

City Currents

Winter 2020



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And More Helpful Information About Your City!



West U Earns Prestigious Accreditation

What Works in Public Works? Everything.



A complex, five-step process, involving several City departments and a rigid self-assessment, has resulted in West University Place receiving the elite status of full accreditation by the American Public Works Association (APWA) – one of only

156 agencies in North America and 13 in Texas to earn this honor out of 30,000 eligible APWA members.

“A few of the distinctions we’ve received, such as ‘best places’ or ‘wealth’ rankings, may be more glamorous,” said Mayor Bob Higley, “but this is a true indication of the quality of life in West U and the dedication of our Public Works department in providing the highest levels of governance, service, and accountability.”

The process for APWA accreditation was no simple matter, and the City Council, City management, and staff had to embrace the effort, which pulled in departments outside Public Works, including Finance, Human Resources, Parks, Emergency Management, Fire, and Information Technology.

West U was first required to perform an intense self-assessment before applying for the accreditation. The application itself involved providing extensive information on the City’s policies and procedures for 464 out of 527 possible areas (with 63 practices not

applicable). After a site evaluation by four APWA inspectors, West U finished with 458 areas at full compliance with APWA’s strict guidelines; six at substantial compliance, which will be brought up within six months; and full accreditation for an initial four-year period.

“Being one of the most visible departments in the City, our actions can directly and indirectly impact the successful delivery of all other City services,” said Public Works Director Gerardo Barrera. “The Public Works Department and our staff are a prime example of dedication, improvement, and the striving for excellence that contribute to making the City of West University a great place to live and work.”

During the four-year accreditation period, the City will be required to submit twice-yearly updates to demonstrate continued compliance, and will go through a re-accreditation at the end of that time.

In 2019, the City received formal recognition of the APWA accreditation at a City Council meeting held on December 9. APWA, www.apwa.net, is a nonprofit international organization promoting professional excellence and public awareness of the field of public works. It is based in Kansas City, Missouri, with an office in Washington, D.C., and 63 chapters throughout North America.



Mayor Bob Higley

From the Mayor's Desk

Just the facts on the Tri-Sports decision

City Council realized that one the biggest hurdles that the Council faces on the Tri-Sports issue is conveying the facts to all West U taxpaying homeowners in a factual, concise manner. You deserve a statement that promotes a better understanding of the decision to deny the \$125,000 **taxpayer cash subsidy** for Tri-Sports, while continuing support by providing fields and utilities at no cost to Tri-Sports (estimated cost to taxpayer is \$130,000)

WHAT IS TRI-SPORTS?

- Tri-Sports is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization.
- Tri-Sports was chartered 33 years ago by three private West U citizens in an effort to coordinate the use of fields by three privately registered youth sports associations (little league, softball and soccer).

WHAT IS WEST U?

- The City of West U, which represents the taxpaying West U homeowners, is a “home rule” municipal government with defined roles established in the City charter, State law and the State Constitution.

WHY WAS THE CASH SUBSIDY DENIED?

- Over numerous public and private meetings with City officials (including Council and staff), Tri-Sports officials failed to provide Council with information supporting all three requirements that are necessary for the City to comply with State law.
- Since its inception 33 years ago, Tri-Sports has now grown into an organization that attracts players from over 136 zip codes in the Houston metro area.
- Today, approximately 80% of the participants in the youth sports leagues come from these zip codes outside of West U.
- Many cities have residents who participate in the Tri-Sports leagues, but none of these cities give a **cash subsidy** in addition to field access and utilities at no charge.
- Until now, 100% of West U taxpayers were subsidizing all of the players from the greater Houston metro area who participate in the three youth sports leagues.

HOW MUCH?

- Based on player data provided by Tri-Sports, the leagues would have to increase their fees by \$15 per player to replace the prior \$125,000 West U taxpayer funded **cash subsidy**.
- The City of West U taxpayer still provides the West U Recreation Center Fields and utilities free of charge to these youth sports leagues (at an estimated cost of \$130,000)
- The City Council returned the \$125,000 taxpayer cash subsidy to all West U taxpayers in the form of a lower tax rate and taxes paid to the City.

