



2021 City Budget: Addressing the Priorities of Today and Tomorrow

By Mayor Bob Higley

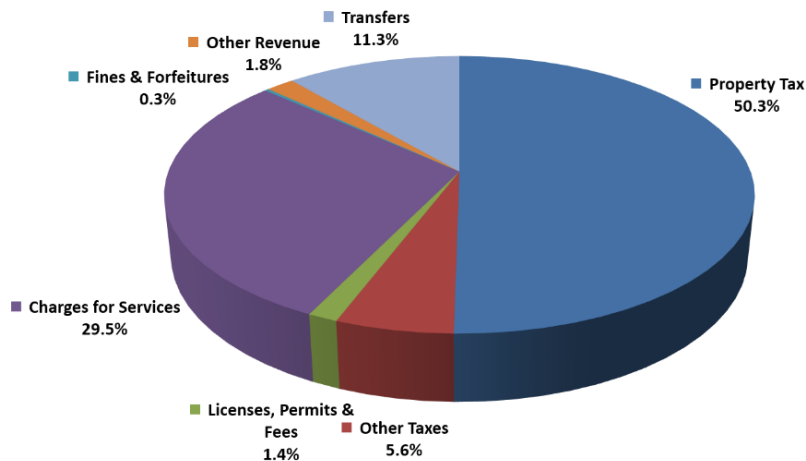
At the City of West U, late summer and early autumn form the most important period of the local government calendar: budget season. For City Council and staff, this is a time to both reflect on the past year and to plan for the future of our city. While approving a budget and setting a tax rate are Charter-mandated functions of City Council each year, these actions have additional meaning. During the budgeting process, we have a chance to examine what we do well as an organization, what we can do better, and to focus on the priorities for West U as a community.

This year has been unlike any other for our community. West U has been experiencing an unprecedented global pandemic that is impacting residents in their personal and professional lives. The City has also seen the cascading effects of this pandemic, resulting in reductions in revenues and impacts to our in-person programming. Additionally, our area has been threatened by a number of hurricanes and tropical storms.

Despite these challenges, I am proud to say that your City Council and staff have worked together to produce a 2021 budget that continues to fund our vital services that we all value so dearly. At the same time, the West U City Council is lowering the property tax rate for the second year in a row.

Since we are a residential community with relatively few commercial businesses, the City is almost exclusively dependent on property taxes and utility charges in order to fund those services that our taxpaying homeowners rely on. However, as public trustees, and as homeowners ourselves, your City Council members know the importance of removing burdens on West U's property owners.

2021 REVENUES – GENERAL, DEBT SERVICE, WATER & SEWER, SOLID WASTE AND TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT FUNDS





This is why the City Council endeavored to ensure that West U citizens would see a 5% drop in their property tax rate, from \$0.30921 to \$0.294066 per \$100 assessed value, with no increase in their sewer, water, or solid waste fees. Council felt that this was particularly important as the West U community strives to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As in years past, we have continued to prioritize the safety and security of our community by devoting more than 44% of General Fund expenditures to our outstanding Police and Fire departments. This is as we continue to fund innovative crime prevention programs such as our Virtual Gate security camera system, which will use strategically placed cameras around the city's perimeter to deter criminals and provide our police with an additional tool to help solve crimes.

While we continue to adapt to the realities of today, we are also working hard to proactively improve the City's systems and services. This City Council has made communication a priority, and I am happy to report that the 2021 budget allows for the addition of a communications position to our staff in order to improve the City's ability to keep West U citizens informed.

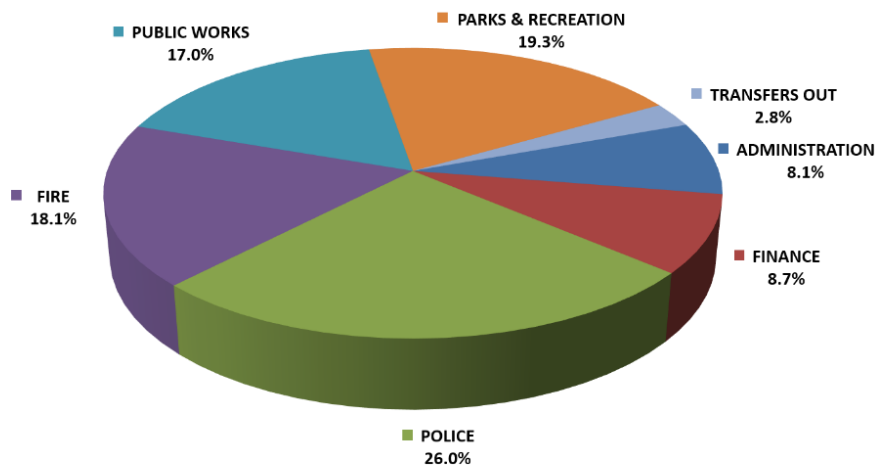
I look forward to the City engaging with citizens through new channels, and giving other residents the chance to see the important and positive work that I am fortunate enough to witness every day.

Overall, we are expecting General Fund revenues to be about \$21.010 million, with expenditures of \$21.296 million. We know that many of you have been disappointed that the City has not been able to provide the same in-person programming (particularly through the Parks & Recreation Department) as in years past, due to the pandemic.

We expect 2021 to be a transitional year. Many of our Parks & Recreation Department programs should be returning in a safe and reliable manner as we work to return to normal operations in 2022.

Finally, this budget continues to fund important investments in our city's infrastructure. These investments in infrastructure will help us to address community priorities, such as drainage and transportation, with funding for street maintenance that addresses standing water issues, engineering design work for improvements to the city's wastewater treatment plant, and a sidewalk and pavement condition assessment. Improvements will progress as preparations

GENERAL FUND
2021 EXPENDITURES BY DEPARTMENT





continue for the Buffalo Speedway replacement, and as citywide streets and drainage improvements are implemented.

These efforts to modernize our infrastructure should benefit residents of West U for generations to come. Knowing that their City Council and staff are working each day to protect the families, property, and quality of life in West U should provide peace of mind to our residents. After all, it is a good thing any time you can maintain your level of service and infrastructure for your community and lower your taxes for residents.