

City Currents

Summer 2019



IN THIS ISSUE

Airbnb in the City

Playground Improvements at Whitt Johnson Park

And More Helpful Information About Your City!

City's 15-Year Strategic Vision Best Suburban Community in the Nation, Nationally Recognized as a 'Best Place to Live'

In June, 2019, the newly elected members of City Council and City Management completed a strategic vision and goal-setting process that included developing a vision, a mission, values and goals for the City. This forward-thinking approach established a 15-year outlook for the City Council and staff to develop an Action Agenda that establishes specific priorities for the upcoming year coupled with a five-year work plan that will be revisited and updated annually.

The overall goal for this process was to help identify priorities for both the City Council and City Management that would narrow down the large number of issues and projects, pending and foreseen, to a manageable workload. By identifying the "top" and "high" priorities for City Council and City Management, the City's workforce can develop a more efficient and effective approach for implementing those priorities.

Policy Agenda, 2019–2020

TOP PRIORITIES

Poor Farm Ditch Project
Zoning and Enforcement: Review and Refinement
Employee Healthcare: Report and Direction
City Legislative Advocacy and Lobbying Program: Direction
Rain Garden: Report
Community Improvement Program: Development and Adoption

HIGH PRIORITIES

Crime Analysis and Safe Community Action Plan: Report
Virtual Gate: Phase I Construction / Phase II: Assessment and Direction
Public-Private Partnership Opportunities: Report
Budget: Service Review, Service Priority and Service Metrics Refinements
Senior Services: Needs Assessment and Plan
Park Land / Open Space Land Acquisition: Location(s) and Direction

Management Agenda, 2019–2020

TOP PRIORITIES

DirectLink System: Enhancements
Buffalo Speedway Road Replacement and Drainage Project
Drainage Improvement Study: Review and Project
Westside Acquisition Easements for Drainage: Next Steps
City Engineer Services Contract: Direction
City Website: Relaunch

HIGH PRIORITIES

Wastewater Treatment Plant Flood Protection: Direction and Funding
Information Technology Upgrades: Funding
Hazard Mitigation Action Plan: Adoption
City Strategic Plan: Development, Adoption and Institutionalization
New Revenue Sources: Report
Noise Ordinances: Revision



Mayor Bob Higley

From the Mayor's Desk

Dear Neighbors,

I recently wrote about the newly elected City Council and City Management charting a new course in strategic visioning and goal setting for our community.

Prior to the Council's first regularly scheduled meeting in June, your hardworking Council-elect met individually with the new City Manager to learn more about the City operations. Over the course of 40 hours, this new group of Councilmembers obtained a greater understanding of their collective role as the Board of Directors for West U and established a strategic vision with a 15-year outlook. Simply put: We want our City to be recognized as the "best suburban community" in the nation and the "best place to live."

How do we get there? By establishing an Action Agenda that identifies current priorities for the City Council and City Management for the upcoming year, coupled with a five-year work plan that will be revisited and updated annually.

Over the next few months, the City Manager will be preparing next year's Annual Budget for the Council's consideration. While I do not expect any surprises from previous years regarding this coming year's City service levels, I am surprised by the unfunded mandates coming from Austin. Cities are being told to do more, while at the same time Austin cuts our ability to fund our existing local services, let alone pay for new services

As the dust settles on decisions from the recently convened legislative session in Austin, the true impact of these decisions on Home Rule cities regarding their ability to govern themselves and pay for the local services expected by their residents will come to light.

— MAYOR BOB HIGLEY

To learn more about the City's strategic vision and goals, visit: www.westutx.gov/726/Vision-Goals

Mayor's Bio

A 47-year resident of West University Place, Bob Higley was elected to serve his first term as mayor in May after serving one two-year term on the City Council. He has a long tenure serving the City, which includes serving three terms on the Zoning and Planning Commission and serving as chair of the Charter Review Committee.

Bob's wife, Laura Carter Higley, served as Mayor Pro Tem for West University Place from 1985–1987 and as its Mayor from 1989–1991. After 13 years as a lawyer with Baker Botts, Laura is currently serving her third six-year term as a justice on Texas' First Court of Appeals.





