

City Currents

Autumn 2020



IN THIS ISSUE

Investments in City Infrastructure

State-of-the-Art Security Camera System

And More Helpful Information About Your City!

City Council approves investment in City's future

City Authorizes Funding for Design on Citywide Street and Drainage Improvements

On October 5, the City Council approved the sale of \$27 million in bonds to fund the construction of street and drainage improvements on Buffalo Speedway, along with engineering designs for street and drainage improvements in various portions of the city.

Buffalo Speedway Project

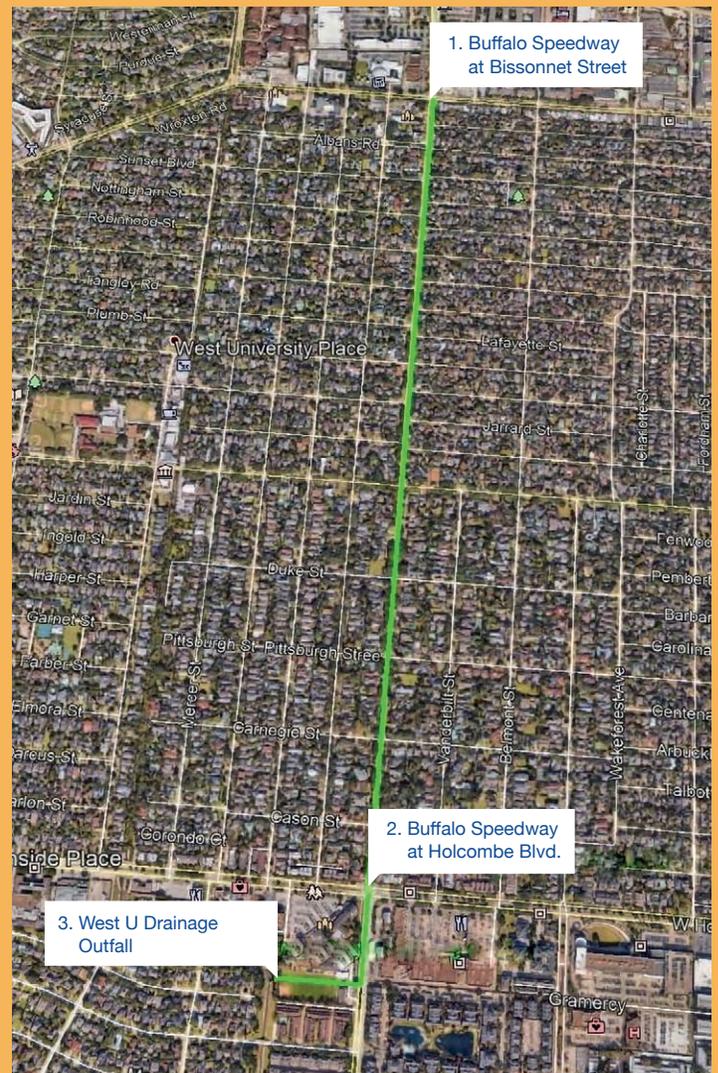
This bond sale includes approximately \$20 million in funding for improvements on Buffalo Speedway, with the remaining \$15 million cost of the project to be covered by grants from the Federal Highway Authority and Community Development Block Grants. This project will include both resurfacing and drainage improvements. The bids for this project will open in November 2020, with work to begin in early 2021. The improvements will take approximately two years to complete.

For more information on the Buffalo Speedway project, please visit www.westutx.gov/639/Buffalo-Speedway-Project

Citywide Street and Drainage Improvements

Approximately \$7 million of the bond proceeds will fund the design work necessary to construct improvements for streets not replaced during the City's Infrastructure Program, along with drainage improvements in various areas of the city. These drainage improvements are the result of a recently completed drainage/modeling study that identified areas of need for 2-year and 10-year storm events. This design work will begin in December of 2020 and take approximately 18 to 24 months to complete.

For more information on this project, please visit www.westutx.gov/682/City-Wide-Drainage-Study



Map of the Buffalo Speedway Project.

From the Mayor's Desk



Mayor Bob Higley

Dear Neighbors,

Like so many other communities, West U residents have been forced to confront a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety this year. In addition to preparing for and reacting to events such as COVID-19 and Hurricane Laura, our City Council and staff continue to make long-term plans for the well-being of our city. For example, City Council voted to issue \$27 million in bonds to replace Buffalo Speedway, as well as to begin design work for street and drainage improvements throughout West U.

The 65-year old Buffalo Speedway is one of our main north-to-south arterial streets. It is long overdue for replacement. Planning and preparation for this project started in 2015, with the City applying for grant funding from the Federal Highway Authority (approximately \$9.5 million) for replacement of the road surface. Design work for this project began in the fall of 2018.

The City's quest for grant funding didn't stop there. The City was able to secure additional grant funding (approximately \$4.5 million) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant program for associated drainage improvements, which helps offset the total project cost of approximately \$35 million.

