

April 30, 2024

Conny B. McCormack
6799 Worsham Dr.
Whittier, CA. 90602

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

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

Since the City Council's action on December 12, 2023 on the Greenleaf Promenade Plan, five regular and one special City Council meeting/study session have occurred. During Public Comment, I addressed the Council at each of those meetings, and also sent numerous, detailed letters¹ vociferously objecting to your ill-advised decision to cut down all of the trees at once on three blocks of Greenleaf AV in the heart of Uptown. Community opposition has grown exponentially, as evidenced by a petition to Save Our Trees in Uptown Whittier presented at the April 23rd Council meeting now containing 2,750+ signatures².

Rather than reiterate the points I addressed in those communications, the focus of this letter is on a *Tale of Two Cities*, comparing the opposite approaches the City Councils in Pasadena and Beverly Hills have taken regarding the issue of ficus trees over the past few years³. As explained in the links below, Pasadena held a Ficus Tree community meeting and conducted a survey seeking public input to assess the City's master street plan on the ficus issue. Following that feedback, the City planted an additional 28 ficus trees on Arbor Day in March 2023 to enhance the ficus tree canopy on Green St.

<https://www.pasadenanow.com/main/city-no-plans-to-remove-ficus-trees-along-green-street>
<https://www.pasadenabeautiful.org/in-the-news/ficus-trees-planted-on-green-street-bringing-trees-and-sidewalks-to-life/>

In contrast, the City of Beverly Hills began removing ficus trees on one side of Robertson Blvd.⁴ in Feb. 2023 as part of a sidewalk improvement project. Despite public outrage, the City refused to halt the project (1st link below dated 4/12/23). Opponents hired an environmental attorney. The ficus trees on the other side of Robertson Blvd. remain standing as litigation is ongoing⁵ (2nd link dated 11/19/23).

<https://beverlypress.com/2023/04/robertson-boulevard-trees-court-battle-placed-on-pause/>
<https://beverlypress.com/2023/11/fate-of-robertson-blvd-ficus-trees-still-in-limbo/>

Seeking a firsthand experience, I drove to Robertson Blvd. in Beverly Hills and to Green St. in Pasadena on April 27 to take a look. It was jarring to see the stark difference on one side of Robertson Blvd. with tall, mature ficus trees shading the sidewalk, compared with the other "renovated" side with small,

¹ Letters to you dated Feb. 5, Feb. 20, Feb. 27, and Mar. 26, and Public Comments on Jan. 23, Feb. 13, Feb. 20, March 12, March 26, and April 23 incorporated by reference.

² The petition is ongoing, with hundreds of additional signatures since it was presented to City Council on April 23.

³ These articles mention that cities are challenged by significant, ongoing maintenance that ficus trees require.

⁴ One block between Gregory Way and Charleville Blvd.

⁵ I spoke with the plaintiff's attorney, Jamie T. Hall, on April 19, 2024 who confirmed litigation is still ongoing.

RECEIVED ON:

Council Meeting: _____
Agenda Item No: _____

replacement trees (pix attached). The new sidewalks look nice, but the glare caused by lack of shade on that sunny day revealed people walking and parking on the other side of the street under ficus foliage.

Driving from Beverly Hills to Pasadena, I approached the L.A. skyline under the shady canopy of ficus trees lining Pico Blvd. After arriving in Pasadena, I drove several blocks under the canopy of ficus trees along Green St. which is truly wondrous to behold (pix attached). While walking along several blocks of Green St., I observed some uneven sidewalks and berry droppings - significantly less than in Uptown Whittier - indicating more frequent attention to sidewalk cleaning and maintenance.

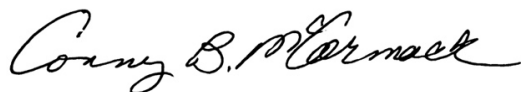
After driving home, I walked along Greenleaf AV under our tall tree canopy, reveling anew that Whittier's shady canopy is the envy of other cities, even more attractive than the tree canopies Beverly Hills and Pasadena possess! (pix attached). Our iconic, mature canopy of trees is THE attraction that draws people to Uptown, from local residents to visitors from surrounding cities, states and countries.

My day-long field trip to compare tree canopies in Beverly Hills, Pasadena, and Whittier evokes the looming question: What path will emerge following your City Council special meeting/study session tonight regarding Whittier's tree controversy?

To quote the opening of Charles Dickens' **A Tale of Two Cities**: *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epic of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..."*

It is my fervent belief that a viable compromise solution will emerge in the weeks ahead that can deliver much-needed, taxpayer-funded Uptown improvements that both residents AND business owners can accept without sacrificing our City's most recognizable feature, our magnificent, mature canopy of trees. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Conny B. McCormack
28-year resident of Whittier
Former LA Co. Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (Ret.)

Attachments: pix of Pasadena, Beverly Hills & Whittier ficus tree canopies

cc: Brian Saeki, City Manager
Rigo Garcia, City Clerk



PASADENA: Under Green St. ficus canopy (picture taken April 27, 2024)



PASADENA: Ficus trees planted in Pasadena in March 2023 to fill in bare spaces in the canopy (picture taken April 27, 2024).

RECEIVED ON:

Council Meeting: _____
Agenda Item No: _____



PASADENA: 20ft. replacement ficus trees on Green St. planted in March 2023 (picture taken April 27, 2024).



PASADENA: Ficus tree roots without surrounding barriers (picture taken April 27, 2024).



BEVERLY HILLS: Ficus trees were removed in Feb. 2023 on one side of Robertson Blvd. in a one block area, and replaced with small palm and crepe myrtle trees as part of a sidewalk renovation project. Citizens sued to stop removal of ficus trees on the other side of the street. Litigation is ongoing 15 months later... (picture taken April 27, 2024).



BEVERLY HILLS: Another view of Robertson Blvd. showing immature trees on one side of renovated block, compared with mature ficus trees on other side (picture taken April 27, 2024).

RECEIVED ON:

Council Meeting: _____
Agenda Item No: _____



BEVERLY HILLS: View of new sidewalk and replacement trees on one side of Robertson Blvd. compared with mature ficus trees on the other side of the street (picture taken April 27, 2024).



BEVERLY HILLS: Unattractive concrete barriers surround ficus trees.
(picture taken April 27, 2024)



WHITTIER: iconic canopy of mature ficus trees on Greenleaf AV
(picture taken April 27, 2024).

RECEIVED ON:

Council Meeting: _____
Agenda Item No: _____



WHITTIER: Wrought iron barriers surrounding ficus trees on Greenleaf AV. These need to be refurbished and painted (picture taken April 27, 2024).