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From: [Linda de Vries](#)
To: [WebMail - CCD](#)
Subject: Follow up to April 30 study session
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Congratulations Mayor Pro Tem Warner and council for the process of tonight's study session: you handled a difficult situation with dignity. Fernando was right – it's a complicated situation. The majority was right In its decision to reconsider the Greenleaf Promenade plan.

Permit me to emphasize some of the things I said and heard tonight.

1. Members of the community were ready to issue sworn statements that they had heard Octavio say publicly that his mind was made up. Octavio, your prepared speech tonight reinforces that perception. To go into a discussion based on new information having prejudged is against the law. You should consider recusing yourself from discussion and vote on the Promenade or sincerely find a way to consider new possibilities.

2. There has to be a better way to handle public comment, a way that does not infantilize the speakers, that does not send the message that the council is engaging in a necessary exercise but does not really wish to hear from the people. Cathy, you suggested tonight what might be the foundation for an alternative plan that could make Whittier a leader in true commitment to the Brown act. You suggested that if speakers were members of a constituency, they might wish to allow one speaker to speak for all of them. If this idea were formalized, and constituent groups were allowed to vote on their temporary speakers in advance of the meeting, and sufficient time were allowed for them to truly make their points, a real dialogue might develop between the governors and their representatives. The Council can create such a structure.

3. There is a strong feeling in the city that transparency is a myth in Whittier. As each of you makes sure that you understand all the facts of a situation, make sure that the answers to your questions are shared with the citizens. Their job is to make sure they, too, understand. There is a great deal of misinformation at the root of the hostility in meetings. This can and needs to be overcome.

4. Octavio, your support of business is spot on—if uptown dies the town dies. Businesses are what uptown is. Encourage residents to understand that. Encourage business owners to appreciate residents' love for their trees, the historic fabric of Whittier, and a warm small town feel. Create opportunities for the two groups to sit down together and share ideas for the revitalization of uptown. And be sure that business owners fully understand the impact of their front doors being inaccessible, and possibly their back doors, for an extended period of time.

Now, a completely personal perception. When I was a student at Whittier High, I was sponsored by the Whittier host Lions Club in their public speaking contest. The topic was "Community Service: a Way of Life." I went all the way to the top in the competition, losing the last round to a young man from another school. I was on Whittier's youth coordinating council. Our major concern then, as we worked with the city council, was fair housing.

Sixty years later, I understand that community service may also mean speaking truth to power. It is in that spirit that I offer the above comments and the following perception.

I have lived through four attempts at revitalizing uptown Whittier. All of them have been less than complete successes. Indeed, it can be said that a major piece of what makes Whittier Whittier was lost each time. In each instance, although there were external conditions to overcome, the loss was caused by the lack of full citizen involvement in all stages, and by the lack of a comprehensive and forward-looking vision. Quaker traditions in the city and the college began to slip away in the 60s. At that same time, when the ficus trees were planted, business owners rejected competition, allowing business to be drawn to the quad and away from Uptown. The specific plan had wide citizen involvement, but the council with two and ultimately three of you forming the majority, was unable to see its way to make it through the 2008 recession and implement the Specific Plan. Following the earthquake, historic neighborhoods were besieged by developers wanting to put up apartment buildings. Plans for

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preservation were put in place, but remained incomplete owing to council's unenlightened favoritism toward business. Now, risk management, following obvious failures to avoid risk, is allowed to take precedence over the people's love for their city.

Every one of the above failures at revitalizing the city arose from a misunderstanding of how to protect and expand business in a changing environment. Stop circling the wagons and let "the enemy" in. "Vision" results from the ideas of many bouncing off of one another like atomic particles. Trust this. In my profession we practice an exercise that looks at a situation one way then 180° opposite, then 180° opposite, and so on, each 180° shift just naturally not returning to its original opposite. Remarkable things are generated. Feel free to use it!

However many meetings the council cites were devoted to the uptown beautification plan, the citizens were blindsided with the vote on December 12, 2023. Such surprises are counterproductive. I urge you to find ways to avoid this in the future.

Lastly, I understand that one of the big changes we all face is that California is at the mercy of insurance companies. They refuse to write additional policies in the state, and the state invites them back because it needs them, and the insurance companies exact extreme penalties. This is up against climate change and the need for the legislature to pass more and more laws aimed at maintaining and enhancing our threatened urban canopy. The state of California and the federal government are creating programs to aid local governments in maintaining their canopies. Is Whittier aware of all of these? Is it using as many as possible?

Brian, I appreciate the times when you have apologized to the citizens for mistakes the city has made. The jeering will pass. Don't be afraid to be fully honest about the reasons for decisions. don't hold anything close to the chest because you fear it will be unpopular. It is absolutely true that the more transparent the government, the greater the support it has from its citizens.

If you read this far, thank you for indulging me, and I wish you all the best as this project comes to fruition.

Sent from my iPhone