Construction is expected to be underway starting in January 2021. Once completed in late 2022, this improvements will go a long way toward alleviating drainage issues for the homeowners along Buffalo Speedway.

Like the Buffalo Speedway improvements, planning for the second major undertaking took a good deal of thought and effort. In 2019, City Council approved a Comprehensive Drainage and Modeling Study to evaluate the remaining portion of the drainage system that is not addressed in the Buffalo Speedway Project. The results of that study, presented to the City Council in June of 2020, proved invaluable to the City Council in arriving at their decision to move forward with the engineering design for improvements to streets and drainage systems throughout the city. The design portion will take approximately 18–24 months to complete and will cost approximately \$7 million. Once completed, the City will be able to solicit bids for the construction of these improvements that will provide significant benefit by lowering the water level in the streets during 2- and 10-year storm events.

While we were fortunate to not have any major impacts from Hurricane Laura, we know that a severe storm event on the Gulf Coast is just a matter of time.

The City Council and staff are making safety a priority as we address drainage issues and improve vital West U infrastructure. City Council has made the decision to utilize historic lows on interest rates to reinvest in the community. Once complete, both of these major projects will help to minimize the damage and disruption from storms.

We cannot always know what the future holds, as has been witnessed by the global emergence of COVID-19. West U residents can, however, rest assured that City Council takes its responsibility as a steward of your tax dollars very seriously. West U is working every day while keeping an eye on the future.

This helps to ensure that West U is, and continues to be, a great place to live!

— MAYOR BOB HIGLEY

West U's Virtual Gate

State-of-the-Art Security Camera System Becoming a Reality to Keep West U Safer

Work began in June on the first step of the City's \$4.5 million project to turn West University into a "virtual gated community" that is circled with a network of security cameras in and around the city. After completing a one-month "proof of concept" test run, the City began installing 15 camera gateways in August, work which will be completed by the end of the year. The second phase will be adding the remaining 25 cameras in 2021.

West U's Virtual Gate system will expand on the license plate recognition (LPR) technology currently being used on a few police patrol cars. The Virtual Gate will be a passive, non-monitored system, and the images captured will be used by our Police Department to help narrow possible leads for solving crimes in the area. Additionally, since the system is designed to access local, state, and federal databases, it will notify patrol officers of stolen vehicles, AMBER Alerts, and more.

Security camera systems have long been embraced by many as passive crime fighters and deterrents for would-be wrongdoers – and these systems range from doorbell camera surveillance systems at individual homes, to closed-circuit cameras silently monitoring businesses and scanning public spaces.

The Virtual Gate design will allow our system to grow and expand beyond today's capabilities, and may eventually include facial recognition, motion detection, and connection with private cameras.

To learn more about the Virtual Gate project, please visit www.westutx.gov/1016/Virtual-Gate





*Councilmember
Lauri Lankford*

West U Excels – Most of the Time

West U excels – most of the time. Why do I say “most of the time”? I have heard complaints from West U residents about the City’s lack of communication on some issues. I also have not been satisfied with the level of communication, and, in my opinion, our City can do better.

Before further discussing this communications issue, I’d like to highlight just a few of the prestigious awards that our City departments have received this year: 1) our Public Works Department received national accreditation from the American Public Works Association, 2) our Police Department was recognized by the Best Practices Recognition Program of the Texas Police Chiefs Association, and 3) our Parks & Recreation Department received its second consecutive gold medal from the Texas Recreation and Parks Society.

Responding to real-time situations is in addition to the excellent services that each City department provides our residents each and every day. During the recent threat of Hurricane Laura, approximately 60 City employees sheltered in place inside City buildings to ensure that West U would be able to respond immediately to any storm-related issue. Thankfully, those resources were not needed, but West U was prepared. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, West U began its response by declaring a local state of disaster, canceling events, closing or limiting access to parks and recreational facilities, restricting access to City buildings, and alternating days that City employees worked from home or onsite – all in an effort to “flatten the curve.” Our Fire Chief still continues to lead the Emergency Management team for our City’s COVID-19 response.

Additionally, West U is unique in many ways. It is one of just a few cities in Texas that has its own alarm monitoring service (DirectLink) and recently completed enhancements to DirectLink to provide subscribers with more convenient functionality, such as remote access via a phone or computer app, provided residents have a compatible security system. Additionally, all West U firefighters are dual-qualified as firefighters and paramedics, which permits lifesaving measures to be provided, regardless of whether an ambulance or a fire truck responds to a call. And, while somewhat limited due to COVID-19, our Senior Services Department coordinates City resources and volunteers to help with transportation, home maintenance and repair, and special porch trash/recycling pickups for West U seniors and residents who need extra assistance. West U’s Good Neighbor team of volunteers has been in existence for over 20 years. These are only a few examples of the services that make West U one of the best places to live.

City Council Sets Priorities for the Next Year

The City Council met on June 14–15 to discuss strategic visioning for 2020-2021. This process allows Councilmembers and City staff to proactively identify priorities to focus on for the next year. Establishing a vision and setting goals are part of our long-term and short-term planning, which helps to ensure that West U continues to be recognized as one of the best places to live in the country.

