

Parks and Senior Services: Enhancing and Upholding Quality of Life for All Residents

By Mayor Susan Sample

There are countless reasons that people choose to move to West U, including our beautiful, tree-lined streets, our safe neighborhoods, and our strong zoning that protects residents' property values while promoting our small town atmosphere. Thankfully, many who move to this city choose to stay permanently, with the peace of mind of knowing that West U is an optimal community for those who choose to age in place and spend their golden years here.

Among the many reasons for this are our superb programming and services tailored for seniors, which have been offered through the Parks & Recreation Department's Senior Services division since 1975. These include themed luncheons, transportation, volunteer handymen service for minor home repairs, social services referrals, educational lectures and trips, and a wide variety of classes for active seniors.

In addition to our excellent programming, West U offers a number of financial benefits that senior residents may take advantage of. These include senior exemptions on property taxes, discounts on solid waste collection fees, discounted and waiver membership options for the Recreation Center and Colonial Park Pool, and discounts on Senior Services programming. In 2021, the value of the City's total benefits (tax breaks, discounts and senior services) directed towards senior residents is estimated to be approximately \$1.6 million, with an expected increase of \$40,000 in 2022. These benefits ensure that all seniors who wish to do so are able to participate in West U programming.

This Council has held many discussions during the 2022 Budget process regarding City services for our seniors. As we examine lessons learned from programming during the COVID-19 pandemic, the results of last year's Senior Services and Parks programming survey, program participation rates, and demographic trends in the community, the City continues to adapt to community needs to provide valued services for our residents. Among the changes that are included in the 2022 Budget is the addition of a part-time Senior Services Program Coordinator position to provide enhanced and consistent service to our residents.

However, I am also happy to say that the City of West University Place and Parks & Recreation continues to serve all of our residents, regardless of age. Many of you may have seen the recently completed redevelopment of Huffington Park, the City's park and playground designed around providing active engagement for West U's youngest residents. This is part of the City's long-term implementation of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan, which identifies areas to be enhanced and redeveloped throughout West U. Residents can look forward to upcoming improvements at Judson Park and Wier Park in 2022 and 2023, reinvestments in partnership with the Friends of West U Parks Fund that ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the City's greenspaces.

In addition, among the exciting projects adopted in West U's five-year Capital Improvement Plan is the construction of a walking trail along Poor Farm Ditch on Edloe Street. This pathway, which will run north from Georgetown Street to Albans Street, underscores this Council's

commitment to promoting walkability and beautification throughout West U. It will replace the old growth oleanders along this stretch that unfortunately did not survive the winter freeze earlier this year. Among the items that may be included are rest areas with benches, landscaping, ornamental fencing, and irrigation, among others, providing another pleasant greenspace for the community's use.

I will be excited to continue providing updates on the City's efforts regarding beautification, Senior Services, and upholding all of our quality of life over the coming months. I believe that West University Place is the best small town in America, and City Council and staff continues to work day-in and day-out to ensure that all who live in our community are able to enjoy what it has to offer.

To learn more about our parks and senior services available to West U's residents, please visit www.westutx.gov/parks or www.westutx.gov/seniors .