LET'S AGREE

Youth sports is a great activity for all players and their families. All of the communities in the greater Houston metro area benefit from the youth sports provided by little league, softball and soccer. West U is not unique in the benefits received from Tri-Sports.

In the 33 years since it was created, Tri-Sports has grown well beyond the original borders of West U. Tri-Sports and West U should be proud of our individual and joint successes.

The City Council's decision on who should bear the expense for participation in Tri-Sports will not change the arc of Tri-Sports' growth nor alter their financial integrity.

The different roles of city government and youth sports is best illustrated by our vastly different means of obtaining revenue and our very different mandates.

Homeowners in West U are compelled to pay taxes. Youth sports is funded by registration fees and sponsorships. Youth sports are elective family expenditures and property taxes are not.

Our goal as Council is to ensure that West U remains one of the best communities in Texas by ensuring the decisions we make put the taxpaying homeowners at the center of every discussion. It's time to move forward.

— MAYOR BOB HIGLEY



As we begin the New Year,

I'd like to take a moment to recognize the wonderful people who serve our community. From top to bottom, our City staff comprise some of the most dedicated, skillful, hardworking, and downright nice people that I've ever had the pleasure to work with. As was recognized on December 9 by the American Public Works Association, our Public Works Department is among the most elite in the nation. Last summer, our exemplary Police Department was recognized for its excellence by the Texas Police Chiefs Association. And similar recognition has previously been bestowed upon our outstanding Parks and Recreation Department in the form of a Gold Medal Award from the Texas Recreation and Park Society. The other departments of our City – from the firefighters, whose bravery keeps our families and property safe, to the good people of our Finance Department, whose tireless efforts are essential to fulfilling this Council's commitment to sound stewardship of your tax dollars – are of likewise unmatched quality.

Therefore, as we go about our own personal business, I would ask each of us to take the opportunity to say a word of thanks to the people who, day in and day out, and often without notice or recognition, work unceasingly to maintain and enhance the quality of life that each of us has come to enjoy in the City of West University Place. Beyond simply keeping us safe, these are the people who make sure that the small, but essential, experiences of our daily lives – like turning on a faucet, flipping on a light, driving on our streets, or going for a walk – are smooth and seamless, making life just a little bit better. These are also the people whose efforts and imagination provide the many services and programs that foster and add to the spirit of community that lies at the heart of our City. West U is what it is because of them, and they are, quite simply, the best.

— COUNCILMEMBER JOHN BARNES



The Information Highway More Traveled

West U Ready to Move Forward with Communications Strategy

The key to good government – with engaged residents and responsive leaders and staff – is effective communication. Armed with results of a community survey of residents' preferences on how they want to receive information, West University's staff is creating a communications strategy that it will be implementing over the next year.

Based on results, as well as on best practices, West U will focus on fast, direct messaging in order to establish the City as the go-to source of information, regarding both emergencies and routine operations.

"We understand the allure of social media," said City Manager Dave Beach, "but this type of water-cooler gossip runs counter to good, useful, and strategic communications – and is clearly not how residents want us to communicate. It was enlightening to see that, while social media occasionally attracts a lot of attention, only a small number of residents consider it a primary source of information from the City."

Email notices from the City were the clear choice of West University residents for non-emergency information – such as regarding construction work or community events – with

85 percent of respondents citing receiving email notices as their preference. Overall, 77 percent said the City’s website was their No. 1 information source for all types of City communications – with preferences for emails at 8 percent and for social media at 5 percent.

Conducted through Integrate/YouGov, the survey was emailed to about 2,600 residents – and 821 responded. Half were female, half male. Residents 55 and older were a bit more responsive, at 54 percent, with respondents 54 and younger at 46 percent.

