and increased police pay and employee benefits –while also managing to cut the tax rate to the lowest rate in over a decade, in large part due to the increased value of our homes.

I will continue working to shape change that will enhance the residential quality of life in West U, while ensuring that value is delivered for your hard-earned tax dollars.

— KEVIN TRAUTNER

News and Special Events



Tree Trust Planting Program

Once again, West U will be sponsoring a tree planting program with funds from the Tree Trust. Residents who wish to apply to receive a complimentary tree can stop by the Public Works office at 3826 Amherst and fill out an application – or download the “tree trust application” from www.westutx.gov, fill it out, and mail it in.

Deadline for applications is Friday, November 29

Trees from the Tree Trust may only be planted in the street right-of-way or in a front yard or side-street yard where they can be of benefit to the public. Please consider your available planting space when selecting the type of tree you want. City contractors will not plant tree species that mature into large trees beneath the canopy of an existing healthy tree or beneath overhead utility lines. Also consider visibility triangles at street intersections and at street and

driveway intersections. Applicants who have the required growth space and are approved will receive a tree at no cost. City contractors will plant, stake, mulch and fertilize the trees. The applicant will be responsible for watering and maintenance after planting.

The purpose of the Tree Trust is to ensure the regeneration and diversity of the City’s Urban Forest. The Tree Trust is funded by those residents and contractors who have removed trees for the construction of homes, garages, pools or other structures, and did not have enough space on their lot to plant the minimum required replacement plantings. Contact Craig Koehl, urban forestry consultant, at 713. 662.5313 or ckoehl@westutx.gov, if you have questions or would like additional information.



For additional questions regarding the City's CRS, please call Clay Chew at 713.662.5830, email him at cchew@westutx.gov, or westutx.gov/662/Flood-Insurance.

Potential Reduction in Flood Insurance Premiums

Effective October 1, property owners in the City of West University Place may be eligible for a reduction in flood insurance premiums because of the City's active participation in the National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP's) Community Rating System (CRS). The classifications are from a 1 to 10. The premium reduction is in the form of a CRS Class, similar to the classifications used for fire insurance. A Class 1 provides a 45% premium reduction. A Class 10 provides no reduction. The CRS Class is based on the floodplain management activities a community implements. The more activities implemented, the better the CRS class. The City of West University Place recently received a rating of 7.

The CRS program is a voluntary, incentive-based community program that recognizes, encourages and rewards local floodplain management activities that exceed the minimum standard of the NFIP. The CRS provides a variety of technical resources to help participating communities implement flood risk management programs designed to reduce and avoid flood losses and promote the awareness of flood insurance. For more information on the NFIP's CRS program, please visit www.fema.gov/national-flood-insurance-program/community-rating-system.

Buffalo Speedway Project Design Continues

The City's engineers (Freese & Nichols and HDR) are continuing their design of the roadway surface and underground storm sewer system for the Buffalo Speedway project.

In October, the project was 60% designed, and the City held the second of three public meetings to provide interested parties a broad overview of the project.

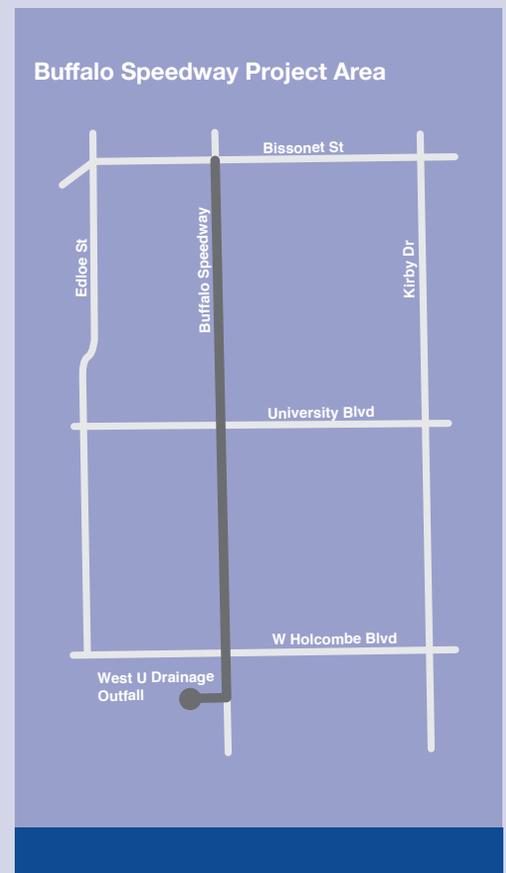
The project is expected to be 90% designed by February 2020, and the final public meeting will be scheduled at that time for a more in-depth overview as the design of the project nears completion.

