

**WESTWOOD CITY COUNCIL
MAYOR'S REPORT ITEMS**

APRIL 2025

Before Public Comment tonight, I do want to speak to the results of last week's election and set the stage for what I hope can be productive public comment this evening.

Spring 2025 Election.

With last week's mail-in ballot election, 841 ballots were cast. That is 58.73% of Westwood's registered voters. Just for comparison, Lenexa's sales tax mail-in ballot vote had a voter turnout of only 24.48% and the Gardner-Edgerton School District bond mail-in ballot had a voter turnout of only 19.71%. So, the City of Westwood should be very proud of its engagement and the numbers in which our residents exercised their right to vote.

The Lenexa and Gardner-Edgerton questions were both approved by the electorate. In Westwood, on the question of "whether the Joe D. Dennis Park shall be sold, traded, or exchanged", the final results were:

398 votes in favor (47.44%)

441 votes against (52.56%)

As I have stated many times, here from the dais and in the City's written communications, the City respects the process and the City respects the ultimate decision made by our Westwood community.

So, What Happens Now?

In our City FAQ, one of the questions we addressed was, "What happens if the ballot measure fails?" I am going to read directly from that FAQ response:

If the ballot measure fails, then the City would retain Joe D. Dennis Park and it would remain in place. Neither the Karbank development nor the new park would be built. The City would also continue to hold the vacant former Westwood Christian Church site (which is not officially part of Dennis Park) and approximately \$275,000 in debt on that property.

There are not any current plans or funds budgeted for renovation or expansion of Dennis Park or the former church property. Dennis Park would remain as it currently is and continue to be used for park purposes. At some time, the City may need to determine what use—if any—should be made of the former church property, whether that be for park and green space or other uses.

The School District would likely seek another buyer for the old Westwood View school site, and the City would have no control over that sale. The City would not be in a financial position to purchase the property. If future owners of the site present their own development proposals, the City would review those under the City's zoning regulations but would not otherwise have a say in them or participate in them.

At this time, I have no reason to believe that those statements are not still accurate.

For us on the City Council, it can be somewhat difficult to determine exactly what path the City does actually want. As an example, as part of the 2022 City Facilities Assessment and Feasibility Analysis, the City conducted resident surveys and held an open house, soliciting and obtaining very good feedback from residents on options the City might consider.

66% of survey respondents felt that the best approach to improving City facilities and amenities (such as increased park space) was to leverage available property to generate additional revenues from future development projects. Of the various scenarios presented, the survey respondents' top choices contemplated development on the site of existing Dennis Park and former church property.

That, obviously, was not reflected in the outcome of last week's election. So, you, our residents, especially those who were opposed to the project, need to tell us what it is you would like to see done, and provide us that path to get there. Based on social media posts, flyers, webpages, etc., I think we have all seen various things, which have included:

- The City should buy the former Westwood View site and sell off residential lots.

- The City should buy the former Westwood View site and create an 8-acre park.
- The City should ask that Johnson County dedicate funds to develop a new park.
- The City should work with Mission Woods and Westwood Hills to create a park supported financially by all three cities.
- The City should let the School District sell the former Westwood View, and the City should raise money in other ways to improve the Dennis Park that we do have, possibly including selling 5050 Rainbow given the debt on the property.

Or various mixing-and-matching of these.

At the request of one resident—near to when this process began—the City did look at something called the State of Kansas Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Program. That program is a reimbursement program—meaning, the City would have to raise funds and spend them first and then get up to 50% reimbursement for eligible expenses. However, each project can only receive up to a maximum of 10% of the total state allocation during each cycle. For 2024, the total allocation was only \$3.9 million, so—even assuming eligibility, which was not a given—the maximum that could be available to Westwood would have been only \$390,000.

I think you have all seen the numbers in our FAQ on the anticipated expenses in acquiring land and developing a new park, which is incredibly higher. The City will continue to look into grant opportunities where appropriate.