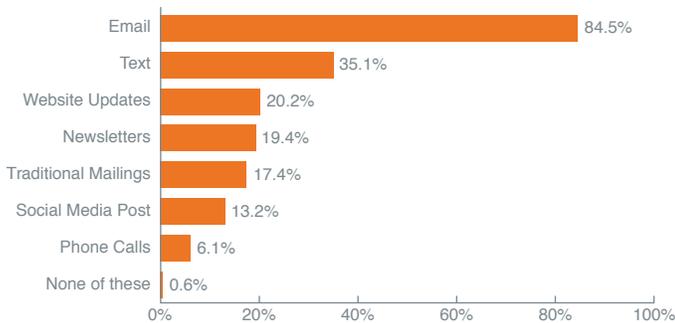
More than 81 percent of respondents favored a single email that combined information for non-emergency items in lieu

of receiving multiple emails on different items, and 37 percent of residents preferred once-a-week communications, while 27 percent preferred once-a-month communications.

In the comments section of the survey, residents requested more content in the body of emails from the City, along with an option to receive a summary of City Council meetings. They also suggested a more efficient system for emergency alerts.

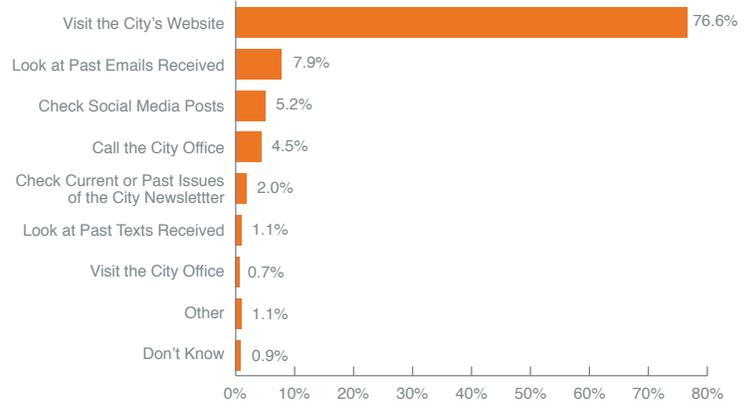
Questions and suggestions on how City staff can further improve West U’s communications efforts are always welcome, and should be directed to City Secretary Thelma Gilliam at tgilliam@westutx.gov or 713.662.5813.

Preferred Method for Non-Emergency Announcements



Base: West University Place Residents (821)

Where Residents Turn First for City Information



Base: West University Place Residents (821)

Public Meeting in March for Buffalo Speedway Project (90% Design)

The Buffalo Speedway Project, which is being developed to replace the existing roadway and improve drainage, will have its third and final public meeting in late February 2020. The meeting date will be determined by the end of January. This public meeting will provide adjacent property owners and other interested parties an opportunity to review the proposed design plans for the project.

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

Below is the upcoming timeline for the Buffalo Speedway Project:

- **Wednesday, March 4, 2020 – Third and final public meeting will be held with affected property owners to discuss the Buffalo Speedway Project (design will be 90% completed)**
- **June 2020 – Final design (100 percent completed) will be due to the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) for a final review**
- **June–November 2020 – TXDOT will solicit bids for construction**
- **First Quarter 2021 – Construction will begin**

News and Special Events

Reminder: Don't Miss Out on a Flood Insurance Discount

West University's stellar rating for floodplain management means that homeowners may qualify for a significant reduction in their flood insurance rates.

The City has earned a Community Class Rating of 7 in the FEMA National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP's) Community Rating System (CRS) – a voluntary, incentive based program that evaluates local floodplain management activities that exceed the minimum standards of the NFIP. This means that, as of October 1, 2019, West University homeowners are eligible for a 15 percent discount.

For additional information, visit www.westutx.gov/662/Flood-Insurance, or contact Chief Building Official Clay Chew at 713.662.5830 or cchew@westutx.gov. You can learn more about the NFIP CRS at www.fema.gov/national-flood-insurance-program/community-rating-system.



Rate Increase to Begin Appearing on February Bills

The utility rate increases that have been approved by the City Council in West University's 2020 Operating Budget will begin appearing on February bills. This includes a 2.32 percent increase in water rates, a 2.76 percent hike in sewer rates, and a 5 percent rise in solid waste rates. The rates actually took effect on January 1, but billing is done at the end of each monthly cycle. If you have any questions, please contact the Utility Billing Office at billinghelp@westutx.gov or 713.662.5824.