Councilmembers' Bios

Please welcome members of your new City Council, whose terms run from June 1, 2019, to May 30, 2021



Kevin Trautner, Mayor Pro Tem

Kevin Trautner and his wife of 24 years, Barbara, have lived in West University Place for 23 years, raising two children: Margaret (20), a junior and math major at MIT, and Mark (17), a junior at St. John's School. Kevin has been the chief legal officer and a member of the senior executive team of an oilfield services company over the last three years. Prior to that, he was a corporate associate and then partner in several major Houston law firms for over 20 years, advising companies on mergers and acquisitions, securities law and governance. Kevin also served for six years as secretary of the Houston Chapter of the Texas General Counsel Forum. He has been active in West U issues and has attended West University Place Council meetings since mid-2018. Kevin and his family are members of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church. He received a BS degree from Notre Dame, an MD from Vanderbilt University, and a JD from the University of Virginia.



John Barnes, Councilmember

John P. Barnes is a third-generation resident of the City of West University Place, residing since 2003 on the property purchased in 1941 by his grandparents. A graduate of both Vanderbilt University and South Texas College of Law, John has practiced law in the Houston area for more than 20 years. He is currently the managing member of the J.P. Barnes Law Firm, PLLC.

John has a long-standing commitment to community service, having volunteered with the DePelchin Children's Center Holiday Project, the Houston Bar Association's LegalLine, the Souper Bowl of Caring and Habitat for Humanity. A Fellow of Class XXXI of Leadership Houston, John currently serves on Leadership Houston's Board of Directors as its secretary, having previously served one year as its outside counsel and two years in the role of treasurer. He is also an active member of the Rotary Club of West U, where he is the treasurer-elect and he also serves on both the membership and flag committees. John and his wife, Susan, are members of St. Luke's United Methodist Church.



Lauri Lankford, Councilmember

Lauri Lankford is a retired attorney with prior business experience. She has an undergraduate degree from Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, and a Master of Science degree in mineral economics from Penn State. She originally moved to Houston after being recruited to work for Shell Mining Company as a mineral economist. She later attended South Texas College of Law at night while working full time. After obtaining her law degree and passing the Texas Bar Exam in 1991, she worked for several national and international law firms with an emphasis on corporate and commercial matters, contracts, company law, and international transactions.

Lauri and her husband, Brad, have been homeowners in West U since 1992. They are currently living in their third West U home. Lauri served on West U's Building and Standards Commission for two terms, from August 2009 through August 2013. She is a member of the West U Garden Club, attends the Thursday evening Tai Chi class at the Community Building, and plays bridge competitively.



Ed Sobash, Councilmember

Ed Sobash is a 20-year West U resident, but grew up in the small steel town of Sharon, Pennsylvania. He joined the U.S. Air Force after high school and was trained as a radar technician.

Following his enlistment in the Air Force, he attended the University of Houston to become an electrical engineer, and this is where he met his future bride, Denise. Their first home was in Bellaire for four years, but, eventually, they found a 1932 bungalow in West U. Ed and Denise have two high school daughters, Lauren and Claire, who attend Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts and Carnegie Vanguard High School, respectively. Ed served on the Zoning Board of Adjustment for two terms, from 2013 through 2017.

Six Common Summer Hazards for Dogs

Now that summer is here, and the temperatures are beginning to warm up significantly, you may want to consider the following safety tips for your dog during this hot weather:

1. Dehydration

One of the best ways to keep your dog safe in the summer time is by providing lots of cool, clean, fresh water.

2. Burned Pads

Asphalt on sidewalks and streets can heat up to a temperature that can burn a dog's paw pads. To avoid scorched paw pads, walk your dog very early in the morning or in the late evening when the sidewalks and streets have cooled off.

3. Parasites

Summer is the season for fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes. These pests can cause minor discomforts to your dog, and, at worst, can cause life-threatening illnesses. Itching and other irritations can also cause your dog to have self-mutilating behaviors. To reduce the risk of parasite infestations, clean your house and pet areas frequently, and keep your dog well groomed.

4. Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is a serious risk to your dog's health, and it can be fatal. You can prevent heat stroke by restricting your pet's exercise during the hottest hours of the day. Make sure that your dog stays well hydrated, and provide cool places for your pet to stay out of the heat. Provide opportunities for your dog to swim or to lay on a cooling mat. And never leave your dog unattended in a car during the summer heat.

5. Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease contracted through bodily fluids or tissue, and can be transmitted through direct (as in the case of a bite or ingestion of flesh) or indirect contact (through water sources, food, etc.) with an infected animal. Stagnant waters are a common source of leptospirosis bacteria

6. Seasonal Allergies

Your dog may be allergic to one or more seasonal items, which may include fleas, mold, and grass and other various plants. If your dog is scratching and perhaps losing fur, a visit to your vet is recommended.



Let's keep our furry friends as healthy as we can. Also remember to vaccinate and register your dogs and cats and keep all dogs on a leash or in a secured enclosure at all times.

If you have any questions or need more information, contact West U Animal Control at 713-662-5831 or email pwinfo@westutx.gov

Are Temporary or Short-Term Rentals Allowed in West U?

The short answer is “yes and no”...

Where they are not allowed – In districts zoned “residential.” The City Code does not allow for temporary or short-term rentals (i.e. Air bnb, VRBO, etc.) in a district zoned as residential. Temporary and short-term rentals are defined as rentals that are less than 30 consecutive days.

Where they are allowed – In districts zoned “non-residential.” The City Code allows for temporary and short-term rentals in districts that are non-residential, but the property must meet additional requirements and obtain a City-issued permit prior to rental.

For questions on temporary or short-term rentals, and where they are allowed and the requirements, Please contact the City Public Works Department at 713-662-5839 or pwinfo@westutx.gov.

Water Works

Water Conservation

As water becomes one of the more precious natural resources nationwide, the conservation of this resource has become a very important issue for cities, counties, and states. Regulations and guidelines have been established to help conserve this resource, and these can be found in the City's Water Conservation Plan (www.westutx.gov/wcp).

Why is water conservation important to all of us? Namely, we can't live without it, and, as our population continues to grow, this will place a greater demand on this finite resource. The good news is that it is not all gloom and doom, because changes in building codes and efficiency requirements for water fixtures and appliances have helped reduce overall water use.

Take some time to inspect your house for leaking faucets and toilets, and make timely repairs. Also, don't forget to have your irrigation system inspected on a regular basis to ensure that there are no leaks and that it is programmed correctly to not overwater. These simple things will help you do your part to conserve water.



Drought Contingency

The City is required to have a Drought Contingency Plan, which establishes procedures that the City will enact if a drought is declared. The procedures for conserving water are voluntary at first, but, depending on residents' response in conserving water and the severity of the declared drought, the requirements can become mandatory. You can view the City's Drought Contingency Plan on our website: www.westutx.gov/conservewater.

Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan

The City of West U recently completed an update to its Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan, which ensures that West U remains compliant with state and federal storm water regulations. This plan provides information and serves as a guide for the City and residents to be good stewards of the environment and to minimize contaminants that enter waterways through our storm drains.

For more information on the new plan, please visit: www.westutx.gov/stormwater





Who is Responsible for Maintaining Trees and Vegetation in Front of Your Home?

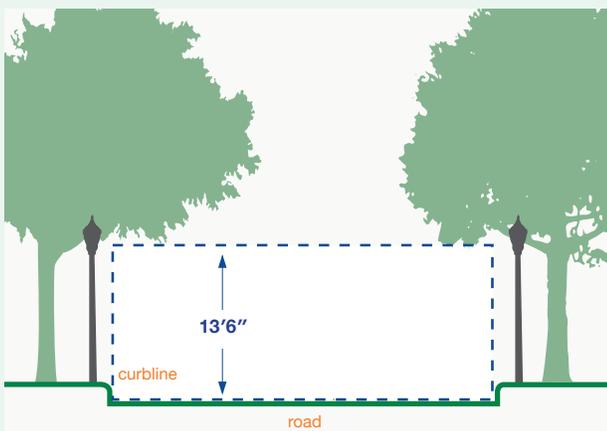
Property owners are responsible for the care and maintenance of vegetation and trees that are planted in the City's right-of-way (ROW) adjacent to your property.

Our trees and vegetation are lush and beautiful, but their foliage has to be maintained to ensure that vehicles can be driven safely on our roads without hitting branches. Drivers need to be able to see stop signs and oncoming vehicles, and sidewalks need to be clear for pedestrians.

Homeowners who do not maintain the foliage adjacent to their properties can be held liable for any damages caused by overgrown trees or vegetation. Examples can include damages from allowing a tree limb to hang too low, or failing to maintain sight clearance at an intersection or a regulatory traffic sign (such as a stop sign).

