

February 5, 2024

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Whittier, CA. 90602

Whittier City Council  
13230 Penn St.  
Whittier, CA. 90602

ATTN: Rigo Garcia, City Clerk

Dear City Council Members:

The Gardens of Uptown Plan, in progress for five years in collaboration with the community to phase-in tree replacement, was abandoned in one fell swoop by the City Council on 12/12/23. The timing of that 12/12 Council meeting, and the Public Hearing held simultaneously, was less than two weeks before Christmas. The wording on the Notice of Public Hearing makes **NO** mention of eliminating the phased-in approach to tree replacement by substituting a radically different Plan to cut down 100+ trees all at once in the heart of Uptown. No members of the public WELL-KNOWN to City Council and staff as residents involved for years in the Gardens of Uptown Plan were contacted or advised about the 12/12 Public Hearing.

By contrast, “heads up” was clearly given to business owners known to support removal of ficus trees. On 12/12, a mere 12 people spoke for 22 minutes in favor of the “amended” Plan. After the community learned what happened, public comments at the 1/23/24 City Council meeting were in stark contrast: 40 people, including three former Whittier City Council members, spoke for 90+ minutes expressing opposition. Additionally, 130+ emails were sent to the City between January 19-23 opposing chopping down all of those trees. The Council’s decision has awakened a “sleeping giant” of anger, outrage and disbelief. The number of residents protesting the Council’s “amended” Greenleaf Promenade Plan to guillotine all the trees at once is growing.

After listening to the public outcry at the end of the 1/23/24 Council meeting, City Manager Brian Saeki said there were 15 Council meetings held to discuss the Greenleaf Promenade Plans. I have looked at the video recordings of ALL of those meetings. At the very end of the 2/14/23 meeting, Mr. Saeki said: “It’s not likely that ALL of the mature ficus trees we have on Greenleaf are going to be able to make it in this Plan.” At NONE of the subsequent Council meetings between 2/14/23 and 12/12/23, when the Greenleaf Promenade Plan was on your Agenda, were trees even mentioned (discussions at those meetings entailed size/style of pavement, lighting, playground equipment, water main replacement, utilities, monumentation arches, etc.)

At the end of the 12/12/23 meeting, Councilmember Cathy Warner, alluding to the public speakers at that meeting, said “I think we’re hearing 100% support.” At that meeting,

Councilmember Fernando Dutra questioned Mr. Cason, asking if the “amended” plan is in compliance with Whittier’s tree manual. **Mr. Cason responded NO.** Mr. Dutra replied that Uptown Whittier is “going to look very bare...for years.”

My Dad was a USAF pilot for 30 years. On his deathbed, he was asked if he ever piloted a plane that was about to crash? Dad said yes, and the first thing you do when the unexpected happens is UNDO what you were doing before the crisis occurred.

What the Council was doing for five years before the crisis occurred called for a phase-in process of tree removal & replacement. Please listen to **overwhelming** public opinion. Revert to the Gardens of Uptown Plan, i.e. what you were doing before public outcry happened.

Whittier’s beauty and historic significance is inextricably linked to our mature canopy of trees. We all want clean sidewalks, safety, and to limit liability, but those goals are not mutually exclusive with maintaining our irreplaceable canopy of trees. I applaud your decision to hold a special City Council session on 2/20/24 to address residents’ concerns and, after further review, amend the Greenleaf Promenade Plan approved on 12/12/23. The result will be a more beautiful Uptown, without the complete loss of our mature canopy of trees, envisioned by your predecessor Council members when those trees were planted as “small twigs” in the 1960s.

All the best,

(original signed)

Conny B. McCormack  
City of Whittier resident for 27 years  
Former L.A. Co. Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (Ret.)