

RECEIVED ON: **June 11, 2024**

Council Meeting: 06/11/2024
Agenda Item No: 10

From: [Ken Bodger](#)
To: [Cathy Warner](#); [Fernando Dutra](#); [Octavio Cesar Martinez](#); [Mary Ann Pacheco](#)
Cc: [Joe Vinatieri](#); [Brian Saeki](#); [WebMail - CCD](#)
Subject: Greenleaf Promenade Design Amendment – WAEC Letter 2
Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2024 12:03:32 PM

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June 11, 2024

To: The Whittier City Council: Mayor Pro Tem Cathy Warner and Council Members Fernando Dutra, Octavio Martinez, and Mary Ann Pacheco

From: Whittier Area Environmental Coalition

Cc: Mayor Joe Vinatieri, City Manager Brian Saeki, City Clerk Rigo Garcia, City of Whittier Public Comment Email Address

Subject: Greenleaf Promenade Design Amendment – WAEC Letter 2

In our letter of June 6, the Whittier Area Environmental Coalition called for the city to consider substantial changes to the approved Final Greenleaf Promenade Design Amendment. In this letter, we provide additional information in support of our position.

We note below three examples that show it is possible to manage the roots and droppings of mature Ficus trees without “just chopping them all down,” so the dichotomy between “rejuvenating Uptown” and “saving the trees” is false. We also make three additional suggestions to help improve Uptown while saving the trees:

<!--[if !supportLists]-->1. <!--[endif]-->WHITTIER

The attached photos show the front yard of a Whittier home at the northwest corner of Rose and Greenleaf, across from Hellman Park. While refurbishing the landscape and house, the new owner dealt with the problem of a mature Ficus with extensive roots by cutting them back.

The first photo, taken in June 2022, shows the Ficus’s extensive root system.

The remaining photos were taken in April of this year, almost two years later. The massive roots (over one foot in diameter in places) have been cut back, so they are nowhere near the house’s foundation, yet the tree is quite healthy.

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The attached photos were taken by Whittier resident Ken Bodger, who commented on this tree in his April 30 e-mail to the city council.

<!--[if !supportLists]-->2. <!--[endif]-->TUSTIN

Downtown Tustin uses a combination of pavers laid without grout, concrete sidewalks, and large wells for its Ficus trees. Roots have been cut back to prevent them from damaging the sidewalks, yet all the trees appear healthy. Each well has two ground-level lamps shining up into the tree canopy, an attractive addition with safety benefits.

A WAEC member visited the area earlier this week. The sidewalks appeared to have been upgraded within the past decade, suggesting that it is possible to work with mature trees. Our member noted only one uplifted concrete slab over an area of five city blocks.

The attached photos were taken by Whittier resident Anthony Avila on June 9.

<!--[if !supportLists]-->3. <!--[endif]-->SEAL BEACH

Sidewalks near the trees are constructed of pavers with sand between them (no grout). They are, therefore, flexible so that, as roots grow, they will adjust on their own, or, if needed, the pavers can be re-laid without the bother and expense of removing and replacing broken concrete sidewalks.

Although, in 2012, the city considered not planting new Ficus trees (while keeping the old ones), they did not do so. At the time, a local landscape architect was quoted as stating, “There is no magic tree’ and that any tree that offers a full canopy is going to have roots that spread out and could potentially damage sidewalks.” (Patch.com, March 27, 2012)

A WAEC member, John Beynon, visited Seal Beach in the past two months and noted that the tree canopy in the downtown shopping area still has large numbers of Ficus trees. The sidewalks look much as they did in the attached photos, which are from the Patch.com article quoted above.

<!--[if !supportLists]-->4. <!--[endif]-->KEEPING SIDEWALKS CLEAN

One complaint regarding Ficus trees is that they are “dirty.” However, the sidewalks in both Seal Beach and Tustin are cleaner than those in Uptown Whittier. This indicates that the problem is inadequate cleaning, not the type of tree.

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We understand that sidewalk sweeping and cleaning is the responsibility of the Uptown Whittier Improvement Association, so we recommend that our city revisit how this function is administered and funded.

<!--[if !supportLists]-->5. <!--[endif]-->ROOT BARRIERS TO CONTROL/REDIRECT
ROOT GROWTH

DeepRoot Green Infrastructure, a San Francisco company that specializes in equipment to manage and support urban forests, sells root barriers that can be used to control and/or redirect tree roots.

See the attached printout of this web page: <https://www.deeproot.com/products/root-barrier/>

Here is the company's home page: <https://www.deeproot.com/about/>

The company states that it provides training for the use of its products as well as consulting services.

Note: No WAEC member has a connection with the company; we found them online and have not contacted them.

<!--[if !supportLists]-->6. <!--[endif]-->WE RECOMMEND THAT THE CITY SEEK OUT
AND WORK WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, NONPROFITS,
AND PROFESSIONALS WITH STRONG RECORDS OF PROTECTING URBAN
FORESTS

In addition to the cities of Tustin and Seal Beach, as noted above, we understand that the City of Claremont has a strong urban forest program. We recommend you reach out to them.

As noted above, the Deeproot company provides training and consulting services. (Again, WAEC has no interest in or connection with this firm.)

There are many local and, we are sure, talented landscape architects.

While researching the history of the Seal Beach trees, we noted that the city hired a local landscape architect (Robert McMahon). A brief web search confirmed that he is still

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practicing. (WAEC has no connection with Mr. McMahon.)

In addition, we are near several colleges and universities with landscape architecture or related programs, including Mount San Antonio College, UC Riverside, UC Riverside Cooperative Extension, and Cal Poly Pomona.

Several government agencies and nonprofits, including the LA County Arboretum, the LA County Countywide Urban Forest Management Plan (c/o the LA County Sustainability Office; refer to Strategy 2D), the Tree People, the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, the Thomas Payne Foundations, etc., may be able to provide technical advice.

CONCLUSION

Except for WAEC founder John Beynon, an architect with many decades of experience, no architects, landscape architects, public works specialists, or city planners are signers of this letter.

Because of our commitment to improving Whittier's environment, we were motivated to locate the above information by "keeping our eyes open" in Whittier and nearby cities and by doing some brief web searches.

We encourage you to "cast a wider net" to obtain information that will lead to creative solutions that improve Uptown AND "Save the Trees."

Thank you for the opportunity to help our city protect its urban forest and correct what we feel is an avoidable, serious, and irreversible mistake.

Respectfully submitted,

WHITTIER AREA ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

Ken Bodger
John Beynon
Bianca Salgado
Anthony Avila
Monica Sena
Stephanie Vallejo

Attachments for different sections of the letter:

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Section 1: 4 photos of Ficus tree, NW corner of Rose and Greenleaf.

Section 2: 9 photos of sidewalks and Ficus trees, downtown Tustin.

Section 3: 3 photos of sidewalks and Ficus trees, Main Street, Seal Beach.

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