The following 2020–2021 Policy and Management Agendas resulted from these workshops:

Policy Agenda – Top Priority

- City Communication Enhancements
- Financial Plan/Model with 5-Year Projections
- Key Performance Metrics
- Alternative Stormwater Detention/ Drainage Modeling
- Virtual Gate – Phase 2
- Lots Maximum Buildable Area
- Traffic Safety Study
- Public Safety Issues

Now to where I do see a need for improvement – communication. The Texas Open Meetings Act severely limits the ways in which a City Council can communicate as a group outside of a public meeting. Since most residents cannot attend every City Council meeting and every workshop to keep abreast of all City Council decisions and to hear the reasoning behind them, this presents one of our problems. While we can communicate our individual opinions or understandings, we cannot prepare any statement on behalf of the entire City Council (or even on behalf of three council members) without first discussing such a statement in a City Council meeting. If we violate that requirement, the Texas Open Meetings laws may subject us to criminal prosecution.

Since the swearing in of the current City Council, we have used the City’s quarterly City Currents newsletter for communication with West U residents. We have also relied on local newspapers and magazines to report on our decisions or to publish letters from our West U mayor, and, additionally, on individual council members to explain our decisions. While this has been adequate in some cases, it clearly has not been sufficient or timely in other cases.

In an effort to address this communication inadequacy, the City Council has held four workshops over the last year to discuss ways to improve future communications. Consequently, West U has increased its social media posts, revamped its website, streamlined the categories that residents can subscribe to for receiving notifications and updates from the City, and changed the City Council minutes from its brief “action item” format to a narrative format that includes more details about what was discussed at each meeting and workshop. Additionally, in August, the City Council gave the City manager informal approval to proceed with adding a new staff position dedicated to citywide communications.

I believe that, by specifically defining expectations, evaluating options to move toward meeting those expectations, and implementing the best courses of action, we can improve the delivery of information to West U residents. Hopefully, by doing this, we will move West U toward total excellence!

— COUNCILMEMBER LAURI LANKFORD



Policy Agenda – High Priority
■ Westside Acquisition of Easements for Drainage
■ Community Feedback on Services and Performances
■ Financial Policies
■ Intergovernmental Partnership Opportunities
■ Balanced Budget FY 2021 (COVID-19 Impacts and Tax Cap)

Management Agenda – Top Priority
■ Wastewater Treatment Plant Flood Protection
■ Police Services Full Staffing
■ City Compensation Policy and Funding
■ Bond Program 2020
■ Succession Planning and Program

Management Agenda – High Priority
■ Harris County Flood Control District - Poor Farm Ditch
■ Buffalo Speedway Road Replacement and Drainage Project
■ COVID-19 Short-Term Action Plan
■ Water Efficiency and Capacity Study
■ Virtual Gate – Phase 1
■ Recreation Programming and Senior Needs Assessment

For more information on the City’s Vision and Goals, please visit www.westutx.gov/742/Vision-Goals



*Councilmember
Ed Sobash*

“Debt” – it’s a four-letter word

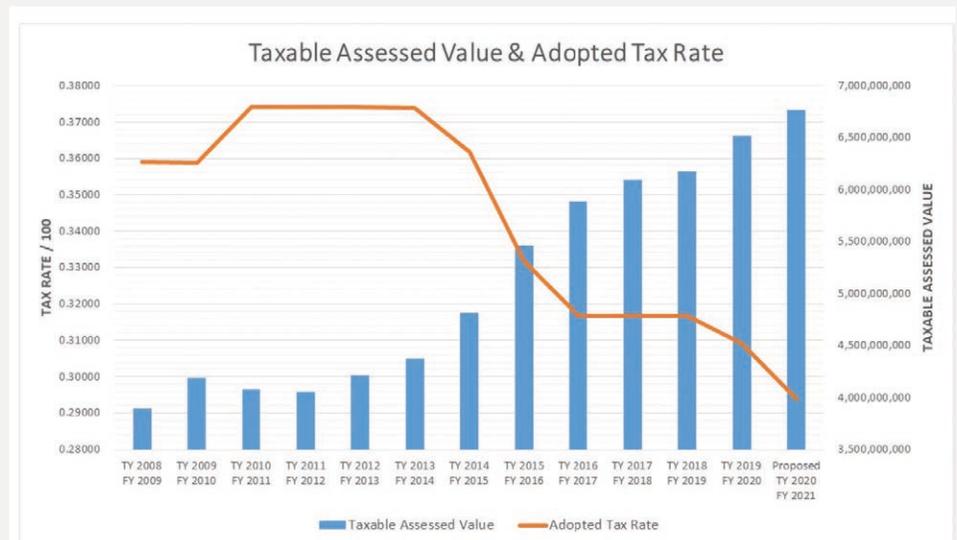
“Debt” – it’s a four-letter word. But, in municipal planning, it’s impossible to prepay for major improvements. Twenty-five years ago, West U took on some ambitious Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects (including drainage, roadways, and sidewalks) after debating which projects should be chosen, since the City couldn’t address every area of the community. West U is now in an enviable position, as, over the next few years, we will be paying off many of the bonds that financed those projects.

