



Agenda Report

City Council

Date: December 12, 2023

To: Brian Saeki, City Manager

From: Kyle Cason, Public Works Director

Subject: Final Greenleaf Promenade Design Amendment and an Addendum to the Negative Declaration for the Uptown Whittier Streetscape Plan

RECOMMENDATION

Conduct a public hearing, approve the final design documents for the Greenleaf Promenade, and adopt Resolution No. 2023-86 approving an addendum to the approved Negative Declaration under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Uptown Whittier Streetscape plan along with an amendment to the Uptown Whittier Streetscape Plan.

BACKGROUND

On February 26, 2019, City Council selected a concept design from SWA Architects for the Uptown Whittier Streetscape Beautification project inclusive of improvements from “paseo to paseo” along Greenleaf Avenue. The project area was approximately midblock north of Wardman Street to midblock north of Philadelphia Street and improvements consisted of new parklets, curbs, gutters, paving, concrete, tree removal, tree preservation, and tree replacement. At the time of the City Council discussion, the project costs were estimated at \$3.8M.

On May 28, 2019, City Council was presented with a summary of public input gathered as part of the Uptown Streetscape Plan process referencing desired improvements including outdoor dining and parklets, gathering spaces, enhanced safety, cleanliness, and walkability, among others.

In June 2020, due to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the City Council approved a temporary closure of Greenleaf Avenue to facilitate the Greenleaf Promenade Outdoor Dine & Shop program. The closure, commonly referred to as the Greenleaf Promenade, has allowed retailers and restaurants to operate their businesses in the City-owned public right-of-way through approval of a temporary encroachment permit while adhering to indoor occupancy restrictions. The application process detailed equipment guidelines, current health order protocols, and notice of the City’s right to revoke the permit at any time should it be deemed necessary due to non-compliance or public safety.

On March 23, 2021, the City Council received a presentation featuring a draft concept of a single-block closure of Greenleaf designed by SWA Architects. At that time, City Council directed staff to research traffic control alternatives and perform further

outreach to stakeholders in the impacted Uptown area, specifically businesses, property owners, and nearby residents.

On August 10, 2021, City Council received the results of the Greenleaf Promenade community survey indicating support for the Promenade concept and feedback in alignment with the prior Streetscape Plan outreach process, including: outdoor dining, aesthetic uniformity, security, cleanliness, and diversification of businesses. Additional improvements including sidewalk repair, lighting, public art, and community gathering space were also noted. City Council action included approving an extension of encroachment permits through February 1, 2022 and directing staff to bring back a report containing further information regarding various options for the construction of a future hybrid or permanent Greenleaf Promenade.

On October 26, 2021, City Council authorized a hybrid concept for the Greenleaf closure that would include the installation of bollards to facilitate expedited police and fire response, uniform build-outs for dining and outdoor gathering, and hosting of special events along Greenleaf Avenue.

On March 8, 2022, the City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into an agreement with SWA Group for preliminary engineering and design services and directed staff to bring back an analysis of concerns brought forward by the Whittier Uptown Association (WUA), Uptown Whittier Improvement Association (UWIA) and Whittier Area Chamber of Commerce.

On June 14, 2022, the City Council directed staff to request a design option from SWA that details a “paseo to paseo” full closure from mid-block north of Philadelphia Street to mid-block south of Philadelphia Street along Greenleaf Avenue, with the remaining portions open to vehicular traffic.

On June 28, 2022, the City Council directed staff to proceed with the Open Street promenade design, with the understanding that traffic access will be temporarily closed at a minimum from Thursday through Saturday.

On September 27, 2022, the City Council was presented with a 30% design progress report.

On November 8, 2022, the City Council received and filed the progress report on the 30% design for Greenleaf Promenade Streetscape Project and authorized the City Manager to execute Amendment No. 1 with SWA for the Greenleaf Promenade Projected Professional Service Agreement A22-039, adding \$675,200 to the project.

At a study session held on February 14, 2023, the City Council directed staff to proceed with 4 x 4 pre-cast unit pavers, a running bond pattern with a gradient color blend, and a pillowed finished for skate deterrence; pre-cast concrete unit pavers with central concrete panels for the intersection crosswalks and midblock crosswalks; primary

overhead structures at Hadley and Wardman reviewed and approved by LA County Fire and secondary column structures at Bailey and Philadelphia; either a metal canopy option or a cantilevered umbrella option for businesses along Greenleaf Avenue; a paseo plaza in front of the Multideck Parking Structure that would be open space and to close the side driveway to the parking structure between the alley and Greenleaf Avenue; and the creation of a pocket park with open space at 7018 Greenleaf Avenue.

