

**From:** [Whittier Citizen](#)  
**To:** [WebMail - CCD](#)  
**Cc:** [Rigo Garcia](#)  
**Subject:** Whittier Promenade: Removal of ficus trees (comment)  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 30, 2024 6:04:39 PM  
**Attachments:** [Trees in the Small City Retail.pdf](#)

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Dear Whittier City Council,

I write to you again regarding your decision to remove the ficus trees on Greenleaf. As I attempted to convey in my previous email, the ficus trees in Uptown Whittier are iconic. So much so that most, if not all, media coverage of Uptown Whittier has noted the abundance of trees and their beauty. Please refer to my previous email for specific media coverage.

I am writing to you today to convey to you the importance of the tree canopy to Uptown Whittier businesses. First, I would like to direct the council to [www.vibrantcitieslab.com](http://www.vibrantcitieslab.com). [Vibrant Cities Lab](#) was created by the U.S. Forest Service, American Forests, and the National Association of Regional Councils to help city managers, policymakers and advocates build thriving forest programs. According to research done by the USDA and U.S. Forest Service, the business impacts of trees are significant. "Shoppers in business districts with robust tree canopy will spend 9 to 12 % more for products, travel further, and spend more time there" (See [Vibrant Cities Lab Research - Economic Impact](#)). The study also notes, "[s]hoppers indicate that they will travel greater distance to visit a district having high quality trees, and spend more time there once they arrive. (See [Vibrant Cities Lab Research - Economic Impact](#)). The benefits of the existing abundant tree canopy would also extend to employees of Uptown businesses. The Vibrant Cities Lab article notes that as it relates to employees, "[v]iews of nature, including office plants, help workers reduce stress, boost productivity, improve job satisfaction, decrease illness incidents and stay more attentive."

Attached to this email is also an article by Kathleen L. Wolf published in the Journal of Forestry comparing resident and visitor perceptions of a city's (their city's) central business districts. According to the article, because a city's central business district face challenges from regional shopping malls, online purchasing, and big box discount retailers, district merchants must strategically enhance their market position to prevent outshopping. Wolf notes that streetscape trees are a physical improvement that can be used to attract and welcome consumers. To support her argument, Wolf referenced a national survey which evaluated public perceptions, patronage behavior intentions, and product willingness-to-pay in relationship to depictions of trees in retail settings. **Results suggest that consumer behavior is positively associated with the urban forest on multiple cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Forest amenities of both wildland and built environments can be used to strengthen local economies.** The evidence is clear, having a tree canopy is good for business and good for Whittier.

Articles have been written about cities outside of California where policymakers have decided to eliminate trees or, more often, failed to stand their ground in defending attempts to cut trees down. One such city is Atlanta. Atlanta, a city known for its abundant tree canopy, is now suffering the consequences of policymakers' decisions to cut trees and these decision makers

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are now lamenting those choices. (See, [As Atlanta grows, its trademark canopy suffers](#) by Drew Kann of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution). These policymakers are now trying to figure out how to mitigate the damage they allowed the cutting of trees, but are having very little success. As they struggle to fix an issue they created, Atlanta is getting hotter. According to Kann, "[i]n Atlanta, heat-absorbing buildings and roadways can create urban heat islands that are much warmer than surrounding areas."

As I stated in my previous email, I understand that there are trees that pose a hazard to patrons and residents or that may make it difficult for the city to ensure compliance with the ADA. But the solution is NOT to cut all the ficus trees in Uptown Whittier. As I've discussed above, the trees are iconic to Uptown Whittier. This is what differentiates Whittier from other cities like Downey, La Habra, La Mirada, Montebello, and other surrounding cities. None of these cities are known for having a charming business center like Whittier, much less a business center with abundant trees. The trees are an integral part of Uptown's charm, the trees are what draw patrons to Uptown. As much as the businesses are advocating for the cutting of trees just to move this project forward, make no mistake that the businesses themselves will inevitably suffer if the trees are cut. And notably, if the businesses do suffer, they will be the first to leave Uptown Whittier (except for a few committed businesses) and the residents of Whittier will be the ones left suffering the consequences of an Uptown without trees.