Here is What We Know

So, before we hear your comments tonight, I want to give you all the lay of the land. The things that we know, tonight, sitting here right now. I am going to give these in as straight-forward a manner as I can, without editorial comment on whether the County, the School District, other cities, etc., are right or wrong. I just want to provide the facts.

And I hope you will incorporate these realities into your comments and any plans you wish to propose.

- As a result of the April 2025 election, Westwood cannot convey Dennis Park. We are keeping that corner piece of land.
- Westwood has approximately **\$275,000** in debt on 5050 Rainbow, which is not part of Dennis Park.
- Karbank has officially terminated its contract with Westwood and will not be financing the acquisition of any property nor developing its intended commercial project.
- Westwood's Purchase Agreement with the School District has not, as of yet, been terminated. However, the School District has asked the City when we plan on doing so.
- The purchase price for the Former WWV (including School District carrying costs) is **\$2.785 million**. That is the cost for acquisition only—not demolition, renovation, or any other park development costs.
- Under Westwood's Purchase Agreement with the School District, Westwood's due diligence period expires on **June 1, 2025**, for a July 1, 2025, closing date. June 1 is date by which Westwood must terminate the Purchase Agreement if no funding plan for acquiring the Former WWV is deemed feasible. June 1 is the date you need to keep in the front of your minds.
- After the election, the School District confirmed that it is not interested in further extending the Purchase Agreement to sell the Former WWV or giving the City more time. School District administration intends to recommend to the Board of Education options for marketing and selling the property to other interested buyers.
- We do not know who those potential buyers might be or what plans they might have for the property.
- We have been in contact with Johnson County and Johnson County Parks & Rec both before and after the April election. After the election, official representatives from Johnson County/JCPRD confirmed what it had previously told us, that its current policy (known as the "2024 Legacy Plan") does not provide for County investment in smaller neighborhood parks. Moreover, the County advises that its current plan is severely underfunded, such that the County does not have revenues available for city parks.

- Accordingly, Johnson County is not willing or able to participate in the development of a new park.
- I have been in contact with the Mayors of both Mission Woods and Westwood Hills. I have not received any solid feedback from Westwood Hills yet, but Mission Woods has told me that they “simply would not be in a financial position to be part of any funding for a park.”
- With the Karbank project, the acquisition of the former Westwood View site was to be paid for by Karbank. With that now off the table, in order for the City to issue bonds to acquire land for a park, Kansas statute would require the publishing of notices, a protest period similar to that we had in selling Dennis Park, and a public vote if there was a similar protest.
- To be frank, there is no way the City could go through that process by June 1.
- That means, acquiring the former Westwood View site is not a practical reality, unless someone out there has a \$2.785 million check ready to go, and then also be willing to dedicate the land to the City. Again, of course, that would not include any costs in actually developing a park.

Public Comment

With that, I turn it over to you for your comments to the Council. I know the Council wants to hear your ideas, and your plans for accomplishing those ideas.

As always when you approach, we ask that you give your name and address, what city you live in, and we ask that you keep your comments to approximately three minutes so that others may have a turn and so that we can then continue with your agenda items this evening.

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Past Events:

- March 13: I presented to the Leadership Northeast Class, as I have done the last few years, on lessons in leadership and the work of serving the community.
- March 21: I had a board meeting for United Community Services of Johnson County and also a lunch with the Mayors of Northeast Johnson County.
- April 8: This week, Midwest Transplant Network held a flag-raising ceremony in recognition of National Donate Life Month. I attended this event last year, but was not able to attend this year, and I want to thank Jason Hannaman for attending in my place and representing the City there.
- April 9: Johnson and Wyandotte Counties Council of Mayors meeting, this time in Lake Quivira.

Upcoming Events:

- April 11: I will be attending the Downtown Council (KCMO) Annual Lunch.
- April 18: I will have another UCS board meeting and another Northeast Mayors' Lunch.
- April 19: One of the best—and also the fastest—events, the annual Easter Egg Hunt. Be there by 2:45, the whistle blows promptly at 3:00!