



**STANDING FOR TRUTH:
SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION
IN WEST U**

Fiction

The City is facing a debt crisis that will worsen with the approval of a new library and community center.

Citizens were prevented from voting on the new library and community center until a petition delivered to the City placed the project on the ballot.

The City subverted residents by commissioning library and community center design work ahead of the Proposition D vote.

The library and community center satisfy the needs of City residents.

Fact

This is false. The West U debt level is the lowest, relative to its tax base, in modern history, and the City can address all of its infrastructure needs while maintaining its investment grade credit rating.

This is a false narrative meant to frame the existing Mayor and Council as being unresponsive to residents' voices. No petition was ever delivered to the City. Hearing residents' voices asking for a vote, City Council voted 3-0, with one absent, and one abstaining, to place the library and community center on the ballot as Prop D.

All projects of any nature - whether by this City, a company or anyone else - receive preliminary architectural design work before a final decision on the project. Every major project in the future will obtain design work so that a conceptual appearance and cost estimate can be evaluated by residents, just as every project in the past has received the same.

The 2022 Facilities Master Plan, approved by John Barnes, recommended replacement of existing facilities to address (1) significant costs otherwise required to maintain existing facilities and (2) limitations on the technology, materials and programs that can be used in the library.

The West U library is among the oldest and smallest in all of Harris County.

Voting for Proposition D will automatically lead to \$50-\$60 million in additional facilities costs for residents or, said another way, Proposition D hides the cost of facilities upgrades from residents.

In order to make the project sound less expensive than it will actually cost, Prop D asks for only \$15 million because Council stripped the required landscaping and pedestrian enhancements, including ADA compliance, which means that these NECESSARY streets, sideways and right-of-way enhancements will be immediately back on the table if Prop D is approved, adding a further \$11 million to the cost of the project.

This one stretches the imagination because Prop D literally only authorizes financing for a library and community center. Any additional facilities work requires design work, resident input and Council votes in the future, and the recent revision of the facilities plan regarding the fire department demonstrates that nothing is set in stone until the City separately votes to expend money on physical development – there are no expenditures on physical development authorized in the 2025 budget beyond Prop D.

Pedestrian enhancements refer to a \$21 million proposed package to repave the streets around City Hall with brick and line it with oak trees. While that could be very nice one day, it is purely aesthetic and relatively costly, so Council deferred its consideration until the City actually builds something new in the civic center area. It's really quite rich to characterize this as the most "necessary" part of the project when it has nothing to do with City functionality, and ADA and landscaping is already included in the cost of Prop D. When you read a claim about \$11 million in landscaping and ADA compliance, unless you are talking about Augusta National Golf Club, you can safely assume the writer has become completely unglued from reality.

Something on the streets could be proposed to the residents in 5-6 years if there was a compelling rationale. Pedestrian safety improvements on normal concrete are achieved with lighting, signage, paint and are generally 4, 5 or 6 figure items. There will be pedestrian safety measures around the new town green.

The existing community center is not ADA compliant, and retrofitting it is expensive and consumes space, which is one of the reasons building a new community center makes fiscal sense. ADA compliance on the sidewalks consists of a slab of concrete ramp, a railing and some adjacent parking spaces, and the new buildings include ADA compliance costs.

The City will imminently demolish existing buildings.

This is a scare tactic and the statement is untrue.

The City will address its facility needs through multiple years of forthcoming town halls, similar to its process on the new library and community center, to gather resident feedback and determine the next steps for the City's buildings, while addressing the needs of our fire and police department facilities.

Ironically, the Facilities Master Plan approved by John Barnes would have led to the demolition of the existing library and community center to place a fire station at Rice and Auden. The existing Mayor and Council voted to leave the fire station in its existing location after hearing residents' concerns and receiving a plan from City staff to maintain fire station operations in the civic center during its construction phase.

This comment is elaborated on below in the passage starting "There are two premises..."

The costs of addressing the facility needs of the City are being hidden from residents, and the Council will increase taxes to fund new facilities without resident approval.

As a matter of law, any public financing of a City Hall or City administrative facilities must be put to the residents for a vote, and this vote will take place when design plans are advanced in the future.

The estimated costs of addressing the facility needs of the City are regularly published in Council presentations, discussed at public meetings and presently available on the City's website, and have been for many years. All deliberation among Council relating to addressing our facility needs has taken place in a public setting. These projects will be presented to the residents prior to construction, and final plans may be adopted that avoid any demolition whatsoever.

The new library and community center is planned to be located between two water tanks.

Please ask people sharing this false narrative to show you floorplans or an architectural design of this palatial City Hall. They do not exist, because one is not proposed. The primary function of City Hall is to provide workspace for the core employees of the City, and the design needs are functional more than aesthetic.

The new library and community center will be located farther away from the elementary school than the current library.

