

West University Mayor's Insights

By Mayor Bob Higley

Investing in Our Future

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!