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Whittier Must Preserve and Augmenting Greenleaf Avenue's Trees

The City of Whittier's proposal to remove 113 trees from Greenleaf Avenue neglects key health, environmental, and financial considerations, and seriously calls into question the logic and due diligence that has gone into this decision. Overlooking the substantial benefits these trees provide to the urban ecosystem, community, and local commerce could lead to a range of negative consequences.

Environmental and Health Impact:

The environmental implications of this tree removal plan are profound. By uprooting these trees, approximately 867 tons of carbon, previously sequestered, risk being released back into the atmosphere, exacerbating greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, the tree removal process itself will contribute to carbon emissions due to the use of heavy machinery. The loss of these trees extends beyond just carbon emissions; it threatens to disrupt the local microclimate. Trees play a critical role in cooling urban areas and mitigating the urban heat island effect. This loss of natural cooling will likely lead to increased air conditioning use, spiking energy consumption and emissions. Furthermore, trees significantly enhance air quality by filtering pollutants, which is crucial for reducing respiratory problems and other health risks. They also contribute to mental well-being, offering aesthetic value and reducing stress among Whittier residents.

Financial Cost:

The tree removal plan in Whittier carries considerable direct and indirect financial implications. The direct costs for uprooting 113 mature trees could range from \$300,000 to \$1 million or more, depending on various factors like tree size and removal complexity. Additionally, the resultant increase in local temperatures is expected to boost air conditioning use, leading to higher energy bills and increased greenhouse gas emissions along with contributing to increased power load during peak hours. These indirect costs represent a long-term financial strain for both the city and its residents, amplifying the economic challenge of the tree removal project.

Detracting from Statewide Environmental Commitments:

The proposed removal of trees on Greenleaf Avenue not only impacts local environmental and public health but also contradicts California's broader commitments to reducing carbon emissions. Key state initiatives that this action undermines include Senate Bill 32 (SB 32) mandating a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, Governor Jerry Brown's Executive Order B-55-18 targeting carbon neutrality by 2045, and Senate Bill 100 (SB 100) emphasizing the need for carbon-free electricity. The tree removal plan, therefore, stands in direct opposition to these state-level environmental commitments.

Conclusion:

Considering the environmental, health, and financial impacts, along with the contradiction to California's environmental commitments, a reevaluation of the tree removal plan is imperative. Instead of removing these crucial natural assets, Whittier should aim to preserve the existing trees and further enhance the urban landscape by planting more. This approach not only maintains the existing microclimate benefits but also contributes to improved air quality and overall urban well-being. Investing in green infrastructure, like tree preservation and augmentation, represents a sustainable, health-conscious, and economically sound strategy for the city. Such an initiative would not only benefit current residents but also serve as a legacy of responsible urban planning for future generations.