They are actually both 0.2 miles from the front of the elementary school.

Prop D construction will increase traffic around West U senior center & elementary school for years.

The City's plans, if Prop D is approved, actually expands parking on Milton and Amherst and adds new ingress and egress points that would improve traffic flow away from the elementary school. Any renovation of the civic center, including all renovation proposals made by opponents of Prop D, will involve construction work, and a renovation of the senior center and library in their existing location would obviously shut them down for an extended period while work takes place.

\$11 per month per median household only covers the interest on the bonds that would be issued with Prop D.

\$11 per month per median household covers all amortization and interest on the bonds that would be issued for Prop D.

The long-term fixed rate bonds that the City would be expected to issue contain unusual financing terms.

The City is a AAA municipal bond issuer and is advised by sophisticated, well-respected financial and legal advisors. The City has been advised and the market demonstrates that the City's proposed issuance is usual and customary in all respects.

The new library and community center is planned to be located between two water tanks.

The development of the library and community center will relocate the small water tank at Milton and College to the site of the large water tank next to the church. The footprint of the small water tank will be

The Facilities Master Plan is like "somebody who makes \$21,000 per year buying an \$84,000 car."

The total Prop D Bond project is really a minimum of \$36 million. This is also the first piece of a MAJOR domino effect of discretionary infrastructure projects which really needs to be considered.

This was obviously not drafted by a financial professional. The City of West U has a \$9 billion (with a b) tax base and finances its investments by issuing 25 or 30 year amortizing bonds at investment grade credit (approx. 3.5% today).

Let's take the \$84 million number that the Barnes campaign and Prop D opponents like. At a \$9 billion tax base, this \$84 million number for new City facilities, after many years of additional town halls and votes, is more like an owner of a \$1,000,000 home taking out a \$9,333 loan to build an expansion to their home. This loan is paid monthly at a very low interest rate secured by the home, unlike a car, and the investment in expansion is made to improve the value and utility of the home. The City's broad tax base and great credit is why the \$15 million represented by Prop D can be financed at only \$11 per month per median household, and the City's cost of borrowing is not jeopardized by any City capital plans.

The City of West U finance staff has developed strong forecasting tools with respect to the interplay between City investments, property value growth and tax rates, which are presented very conservatively to protect residents and the City balance sheet, and I would encourage residents to request the City's financial models to look at scenarios that matter to them.

Prop D is just about a library and community center. None of this other stuff has anything to do with it, although the City expands its usable space by redeveloping the industrialized public works area west of the church. If our residents have strong feelings about the existing library and community center buildings, those can be repurposed in the future to the extent possible, and they would likely host City employees.

The tax impact from the facilities master plan will be so great that seniors will lose their homes.

Each person's financial circumstances are different. The impact on seniors is generally modest. The projected expense of \$11 per month is based on a non-senior resident with a \$1.5 million home. The expense to a household would be expected to slide with the value of the West U property.

West U seniors are partially shielded from ad valorem taxes, with assessed value being reduced by \$185,000 for residents 65 and older for West U taxes. Harris County has a similar exemption at \$275,000.

A senior living in a \$750,000 home would be subject to less than \$5 per month for Prop D after applying the deduction.

At the most extreme version of Prop D opponents' claimed expenditures (\$84 million(?)), a senior in a \$750,000 home would be subject to about \$30 per month at some point in the future for the full new city facilities, if \$84 million of total projects are approved in the future.

As opposed to beautiful oak trees as currently seen from the library windows, residents will be staring at one very tall water tank and this tank will also impose over the little league fields.

This fiction is referring to the oak trees along Auden. We should be able to keep those, and there's no demolition plan published today, let alone one that removes them.

The double water tank will be behind the church and is on a different block from the current library, behind the planned community building, not facing Auden. The community building will face Huffington Park, away from the tank, and the library faces north to look into the new town green.

The West U fire station is moving from University & Auden to Rice & Auden.

This is false. The Council voted unanimously to adopt plans to expand fire station facilities in its existing location at University in 2024.

Alternatively: "They" don't mention the \$8-\$10 million that will be spent to buy a new water tank (5 years before it is needed). They want to combine the 2 large water tanks into 1 very tall water tank to make more space for the new buildings in this very industrial part of our City. They have not considered that if one water tank is to fail, there will not be a second one to back it up.

We will have significant capital expenditures on the small ground water tank in the next 4-5 years no matter what we do on Prop D. To open up the "town green" courtyard of the new library and community center, we can build around the shell of the existing large tank to create redundancy (two separate pipeworks, pump systems and reservoirs) while using the footprint of the big tank. This opens up the greenspace facing Huffington Park and results in valuable new real estate for the City in a communal space.