Today, a few areas of the city that didn’t benefit from these previous improvements now need our renewed attention. This Council has been focused on a current five-year CIP that prioritizes those areas of the city with substandard infrastructure. These projects include things like underground drainage and new road surfaces. CIP projects are expensive, and your Council is working to justify this investment with plans and models that have the greatest return on investment for the entire city. At the same time, we are seeking to balance our ad valorem (according to assessed value) tax rate, which funds the repayment of bonds. Here is a quick look at where we are now:

Tax Year	Ad Valorem Tax Rate (Total)	Ad Valorem Tax Rate (Debt Portion)
2020 Proposed	\$0.29382 / \$100 valuation	\$0.10149/\$100 valuation
2019	\$0.3019/\$100 valuation	\$0.11952/\$100 valuation
2018	\$0.31680/\$100 valuation	\$0.12403/\$100 valuation
2017	\$0.31680/\$100 valuation	\$0.12466/\$100 valuation

Note: The proposed tax rate for 2020 had not been finalized at the time this article was written in August, and the adopted tax rate may be slightly different based upon changes approved during the budget process.

Each year, around the end of September/early October, the City Council adopts a budget with an adopted tax rate that consists of two parts – maintenance & operations (M&O) and debt service expenses. Typically, the M&O expenses increase due to increased costs of living and improvements to City service levels (such as for our Police, Fire, Public Works, and Parks & Recreation departments), while the debt service portion can increase up or down depending on whether a city is paying off or adding debt. West U is in a unique situation, where our debt is being paid off and, even with adding additional debt, our debt service tax rate is still declining.



Here are some additional details regarding our debt. Excluding a defeasance payment (nullification of a bond through early payoff) in 2021, the average annual principal and interest payment for 2021–2034 is \$1.9 MM/yr. Starting in 2029, the only remaining debt will be the 2019 Certificates of Obligation issuance (for the Virtual Gate project), which reduces our average annual payment to \$397,400/yr. We have the capacity to add \$120 MM of new debt and to still maintain our current debt service tax rate.

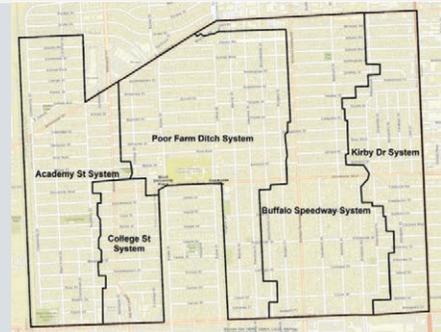
Here are the last five bonds issued by the City that are currently being serviced (this doesn't include remaining bonds prior to 2013):

2020	Refunding (refinancing to lower rate)	\$10,780,000
2019	Virtual Gate	\$4,040,000
2017	Refunding (refinancing to lower rate)	\$9,755,000
2016	Refunding (refinancing to lower rate)	\$3,170,000
2013	Refunding (refinancing to lower rate)	\$16,360,000

It has been awhile since we have addressed a major drainage or road project. In the very near future, the Buffalo Speedway project will be funded (currently estimated at \$20 MM). An additional portion of this project has already been approved for federal grant funding (\$5 MM). To seek public input on the Buffalo Speedway project, we have held multiple public meetings as we have progressed through the project's design phases. Construction on this project will begin early next year, and more details will follow on the impacts of this project on West U citizens and on what to expect as it gets started.

Regarding our city's drainage infrastructure, there are five major drainage systems in West U:

1. Kirby Dr.
2. Buffalo Speedway
3. Poor Farm Ditch
4. College St.
5. Academy Dr.



A comprehensive drainage study has been conducted to identify our next CIP priorities. Our City engineers have proposed two CIP projects for \$60 MM (including four-year escalations in costs):

1. \$31 MM (road replacement and drainage improvements)
2. \$29 MM (drainage improvements)



Completion of these CIP projects will be a major accomplishment for the city, keeping roadways clear of flooding during two-year rain events (with only minor exceptions). If you live outside of these proposed areas, then you have benefited from the past projects. Those living inside of the proposed areas know that these current improvements have been sorely needed.

It's time again to invest in the infrastructure of our city to ensure that we continue to improve upon this wonderful place that we all call home.

— COUNCILMEMBER ED SOBASH

Domino Effect on Fire Department Staffing

Saying Goodbye to One, Promoting Our Newest Captain and Lieutenant, and Welcoming Our Newest Firefighter

As with all small departments, the retirement of an employee can kick off a series of cascading events, such as a hiring and promotions process. This was the case for our Fire Department, as well, when a long-term member retired in January.

Captain Joe Gebhardt's Retirement

After 34 years with the City, Captain Joe Gebhardt retired from the West U Fire Department on January 23. We would like to thank Captain Gebhardt for his dedicated service to the City, and wish him the best in his next adventure – retirement!