Please read below to further understand the requirements for ROW vegetation and tree maintenance.

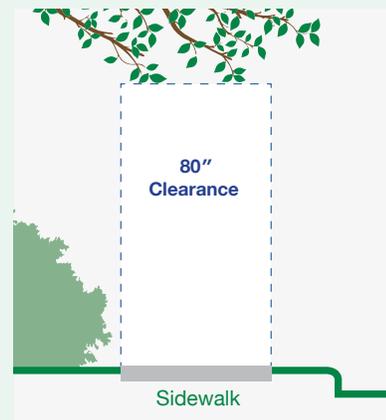
Minimum Height Clearance Over Streets is 13'6"



The City requires that vegetation over the roadway be maintained at a minimum height of 13 feet 6 inches, extending from curb to curb. This ensures adequate clearance for all types of vehicles (fire trucks, ambulances, garbage trucks, street sweepers, etc.) that are on the road daily providing essential City services. It also provides height for privately owned vehicles that are of legal height to drive on public roads.

Please check trees quarterly to ensure that this proper clearance requirement is maintained.

Minimum Clearance Over Sidewalks Is 80"



The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the City require that vegetation does not block the width of sidewalks and that a minimum height clearance of 80 inches (6 feet 8 inches) is provided. This ensures adequate clearance for all pedestrians utilizing the sidewalks.

Please check trees and shrubs monthly to ensure that this clearance requirement is maintained along sidewalks adjacent to your property. Failure to comply can result in a fine.

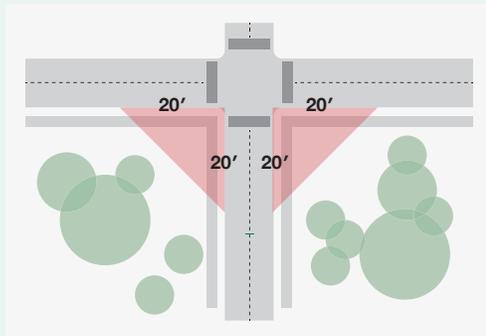
Regulatory Sign Obstruction



To ensure that all drivers remain safe while driving, it is paramount that visibility to drivers of all regulatory signs (e.g., stop signs) be maintained. Regulatory signs should be visible from 200 feet away (approximately four lots) to allow drivers enough time to see the sign and react. If you own a property near a regulatory sign and cannot see the sign from four lots away, more than likely the vegetation needs to be trimmed.

Please check trees and shrubs quarterly to ensure that this proper clearance requirement is maintained. If you have questions regarding sight distances, please contact West U Traffic Control at pwinfo@westutx.gov or 713-662-5839.

Visibility Triangle



To ensure that drivers can navigate an intersection and see oncoming traffic, the City has established a minimum sight distance triangle. The overwhelming majority of intersections in West U are required to maintain a 20 foot by 20 foot sight distance triangle, which means that the height of vegetation cannot be in the area from 3 feet to 13 feet 6 inches in order to allow drivers to see oncoming traffic. While this covers the majority of roads in West U, there are roads with higher traffic volumes or speed limits that have a larger visibility triangle.

If you have questions regarding sight distances, please contact West U Traffic Control at pwinfo@westutx.gov or 713-662-5839.

Upcoming Composting Workshop

When: Saturday, October 5

Where: West U Rec. Center, 4210 Bellaire Blvd.

Time: 9–11 am

Join West U resident Steve Stelzer, who has successfully backyard-composted for 15 years and who has facilitated a STAR Master Composter Training course for the City of Houston for the past three years. Steve presents slides, samples, demonstrations, and resources to give you the confidence to do it yourself and succeed. This two-hour course is for people who want to learn how to compost in their backyard, and for people who have tried and experienced some difficulty. This course is FREE to residents (\$10 for non-residents).

Register in person at the West University Place Recreation Center or online by visiting www.westutx.gov/reg (Activity/Event #306111-01)

If you need more information or assistance registering for this event, please contact the Parks Department at 713-662-7420.



Parks and Recreation

Star Citizen Awards

The Star Citizen Awards were presented at the May 8 Friends board meeting and annual appreciation luncheon, hosted by the City of West University Place and held at El Meson in Rice Village. Former Mayor Susan Sample presented awards to Alison and Gary Moorhead, Julia and Carl Williams, and Mitra and Josh Woody for co-chairing Fathers & Flashlights in 2017 and 2018, and to Jennifer and Scott Allison, Megan and Brian Cushing, Stephanie and Ryan Fleck, and Caroline and Kevin Walter for co-chairing the 2019 Park Lovers' Ball held in February.