At the Prop D debate, opponents of Prop D have now proposed that we put a City Hall between the two water tanks. Imagine proposing that idea to an architect, or explaining it to a City employee. One of our serious challenges in the City is recruiting and retaining employees. This alternative plan will hurt our City's function and, personal opinion here, go out of its way to make it ugly.

Once a new City Hall is complete, a new Fire Station will be rebuilt. The total cost of all phases is considered to be over \$76 million. This is just the projected cost, and in reality it will likely be much higher.

The estimate on the expanded fire station is \$13 million to renovate in place or \$18 million to rebuild new. Some residents have expressed a preference to focus on the fire station and police facilities as the next step of the facilities plan, and these views could be adopted in a revised facilities master plan in 2025.

The flexibility that the City has to amend its plan (which has existed in the public for 8 years) demonstrates the false nature of the "imminent demolition" narrative, and this fact is supported by the amendments to the plan only last year to keep the fire station in its existing location.

The Wastewater Treatment Plant requires urgent repairs, or residents will be put at risk.

This is a false narrative meant to frighten residents. Each professional employee and engineer involved in the project advised the Council to undertake upgrades and improvements over a period of years, which allows the City to achieve the lowest cost to the taxpayer. The Wastewater Treatment Plant operates below 50% of its existing capacity, extending the life of its equipment, with complete redundancy to undertake future work without interruption. The City has replaced key equipment at the Wastewater Treatment Plant in the past without disruption to residents.

The City was negligent not to accept a solo bid from ITX to address upgrades to its Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The City rejected the ITX bid to ensure that it was getting the best price for the project, with the benefit of the Plant's excess capacity providing time to get the project right. The Council concluded that the process to obtain the ITX bid may have been flawed. A solo bid does not provide the City with information about market pricing to make an informed decision, and there are many components to Plant upgrades for which a competitive subcontractor market would exist.

The City's rejection of the ITX bid will lead to increased costs to taxpayers.

The Council approved a bid for Phase I of Wastewater Treatment Plant repairs that included a competing bid from ITX for the same work. The City saved over \$1 million in its selected bid relative to the ITX bid. By obtaining bids from competitive markets and offering subcontractors direct bidding opportunities, the City chose the deferred path to save taxpayers money relative to the initial solo ITX bid.

The City must make a choice between addressing facility needs in its civic center and undertaking infrastructure projects around the City.

The candidates spreading this message will lead the City to deteriorate as its needs are not addressed. The City has the financial and management capacity to undertake multiple major projects simultaneously, and its infrastructure exists in a constant cycle of decay and renewal that must continue. For example, over the last year, the City has completed the Eastside Drainage Project, broken ground on the new Public Works facility, completed sidewalk repairs, re-opened Weir Park and finished the Edloe Pathway, generally working concurrently.

If Prop D passes, after the Prop D facilities are complete, a new City Hall will be built on the site of the existing Library and Senior Center (the existing ones will be demolished-cost not included)! Matt Hart made the motion and Clay Brett voted for this on February 10, 2025.

There are two premises that this false narrative depends on: (1) long-term city planning documents constitute action today and (2) the City would undertake a demolition and reconstruction project with cash on hand rather than seeking a public vote on the financing for a City Hall. The discussion below demonstrates why both are false.

Council hasn't voted to demolish anything. We have a capital plan as a City that serves as a planning document for 10 years forward. In our regular work we amend the capital plan (one is always in place), with our comments about the future years of the plan and the plan is presented to Council regularly for ongoing discussion and revision. Projects don't happen in the real world until we do a LOT more work than we have today.

This is the critical piece here: the process of upgrading the City's buildings or approving any other major project goes (1) resident input, (2) design, (3) resident input, (4) cost estimates, (5) resident input, (6) a vote to authorize the expenditures, financing and work. On the City Hall that would result in this supposed demolition, we are on step (1).

On core City infrastructure (roads, water) and public safety, financing of expenditures may be financed with a Council vote, but on a City Hall, financing approval must be obtained in a Citywide vote, similar to Prop D today, which means that the demolition and "palatial" rebuilding banded about today cannot occur by law without a public vote on its financing.

The City today actually has cash on its balance sheet that could have theoretically funded about \$15 million in projects without issuing bonds (and could have funded the Prop D projects with cash), but as other infrastructure projects have matured or accelerated (repairs to Bellaire elevated storage tank, for example) while the facilities master plan remains under debate, the cash would be used for infrastructure before anything beyond Prop D is settled.

Narratives of this nature take planning documents of the City, which occur in the real world with years of iteration on feedback and design, and present them as a cascade of automatic dominos that somehow fall based on the bonds for a library being issued. This false narrative creates a much larger specter of change and expense than is actually under consideration for action today. It is intended to give you images of a runaway, fast-paced city government. In reality, municipal processes move pretty slow and the neighborhood-nature of our City allows residents to interact with the process quite intimately before anything happens in the real world.