Lt. Jennifer Drake's Promotion to Captain

As with any change, there is opportunity, and, with Captain Joe's retirement, we are pleased to announce the promotion of Lieutenant Jennifer Drake to Captain. Jennifer has been with the City since 2004, and has been influential in the areas of fire prevention, emergency medical service (EMS) training and protocols, and the licensing of West U's fire and EMS onboarding programs. She has an unparalleled work ethic, and is our first female firefighter, lieutenant, and now captain. Congratulations, Jennifer!

Firefighter/Paramedic Adam Smith's Promotion to Lieutenant

We are also pleased to announce the promotion of Adam Smith to Lieutenant. Adam has been with the City since 2014, and has had an impact on the department in areas such as fire prevention; promotion of the department's child passenger safety technician program; and implementation of the Handtevy Pediatric System, a software application that provides for quicker, more effective drug dosing for children.



Newest Member of the Family: Firefighter and Paramedic Cassandra Reddin

We welcome our newest member, Cassandra "Cassie" Reddin, who brings six years of paramedic experience as a member of a busy EMS team. She completed her fire training locally, and is full of skills, knowledge, and determination.

For safety information and updates on West U's Fire Department team, please visit www.westutx.gov/175/Fire-Department

The Impact of Coronavirus on the City

Like many in our community, the City of West U has been forced to adapt to changing realities in response to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. This has included changes to facilities, such as installing glass barriers and hand-sanitizing stations at customer service desks, as well as transitioning public meetings and workshops to a teleconference format. While COVID-19 has impacted Parks & Recreation Department programming, the City has continued to provide core services for residents.

The City continues to strive to provide innovative services in a safe and reliable manner during this pandemic. This includes monitoring federal, state, and local recommendations and requirements; providing virtual programming; and continually evaluating City programs to emphasize both service delivery and safety. In addition, the City is pursuing grant funding to offset the financial impact of COVID-19.

For information and updates on the City's response to COVID-19, please visit: www.westutx.gov/1091/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Information

News and Events

Changes to City Noise Ordinances

On July 27, the City Council voted to amend the City's noise ordinance, expanding residential quiet hours in West University Place and establishing a noise limit for lawn equipment.

Residential Quiet Hours in West University Place Are Now:

- Monday through Friday: Before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m.
- Saturday: Before 8 a.m. or after 5 p.m.
- Sunday, New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, Independence Day, and any City Holiday on which there is no curbside trash collection: Before noon or after 5 p.m.

In addition, Council voted to limit leaf blowers operating in West U to a maximum noise limit of 70 decibels. This limit will take effect for residents and business owners in April 2021. Lawnmowers and all other lawn equipment will remain subject to an 85-decibel limit.

Residents and equipment operators can check their lawn equipment or verify with the manufacturer in order to confirm compliance with these noise ordinances.

Is Your Home Located in a Floodplain?

Make Sure Your Flood Insurance is Current

Portions of the City of West University Place are subject to flooding. The City of West U wants to remind you to take time to review your home's insurance coverages to ensure that they are up to date, and, if you have flood insurance, that you may be eligible for a discount. This is because of the City's rating of 7 in the FEMA National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System. Additionally, please help do your part to reduce the potential for flooding by keeping debris and trash out of the streets, inlets, and ditches.



The City of West University Place strives to protect its residents and their property. We may not be able to eliminate flooding, but we can minimize its effects. And, remember, when driving on flooded roadways, turn around – don't drown!

For more information, go to www.westutx.gov/662/Flood-Insurance, or contact the West U Community Development Division at pwinfo@westutx.gov or 713.662.5839.

Save the Date!

- WHAT:** Paper Shredding/E-Waste/Mattress Collection Event
WHEN: Saturday, November 7
WHERE: 3826 Milton St.
HOURS: 9 a.m. to Noon

Shredding will be limited to five banker boxes per household. No business or commercial shredding will be accepted. This event is for West University Place residents only, and proof of residency will be required.

Reminders: Upcoming City Holidays

The City of West University Place will be observing the following holidays:

Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 26

- No curbside trash, recycling, or yard waste collection
- Recreation Center closed

Day after Thanksgiving – Friday, November 27

- Recreation Center hours: 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. (subject to change)

Additional Christmas Holiday – Thursday, December 24

- Recreation Center hours: 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. (subject to change)

Christmas Holiday – Friday, December 25

- No curbside trash, recycling, or yard waste collection
- Recreation Center closed

New Year's Day – Friday, January 1, 2021

- No curbside trash, recycling, or yard waste collection
- Recreation Center closed

On these days, City offices will be closed. Emergency functions of the City will still operate on these holidays.



News and Events

Traffic Speed and Safety Study Delayed

The City's traffic speed and safety study has been delayed due to impacts from COVID-19. This traffic study was approved in response to concerns expressed by residents over traffic conditions in the city, and it will be necessary for evaluating permanent changes to speed limits and other potential traffic-calming methods. The city's current speed limit is set by state law at 30 miles per hour, but this could be changed based on the results of a traffic study.