The public meeting in February will give affected residents along Buffalo Speedway one final opportunity to raise any issues or concerns about the project to City engineers and staff.

The following is the proposed project timeline:

- **February 2020 – Third/final meeting with affected property owners**
- **June 2020 – Final design (100%) due to TXDOT for final review**
- **June – November 2020 – TXDOT solicits bids for construction**
- **First Quarter 2021 – Construction begins**

For more information regarding the Buffalo Speedway project or to sign up to receive email and text alerts, please visit: www.westutx.gov/buffalo



Do you know about the City's West U Collects Webpage and Mobile App?

Are you interested in knowing your schedule for trash, recycling, yard waste and street sweeping days? Do you want a simple search feature to find out where and how to dispose of items not collected curbside? Would you like to receive notifications of service interruptions? Knowing the collection schedule during observed holidays?

If you answered YES to any of the questions above, visit www.westutx.gov/westucollects for more information. On the go? Search "West U Collects" in the Apple or Android store and download the mobile app.

Having trouble finding the app or have other questions regarding trash, recycling, yard waste and street sweeping services? Contact the Public Works Department at (713) 662-5839 or pwinfo@westutx.gov.



New 'Point & Pay' Online Portal for Making Utility Payments

The City's new online "Point & Pay" payment portal, powered by the QuickPay platform, for utility billing will provide a hassle-free and user-friendly experience for paying bills online. You will be able to activate your account as a registered user and/or make a fast one-time payment without logging in. QuickPay will also help you to avoid unwanted late fees! As a registered account user, you will gain access to several account features that will help you appreciate this new and efficient way to manage your account. Additionally, when you enroll in the City's e-billing program, you will reduce cumbersome paper trails, gain 24-hour account access, and help make West University Place a greener community. Experience convenience at your fingertips by enabling the ability to "set it and forget it"! To access the new payment portal, visit the City's website at www.westutx.gov and click on the "Online Payments" button.

Note: If you had recurring credit/debit card payments set up through the old citizen access portal or recurring checking payments set up through the City, you must set this up in the new Point & Pay portal.

The new Point & Pay portal will provide the ability to:

- Store/update payment methods and settings
- Make payments
- View bills
- Schedule recurring or future-dated payments
- View payment and statement history
- Download billing statements
- Establish and manage communication preferences, such as email and text notifications



Parks and Recreation

FATHERS & FLASHLIGHTS



Friends of West University Parks Fund and the Parks and Recreation Department hosted the 13th annual Fathers & Flashlights campout on the fields surrounding West University Elementary School on November 2 and 3. The Huth, Morrison and Parker Families, along with all of the wonderful volunteers, provided another fun and memorable event. Fathers & Flashlights continues to be a very successful fundraiser for Friends of West U Parks. It is a neighborhood favorite.

Thank you to Conway MacKenzie, Camp Founder and Title Sponsor for Fathers & Flashlights 2019. The campout would not have been possible without the generosity of the following underwriters and sponsors also: Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital, Jones Day, Frost Bank, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Lloyd Engineering, Vinglace, BB&T, Cammarata Pediatric Dentistry Group, Goodsmith, Heidi Dugan, Realtor/Greenwood King Properties, Maggie Y. Garza, Realtor/Compass & Elizabeth Borski/Old Republic Title, The Pit Room, Anthony Echo, MD, The Woman's Hospital of Texas and Lauren DeFrehn Photography.

Thanks also to those whose contributions came in after our print deadline.



KIRKLAND & ELLIS



For a complete listing of the generous underwriters and sponsors and more event highlights, please visit www.westuparks.org.