Thank you,

Brenda

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Whittier Citizen** <[whittiercitizen90602@gmail.com](mailto:whittiercitizen90602@gmail.com)>

Date: Mon, Jan 22, 2024 at 7:31 PM

Subject: Whittier Promenade: Removal of ficus trees (comment)

To: <[rgarcia@cityofwhittier.org](mailto:rgarcia@cityofwhittier.org)>, [CCD@cityofwhittier.org](mailto:CCD@cityofwhittier.org) <[CCD@cityofwhittier.org](mailto:CCD@cityofwhittier.org)>

Dear Whittier City Council,

I write to you regarding your decision to remove the ficus trees on Greenleaf. I understand the topic of the Greenleaf Promenade & Streetscape Beautification Project has been on the agenda at 15 Whittier City Council meetings, some of which I have attended. However, I believe the first time the actual removal of the ficus trees was discussed was at the most recent December 2023 meeting with the publishing of the December 12, 2023 report. Given the fact that the decision to remove the trees was made about a month ago, it should come as no surprise to the council that word is quickly spreading about your decision to remove the ficus trees, engendering a desire to discuss your decision. I strongly encourage you to take the public's comments on the topic under submission.

One of the reasons I purchased my home in Whittier three years ago was because of the abundance of trees in both the uptown and residential areas. The ficus trees make uptown quite unlike any of our neighboring cities like La Mirada, La Habra, Downey, Montebello and others, which are desirous of trees and the shade they bring in the hot summer months. Though I understand that keeping the ficus trees would mean an increase to the overall cost of the beautification project, I believe there is room for compromise. I urge the council to reconsider keeping a percentage of the ficus trees. For instance, if 25-40% of the ficus trees are kept, this

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would allow the council to minimize costs and also allow the new trees to reach maturity and provide the shade the ficus trees currently provide. Once the new trees reach maturity, the remaining ficus trees could be removed based on a set schedule and replaced with new trees.

To emphasize the importance of the ficus trees and how iconic they are, I'd like to direct you to (1) the "Destination California: Whittier" link available on the city's instagram social media account (published 8/26/2021), (2) Spectrum News "Spotlighting the Picturesque Streets of Whittier" (published 9/28/2023), and (3) RSM's October 24, 2023 update to the city counsel on the Branding Outreach to Whittier residents to revamp the city's brand. In the first example, "Destination California: Whittier", the attention grabbing header of the article reads "Destination California: **Stolling the tree-lined streets of Whittier**". The article goes on to share, in relevant part, "[n]ew restaurants and small shops have popped up along the **tree-lined streets of uptown**...About 20 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles, you'll find **city streets lined with over 20,000 trees**." In the second example, Spectrum News - The SoCal Scene, features uptown Whittier businesses and historical buildings, and described Whittier as **picturesque**. Picturesque is defined as "visually attractive, especially in quaint or pretty style." Without the ficus trees it is hard to imagine Whittier being described as *picturesque*. In the third example, RSM's representative presented the results of their outreach to Whittier residents. One of the topics RSM discussed in their presentation was *What Makes Whittier*, and stated, "natural beauty, the city's parks program is really vast and great, **it is a really big part of why people want to live here...the trees, the hills, all of these natural elements are a huge part of the story...so we want to make sure we include these ideas as part of a really great aspect of living in Whittier.**" RSM suggested "Charm.Culture.Community" as the new brand for Whittier. Without the Greenleaf ficus trees there is no charm.

Again, I **strongly** encourage the city council to reconsider their decision to remove all the ficus trees on Greenleaf given their iconic value to our city. Without the **tree-lined streets** of Whittier there is no **picturesque**, there is no **charm**. Removing all the ficus trees at once would be, in my opinion, a gross misstep by the city council.

Thank you for your consideration,

Brenda (concerned Whittier resident)