

Lower Tax Rate With A High Service Level: The 2022 Budget

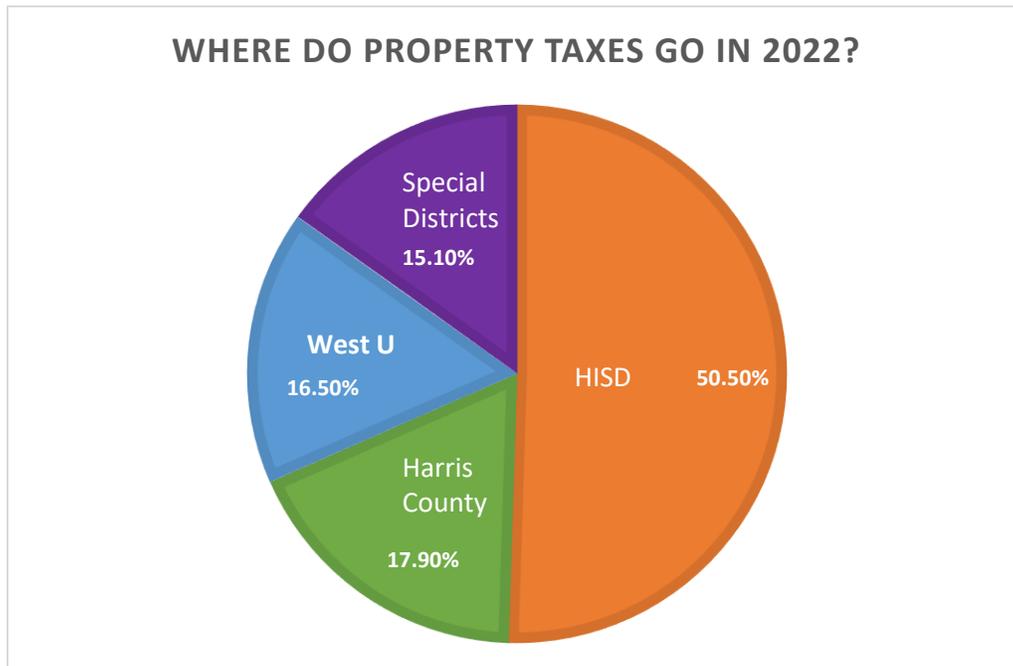
By Mayor Susan Sample

On September 27th, this Council unanimously voted to adopt the City of West University Place's 2022 Operating Budget, which covers the period from January 1 to December 31, 2022. It is a great privilege to serve one's neighbors on City Council, but one of the most difficult and weighty responsibilities of this position is deciding how to use the community's resources.

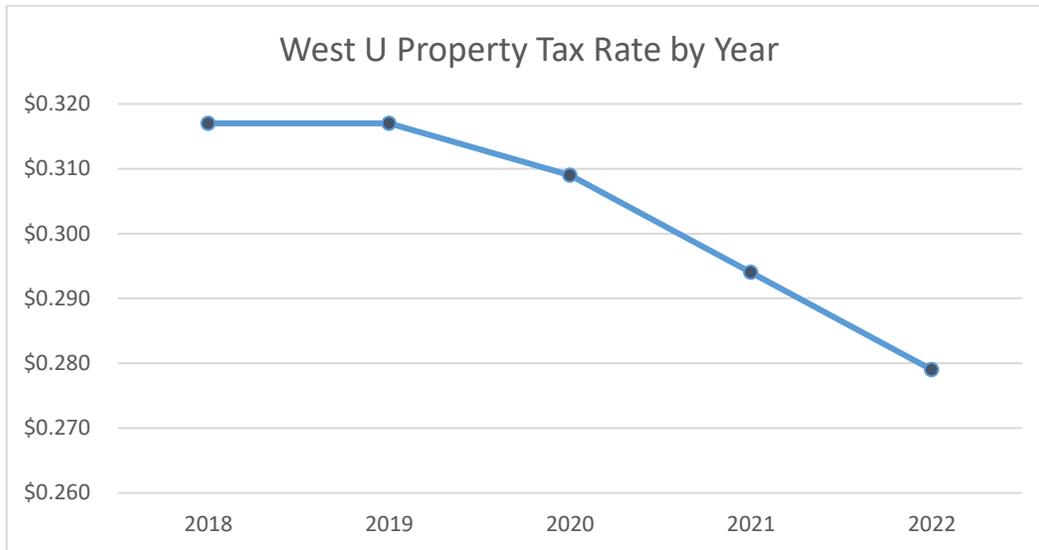
Our budgeting process started almost as soon as this Council took office in May, as we completed our strategic planning process to identify those citywide priorities and issues we needed to address, such as public safety, quality of life, and strong infrastructure. During the budgeting process, we build on this vision and continued to hold multiple workshops, discussions, and public hearings to solicit the community's feedback on its values, along with operational needs.

What The Budget Means For You

Our community's affluence is a blessing, however one of the biggest headaches and financial stressors for many of our homeowners is the annual property tax bill. In conversations with residents, I find that many of us do not realize how little of this actually goes to the City. In fact, this year less than 17 cents of each dollar you pay in property taxes will go to West U, with the bulk of it going to the school district.