Fathers & Flashlights co-chairs, from left, Michelle Huth, Sami Morrison, and Christine Parker



Mary Frances and David DuMay (left), Kimberly and John Carr Eads (Right) PLB2020 Co-Chairs

PARK LOVERS' BALL

February 8, 2020, Hilton Americas

Get ready for "A Medieval Knight in the Park"! Event co-chairs Mary Frances and David DuMay and Kimberly and John Carr Eads are planning a fun and exciting evening for park lovers. Heading up the auction for the ball are Laura Avila and Elizabeth Rambin. Auction donations can be made on the Friends website at www.westuparks.org. The underwriter/sponsor co-chairs are Lindley Arnoldy and Emily Yardley. Décor co-chairs are Lauren Droubi and Kelly Beth Hapgood. Couple seats for the gala start at \$300, and tables for 10 start at \$3,000. Seats and tables can also be purchased online through the Friends website. Look for your invitation to the ball to arrive in the mail in early January. Meanwhile, for information on becoming an underwriter, sponsor, auction donor, or to volunteer on a committee, please visit westuparks.org, or email Friends executive director at DLaMond@westutx.gov, or call 713.662.7430.



While Fathers & Flashlights and Park Lovers' Ball are the largest Friends fundraising events, there are other opportunities for involvement. Friends fundraising continues year round with business partnerships, memorials and honorariums, pavers, benches, and tree sales. For more information, please visit westuparks.org or call 713.662.7430.

Programming

For detailed information on West U Events, visit www.westutx.gov/events.



CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

December 2, 5:30–7:00pm, at the Community Building, 6104 Auden

West University Place kicks off the holiday season with the 31st Annual Christmas Tree Lighting. Join us as the lights on the tree are turned on for the season. You will see dance performances, ice sculpture creations, games and activity booths, selfie stations for family fun photos, snow, and a visit from Santa Claus. And don't forget to enter your colorful creation in the kids' coloring contest.

Bring your camera so you can take pictures of your little ones with Santa! Join your neighbors and friends as West U lights the Christmas tree and officially kicks off the holiday season.



WINTER/SPRING CLASS REGISTRATION

Are you ready for 2020? Most Winter/Spring classes begin in January, so this is the perfect time to plan for the New Year. Classes include dance, tennis, yoga, swimming, and so much more!

Priority registration begins on Tuesday, November 26, for current participants who have been enrolled in the same classes within the past 30 days. Online registration is not available for priority registration, and registration dates do not apply to Senior Services classes.

Resident registration: Tuesday, December 3, in person at the Recreation Center or online

Non-resident registration: Thursday, December 5, both at the Recreation Center and online

Register online at www.westutx.gov/reg or at the Recreation Center, 4210 Bellaire Blvd. To view a copy of the "West U at Your Leisure" guide, visit www.westutx.gov/parks or call 713.662.7420 for more information.

PARKS & RECREATION PART-TIME JOBS

Are you looking to join a fantastic team? The West University Recreation Center is hiring part-time employees. Positions available are Customer Service Team Member, Swim Instructor, and Lifeguard. If you are interested in excellent starting pay, flexible schedules, a team atmosphere, the potential for advancement, and a fun place to work, then West U is the place for you! For more information, call 713.662.7420, visit www.westutx.gov, or pick up an application at the Recreation Center at 4210 Bellaire Blvd.



WHITT JOHNSON PARK REOPENING CELEBRATION

**6540 Wakeforest
November 17, 3–5pm**

The City of West University Place and the Friends of West University Parks invite neighbors to attend the official reopening celebration at Whitt Johnson Park and check out all of the park and playground updates. There will be music, refreshments, and plenty of fun! Updates include new playground equipment, turf safety surfacing, a GaGa ball pit, benches, picnic tables, a drinking fountain, basketball court updates, and landscaping.

This project is funded entirely through the generosity of the Friends of West U Parks Fund. For more information, please visit www.westutx.gov/parkprojects or contact Parks and Recreation Director Susan White at swhite@westutx.gov.

West University Senior Services

Did You Know?

We want to make sure that all West U residents are aware of some of the services that the Parks and Recreation division of Senior Services offers for qualifying West U residents.

Transportation Services:

Monday through Friday, we provide transportation to senior activities, doctor and dentist appointments, beauty shops, drug stores, banks, and the post office by appointment only, schedule permitting. Participants must have the cognitive and physical ability to get to and from the vehicle and the appointment site on their own. If not, a caretaker must be present. Grocery shopping is provided on a designated day. When you call for transportation, please have the name, address, and phone number of your appointment available. Reservations must be made at least one day in advance. There are no standing appointments. Please call 713.662.5895 for more information.

Words on Wheels:

Enjoy reading but can't get to the library? Call 832.927.5490 to reserve your books. We will bring them to your home and return them as well.

Home Maintenance and Repair:

Call 713.662.5895 to request assistance with small or odd jobs.