Because of the pandemic's impacts, including decreased work and school traffic, the study has been delayed until vehicle traffic returns to normal conditions.

If you have questions on this study, please contact Public Works Director Gerardo Barrera at 713.662.5845 or gbarrera@westutx.gov.



Apiary (Beehive) Registration

In February, the City of West University Place adopted an ordinance requiring residents who wish to keep bees on their property to register the hives with the City. Any person who keeps a hive within the City must register it with the City, providing the location, number of hives, and owner's name and contact information. The purpose of the ordinance is to promote a comprehensive and safe approach to urban beekeeping.

Hive owners within the City must register their hives no later than Thursday, December 31, 2020. Failure to register any hives may result in further enforcement that may carry restrictions and fines.

For more information on registering hives on your property, please contact the Public Works department at 713.662.5839, or via email at pwinfo@westutx.gov.

Residents may review the complete ordinance by referencing Chapter 14, Article IV, of the City's Code at https://library.municode.com/tx/west_university_place/codes/code_of_ordinances



Don't Forget to Vote Election Dates to Remember

Early Voting: October 13–30

Last Day to Apply for Ballot by Mail (received, not postmarked): October 23

General and Special Elections: November 3

For more information, please visit the City's website at www.westutx.gov/160/Elections

You may also contact the Harris County Election Help Line at 713.755.6965, or visit the Harris County Election Division website at www.harrisvotes.com.

Going Virtual

Virtual Programming

Take a Class Virtually with West U Parks & Recreation Department

Looking for exciting classes or programs to do at home? Join us for live and prerecorded online classes that you can enjoy from the comfort of your own home. We offer a variety of classes and programs for youth, adults, and seniors.

For information on classes and how to register, please visit

<https://www.westutx.gov/virtualplay>.

Do you have a skill or a specific knowledge that you would like to offer virtually? If so, please contact us at 713.662.7420 or recstaff@westutx.gov.

Point & Pay System Reduces Billing Fuss (and Paper)

It's never too late to sign up for Point & Pay – the fast, easy way to pay your West U utility bill every month.

Registration can be done through the City's website at

www.westutx.gov by clicking on the "Online Payments" button and then on the "Pay Water Bill" button, or by calling 888.891.6064.

Signing up will enable you to make your payments through a computer, phone, or tablet – and to also:

- Set up or update account information and settings
- Schedule recurring or future-dated payments
- View statements and payment history

You can also save paper and reduce your mail by signing up to receive your utility statements by email. Simply choose the electronic statement option from your Point & Pay dashboard, call Utility Billing at 713.662.5824, or email billinghelp@westutx.gov.

For more information, please visit www.pointandpay.com.

New Recreation Center Hours and Reservation Procedures

Recreation Center hours and reservation procedures have been altered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For information on Recreation Center hours and reservation instructions, please visit www.westutx.gov/reccenter



Don't Forget to Download the 'Click West U' App!

Do you know of an issue that needs attention in the City? Submit requests from the convenience of your smartphone by downloading the "Click West U" app, which is available for Apple or Android phones.

This app allows residents to report non-emergency issues, such as sidewalk conditions, code enforcement requests, street light outages, and more. From their own homes, citizens can track their complaints or requests, receive updates from staff members, and learn about issues of interest.

The "Click West U" app is just one way that the City works to innovate and provide a high level of service to residents.

For more information on the "Click West U" app, please visit www.westutx.gov/350/Report-an-Issue-Click-West-U



DirectLink Alarm-Monitoring System Provides Peace of Mind for Residents

New Look and Features for DirectLink System!

The City's alarm-monitoring program, DirectLink, has rolled out enhancements available only to West U residents. Through the DirectLink program, West U's Police Department receives your alarm signal directly, rather than through a third party, and can dispatch first responders to your property immediately – saving valuable time for emergency responses.

We have refreshed our DirectLink logo, signs, and decals. If you are an existing customer and would like to pick up a new yard sign with the new logo, please stop by the Police Department and we will be happy to provide you with an updated yard sign.

Additionally, this year we have partnered with Alarm.com to bring convenience to your fingertips. This new feature allows you to access your DirectLink system remotely on any compatible smartphone or tablet.

For more information on the DirectLink system, please visit our website at <https://www.westutx.gov/216/Alarm-Monitoring> or call our DirectLink coordinator at 713.662.5860.

Parks and Recreation

In-Person Fathers & Flashlights 2020 Event Canceled – Camp at Home Instead

Due to continued uncertainties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, **Friends of West University Parks has made the difficult decision to cancel the 2020 Fathers & Flashlights event.** Entering its 14th year, this annual event offers West U families the opportunity to camp with their friends and neighbors while raising vital funds for their neighborhood parks. Chairs Michelle and Doug Huth, Sami and Jud Morrison, and Christine and Owen Parker look forward to welcoming campers back in the fall of 2021, and they will announce a date early next year. We will miss all of our tremendous sponsors, volunteers, and participant families this year, but we look forward to bringing the Fathers & Flashlights event back better than ever in 2021. Kids, don't worry, the camel rides will be back for the campout next fall!