Go Green on Your Utility Billing

Reduce the City of West University's paperwork and your unnecessary postal mail by signing up to receive your utility statements via email.

Point & Pay customers can easily choose electronic statements from their Point & Pay dashboard, where they will then see a green light on the paperless statement option.

Those not on Point & Pay may contact the Utility Billing Office at 713.662.5824 or email billinghelp@westutx.gov and request electronic billing by providing their account number.

Bill Paying is a Few Clicks Away with Point & Pay

West University's new Point & Pay system to make utility payments online is already serving residents – and is always accepting new accounts.

Registration can be done through the City's website, www.westutx.gov, by clicking on the "Online Payments" button, then the "Pay Water Bill" button. Registration can also be completed by phoning 888.891.6064.

Remember that, if you had automatic credit or debit card payments or recurring check payments set up in the old system, you must re-register in the new Point & Pay system.

Using your computer, phone, or tablet, this new portal offers the ability to:

- Establish/update account information and settings
- Store/update payment methods
- Make payments
- Schedule recurring or future-dated payments
- View payment and statement history

For more information, visit www.pointandpay.com.



Parks and Recreation



This new water slide is among the improvements to be enjoyed this season at the Colonial Park Pool. This is a rendering of the slide only for presentation purposes.

COLONIAL PARK POOL MARKS 10TH YEAR WITH ‘SPLASH BASH’ AND NEW ATTRACTIONS

Memberships are available now for the 10th season of the Colonial Park Pool, which is currently undergoing a make-over that includes a new water slide. This 10th anniversary will be celebrated with a slate of special events.

On Saturday, May, 2, these festivities will kick off with a members-only “Splash Bash” that will be held from noon till 6 p.m. Attendees will be among the first to preview the newly resurfaced pool, along with a giant spiral water slide with a unique lighting effect, a Wally the Walrus-themed kiddie slide, and a new splash play feature – all provided by the Friends of West University Parks Fund.

Memberships can be purchased online now at www.westutx.gov/reg or by visiting the Recreation Center at 4210 Bellaire Blvd.

COLONIAL PARK PLAYGROUND PLANNING CONTINUES

The West University Parks and Recreation Board and a resident group are working together on recommendations for improvements to the playground area of Colonial Park and the addition of lighting on the east end of the park.

Stay current on parks and recreation projects by registering for updates at www.westutx.gov/park projects.



EXPLORING YOUNG INTERESTS

Here is the Signup Schedule for West U Summer Camps

Priority registration begins in January for a wide variety of West University summer camp offerings for youngsters – everything from Building Brains LEGO camps and Kidventure camps to activities involving computers, dance, tennis, and more. Spaces are limited, and camps are expected to fill up quickly.

Registration dates:

- Summer Camp registration going on now.
- Camp enrollment often changes. Waitlist enrollment is encouraged.

Kidventure (KV) summer camp:

- To learn more, call us at 713.960.8989 or visit www.kidventure.com/houston-summer-camp

To obtain a complete listing of camps, dates, times, and fees, call 713.662.7420 or click on www.westutx.gov/camps. Information and registration for the Kidventure camps is available at www.kidventure.com.



HAVE YOUR SAY ON PLANNING FOR PARKS AND ON SENIORS' NEEDS

West University relies on its residents to offer input on their preferences for parks and recreation planning and to assess the needs of its senior citizens – and, for 2020, this process will start with residents receiving a letter in the mail.

This letter will contain a web link address and an access code, so that recipients can participate in an online survey. Residents may also request to take a written survey and return their answers via the United States Postal Service.

If you haven't received the survey request by the end of March, or if you have questions about the survey, please contact the Parks and Recreation Department at myparks@westutx.gov or 713.662.5367.

West University Senior Services

Good Neighbor Team – Serving West U Seniors for Over 20 Years

What started as a “Good Neighbor Team” concept in a 1998 community survey has now been a vital part of West University for over 20 years, and it continues to fill a need.

