

August 27, 2024

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

Subject: Greenleaf Promenade: Who Do You Represent?

Dear City Council Members:

Your rationale for holding a special City Council “study session” on Aug. 20 after final approval of the Greenleaf Promenade design on June 18, 2024 was puzzling at best. No further action was taken. Suggest you watch the videotape to see your expressions of gloom, akin to attendance at a close family member’s funeral. Where’s the joy, or even satisfaction? You have committed to spending \$20 million of taxpayers’ money on a City “beautification” project despite enormous public disapproval¹ and outrage. Residents want beautification and revitalization while keeping our tree canopy which can be done. Why are you stubbornly claiming that you have no other recourse but to chop down ALL of the trees on the three blocks of Greenleaf in the heart of Uptown?

As I and other residents have described in multiple letters and public comments² over the past seven months, cities routinely use appropriate measures to protect large existing trees during major construction projects. Whittier recently replaced raised/broken sidewalks surrounding much larger ficus trees on multiple city streets including where high voltage utilities are buried. The City’s arborist has been involved in overseeing this work that is occurring in compliance with Whittier’s Tree Manual/ordinance including Tree Protection Zones (TPZs). Attached photos and short video show significant root pruning during successful sidewalk replacement at 6739 Washington St. next to Friends Church on July 8, 2024.³

More than 5,863 people have signed a petition to Save Our Trees in Uptown Whittier (<https://chnng.it/fFN5cS8yVP>). Hundreds have spoken at City Council meetings and written letters and emails requesting **reasonable and achievable** modifications to your adopted Plan⁴. Community opposition continues to gain momentum as more people learn about the City’s decision to chop down ALL of the mature trees that provide irreplaceable shade and oxygen to combat climate change. It’s astounding and unprecedented for elected officials to disregard the overwhelming opinion of the public, their voters. Who do you represent?

This project morphed from a Streetscape Beautification Plan to a Public Works project when the City added construction of a new water main to the project, involving \$6-8 million of the estimated \$20

¹ Significant disapproval of tree removal by many businesses, including 28 in the project area displaying stickers supporting retention of the existing trees, has recently been revealed.

² Letters to you dated Feb. 5, Feb. 20, Feb. 27, Mar. 26, Apr. 29, May 7, May 28, June 11, June 18, July 9, July 23 and Aug. 19, and in public comments on Jan. 23, Feb. 13, Feb. 20, Feb. 27, Mar 12, March 26, Apr. 23, Apr. 30, May 14, May 28, June 11, June 18, July 9 and July 23, Aug. 13 and Aug 20, 2024, incorporated by reference.

³ Historic photos dating from 1950 (attached) reveal these healthy ficus trees are approximately 84 years old.

⁴ City Manager Brian Saeki admitted on Aug. 20 that the design choice of pavement types doomed the trees.

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million project cost. Increasing water capacity is clearly related to your exclusive negotiation agreement to contract with Uptown Community Partners, a consortium of developers, to build 344 housing units on eight City-owned lots in Uptown, an estimated \$200+ million of new housing construction <https://www.whittierdailynews.com/2022/03/23/whittier-is-ready-to-try-again-to-develop-alpha-beta-site/>. Of course, clear cutting is easier and cheaper for developers before starting a project. Whittier's ironically-named The Groves project is a horrific example of unnecessary removal of over 500 mature trees instead of designing the project to incorporate many of those trees in recognition of the tremendous value and beauty that shady trees provide. Builders are legally required to pay development fees for water and utilities. Yet the adopted Plan calls for resident taxpayers to fund this "beautification" project despite overwhelming condemnation of the selected Plan eliminating Uptown Whittier's most recognizable feature, our magnificent canopy of trees. It appears that OUR taxpayers' money is burning a hole in your pockets.

At the Aug. 20 meeting, several of you appeared to scold residents for a lack of "foresight" which was insulting. Fernando Dutra said it would be illogical and irresponsible to not replace the 104-year old water main on Greenleaf Av. Have residents disagreed with doing that? When Mr. Dutra asked Public Works Director Kyle Cason if the water main project would require removal of all of the trees, Mr. Cason admitted it would not.⁵ He mentioned the laterals to the buildings would involve encroachment into the TPZs, but you and we know that careful tree and root pruning⁶ can and is accommodating existing large ficus trees in Whittier and in other cities. And during that Aug. 20 meeting, it was mentioned that the replacement water main would run from Hadley St. all the way to Mar Vista St. Several of you have said total ficus tree removal involves "only" the three blocks of this project area. Does that mean that new laterals to buildings extending from the replacement water main would somehow not impact the large ficus trees from Wardman to Mar Vista?

Whittier residents understand what's going on. We are united and will NOT give up the fight!

