

August 11, 2026

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

SUBJECT: Reinstate Whittier's Tree Protection Ordinance and Parkway Tree Manual

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

Organize Whittier, a coalition of Whittier Community-based organizations, has sent you a letter (attached) expressing solidarity in urging you to take action on priorities and key campaign promises made to voters by the newly-elected Mayor and City Council members at the April 14, 2026 City election. It highlights the priority of Reinstating Whittier's Tree Protection Ordinance and Parkway Tree Manual that safely protected our publicly-owned healthy trees for decades. The previous City Council, on a 4-1 voteⁱ, stripped away our tree protections - in violation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) - at their LAST City Council meeting on March 24 before their landslide defeats at the April 14 election. Their illegal action provoked a lawsuit by the Whittier Conservancy demanding reinstatement of our Tree Protection Ordinance and Parkway Tree Manual. Why is the newly elected City Council now spending tens of thousands of our taxpayers' dollars on lawyers to defend against this indefensible action of the last City Council?

The previous City Council galvanized public outrage when they voted to chop down ALL of the mature, shady trees in the heart of Uptown. Protecting our publicly-owned trees against destruction became a major rallying cry, resulting in a petition to Save Our Trees signed by more than 6,000 Whittier residents (8,269 total signatures and growing), www.saveourtreeswhittier.com. Tree protection was a principal issue motivating Whittier voters on April 14th, culminating in doubling the voter turnout from previous city elections and the overwhelming electoral loss of the previous incumbents. Their vote to strip away Whittier's tree protections was based on false information, a calculated deception, fully revealed and described in my letter to you of June 23, 2026 (copy attached).

Instead of updating Whittier's Tree Protection Ordinance and Parkway Tree Manual every five years as required by city law, the previous City Council voted to award a NO BID contract to Michael Baker - **at a cost of \$564,133** - to wholesale replace it with an EIR and Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP). The public was blindsided by this action; there was no prior public input or discussion.

Many area cities have adopted UFMPs in conjunction with their Tree Protection Ordinances and Tree Manuals. Speaking for www.saveourtreeswhittier.com, we support an UFMP selected through a competitive bid process with a clear mission statement and objectives. The motivation of the previous City Council in sole source selecting Michael Baker is suspect. Michael Baker's project manager signed Whittier's paperwork filed with the CA State Clearinghouse declaring exemption to the CEQA law that forms the basis of the Whittier Conservancy's lawsuit.

Fortunately, the City has the right to cancel the No Bid contract with Michael Baker at any time with NO penalty clauseⁱⁱ. To date, very little has been spent on this \$564,133 contractⁱⁱⁱ which is four months behind the scheduled kickoff date, and payment points are tied to task completions. Clearly there is no urgency to proceed with this no bid contract. Go out to bid for an UFMP!

The newly-elected Mayor and City Council candidates rode to a landslide victory with high voter turnout based in large part against the previous City Council's tree decisions and policies. The cost to continue with this ill-advised, no bid contract is much greater than \$564,133. The cost extends to the loss of public support by not distinguishing yourselves from your predecessors.

Sincerely,



Conny McCormack
Founder & Leader, www.saveourtreeswhittier.com
City of Whittier resident for 30 years
Former L.A. Co. Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (Ret.)

cc: Conal McNamara, City Manager
Rigo Garcia, City Clerk

See Attachments A, B

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- i. With Council member Mary Ann Pacheco voting against.
 - ii. TERMS and TERMINATION of the Michael Baker contract are described in Sections 4.2 and 4.3: The CITY reserves and has the right and privilege of canceling, suspending or abandoning the execution of all or any part of the work contemplated by this Agreement, **with or without cause**, at any time, by providing at least fifteen (15) days prior notice to CONSULTANT. Upon termination, the CITY shall pay CONSULTANT for reasonable costs incurred within thirty-five (35) days after service of the notice of termination.
 - iii. A Public Records Request (PRR) has been sent to the City requesting to see invoices submitted to date by Michael Baker in conjunction with contract A26-004 and Amendment 1 of contract.