Medical Equipment Loans:

Basic medical equipment is available for temporary use.

Special Trash Pickup:

For those with special needs, the City provides trash and recycle pickup at your door.

The Good Neighbor Team:

The Good Neighbor Team is a group of caring and concerned neighbors who take the time to give back to their community by offering friendship and assistance to homebound seniors. If you would like to be a part of this team, call 713.662.5897.

Don't forget to view our online version of the "Hi Neighbor" newsletter at www.westutx.gov/seniors to view all of our programs and services in their entirety.



Safety and Public Works

LOCK IT — OR LOSE IT!

Friendly Reminders from the West University Place Police Department:

The following list details preventive measures to reduce risk and increase protection from car burglary and theft:

1. Take, lock, hide. Take possessions and valuables out of the vehicle, or place them out of plain view or put them in the trunk. Hiding property is the least preventive measure to be taken.
2. Lock your vehicle and ensure that the windows are completely raised. Set alarms or anti-theft devices.
3. Park in well-lit areas.
4. Consider engraving identifying information on items (NOT your Social Security number or date of birth, as these may inspire identity theft).
5. Be aware of your surroundings and report suspicious activity.
6. Use devices such as steering wheel locks and locking wheel nuts to prevent thefts.
7. Record serial numbers, make, models, and brands.
8. Never leave your vehicle unattended with the engine running.
9. Do not leave spare keys in your vehicle, and do not use a “hide-a-key” device, as thieves know how to detect where these are located.

Things to Know About Your Fire Department!

In addition to fire suppression and fire prevention services, your Fire Department operates an ambulance that is licensed as a Mobile Intensive Care Unit (MICU) – the highest licensed level of care possible for a ground ambulance. Not all fire departments operate a MICU, and the main reason that West U is able to operate a MICU is our requirement that each Fire Department staff member be dual-certified as a firefighter and as a paramedic. Paramedic training is the highest level of emergency medical technician (EMT) certification possible, and it prepares our staff members to perform advanced life-support measures for critically sick and injured patients.

Additionally, this dual certification allows the City to staff firefighter/paramedic personnel on the well-equipped fire engine, too, so that these responders can also provide advanced lifesaving assistance even if an ambulance is not immediately available.

“Our goal is to provide the highest level of care to our patients by requiring firefighter/paramedic personnel to be staffed on every response,” said Chief Aaron Taylor.

“This is possible due to the support of the City Council and residents in providing funding for state-of-the-art equipment and training that allows our staff to maintain this high level of service.”

Last year, the Fire Department placed its new ambulance into service. This new ambulance has some major improvements over its predecessor, such as improved suspension and handling, as well as an improved cabin design that improves EMT operability while also increasing patient comfort.



Frazer Type I ambulance, acquired by the Fire Department in October of 2018.

Where do I Recycle Plastic Bags?

Blue Bin: NO

There might be a recycling symbol on the bag, but that does not mean it goes in your blue bin. It doesn't!

If it's plastic film of any kind, such as a plastic bag, take it to an appropriate recycling drop-off location for this material.

