



September 20, 2022

Dear Mayor Vinatierri and members of the City Council,

Homes for Whittier is concerned about Item 14A on this week's agenda, which can at best be described as awkwardly placed--and at worst, it looks like the item was buried in the agenda to avoid public scrutiny. In short, the placement is suspect. We at Homes for Whittier request that the Whittier City Council engage in a thorough policy discussion of how items that change city-wide policies become agendaized. The City of Whittier's General Plan and Specific Plans are documents that property owners should be able to rely upon when planning development projects within the City. Enacting temporary changes -- not to mention permanent changes -- on an ad hoc basis, without a thorough policy review and discussion, raises the appearance of cronyism, rather than open and transparent government in which all residents have an equal voice. This is the second ad hoc proposal to change City-wide or area-wide policies that has come before the City Council in just a month's time. This is a red flag. We expect this red flag to prompt the City Council to engage its own policies around policy-making.

Changes to the City's General Plan or specific plans are expected and can be beneficial. However, establishing ad hoc ordinances without the thorough notice and review that attends major planning decisions means that the loud voice of a small group of people undermines the accountability established by the existence of a General Plan or Specific Plan. These plans are thereby dismantled a piece at a time without the broad public process appropriate to creating policies that impact us all. Appropriate policies around changing policies that impact the City's most important planning instruments must include broad-based accountability to the public at large. This includes transparency including advance notice to the public and extensive study and discussion dedicated to the ramifications of such changes.

Item 14A on this week's agenda appears to have been put before the City Council as an urgency measure simply as a result of a few individuals complaining to city staff about a project that is fully compliant with Whittier's existing codes. This proposed city-wide moratorium appears to have been drafted specifically to block just one house from being built. Enacting an emergency ordinance to stop one home from being built sets a bad precedent.

This agenda item follows on the heels of an Uptown Specific Plan amendment that was also proposed and passed quickly under an agenda item that appeared to deal with just one project. While Homes for Whittier supported those specific changes (some changes to parking requirements, plus allowing residential uses on the first floor of some Uptown buildings), we believe the way in which a major planning policy change was not publicly noticed (separately from notice of the project) and was enacted very quickly, with little public policy discussion, was not desirable. That recent change, combined with this proposal, led us to the question of whether the City is setting a bad precedent, and what kinds of procedures should be used when either a developer or opponents of particular developments demand broad policy changes made to accommodate their specific wishes.

Furthermore, Homes for Whittier requests the following information:

- How did staff determine that this ordinance should be put on the City Council agenda without first being reviewed by the Planning Commission?
- Why did the staff report contain no information about the policy considerations behind this proposal?
- What policies and/or procedures did the city staff follow in making the determination to put this ordinance on the City Council's agenda?
- Is there a policy to draft a proposed ordinance every time some members of the community decide to try to stop a property owner from building a home that complies with city zoning ordinances? If not, what criteria do city staff members and/or Council members use to determine whether or not to propose an ordinance to facilitate or block a particular development?

This ordinance appears to us an extraordinary measure which will change the property rights of all Whittier homeowners in order to try to stop one property owner from building a large home. If an individual property owner can design a project tailored to comply with all city requirements, only to have those requirements changed when enough naysayers catch the ear of the right people, our General Plan and Specific plans become meaningless documents that no one can rely upon.

Thank you for your careful discussion of these issues,

Susan Cameron

Homes for Whittier