2017 and 2018 Fathers & Flashlights Co-Chairs (l-r) Mitra Woody, Alison Moorhead, and Julia Williams.
Not pictured: Josh Woody, Gary Moorhead, and Carl Williams
Photo Credit: DeAnna Villalobos



2019 Park Lovers' Ball Co-Chairs: Jennifer Allison, left, and Stephanie Fleck, right. Not pictured: Co-Chairs Scott Allison, Ryan Fleck, Megan and Brian Cushing, and Caroline and Kevin Walter.
Photo Credit: DeAnna Villalobos



2019 Park Lovers' Ball Co-Chairs (l-r): Scott and Jennifer Allison, Ryan and Stephanie Fleck, Caroline and Kevin Walter, and Megan and Brian Cushing
Photo Credit: DeAnna Villalobos

2020 Park Lovers' Ball

Mark your calendars for Saturday, February 8, 2020, when next year's Park Lovers' Ball will be held at the Hilton Americas-Houston. Event chairs are Mary Frances and David DuMay, and Kim and John Carr Eads. Are you interested in volunteering to help with the ball? Sign up on the Friends website or email Donna LaMond at [dlamond@westutx.gov](mailto:diamond@westutx.gov).

Friends fundraising continues year-round with community and business partnerships, memorials and honorariums, pavers, benches, and tree sales. For more information, please visit the Friends website at www.westuparks.org, call 713-662-7430, or stop by the Friends of West U Parks office located in the West U Rec Center at 4210 Bellaire Blvd.



Fathers & Flashlights

The Fathers & Flashlights campout known throughout our community and beyond starts the weekend of November 2–3. Campers can look forward to an afternoon of fun activities such as live catch-and-release fishing, obstacle courses, and an array of new activities and entertainment for this year. Registration for the campout will be available online only. To be eligible to participate in the event as a camper, you must be zoned to attend West University Elementary School or be an underwriter or sponsor at qualifying levels. Campers returning from the 2018 event can begin registering online on September 10, while online registration for new campers is September 12. Registration details will be distributed via email and will also be available on the Friends website at www.westuparks.org.



The Huth, Morrison, and Parker families are among the participants of the 2018 Fathers & Flashlights event.

Photo Credit: DeAnna Villalobos



West U Recreation Center Closed for Maintenance

Facility Closed August 25 – September 2
Pool Closed August 19 – September 9

The West University Place Recreation Center will be closed August 25 through September 2 to allow staff to complete necessary maintenance. In addition, this year, the pool is scheduled to be closed for re-plastering from August 19 through September 9.

During the closure, West U Recreation Center swimming pool users may use the UTHHealth Auxiliary Enterprises Recreation Center swimming pool, located at 7779 Knight Road in Houston. You must show your valid West U Rec Center membership card for entry. Log on to www.uthouston.edu/recreation-center or call 713-500-8420 for hours and pool schedule information. This exchange is for pool and locker room use, and is not valid for the weight room, cardio room, racquetball membership, or other areas of use.

During the Recreation Center closure, customers may call or visit the Colonial Park Pool to sign up for classes, make tennis/racquetball/pavilion reservations, purchase memberships, or get general Parks and Recreation information. Recreation Center staff will be temporarily relocated to Colonial Park Pool, 4130 Byron, in order to conduct daily business during the closure week.

West University Place Recreation Center operations will resume September 3, except for the pool, which will reopen on September 9. For more information, please visit www.westutx.gov or call West U Recreation Center at 713-662-7420 or Colonial Park Pool at 713-662-7460.

Looking for a Job with Parks & Rec?

Hey, you! Yes, you! The West University Recreation Center is hiring part-time employees. Positions available are Customer Service Team Member, Swim Instructor, and Lifeguard. If you are interested in great starting pay, flexible schedules, a team atmosphere, the potential for advancement, and a fun place to work, then West U is the place for you. For more information, call 713- 662-7420, visit www.westutx.gov, or pick up an application at the Recreation Center at 4210 Bellaire Blvd.



News & Special Events

Movies in the Park

Grab your picnic blankets or lawn chairs, bring the family, and enjoy an outdoor movie shown on a huge inflatable screen! Free and fun for the whole family!