On March 21, 2023, the City Council directed Staff to work with the consultant to design a blend of sign options and then obtain input from the Uptown Association and the Business Improvement Area; to move forward with an open space design; and to explore design options similar to the lights in East Whittier.

As of May 1, 2023, all businesses removed their outdoor enclosures and Greenleaf Avenue is open to traffic.

On May 9, 2023, the City Council directed staff to move forward with streetlight options, modular tenant structures in consultation with the branding team, and removable bollards. The City Council also directed staff to move forward with a small pocket park at the City-owned property located at 7018 Greenleaf Avenue.

On August 22, 2023, the City Council authorized the City Manager to execute Amendment No. 2 with SWA for the Greenleaf Promenade Project Professional Services Agreement (A22-039). The amendment expanded the work limits to include designing and rehabilitating street, sidewalk, and alley approaches for an additional cost of \$84,500.

On September 12, 2023, the City Council discussed design options related to the new, small pocket park at the City-owned property located at 7018 Greenleaf Avenue and directed staff to move forward with the Weevos + Evos option manufactured by Landscape Structures.

DISCUSSION

The City Council's ongoing conversations related to the design of the Greenleaf portion of the Streetscape Plan between Hadley Street and Wardman Street have culminated in final design plans for the Greenleaf Promenade (Attachment B), which the City's consultant Landscape Architect, SWA Group, will carry forward into final construction documents. The City Council has provided input on the design concepts featured within the Greenleaf Promenade Amendment to the Streetscape Plan, which will optimize the usage of outdoor spaces while revitalizing Greenleaf Avenue. The Amendment supersedes the 'Gardens of Uptown' as the design selected for implementation. Further, it amends the 2019 plan to reflect and accommodate the elements of the Promenade in the overall framework set by the Streetscape Plan.

During the design period, outreach to stakeholders indicated that more than 1,600 of 1,800 community members supported a permanent Promenade. When asked to rank priorities within the Promenade, common responses aligned with feedback received during the prior Streetscape Plan outreach process and included outdoor dining, aesthetic uniformity, security, cleanliness, and diversification of businesses. Additional improvements including sidewalk repair, lighting, public art, and community gathering space were also noted.

The Greenleaf Promenade Amendment spans three blocks, from Wardman Street to Hadley Street. In addition to the City Council requested improvements and the stakeholder input on the Greenleaf Promenade two adjacent pocket parks are planned. While the specific design of these parks is not governed by the Streetscape Plan and therefore not part of this amendment, they are consistent with the intentions of the plan in utilizing and enhancing street-adjacent parcels as paseos and park space.

The design removes a portion of the existing angled street parking to expand the public realm with a mix of flexible program zones and planting. The program zones can be furnished for public use or leased by the City to adjacent tenants for outdoor dining or retail uses. A system of modular precast seat walls define the edges of the pedestrian space, protecting it from vehicular traffic and doubling as seating devices. Retractable bollards at each block allow the streets to be closed for special uses and events. Pedestrian areas are paved with precast unit pavers with a gradient color blend and a pillowed finish for skate deterrence. Intersections use vehicular precast concrete unit pavers. Existing ornamental light poles are relocated, and supplemental light fixtures as well as overhead decorative lights are introduced. Primary over-the-road gateway monumentation will be featured at Hadley Street and Wardman Street, and secondary pylon monuments at Philadelphia Street and Bailey Street.

Challenges posed by existing site conditions include steep site grades and cross slopes, poor soil infiltration, and extensive damage to existing pavement caused by Ficus tree roots. The proposed design resolves and mitigates issues through careful grading, introduction of plant material better suited for dense urban conditions, and use of modular paving materials and furnishings that allow for removal and replacement as needed for utility repairs and other public works efforts without permanent impact to hardscape. Due to the site grading adjustments required to achieve ADA-compliant surfaces and functional street drainage, the design removes all 83 existing Ficus trees, which is consistent with the long-term intent of the Streetscape Plan and the Uptown Specific Plan, while introducing new canopy trees at a 1.1 to 1 ratio and over 39,000 square feet of understory planting.

As street trees are some of the most functional and iconic elements in the streetscape, careful selection is important in creating a successful urban forest. Species selection criteria for Uptown Whittier include:

- Species adapted to the Uptown Whittier micro-climate and soil conditions.
- Trees that thrive receiving the natural regional precipitation and require minimal supplemental irrigation.
- Species that have proven long-term durability in the region.
- Species that are tolerant of rough urban conditions and are adaptable to adjacencies to development.
- Although not required, trees that provide habitat opportunities for birds and other small wildlife are encouraged.

