

From: lindy540@gmail.com
To: [WebMail - CCD](#)
Subject: Advance reading for February 20, 2024 meeting
Date: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 7:54:12 PM

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February 13, 2024

RE: Greenleaf Promenade

Mayor Vinatieri, Mayor Pro-Tem Dutra, Council, City Manager Saeki, Director of Community Development Pongetti, Director of Public Works Cason

cc. Historic Resources Commission, Board of Whittier Conservancy

I write to address issues surrounding the recently approved Greenleaf Promenade plan. Given the strong citizen response and Whittier Conservancy data, I believe you have no choice but to return to some version of a phased removal of the Ficus trees, which Council actions have supported since 2003.

There are significant legal considerations, but I address those last. There are stronger concerns and more serious needs that the Council should consider before undertaking this project.

Transparency

In the recent Council meeting, people spoke equally as passionately about their perceived lack of transparency as about preservation of the Ficus trees. Watching, I had strong thoughts about how to answer those pleas, cries, and demands. Experience tells me there is indeed a lack of transparency, owing to changes in the ways people get information. It is, therefore, easily improved.

To increase transparency, the city needs to implement better techniques for giving people notice, for educating them as to why their involvement is necessary for both them and the city, and for incorporating their input. This might seem the slower way, but democracy is slow.

Amidst the passion and protest of that meeting, speakers put forth promising ideas. If the citizens were allowed more input, the workings of the city could be less adversarial. Our Quaker roots are more than just quaint history; they can guide us in the present. Decisions arrived at through consensus face less resistance. We live in an electronic, digital, social media world. Notices in newspaper(s) and postings at City Hall or on the website are not enough. Some suggestions as to how to reach out to get the word out:

1. Letters or flyers, like the one recently sent to stakeholders in the two Historic Districts, mailed each time the Council plans to discuss expansive and expensive developments or major changes in city documents, such as the environmental impact of the Greenleaf Promenade.
2. Letters once a year to residents reminding them of notices they can receive electronically. This program exists, but people don't know it exists. The city could also expand it to include more than just meetings and agendas.
3. An electronic alert, much as weather alerts, when the council plans to discuss major developments or ordinance changes.
4. Create ways to have shared dialogue with citizens without the limitations of time. Let the

CC: CM; ACM; CA; Council; Original to CC; Public Binder; Department

February 20 Study Session allow more input from the people.

Other cities and the League of Cities provide examples of ways to increase transparency; here are a few sites:

<https://www.westerncity.com/article/strategies-creating-more-collaborative-effective-council>

<https://www.ca-ilg.org/inclusive-public-engagement>

<https://www.ca-ilg.org/civility>

History Creates Community

Preservation has been proven to increase property values in historic neighborhoods and to provide economic benefits through tourism. There are now many studies underway that examine the power of history to maintain a sense of community.

You saw the passion people feel for the trees. Thousands of people share this passion for memories of Whittier on more than one Facebook page. In a time of change and virtual communication, Historic buildings, neighborhoods, and landscapes ground us. They provide a sense of identity and continuity. They have stories to tell about what our community was that help us understand who we are. They help us to visualize our world and give meaning to our way of living together. History is what holds a community together. Without community, crime increases and economic stability declines.

Current Trends and Legislation

The 2023 **World Forum on Urban Forestry** (WFUF) in Washington, D.C., concluded that the urban forests of our towns and cities have a greater role to play in the daily lives of most of the global population than Amazon rain forests. As Trey Lord reported, “They provide us the ecosystem services that affect our resilience to all manner of acute environmental challenges including the apathy that will result in the continued destruction of forest ecosystems.” Trey noted that the Forum identified five key trends:

- Integrating nature-based solutions, such as urban forests and green spaces, into urban planning and development strategies to improve resilience and sustainability
- Developing collaborative and community-centric approaches to urban and community forestry that encourage public participation and involvement in decision-making processes that foster a sense of ownership and stewardship among local communities
- Recognizing trees as critical components of climate change mitigation and the importance of trees and green spaces in reducing urban heat islands, improving air quality, and enhancing overall environmental resilience
- Adopting innovative green infrastructure solutions that integrate trees and vegetation with built urban environments by incorporating green roofs, vertical gardens and other nature-based technologies that improve the overall sustainability of cities.
- Using data and technology to assess the impact of urban forestry initiatives, monitor tree health and optimize the planning and management of urban green spaces.
<https://us.1t.org/stories/five-key-trends-in-urban-and-community-forestry/>

The U.S. “looks to play a catalytic role” through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and its historic investment of \$1.5 billion in support for urban and community forests. The state of California follows suit. Not only has the Governor spoken on the need for better management of our urban forests, but Lisa Calderon, Whittier’s representative, has introduced several new bills, one still in committee.

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Council Meeting: _____
Agenda Item No: _____

I will address these and other state laws with which the city must comply in a second email prior to or at the February 20th session. I hope that session can generate solutions through collaboration.

Sincerely,



Linda de Vries