October 11: *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (Rated PG)

October 18: *A Dog's Way Home* (Rated PG)

Colonial Park Pavilion, 4130 Byron

Start time for movies is 7 pm



Full Moon Fest

Friday, October 18, at 5:30 pm

Colonial Park Pavilion – 4130 Byron

The City of West University Place Parks and Recreation Department will host its 7th annual Halloween celebration, Full Moon Fest, at 5:30 pm on October 18. Join us for an evening of pumpkin decorating, face painting, and costume contests. The costume contests will be for different age groups, so make sure the whole family comes in their spookiest attire. Participants in the costume contest must register and be a resident to compete.

Come for the Full Moon Fest and continue the fun with the last movie in the park – *A Dog's Way Home*, starting at 7 pm!

Fall 2019 Class Registration Underway!

Register now to secure your spot

The West University Place Parks and Recreation Department has the perfect class just for you! Sessions range from fitness classes for adults to chess for children. Spaces are limited.

Complete your registration online at www.westutx.gov/reg or come by the Recreation Center, 4210 Bellaire, to sign up. Visa, Mastercard, Discover, personal checks, and cash are accepted.

For more information, and to view our fall "West U at Your Leisure" guide, please visit www.westutx.gov/parks or call 713-662-7420.

King & Spalding's West U Halloween Dash and Kids' Fun Run

Presented by Texas Children's Hospital

Register now for the 9th annual West U Halloween Dash and Kids' Fun Run on Saturday, October 26. The Dash is a chip-timed 5K race through the beautiful tree-lined streets of West U, while the Kids' Fun Run is a non-competitive one-mile run or walk. All Fun Run finishers will receive a medal, and proceeds from the event will benefit the West U Parks and Recreation Department. Register now for this great event at www.westutx.gov/funrun.



New Playground Equipment Coming to Whitt Johnson Park This Fall!

Children who visit Whitt Johnson Park will soon have some new playground equipment to enjoy. Updates include the replacement of an aging playground unit with a modern rotating climber, a standalone spinner, stepping pods, and a balance challenge. The existing tree house will be equipped with ADA access allowing for additional play opportunities, and the safety surfacing will be changed from wood chips to all-new artificial turf to green up the park. Additional updates include removing the gazebo and adding Gaga ball; updating the benches and picnic tables; painting the fence, light poles, and remaining playground equipment; and installing new St. Augustine grass in the open green space. The two basketball half-courts will be resurfaced, and one half-court will include multi-use lines for foursquare and hopscotch.

This project is funded entirely through the generosity of the Friends of West U Parks Fund, Inc. The park is scheduled to close for construction in early September with reopening slated by the end of October, weather permitting. For more information, please visit www.westutx.gov/parkprojects or contact Parks and Recreation Director Susan White at swhite@westutx.gov.



A Newsletter for the Citizens of City of West University Place

City of West U Officials

CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mayor Bob Higley
Mayor Pro Tem Kevin Trautner
John Barnes
Lauri Lankford
Ed Sobash

CITY MANAGER

Dave Beach
dbeach@westutx.gov

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and is printed on recycled paper.

For questions and comments about *City Currents*,
contact City Secretary Thelma Gilliam at
tgilliam@westutx.gov or 713-662-5812.

Design by Minor Design

Meeting Reminder for City Council, Boards and Commissions

City Council

Meetings are the second and fourth Monday of each month
Starts at 6:30 pm at City Hall

Building and Standards Commission

Meetings are the first Thursday of each month
Starts at 6:00 pm at City Hall

Zoning and Planning Commission

Meetings are the second Thursday of each month
Starts at 6:15 pm at City Hall

Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction Board

Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month
Starts at 6:00 pm at the Community Building

Parks and Recreation Board

Meetings are the first Wednesday of each month
Starts at 6:30 pm at the Recreation Center

Senior Services Board

Meetings are the second Thursday of each month
Starts at 2:00 pm at the Community Building

Zoning Board of Adjustment

Meetings are the fourth Thursday of each month
Starts at 6:30 pm at City Hall



We Need Your Help to Keep West U Green!

Receive Your Utility Bill Statement Electronically

Help conserve resources now by enrolling to receive your e-statement.
To get started, please email us at billinghelp@westutx.gov or call
713-662-5824, and please reference your account number.