ORGANIZE WHITTIER



Dear Mayor Becerra and Members of the Whittier City Council:

Congratulations on your election to the Whittier City Council.

As the three new members approach the conclusion of your first 100 days in office, we write on behalf of Organize Whittier and the residents who entrusted you with their votes to reflect on the opportunities before you—and the expectations that brought each of you into office.

We want to begin by applauding the progress on two Organize Whittier priorities. First, the Council voted on June 23 to place charter amendments on the November 2026 ballot that would move Whittier's municipal elections to the November statewide cycle and add term limits to the city council — a change that would take effect in 2028 and put the question where it belongs: with the voters. Second, the Council recognized June as LGBTQ+ Pride Month—a monumental step forward. We appreciate your leadership on both these issues.

The first 100 days are more than a symbolic milestone. They are an opportunity to demonstrate that the promises made during the campaign are becoming the principles that guide your governance and to establish a City Council that is transparent, accountable, and responsive to the people it serves.

The residents of Whittier elected a Council prepared to listen, lead, and make decisions that place the long-term well-being of the community above short-term convenience. They expect leadership that honors its commitments, protects our neighborhoods and environment, strengthens public trust, and invites meaningful public participation in the decisions that shape our city.

To that end, we respectfully urge the Council to advance the following priorities:

Protect Whittier's immigrant families. Adopt local ordinances that prohibit the use of City resources to assist civil immigration enforcement; restrict immigration authorities' access to non-public areas of City property except where legally required; and limit the collection, use, and disclosure of residents' sensitive personal information. We also urge the Council to prohibit the City from entering into new contracts with vendors or contractors that directly or indirectly provide resident information to immigration authorities, thereby closing an indirect pathway through which personal data could be used for immigration enforcement. Neighboring Lynwood recently adopted similar protections, demonstrating that cities across Los Angeles County are responding to their communities with thoughtful local safeguards.

Restore Whittier's Tree Protection Ordinance and Tree Manual. Reinstate the protections suspended by the previous City Council. Whittier is now the only one of the fourteen

CIPA-member cities without a Tree Protection Ordinance protecting healthy public trees and without a formal administrative appeal process for residents. Mature trees are irreplaceable public assets that improve air quality, reduce extreme heat, strengthen environmental resilience, and preserve the character and beauty of our neighborhoods.

Uphold the Planning Commission's recommendation regarding the Go Store It project.

Responsible growth means smart growth that follows adopted planning policies, reflects community priorities, strengthens existing neighborhoods, and serves the public interest by delivering lasting benefits for residents. The Planning Commission unanimously recommended denial after concluding that the proposal is inconsistent with the community's long-term vision for the corridor and that the addition of 42 public parking spaces does not justify that departure. Community opposition has been overwhelming and well documented. A verified survey found that 125 of 126 participating Groves residents opposed the project, and testimony before the Commission demonstrated that residents' concerns are based on sound planning and land-use principles—not opposition to responsible redevelopment. In addition, the Groves Master HOA board, last week, approved for legal to draft an official letter from the HOA with their statement of "unified position against the project".

Organize Whittier and the residents we represent stand ready to work collaboratively with you by providing thoughtful input, constructive engagement, and community support as you address these and other important issues facing our city.

We believe the strongest communities are built through shared governance, mutual respect, and meaningful civic participation. We look forward to working with you to advance initiatives that will help shape a more responsive, transparent, and forward-looking Whittier—one that reflects the needs, values, and aspirations of all its residents.

These priorities represent practical first steps toward building a Whittier that is more transparent, environmentally responsible, and responsive to the people it serves. The decisions you make during these first 100 days set the tone for your tenure and help define the legacy of this Council. We are confident you will demonstrate the leadership, vision, and integrity that the people of Whittier entrusted you to provide.

