

## **A Message from Councilmember John Barnes**

West U is unquestionably a great place to live, but it is not an inexpensive one. While many West U citizens are in the upper echelon of income earners, we have just as many who live on fixed incomes, are single parents, are small business owners, or are paying off student loans. And, as with the rest of the country, the City has residents who have lost employment or found their incomes considerably reduced in the past year and wonder what the future holds for them. Though high property values fund the excellent services and amenities that our City provides, in any year, the arrival of the annual tax bill forces a good number of our residents, both new arrivals and those who have been here for decades, to wonder just how much longer they will be able to continue to live here. As such, the funds taken from our taxpayers are not a “bucket of money” to be used at will, but rather a sacred public trust, of which the City’s elected officials must ever be watchful guardians.

That, more than anything, is why Council is committed to being diligent stewards of the taxpayers’ money, even declining the compensation provided for under the City’s ordinances, and why I am proud of what our City has been able to achieve over the past two years. In spite of new state laws imposing unfunded mandates and either capping or eliminating revenues, our City has continued to move forward to make sure that it can continue to deliver the high standard of service and quality of life that our citizens rightly expect. Though there are many examples, notable achievements include the following:

- Heightening neighborhood security through the implementation of the Virtual Gate program in partnership with the City of Houston.

- Revising our Code of Ordinances to address long-standing issues affecting quality of life, including noise and light pollution.
- Expanding recreational programming to include virtual classes and events.
- Enhancing amenities at Colonial and Whitt Johnson Parks, and throughout our parks system.
- Initiating long-needed capital improvements, including replacement of major components at the wastewater treatment plant and the design and implementation of substantial upgrades to our drainage system to safeguard residents' homes and mitigate future flooding.
- Overhauling our City's employee compensation system to increase our ability to recruit and retain the best and brightest.

All of the foregoing projects were accomplished in spite of the financial impact of COVID, and while still delivering both a balanced budget and a lowered effective tax rate for each of the past two years.

This achievement was not easy, as it involved the collective sacrifice of thousands upon thousands of hours on the part of many people in addition to the members of your Council, including the citizen volunteers on our civic boards and commissions and our City's incredible staff, all of whom went way above and beyond the call of duty on behalf of our residents. Nor was the process always pleasant, as both legal constraints and sound fiscal policy sometimes required us to say "no" in whole or in part to causes that we would otherwise like to be able to support. But it was the right thing to do, and it has set this City on an even better and more secure course for the future, and for that we should all feel proud.



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For more information, residents should visit the City's 2021 Budget page, which may be found at the following link: <http://www.westutx.gov/2021budget> .