

WEST U ESSENTIALS MAGAZINE – JUNE 2019

WEST UNIVERSITY MAYOR INSIGHTS

New leadership team is up to a challenge right out of the gate

By Mayor Bob Higley

At first, I thought of using this space to extol the many strengths of the four new City Council members and our very experienced but relatively new city manager. Then their response to a surprising presentation from Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) on the subject of repairs to Poor Farm Ditch (PFD) made my point for me.

Why would four newly elected councilmembers and recently chosen city manager respond so quickly? Because the policy-making City Council and the implementing arm of our Home Rule city have a firm grasp on the vital calculus that propels West U's financial success. There's no learning curve here.

If property values in one area of our city are held down for any reason within our control, all other homeowners pay higher taxes to support the service model that attracts prospective buyers to our homes when we decide to sell. The proposition is that simple.

Of all the property taxes we pay, West U's slice of the pie is about 17 percent. Of West U's cut, 77 percent goes to fund salaries and benefits. Simply, our appraised property values drive revenues to fund the people who, in turn, produce our service model for us.

The implementation, though, is far more complex.

Poor Farm Ditch is not as insignificant as its name implies. In fact, it is one of the oldest and most important viaducts for transporting drainage through West U, and improving the channel has been an issue for the HCFCD for many years. During a presentation at the last scheduled meeting of the preceding City Council, HCFCD informed West U that it was 90 percent complete in its design phase.

I was disheartened to learn the design was that far along because of our past discussions and partnership on this project, which was characterized by the kind of give-and-take that makes everyone satisfied in the end. The fact that West U's leadership had not been involved in the current design nor in the prospective impact on West U homeowners who live along PFD was a break from this historic working relationship.

My message here is not to incite anxiety of the PFD issue. Hopefully we can clearly convey to HCFCD the intensity of West U's interests and work out our differences. Ultimate this first column is meant to express my delight in watching our city's leadership come together on a vital issue so decisively.

I can't wait to watch this team guide us into the next decade. All members seem to be of one mind - strong zoning and building ordinances strictly enforced, security delivered physically and fiscally, and performance-driven implementation policies.

Higley, a longtime public servant in West U, was elected mayor in May with no opposition and took office May 30. He may be contacted at bhigley@westutx.gov.