Respectfully,

Organize Whittier:

Save Our Trees Whittier
Whittier Conservancy
Whittier Indivisible Chapter
Whittier Latino Coalition
Whittier Pride

ATTACHMENT B

June 22, 2026

Whittier City Council
13230 Penn St.
Whittier, CA 90602

SUBJECT: Hoax used to “justify” ditching Tree Protection Ordinance & Parkway Tree Manual

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

The previous City Council AND the public were deceived and misled when told that Whittier’s “extensive” tree Appeal process in our Tree Protection Ordinance & Parkway Tree Manual is different from other CIPA cities’ Tree Protection Ordinances and Appeals process – **it is NOT!** Whittier’s allegedly more restrictive, “potentially dangerous” Parkway Tree Manual provisions resulted in our City being threatened with termination of our insurance coverage unless “permanently eliminated” (letter from California Insurance Pool Authority (CIPA) General Manager Janet Kiser, Attachment A). The former City Council used this fabricated “reason” to adopt Ordinance 3176 on March 24, 2026 on a 4-1¹ vote, eviscerating our Tree Protection Ordinance & Parkway Tree Manual. This unprecedented action provoked a lawsuit² to reinstate Whittier’s Tree Protection Ordinance & Parkway Tree Manual, laws that have safely protected our publicly-owned healthy trees for decades.

FACT: Research has revealed that all 14 CIPA member cities have adopted Tree Protection Ordinances **that also contain a lengthy, multi-step Appeals process involving: Posted Notice by the City of planned tree removal; Resident Appeal filing period; setting a Public Hearing conducted by a city department or commission; and a further Resident Appeal opportunity at a City Council meeting – like Whittier’s previous process prior to elimination.** Yet none of the other CIPA member cities have been threatened with cancelation of their insurance. Several CIPA cities’ Tree Protection ordinances entail even more stringent requirements including prior notification of property owners, and specifying tree replacement ratios of up to seven trees based on tree trunk diameter (Attachment B).

This revelation begs the Question: Why did CIPA’s General Manager Janet Kiser email Whittier a threatening letter recommending permanent elimination of Whittier’s Parkway Tree “policy” when their other CIPA member cities have near-identical policies/ordinances with a multi-step Appeals process for healthy trees? The answer lies in Janet Kiser’s response during open (public) session at the Whittier City Council meeting on Jan. 23, 2024: “If you don’t remove unhealthy trees then you stand a higher likelihood of having a claim that could increase your premium.” With that response, Ms. Kiser revealed her erroneous belief that Whittier’s tree Appeal process delays removal of unhealthy, hazardous trees. In fact, Whittier’s Tree Protection Ordinance – and the Tree Protection ordinances of all 14 CIPA cities –

¹ AYES: Vinatieri, Martine, Dutra, Warner; NO: Pacheco

² Whittier Conservancy v City of Whittier – Case No. 26STCP01883

allows immediate removal of any unhealthy trees **without Appeal** to avoid endangering the public. At that meeting, Ms. Kiser stated: “What impacts your premiums directly are your losses.”

There is no question that Whittier’s loss history and claims over the past six years has caused Whittier’s CIPA insurance premiums to skyrocket³, in contrast with lower losses incurred by other CIPA cities. During the most recent Liability Update presentation to the Whittier City Council during open session on Jan. 28, 2025, former City Manager Brian Saeki admitted that CIPA had never referenced our Tree Manual, **saying CIPA discussed overall liability concerns regarding sidewalks and police**. Yet former mayor Joe Vinatieri opined at that meeting “We have a clear and present danger with our Tree Manual.” As revealed above, Whittier’s Tree Manual provisions, including extensive Appeals process, is also standard operating procedure in all the other CIPA cities. Due to the former City Council’s action, ONLY Whittier’s healthy trees now have NO legal protection. Our City’s healthy trees can and are being removed by order of the City Manager.