From left, camel photo bombs Michelle Huth, Christine Parker, Donna LaMond, and Sami Morrison

While our community will not be camping together in person on November 7, we encourage families to celebrate the spirit of Fathers & Flashlights by camping at home that night! Thank you to our Camp at Home sponsor Gibson Dunn.

The pandemic reminds us how vital our parks and green spaces are to the health and well-being of our community and our children. Fathers & Flashlights is one of two annual fundraising events for the West University Parks Fund, which provides funds for developing, enhancing, and maintaining our local parks and green spaces. If you would like to make a donation in lieu of sponsoring or attending the Fathers & Flashlights event this year, you may do so at:

<https://westuparks.wufoo.com/forms/2020-fathers-flashlights-donations>.



2021 Park Lovers' Ball

While we do not know whether next year's Park Lovers' Ball will take place in person, virtually, or using a hybrid format, we do have a tentative date and place set: Saturday, February 6, at Hotel ZaZa in the Museum District. While our first choice is for all park lovers to gather in person and celebrate our parks, we are preparing for other possibilities as well. We will post updates on the Friends of West University Parks website (www.westuparks.org/) as the event develops.

Friends of West University Parks fundraising activities continue year-round with business partnerships; memorials and honorariums; and donations of pavers, benches, and trees.

For more information, please contact Donna LaMond, Friends Executive Director, at DLamond@westutx.gov or 713.662.7430, or visit www.westuparks.org/. On behalf of Friends of West University Parks, thank you for your continued support.

GIBSON DUNN

Leash Laws Keep Everybody Safe – Including Your Furry Friend

West University Place has laws prohibiting dogs running loose (or “at large”) in City parks or within the city limits. Running “at large” refers to animals moving freely outside of a secure enclosure, and without a securely attached leash held by a person of competent strength to hold and control the animal. Basically, the law requires any animal outside of a secure enclosure to be leashed.



There are good reasons to follow the City’s leash laws:

1

It is the law. There is a law that requires your dog to be leashed (and under your control), so put the leash on your dog and keep it on at all times.

2

When your dog is on a leash, it is less likely to get into trouble. Off-leash and romping unfettered, your dog can get into trash placed out for the night, enter your neighbor’s property and dig in the flower beds, or enter the street.

3

Having your dog on a leash helps to avoid unpredictable situations. Even the best-behaved dogs can react unpredictably in new situations, especially if they are scared. Even if you’re alone on the walk, others can show up and change the scene in an instant.

4

On your walk, not everyone you meet is physically able to withstand a dog jumping up on them. What if your dog encounters a family with young children or an elderly person? If your dog jumps up on someone just to greet them, this action might be enough to knock a person down, resulting in possible injuries.

5

Your dog may not be everybody’s best friend. Remember, not everyone likes animals. People may not react kindly to a loose dog, which may cause the animal to become aggressive in response.

6

On-leash dogs feel vulnerable when approached by loose dogs. It’s common for on-leash dogs to feel defensive when approached by off-leash dogs. The result can be fearful or protective behavior, which may set off a “fight or flight” instinct in the leashed dog. If your loose dog chooses to fight the other dog, then you could both end up in hot water.

7

Leashes help protect your dog from harm. Even if your dogs have perfect recall and you can control their every move, you can’t control everything around them. The leash is there to protect your dog from the world as much as it’s there to protect the world from your dog. A leash provides emergency control over your pet.

Being a responsible dog owner is more than just feeding your dog a good diet or providing positive training methods. Using a leash will benefit you, your neighborhood, and your pet.

To learn more about animals and the City, please visit <https://westutx.gov/286/Animal-Control>.

Single-Serve Beverage Machines: Recycling Methods for Coffee Pods

A Message from the Recycling & Solid Waste Reduction Board

Single-serve coffee makers can be amazing. They offer a vast array of flavors and types of beverages. There are no complicated systems to assemble and disassemble. Just choose your pod and press start. The only downside is the ecologically irritating issue of the used coffee pods, plastic containers which can quickly pile up.



What can consumers do to decrease their coffee pod footprint?

1

The consumer can utilize reusable single-cup filters. Users can simply fill their morning cups with loose coffee or tea, and then brew as normal with hot water from the machine. This is cost efficient with zero waste involved. There are no plastic containers going into the trash, and the coffee grounds can be used in composting bins.

2

Consumers can also disassemble coffee pods themselves. Single-serving pods often contain aluminum, plastic, paper filters, and organic coffee grounds – parts of which can be recycled separately but not together. All of these components also make the containers difficult to take apart. Some companies sell devices that separate the pods, and provide a service for specifically recycling those plastic pods. The plastic single-use pods cannot be recycled in West U because, although the type of plastic they contain is recyclable, the pods are too small and will jam the recycling line at the facility.

