

## **Dream Big, West U, and Remake Your Town Center**

As the relentless summer heat gives way to idyllic fall and winter evenings in our city, many of our residents have emerged from their air-conditioned homes to once again enjoy the green spaces, parks, and community areas of West U. This emergence reminds me that we have wonderful opportunities in front of us to reshape some of the shared spaces in our community, specifically those around our town center between Auden and College streets. On this note, I will describe the challenges facing us, along with my vision for new investment into West U's community spaces, and will ask that you consider communicating your own views on this important City project.

Our City leaders have developed West U's Facilities Master Plan to improve the functionality of our community and government buildings in the town center west of the baseball fields and elementary school. This Plan is the product of town hall meetings and resident feedback regarding our goals for the next 50 years of our town center space.

The Plan addresses operational deficiencies in the town center area. Today, for instance, our Fire Department lacks space in its firehouse for modern equipment and fire engines, as well as decontamination areas. Our community center and library lack modern facilities, as well. Our Public Works buildings and Maintenance areas are inadequate, and they occupy valuable real estate on Milton and Amherst that could enrich our residential experience if better used. Our emergency operations command center is headquartered in a City Hall lecture room, and our Police, Fire, Finance, and administrative departments lack sufficient space. These operational deficiencies hinder our city's ability to provide a high level of service to our residents and to maximize our overall quality of life in West U.

Looking east from Huffington Park or west from the baseball fields, the western town center and government facilities as a whole do not provide an inviting or recreational feeling whatsoever. The library and community center, while quaint, are aged and underutilized. We can do better than that. We can revitalize these spaces to deliver a new library and community center, while also creating functional greenery in our town center.

The community center and library can be rebuilt to face Huffington Park – creating an integrated, two-block recreational area divided by College Street. Co-locating the library with the community center will allow us to generationally connect young and old while incorporating both spaces into modern, mixed-use environments that will benefit everyone.

Imagine this library and community center fronted by an attractive green space to College Street, with new oak trees and landscaping, where today there is only capital equipment and concrete. In place of the current location of the community center, facing the northwest baseball fields, imagine a stately firehouse large enough to house our outstanding West U Fire Department, so it can adequately service its equipment and our safety needs. Moving the Public Works facilities off campus to the City's work locations on Westpark will make these new spaces possible.

Also, imagine transforming Amherst and Milton streets between College and Auden into pedestrian-first spaces, with greenery advancing from the current curbs and flowing, natural areas beside Huffington Park and the new library – creating green corridors between the elementary school block, the library, and Huffington Park.

When I think about the best parts of life in West U, I am drawn to our close-knit sense of community. This is, in part, built by our enjoyment of shared recreational spaces, whether the space is a front yard, a park, or a community center. I believe in increasing the extent and use of these green spaces, embracing our title of Tree City USA, and modernizing our infrastructure to provide our citizens with the high level of services that we have come to expect from West U. To do this, we need to modernize our City facilities.

There is much work still to be done on this Plan, and, in 2024, our City Council will be considering the new community center and library during public engagement sessions, in which we will discuss the design of these invaluable community spaces. Whatever the outcome of these sessions, I will be a voice to advance a vision of our shared sense of community in West U, which includes creating more useable green spaces and modern facilities for West U residents of all ages. I hope you will reflect on these opportunities and join me in shaping our city for the better.