Sincerely,



Conny McCormack
Former L.A. Co. Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (ret.)
28-year resident of Whittier

cc: Mayor Joe Vinatieri
Brian Saeki, City Manager
Rigo Garcia, City Clerk

⁵ And in a phone conversation with Fernando Dutra on July 1, 2024, I specifically asked if the water main project would require removal of all the trees, and he responded it would not.

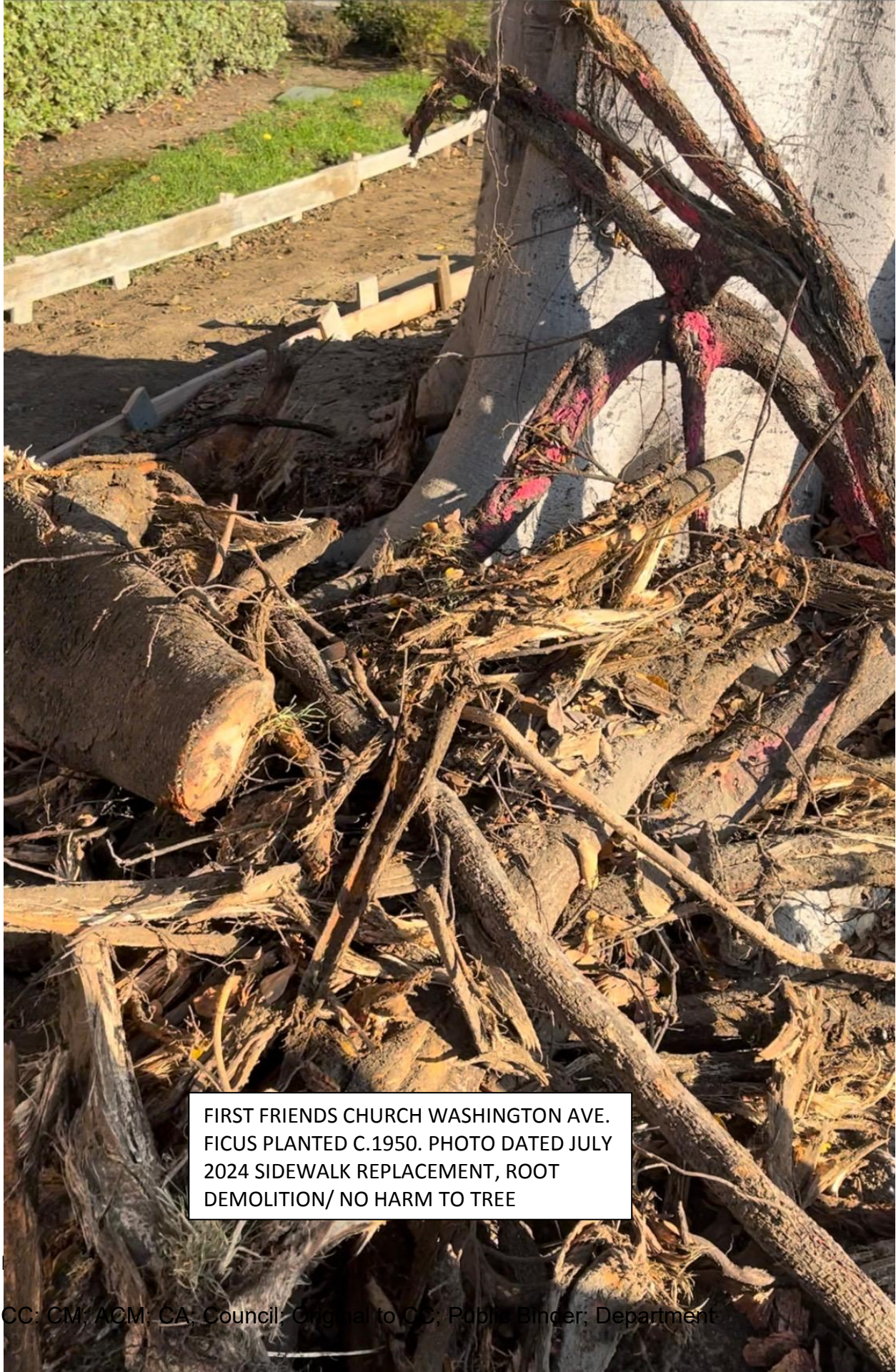
⁶ As shown in attached pictures and video and as described in my letter of Aug. 19th describing Santa Monica's work preserving large ficus during a major development project. Ficus trees are hardy and survive extensive limb & root pruning. They can't survive the chain saws you plan to use on them.

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Attachments: pix & short video





FIRST FRIENDS CHURCH WASHINGTON AVE.
FICUS PLANTED C.1950. PHOTO DATED JULY
2024 SIDEWALK REPLACEMENT, ROOT
DEMOLITION/ NO HARM TO TREE

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FIRST FRIENDS CHURCH
WASHINGTON AVE. FICUS
PLANTED C.1950. PHOTO DATED
JULY 2024 SIDEWALK
REPLACEMENT