The Good Neighbor Team began in 1999 with longtime residents Mary Lee Gray, Stan McCandless, and Dorothy Zink operating as a committee of the Senior Services Board. Today, under the direction of Team Chair Mardi Turner and in conjunction with the Parks and Recreation Department’s Senior Services Division, 35 volunteers serve on the team. They provide regular personal contact with seniors, along with home deliveries of three annual holiday packages and three yearly mailings of holiday cards, as well as a variety of other services.



Original Good Neighbor Team members Stan McCandless, Dorothy Zink, and Mary Lee Gray deliver a gift bag, along with Senior Services Manager Toby Brooks and current Team Chair Mardi Turner.

Applications for volunteer opportunities can be picked up in the Senior Services Office in the Community Building at 6104 Auden St. For more information about the Good Neighbor Team, call 713.662.5895.



Kimberly Eads and Mary Frances DuMay co-chaired this year’s Park Lovers’ Ball.

A Chivalrous Event to Support West University’s Parks

Dinner, dancing, an exciting auction, a wine pull, and whiskey blackjack were just a few of the attractions for knights and ladies at this year’s Park Lovers’ Ball, “A Medieval Knight in the Park.”

The annual gala was held on Saturday, February 8, at the Hilton Americas–Houston.

This year’s honoree was IBC Bank and event co-chairs were Kimberly and John Carr Eads and Mary Frances and David DuMay.

At the time of publication for this City Currents issue, underwriters and sponsors included Cherie and John Lindley/Mandy Rochelle Designs, Greenwood King Properties, IBC Bank, Mitra and Josh Woody/Whitney and Marc Walsh, Rice Village, Stewart Title – Kirby-Bree Knodel/The Swallen Mortgage Team, Scooter Lerner, Elite Care Emergency Center, Buffaloe Floors and Up, Mary Frances and David DuMay, Kimberly and John Carr Eads, Locke Lord LLP, Stephanie and Brett Magill, Vinson & Elkins LLP, Jane and Harry Pefanis, BB&T now Truist, Kirkland & Ellis, John Daugherty, Realtors, Heidi Dugan, Realtor/Greenwood King Properties, Carol Rowley, Realtor/Compass Real Estate, Laura U Design Collective, Caroline Billipp, Kathleen Graf and Alex Heins, Realtors/Greenwood King Properties, Rhett Ross and Lee Kaplan, Realtors/Compass Real Estate, Caroline Bean, Realtor/Compass Real Estate, Cammarata Pediatric Dentistry, Kirsten and Rob Galtney, The Woman’s Hospital of Texas, Children’s Memorial Hermann Urgent Care, Jones Day, Art Attack, Katherine Warren/Martha Turner Sotheby’s International Realty, Village Plumbing & Air, Transwestern, New Leaf Real Estate, and Kasteena Parikh/Keller Williams Realty – The Metropolitan Office.

Safety and Public Works



This FOG Can Also Be Hazardous:

Keeping Fats, Oils, and Grease Out of Sewers

If you are pouring cooking fats, oils, and grease (FOG) down the drain, stop! Meat fats from cooking, along with cooking oils, lard, butter, margarine, and other oily, greasy food waste accumulate in sewer pipes, eventually restricting flow and potentially causing raw sewage (more politely known as “untreated wastewater”) to back up into homes, businesses, and streets.

Quite simply, this is a public health hazard that every West University household can avoid by doing the following:

- Properly dispose of cooking oil by pouring it into a sealable container and placing the container in the trash. You can also recycle used cooking oil by dispose of the container(s) with other Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) utilizing the City’s HHW Voucher program.
- Dispose of food scraps into the trash, not the sink.
- Wipe pots, pans, and dishes with a dry paper towel before rinsing or washing them.
- Rinse dishes and pans with cold water before putting them into the dishwasher. Rinsing dishes and pans with hot water melts the FOG off the dishes, causing FOG to end up in the sewer pipes.

