

RECEIVED ON: June 25, 2024

Council Meeting: 06/25/2024  
Agenda Item No. 3.B., 14.A., 14.C.

June 23, 2024

Honorable Councilwoman Pacheco and  
Whittier City Council  
13230 Penn Street  
Whittier, CA 90602

RE: AGENDA ITEM 3.B, 14.A., 14.C.

Whittier City Council:

I am writing to express my opinion and public comment as a constituent, voter, and long-time resident of the City of Whittier on the below agenda items:

**3.B – Conference with Real Property Negotiators Route 72 (CLOSED SESSION)**

I made a previous public comment asking the city manager and city council to explain why we should annex route 72 several months ago. I have not heard or seen any written explanation for wanting to take on such a huge burden that will cost us copious amounts of taxpayer money.

I had the opportunity to ask Brian Saeki at a public community meeting about annexing route 72 and his response was that the city could maintain it better. In the same breath, at the same meeting a resident asked him why we do not maintain our own streets better and he said we did not have the resources to maintain our streets. A video of that conversation is available for your review.

Yet in another Friendly Hills meeting that I and my neighbor put together, I overheard the mayor tell a resident that the city is annexing Whittier Blvd. because we can synchronize the signals better. I do not believe either one of these explanations authorizes the need to annex 6.8 miles of route 72.

It is my understanding that the city received a grant to maintain Route 72. If this is true, grants run out of money and are sometimes not renewed. Why would we take on almost 7 miles of a heavily used road along with its maintenance and liability because of a grant? I would like an explanation.

**14.A. – Selection of Board and Commissions Applicants**

When I was appointed to the Personnel Board in 2013 I was unfamiliar with the selection process. I was not “tapped on the shoulder” and told to apply. I did it on my own volition. Since then, I have learned that the application/appointment process is not transparent.

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When residents apply, I believe that all applicants should be treated equally and given a fair opportunity to serve this city as opposed to being “tapped on the shoulder” to apply. Doing so creates an appearance of favoritism and the appearance that city council members have already interviewed people one on one prior to the selection process. A clear example of being “told to apply” is in front of you on Jacob Wetrosky’s application.

If you do not have the time to interview all applicants, you should create a board of residents to review the applications and interview the applicants for you then forward the finalist for city council to make the final appointments. You should also use your human resources personnel to help, as they are familiar with the legalities of a selection process. I would also recommend avoiding selecting people who contribute to your political campaigns or your former campaign managers.

#### **14.C. – Tax Transfer Resolution Related to West Whittier, Los Nietos, and Route 72 Annexation**

As previously mentioned above, I would like to know why the city manager and city council believe this is a good idea. I do not believe that the tax revenue (approx.. \$78,000.00) from the properties will cover the immense amounts of resources our city will have to cover to maintain those annexed areas.

##### Sewer Waste

I live in Friendly Hills and in the last two years I have had two exceptionally large sewer waste spills onto my backyard, one in 2023 and another 2024. When I asked why this happened, the city manager informed me that the city was only cleaning the sewer lines in my area once a year. The city was not properly maintaining/cleaning the sewer system. One of the city employees told me that they have frequent sewer spills throughout the city.

In the 2023 spill it took the city only 30 minutes to respond, my backyard was not properly sanitized. I had toilet paper in my backyard because the city’s equipment was not able to reach areas of my yard. The city’s response was for me to pay someone to clean it and then file a claim against the city. As you can see agenda item #12.C.; I have never seen the city recommend an approval of a claim. I spent over \$8,000.00 cleaning that area.

In 2024 when the sewer line spilled again onto my backyard, I emailed everyone including the Los Angeles County Sanitation. Their response was impressive and immediate. They not only took responsibility, but they also replaced my newly installed decomposed granite from the previous year.

The Los Angeles County Sanitation Department showed up with a street maintenance crew, an engineer, an insurance adjuster, and four supervisors. They treated me with dignity, and they took responsibility, even though they said the city was partially at fault.

Their response made me realize how unprofessional the city’s response was in 2023 compared to the county’s response. In 2023 my own city council representative tried to minimize my public

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comments when I spoke about the sewer spill during a council meeting instead of showing compassion and concern for me and my family.

How can we maintain more sewer lines when we can barely maintain what we have?

#### Street Maintenance

This city has spent copious amounts of time and money preparing for the Metro and other special interest projects and has neglected to maintain our own streets. Everywhere you go in Whittier, our streets look deplorable, as do our trees. In friendly hills, our streets are cracked, they have potholes that are repeatedly repaired, limits lines, crosswalk lines, red curbs, etc. are faded and in some parts cannot be seen. I am thankful to our city street workers, but I also sympathize with them because they are overworked. The property taxes you will be collecting from this annexation will not suffice to even hire one additional street maintenance worker.

If we cannot maintain our own streets, why do you believe annexing more is a great idea?

#### West Whittier

I read a few years ago in the Whittier Daily News the mayor say that one business owner asked him to annex the area because, "They already think they are part of Whittier." Mayor, this is not a good enough reason to annex west Whittier.

There is a lot of crime in that area, including heavy gang and drug activity, as well as an unhoused problem. Annexing it will further overburden our police department, it will increase our crime statistics making it look like the city is more unsafe and forcing us to deal with additional vagrant and unhoused populations when we are already overtaxed with that problem in our own city. I also would like to know if the residents of that area want to be part of our city and if their property taxes will increase. The property tax question is not addressed on the city's website.

Lastly, do you wonder why people are so angry with you? It is because you do not communicate your plans (our city's plans) to us. You provide information that is unclear and sometimes misleading, particularly Brian Saeki. As an example, during a Wake-Up Whittier I asked him how we are going to pay for the \$50 + million-dollar Metro and he said, "It probably will never happen." Our own city Councilwoman Cathy Warner said she did not know how we are going to pay for it. This answer and his way of not being honest and direct has caused many people to question his integrity, including myself. I will end with this, please tell us exactly why we need to annex west Whittier, Los Nietos, and Route 72 and how you plan to provide city services without taking away from our areas, thank you.

Best regards,

Stephanie Vallejo, M.S.

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