

Thank You, West U: Four Years of Public Service

By Mayor Bob Higley

It has been a tremendous honor to serve as a Council Member, then as Mayor during the past four years. Working alongside this extraordinarily talented Council, during perhaps the most challenging time in West U's history, was a once in a lifetime experience. The last two years were the epitome of how a democratically elected body should function alongside its equally talented service model partners at City Hall, with your encouragement and support.

Both Council and City Staff performed at quick march pace for 24 months, without a break. Once we got into the assignment, we found that opportunities for improvement abounded. The backlog of unaddressed City issues certainly added to the challenge.

How did 4 newcomers accomplish so much in 24 months, under such seemingly insurmountable conditions? New Council members had no bad habits. We started very early, carefully planned our work, applied exceedingly high industry standards, prepared for every meeting, worked cooperatively to arrive at 5-0 votes, while staying true to our mission: **PUT THE TAXPAYING HOMEOWNERS OF WEST U AT THE CENTER OF EVERY DECISION.**

LASTLY, WE NEVER QUIT ON YOU!

Public Safety

Throughout West U, the value we place on West U's small-town feel and safe atmosphere is a constant. Everyone agrees on these overarching priorities.

Our value propositions for West U were tested over the past two years, as COVID-19 forced us to distance ourselves from our neighbors, brace against the most active Atlantic hurricane season on record, and suffer a “never before” freeze that left many powerless.

In response to these challenges, Council members led from the front, placing the wellbeing of West U homeowners and their families first. One example was our first ever “Warming/Charging Center” at the Recreation Center, helping hundreds of West U families during the freeze.

Additionally, this Council has researched and authorized the purchase of our third high-water vehicle to ensure West U’s response to residents remains even in floodwaters, along with a new fire truck up fitted with the latest in firefighting technology. Council also directed the installation of the Virtual Gate security camera system around the city to assist our police and emergency services.

This Council also authorized a traffic speed and safety study to evaluate the city’s speed limit and traffic calming measures to uphold the safety of drivers and pedestrians. Combined, these investments will help protect homeowners and their property from harm, thus ensuring that our community continues to experience our “small town feel and safe atmosphere”.

Each homeowner must continue to respond quickly and decisively to invasion by climatic and criminal threats. We and our property values will suffer if we lose our edge.

It takes a village, in constant vigilance!

Tax Dollars Working for You

Given the times, this Council chose to emphasize fiscal responsibility as a high priority. Ensuring that all homeowners receive maximum value from every tax dollar, protecting our credit rating, and lowering taxes were part of every decision.

In 2020, this Council lowered our property tax rate for the first time in three years. Again in 2021, we lowered the tax rate for the second year in a row. Does a lower rate translate to actually paying less in taxes? Rarely.

For the first time in three decades we have delivered back to back tax cuts while lowering the actual tax payments in 2021 for the average taxpayer. Someone recently mused that perhaps the last mayor to coordinate this fiscal phenomenon was Mayor Higley – Laura Carter Higley.

Now, for the encore: in addition, we avoided increases in water, sewer, or solid waste fees. We achieved this at a time when other cities in the area raised taxes and fees to compensate for lost revenue.

Infrastructure Improvements

Council has maintained focus on the legacy of the long-term success of West U, by approving a \$27 million bond program in 2020 funding long delayed infrastructure projects that will benefit the community. Specifically the replacement of Buffalo Speedway and design work for COMPREHENSIVE citywide streets and drainage improvements.

Council also approved the design for floodwater protection and improvements, and this month will award a contract to design the Effluent Water Reclamation Project. This will allow for the

safe reuse, outside of the city, of up to a million gallons of wastewater a day, reducing West U's impact on the Buffalo Bayou watershed and creating a new funding source to help offset residents' utility expenses. Together, these projects will deliver on drainage, flooding, utility and environmental stewardship for generations to come.

Quality of Life – “Money isn’t Everything”

Can we prove that West University Place is the “best small town in America?” This Council, along with City staff, improved our quality of life, ensuring that our increasing property values remain a proof positive.

On this Council's watch, the City has completed improvements to Colonial Park Pool, Colonial Park Playground, and Whitt Johnson Park. In March, Council also approved the redevelopment of Huffington Park to support our city's family-friendly atmosphere. These initiatives were made possible by the City's invaluable working partnership with the Friends of West University Place Parks Fund, whose vision and support uphold our quality of life while saving taxpayer money.

Going further, our City Council proudly reaffirmed our community's values. In short order, after decades of neglect, Council recognized Martin Luther King Jr. Day as an official City of West University Place holiday. In addition, we made commonsense updates to our Code of Ordinances in a variety of areas, including lighting and noise ordinances.

A Thanks to the Council, City Staff, and Community – My Neighbors!

My heartfelt thanks to you, my taxpaying bosses, my devoted, respected Council, and every member of City staff for your assistance, diligence, care, and support during my term. Together,

the community, Council, and City staff have unlocked our potential, reasserted our self-respect, and esprit de corps.

We are becoming that special village, once again.

On a personal note:

Laura and I have a shared appreciation for your willingness to allow us the privilege to serve all of our friends and neighbors as Mayors in West U.

Laura will deny that she served four two-year terms on Council, separated by 30 years. I know better. I was “advised” before most Council meetings on strategy and tactics. On returning home, I was “asked” to deliver an after action report on public agenda items as we ate cold, boiled shrimp.

West U has been our “Home Base” for 50 years. We pray that we left our beloved city better than we found it, having done no harm.