Avoid doing the following:

- Don’t use the garbage disposal. Grinding food before rinsing it down the drain does not remove FOG.
- Don’t pour oils, pan drippings, or bacon grease down the sink.
- Don’t use cloth towels or rags to scrape plates or to clean greasy or oily dishware.
- Don’t run water over dishes, pans, or fryers to wash oil and grease down the drain.
- Don’t flush any type of used wipes down the commode. Flushable wipes only break down into smaller pieces, giving FOG something to cling on and causing it to build up more quickly.

Everyone can do their part to keep FOG out of the sewer system. For more information about FOG, visit www.tceq.texas.gov/assistance/water/wastewater/fog.

If you have any questions regarding West University’s sewer system, contact the Plant Supervisor, Barron Cooper at 713.662.5873 or email bcooper@westutx.gov



Be in the Know On Curbside Recycling of Food and Beverage Cartons

From the City's Recycling & Solid Waste Reduction Board

- Steps for recycling cartons: Empty the carton (no need to rinse). It is acceptable to leave the cap on. **DO NOT FLATTEN**. Place in blue bin for curbside recycling.
- There are two types of cartons that are used as packaging for food and beverage products: shelf-stable cartons for juice, milk, soy milk, soup, broth, and wine – and refrigerated cartons, such as for milk, juice, cream, and egg substitutes.
- Cartons are a preferred method of food packaging – each carton is about 93 percent product and only 7 percent waste, much less than with many alternatives.
- Cartons are mainly made from paper. What may seem like wax on a carton is actually a thin layer of plastic.
- Cartons can be recycled into new products such as paper towels, tissues, and printing and writing paper. The aluminum and plastic can be used to generate energy or to become binding. In other cases, the entire carton can be recycled into building materials, like wall-board, roof cover board, and ceiling and roofing tiles.
- Cartons are a sustainable packaging option, but their life cycle ends if they end up in a landfill. Seeing that these cartons get recycled is our responsibility.

Learn to Compost at Home

On Saturday, April 4, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., Steve Stelzer, a West University resident and master composter, will present a workshop on how to compost at home. This event will be held at the Scout House located at 6108 Edloe St.

The session will be free for residents and \$10 for non-residents. For his presentations, Stelzer uses slides and samples, and performs demonstrations to help residents get started on reducing their household and yard waste – and creating a rich source of nutrients for gardening in the process.

Stelzer has composted in his West U backyard for 15 years, and, for the past four years, has facilitated a STAR Master Composter training course for the City of Houston.

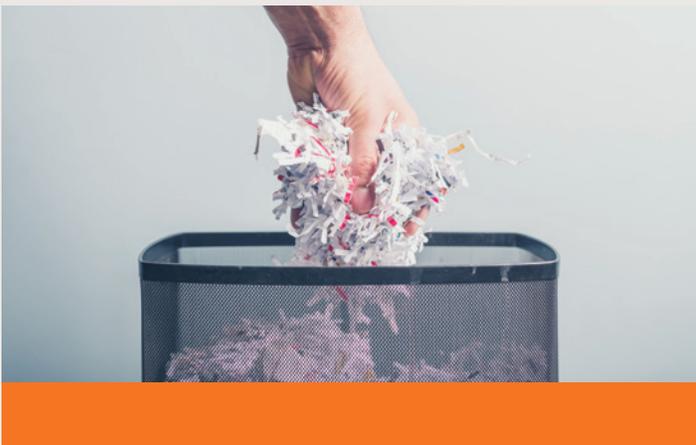
For more information, contact the Parks Department at 713.662.7420. To register for this event, please go to www.westutx.gov/reg (activity/event #106022-01) or visit the West University Recreation Center at 4210 Bellaire Blvd.



Save the Date – Free Paper Shredding, E-Waste, and Mattress Recycling Event

Here's a chance for West University residents (proof of residency required) to dispose of paper, electronic waste, and mattresses. This event will be held on Saturday, May 2, from 9 a.m. until noon, at the Public Works Maintenance Facility located at 3826 Milton St.

For paper shredding, a maximum of five banker's boxes per vehicle will be allowed. This shredding is for personal documents only – no business or commercial papers will be accepted.



A Newsletter for the Citizens of 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

City Currents is a quarterly publication
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 Reminder 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.