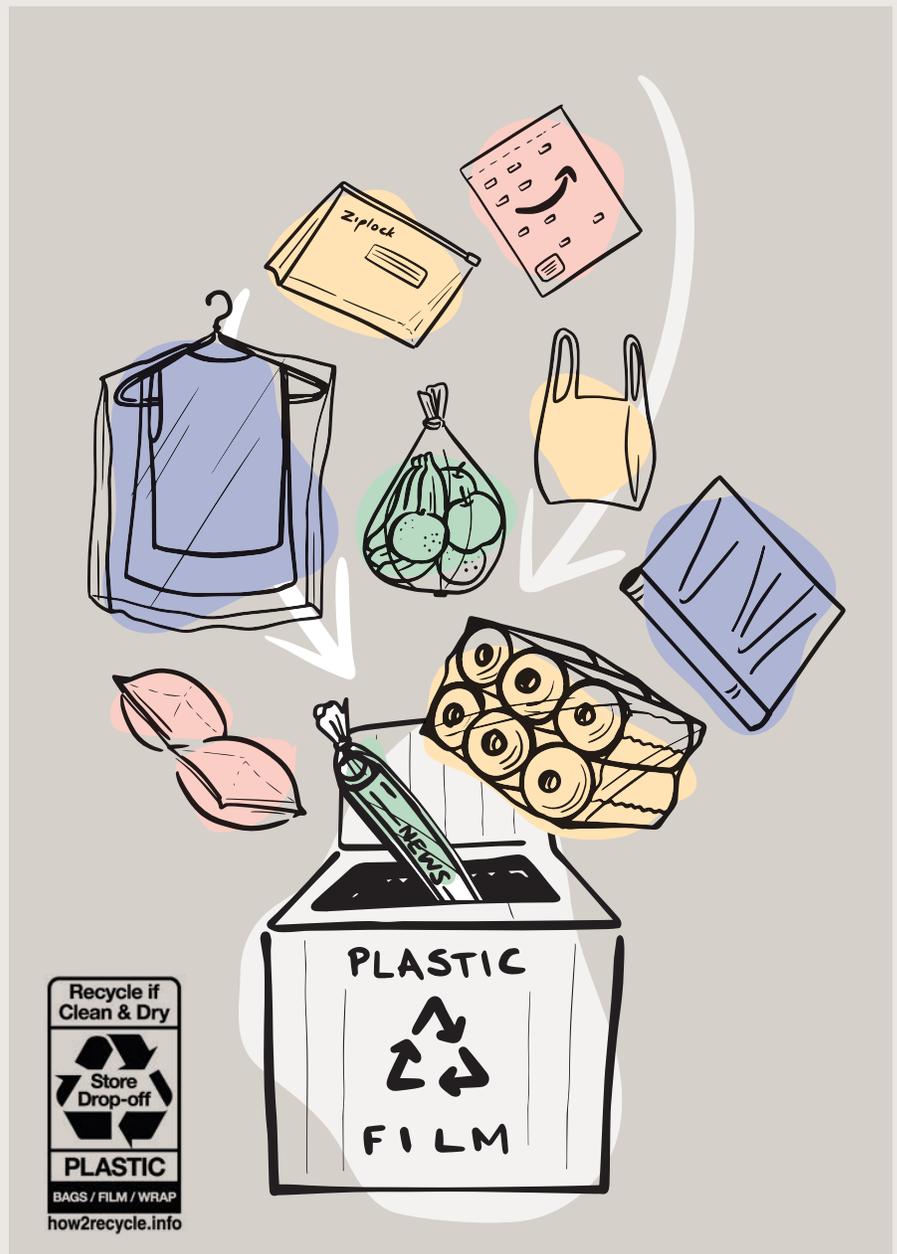
Store Drop-Off: YES

HEB, Randalls, Whole Foods, Target

Look for the plastic bag/film recycling container. **Remember: All items must be CLEAN and DRY.**

Examples of Plastic Film:

- Plastic bags
- Case wrap, like water bottle cases
- Zip-top bags
- Produce bags
- Bubble wrap
- Plastic mailers
- Shrink/stretch wrap
- Newspaper sleeves
- Air pillows
- Cleaner bag



Look for the labeled bin at many participating stores to drop off your plastic film waste for recycling.

A Newsletter for the Citizens of the City of West University Place

City of West U Officials

CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mayor Bob Higley
Mayor Pro Tem Kevin Trautner
John Barnes
Lauri Lankford
Ed Sobash

CITY MANAGER

Dave Beach
dbeach@westutx.gov

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and is printed on recycled paper.

For questions and comments about *City Currents*,
contact City Secretary Thelma Gilliam at
tgilliam@westutx.gov or 713.662.5812.

Design by Minor Design

Meeting Reminders for City Council, Boards and Commissions

City Council

Meetings are the second and fourth Monday of each month
Starts at 6:30 pm at City Hall

Building and Standards Commission

Meetings are the first Thursday of each month
Starts at 6:00 pm at City Hall

Zoning and Planning Commission

Meetings are the second Thursday of each month
Starts at 6:15 pm at City Hall

Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction Board

Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month
Starts at 6:00 pm at the Community Building

Parks and Recreation Board

Meetings are the first Wednesday of each month
Starts at 6:30 pm at the Recreation Center

Senior Services Board

Meetings are the second Thursday of each month
Starts at 2:00 pm at the Community Building

Zoning Board of Adjustment

Meetings are the fourth Thursday of each month
Starts at 6:30 pm at City Hall



We Need Your Help to Keep West U Green!

Receive Your Utility Bill Statement Electronically

Help conserve resources now by enrolling to receive your e-statement.
To get started, please email us at billinghelp@westutx.gov or call
713.662.5824, and please reference your account number.