

PRESS RELEASE

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LEAKED AUDIO EXPOSES INTENT OF WHITTIER'S URBAN FOREST PLAN

SOTW CALLS FOR CANCELING \$1/2 MILLION NO BID CONTRACT

A leaked audio recording of Whittier's City Manager speaking at an invitation-only meeting last week reveals that the intent to adopt an Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) is to make it easy to cut down **healthy** trees to accommodate development.

That evidence emerged during presentations by the City Manager and consultant Michael Baker, Inc. (MBI) when launching the UFMP solely to leaders of Whittier's business associations identified as the Stakeholders. Just like the Greenleaf Promenade debacle, business associations were considered the only Stakeholders when supporting the Council's vote in 2023 to cut down ALL of the trees in the heart of Uptown. That resulted in resident outrage, including 8,270+ people signing a petition to prevent it. Audio recording (on www.saveourtreeswhittier.com) captured Whittier City Manager Conal McNamara saying this to business association leaders on Aug 17:

"...This WHOLE DOCUMENT (UFMP) is going to come down to one word, and that is HEALTHY...So if we can all agree that a hazardous tree can be a healthy tree, we could have saved \$100,000s and a year and a half on this whole exercise, but we can't... because they are going to sue us on that. That's the reason we are here...that one word HEALTHY is what this whole thing is going to be about."

Background: in Nov. 2025, the previous City Council suspended Whittier's Tree Protection Ordinance and Parkway Tree Manual (PTM) giving the City Manager sole authority to remove **healthy** trees with no public notice or appeal process. (Whittier's Tree Protection Ordinance & PTM always allowed immediate removal of any unhealthy, diseased or dying trees. Like other cities, it permitted a citizen Appeal process only regarding removal of healthy trees.) That Council action provoked a lawsuit by the Whittier Conservancy regarding violation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). One month prior to three city council members' landslide defeat in April 2026, they amended the No Bid contract with MBI - totaling \$564,133 - to replace Whittier's PTM with an UFMP that aims to codify the ability to remove HEALTHY trees without public recourse.

"Proof has come to light exposing a conflict of interest that should prevent Whittier from proceeding with the MBI consulting contract to develop an UFMP," said Conny McCormack, founder of Save Our Trees Whittier (SOTW). In Nov. 2025, the City hired MBI to write a memo, filed with the State, claiming that suspending Whittier's Tree Protection Ordinance was exempt from CEQA. That resulted in the ongoing Conservancy lawsuit. A few months later, MBI was rewarded with a No Bid contract for \$564,133. MBI has NO experience developing an UFMP for any city. Other CA cities chose companies with expertise to prepare their UFMPs, funded by CalFire state grants, not an expensive no bid contract. MBI was selected to justify removal of HEALTHY trees with NO appeal process. MBI's contract contains language proposing to manipulate a community survey: *"Carefully framed survey questions, developed in coordination with the City, would focus on public safety, risk management and the necessity of tree removal rather than aesthetics or personal preferences."*

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