3

Coffee grounds. There are numerous uses for these grounds:

- a. Add them to compost bins for hearty doses of much-needed nitrogen
- b. Use them to repel unwanted bugs
- c. Plant coffee grounds with carrot seeds for healthier plants with fewer pests
- d. Rub them in your hands to get rid of unpleasant odors

4

Up-cycle the coffee pods. After removing the grounds for composting, use the plastic pod containers for kids' crafts, paints, or small items (such as paperclips). The containers are especially useful for starting seedlings, as they have a drainage hole and are the perfect size.

5

Buy compostable coffee pods. These are a great idea, but please note that these compostable coffee pods currently only work in commercial compost bins. They will not break down efficiently in your backyard bin. If you find compostable coffee pods, please do your homework and check the company's website for full details.

6

Consumers can also look for recycling programs specifically aimed at single-serving coffee pods. Private companies offer services for both individuals and businesses to recycle their coffee pods and reduce their impact on the environment. Terracycle will recycle all single-use pods, while Nespresso and Keurig both have recycling programs for their own single use pods.

Single-serving coffee recycling is not perfect right now. While there are no simple solutions, consumers have the power and responsibility to minimize their coffee habit's environmental impact.

For more information on recycling in West U, please visit <https://www.westutx.gov/336/Recycling>.



When in Doubt, Throw it Out Are You Flushing Trash Down Your Toilet?

A problem plaguing sanitary sewer systems is the disposal of “flushable” wipes down the toilet. While some products may appear to be safe to flush, misleading or unclear labeling can cause confusion and plumbing issues.

While many wipes look like toilet paper, they are actually made of a different material called “air-laid paper” and are loaded with cleansing chemicals, disinfectants, and cosmetic scents.

Wipes, cleaning cloths, paper towels, and feminine hygiene products are common household items that do not break down fully in water. When flushed, they can cause blockage in the wastewater pipes of your home, neighborhood, and at the wastewater treatment plant. These wipes can also combine with fats, oils, and grease to create “fatbergs” that cause havoc on pipes, leading to costly repairs.

These wipes also cause problems for mechanical equipment at lift stations and wastewater treatment plants. The equipment can become so tightly bound with wipes that it must be taken out of service to be cleared of blockages and debris. To avoid this, residents should avoid flushing any type of wipes down the toilet.

Popular items that are oftentimes confused as being flushable, and that should be disposed of in the trash and not down the toilet, include:

- Cleaning and disinfecting wipes
- Disposable diapers, nursing pads, and baby wipes
- Facial wipes
- Feminine hygiene products and wipes

Questions about West U’s sanitary sewer system should be directed to Wastewater Plant Manager Barron Cooper at 713.662.5370 or bcooper@westutx.gov.

A good reminder is this: WIPES clog PIPES, so, when in DOUBT, throw it OUT!



Update on Colonial Park East-End Improvements

The City is in the process of making improvements to the east end of Colonial Park, a project approved by the City Council at its June 22 meeting. The West U Parks & Recreation Board and City staff worked with a citizen user group for eight months to identify potential updates to the play area. Improvements to Colonial Park will include repurposing the sand volleyball area into an obstacle course, updating the play structures, replacing older equipment and slides, and improving the lighting in the playground area and along the walking path.

Construction on these new improvements began in September, and is scheduled to be completed by the end of November.

For updates, or for more information on Parks & Recreation projects, please visit westutx.gov/parkprojects.



Pedestrian Bridge Rehabilitation

The City is completing the rehabilitation of the three 18-year-old pedestrian bridges on Poor Farm Ditch at Plumb, Tangle, and Robinhood streets. This work includes replacing deck boards, pressure washing, and repainting the bridges. The project will be completed in October, and will help to maintain and preserve the bridges for future use.

Studies

- The City is currently assessing options for additional flood-water protection measures at West U’s wastewater treatment plant. The treatment plant site was flooded during Hurricane Harvey in 2017, temporarily disrupting operations. The City Engineer has compiled a comprehensive review of the treatment plant site to identify mitigation strategies to protect the wastewater treatment plant building and equipment from future severe storms.
- The City is reviewing options to more effectively conserve West U’s water supply by treating the city’s wastewater for non-potable uses. This study includes researching all state and federal requirements to verify whether a reclamation project is feasible, along with estimating probable costs.

If you have questions on any of these studies, please contact Public Works Director Gerardo Barrera at 713.662.5845 or gbarrera@westutx.gov.

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

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 Reminders for City Council, Boards and Commissions

City Council

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

Building and Standards Commission

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

Zoning and Planning Commission

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

Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction Board

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

Parks and Recreation Board

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

Senior Services Board

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

Zoning Board of Adjustment

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

Meetings are currently being held via teleconference

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the federal government's recommendations regarding social distancing measures, meetings are currently being held via teleconference. For more information on how to attend these meetings, please visit <https://www.westutx.gov/280/Boards-Commissions> or call the City Secretary's Office at 713.662.5812.