The overriding Question is WHY and WHAT actions does ditching our Tree Protection Ordinance enable? The answer is paving the way for planned, unfettered development where publicly-owned mature trees stand in the way. The wide greenbelt on Whittier Blvd. from Five Points to Philadelphia St. is a scenic entrance into the City with many mature, beautiful trees. On this publicly-owned land stands a tall row of 49 cypress trees adjacent to The Groves. Those 49 cypress trees, six mature camphor trees and three red oak trees are all slated for destruction to build a massive, 5-story, 57 ft. high storage facility. That looming project will soon appear before Whittier’s Planning Commission and City Council. And ongoing community trauma remains concerning massive tree removals should the controversial Greenleaf Av Promenade project proceed with any design or construction that destroys our iconic, shady tree canopy in the heart of Uptown.

As emphasized in my previous letter to the City Council (Attachment C), the actions of the former City Council to rid the City of our Tree Protection Ordinance was a smokescreen built on intentional deception, a House of Cards. In addition to stripping the City of tree protections, it resulted in the former City Council allocating \$814,133 of our taxpayers’ dollars to hire unnecessary consultants to develop a new tree plan, hire specialty lawyers to fight the lawsuit(s) their actions provoked, and a PR firm to attempt to “sell” it to the residents.

The tree removal actions and votes of the former City Council were key reasons why all three members who sought re-election were defeated by landslide proportions at the April 14, 2026 city election. Now you have the opportunity to distinguish yourselves from your predecessors by taking meaningful actions to assure residents that your campaign commitments to protect our City’s healthy trees are real by:

- 1) Reinstating Whittier’s Tree Protection Ordinance and Parkway Tree Manual;

³ \$27M settlement in 2020 due to death & injuries when an unstable tree fell at Penn Park. Lack of prioritizing sidewalk maintenance resulting in a 2018 trip & fall sidewalk accident that City Council settled seven years later in Oct. 2025 for \$7.5M. And so far in 2026, multiple legal settlements of Whittier Police misconduct lawsuits resulting in cumulative payouts to date of approximately \$8M.

- 2) Canceling the four, unnecessary and expensive contracts⁴ entered into by the previous City Council due to **their** decisions re our Tree Protection Ordinance & Parkway Tree Manual. All four contracts, totaling \$814,133, allow cancellation without cause with a mere 15-day notice. Few funds allocated for these contracts have been spent to date (estimate less than 10%⁵).
- 3) Designate the remainder of these funds to fill the hundreds of empty tree wells where Parkway trees have been removed and have remained empty for years, and where replacement trees have died.

Show us you are different! Show us you value our publicly-owned trees. **Reinstate our City's Tree Protection Ordinance and Parkway Tree Manual.** Thank you.

Sincerely,



Conny McCormack
Founder, www.saveourtreeswhittier.com
30-year resident of Whittier
Former L.A. Co. Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (ret.)

CC. Conal McNamara; Janet Kiser; Rigo Garcia

See Attachments A, B, C

⁴Agreement A-26-004 NO BID contract with M. Baker for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for replacement of Chapter 12.40.100(D) of Whittier Municipal Code & Parkway Tree Manual: **\$369,538**; Agreement with Richard, Watson & Gresham for Special Legal Services related to replacement of same Whittier Muni Code & Parkway Tree Manual: \$200,000; Amendment No.1 to above M. Baker NO BID contract for preparation of Urban Forest Management Plan: **\$194,595**; Agreement with Tripepi Smith to provide PR services on matters related to same Muni Code & Parkway Tree Manual: **\$50,000. TOTAL: \$814,133**

⁵Agreement A-26-004 (described in above footnote), contains a payment schedule associated with processes completed. City Manager Conal McNamara admitted in a June 3, 2026 email response to my PRR request, that the scheduled EIR Notice of Preparation had not yet begun, despite several months delay from contract timeline.