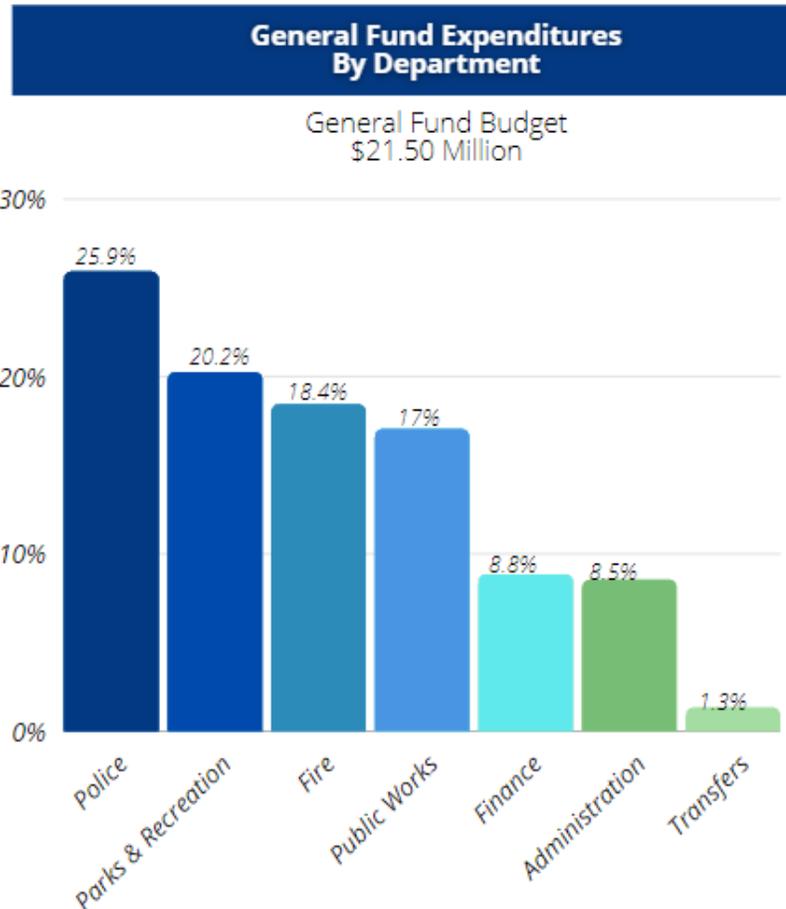


With such a narrow slice of the pie, a community of over 15,000 people to serve, and state restrictions on how much the City’s revenue can increase year-over-year, decisions on what to fund quickly become difficult.



Despite these challenges, the City has managed to lower its property tax rate for the third year in a row, from \$0.297 to \$0.279 per \$100 assessed value, with no increase in sewer and water rates. Many in our community have experienced the personal and economic effects of COVID-19, and so this Council made it a priority to provide a high level of service with as little impact as possible.

In reflection of our residents’ values, public safety remains a priority for this Council, with 44% of General Fund expenditures in 2022 devoted to our outstanding Fire and Police Departments. In addition, this budget creates a new Animal Control & Parking Enforcement Officer position in the Police Department, which, along with our Code Enforcement Officer, will work to improve the enforcement process and uphold safety in our community.



Public engagement has been a priority for this Council, and many of you have seen the City’s improved communications over this past year, with initiatives such as the recently completed Citizens Academy as well as a robust presence on multiple platforms. Aligning with this emphasis, the 2022 Budget increased funding for community relations by \$66,000, which will provide funding to enhance our citywide public engagement efforts, as well as, complete a community-wide survey soliciting citizen feedback on City services.

Investing In Our Future

One of the City Council’s goals is to provide best-in-class infrastructure throughout the City and this Budget, along with the subsequent adoption of the five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), take a large step in that direction.

Among the notable projects included in the 2022 CIP are:

- Design work for the Citywide Streets & Drainage project, which will go a long way towards minimizing street ponding (flooding) for regularly occurring storm events
- The redevelopment of Judson Park and Wier Park, in line with the City’s Parks and Open Space Master Plan

- Design work for the Wastewater Reclamation Project, which will safely treat and sell hundreds of thousands of gallons of wastewater daily for use outside of the city, reducing our community's impact on the Brays Bayou watershed
- Design work for improvements and floodwater protection at our 40-year old wastewater treatment plant, which will ensure this critical system remains operational during extreme weather/flooding as well as implementing updated and energy-efficient treatment processes
- Completion of the City's facilities master plan, which will identify the long-term locations for the City buildings/infrastructure for the next 50 years

The 2022 CIP budget total is approximately \$24.4 million, with the entire five-year program through 2026 projected to be \$124.2 million. Residents will likely see some of these projects on the ballot in the coming years, as approximately 92% of the total cost is projected to be funded through the issuance of municipal bonds. As the City finalizes design work on these improvements, staff will be working diligently to identify other funding sources (grants) to help offset the cost to all of us.

It is always our goal to faithfully and effectively utilize the City's resources for the benefit and betterment of the community as a whole. It is my belief that with the adoption of this budget, the City of West University Place will continue to do so.

For more information on the 2022 Budget, please visit www.westutx.gov/2022budget