

Setting the Record Straight on Debt and Planning

Throughout 2024, we have discussed a lot about the City's Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and the Facilities Master Plan. The goal of these two programs is to align West U's annual budget cycle with anticipated future expenses. The key word here is *anticipated* – not set in stone. By planning for large capital projects, we can adjust our budget strategy each fiscal year to support community projects. By carefully planning for long-term expenses, the City can manage its cash reserves, fund balances, and reduce debt to lower the impact on West U's overall tax rate.

What the Five-Year CIP Does for West U

First, it is important to remember that only the first year of the capital improvement plan is subject to funding. Our CIP is an outlook over the next five years and looks at what funding sources are anticipated for upcoming projects. Once the projects get closer to the current fiscal year, decisions can start being made. When it comes to projects identified in years 2 through 5, their timing could be moved up or pushed further out depending on the economy, market conditions, and other factors.

Decisions can include: Should we schedule a bond election to issue debt? Should we apply for grant funding? Do we use cash on hand in reserve funds? The answers to these questions have important timelines in order to make decisions, hold public hearings, and allow for our City Council to take required action. Additionally, the CIP helps keep the timeline for these discussions on our radar.

A well-managed capital improvement plan helps emphasize the importance of strategic planning for major projects. From large infrastructure projects (like the West Side Drainage Improvement Project) to projects that will enhance our city facilities, the CIP helps establish West U's financial north star.

Planning for the Facilities Master Plan

A subset of the Five-Year CIP is the Facilities Master Plan, which evaluates the City's current facilities to ensure that they are meeting our community's current and future needs, and that they are in their optimal location for the next 50 years. Many of our facilities in the Civic Center, for instance, are 50–70 years old and need major investments.

Other elements that have come out of the Facilities Master Plan study are proposed improvements to the City's right-of-way areas around our Civic Center, which would include adding more green spaces, trees, pedestrian safety improvements, traffic calming measures, and more efficient parking layouts.

These improvements are examples of the many positives that come from planning ahead and taking time to consider things.

To learn more about the Facilities Master Plan, please visit www.westutx.gov/fmp.

Planning and Implementing

I understand the initial reaction to seeing the 5-Year CIP may be sticker shock, I am going to be honest that was my first impression many years ago when I first became involved in government. I understand the importance of this document and how it helps us plan for the future to ensure that our infrastructure doesn't fall into disrepair as you read about in so many other cities.

The Five-Year CIP is a dynamic planning document that will change with the times, whether that be due to the economy or the needs of our community. There are some saying we are driving off financial cliff, but in actuality we are being very prudent in making sound financial decisions to address our community's infrastructure needs before they become critical issues and we are left with no room for discussion, only action. This Council's goal is, and has always been, to put our community as a whole first, to be good stewards of our community's tax dollars, and to ensure West U remains the gem that we all know it is.

I look forward to seeing you around the neighborhood and at future meetings.