A collection of street trees has been identified for their character and potential to thrive in Uptown Whittier. These trees have been divided into two categories: Canopy trees, which define the overall character of a street, and accent trees, which are located to highlight specific parts of a street such as intersections, paseos, or mid-block crossings. The collection of trees has been chosen based on the Uptown Whittier Specific Plan and discussions with city staff. Street tree designations are meant to provide guidance as new trees are planted or aging trees are replaced. Healthy, mature trees that do not pose a safety or maintenance risk should remain in place. The Ficus Trees have been deemed a safety and maintenance risk and should be replaced per the Uptown Whittier Specific Plan and the Streetscape Plan.

Understory planting enhances the identity of a street network and provides opportunities for uniquely characterizing different areas within Uptown Whittier. The following palette represents an array of locally adapted species both native to the area and suitable to Mediterranean climates, noted for their interesting form, flower, foliage, and urban resilience. General requirements for understory planting species are as follows:

- Compatibility with site soils
- Durability in urban settings
- Low water usage
- Compatibility with corresponding street trees
- Low maintenance
- Serving the street service needs (such as bio-filtration)
- Seasonal interest
- Ecological benefits

These general guidelines shall apply to future species selections. However, the plant palettes highlighted in this document express a design intention, and selection of the plants is to be determined within the design of each block.

Mid-block crossings occur at each block of the Greenleaf Promenade, two to the north of Philadelphia and one to the south. Mid-block crossings improve pedestrian circulation, and aid in providing access to parking lots or structures located to the rear of the street. A raised speed table design can help slow traffic, enhancing pedestrian

safety. Concrete unit pavers provide a decorative paving treatment, and overhead lighting is encouraged to enhance ambiance and aid in wayfinding.

Gateway intersections are key locations highlighting entryways into Uptown Whittier, with emphasis on the enhanced blocks of the Greenleaf Promenade. These intersections shall be enhanced with a coordinated program of components including at least three of the following:

- Pedestrian lighting or other specialty lighting.
- Columns/pylons, gateway sign or other urban design structures.
- Signal or light pole treatments.
- Special paving or intersection treatment.

Parklets are special, comfortable outdoor spaces for shoppers and other visitors to spend time. Parklets are clearly defined spaces, located outside the flow of pedestrian traffic. They provide a comfortable barrier from passing cars and integrated seating, are open and flexible, and invite use and adoption by adjacent businesses and vendors. These spaces will be created corresponding to adjacent storefronts or active building entrances.

On-street parking and loading zones for passengers, valet, rideshare services, and commercial deliveries shall be located throughout the core area of Uptown Whittier, providing convenient access to Uptown's buildings and open spaces. On-street parking will be supported eventually by multi-space meters within the core area. Parking along the Greenleaf Promenade varies in concentration and location along the three blocks, as directed by City Council and staff. Retractable bollards are provided at the end of each Promenade block, to allow for temporary street closures.

Tree Succession Strategies

Previously, the City Council evaluated several methods of tree succession and hardscape design, finally settling on a "Gardens of Uptown" hybrid hardscape design with groupings of tree replacement. This design would ease into tree succession but also created a need to return to the same block in the future to replace the remaining Ficus trees as they will likely damage and uplift any new hardscape installed in close proximity to their root zones. This could result in duplicative costs, as repairs to newly installed infrastructure may be necessary. This design also results in a more irregular design where the planters in front of the diagonal parking stalls must be expanded and adjusted to fit around the location of the existing trees. Where the existing Ficus trees are located, the sidewalk will still have a narrow spot where passing walkers must arrange themselves single file to avoid coming into contact with one another. The outdoor parklets and spaces contemplated in the Greenleaf Promenade Amendment cannot be built around the existing Ficus trees. Grading and drainage has been significantly altered with this plan, which makes preservation of the Ficus trees impossible.

The consultant team assigned costs to the design concepts and treatments described in the Streetscape Plan. The cost estimates for the Greenleaf Promenade total nearly \$20 million, but the actual costs can only be finalized when full construction drawings are completed and the project is bid out to contractors who will actually construct it.

Environmental Determination

The Uptown Whittier Streetscape Beautification Plan was reviewed for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and it was determined that the Uptown Whittier Specific Plan and accompanying Environmental Impact Report (EIR) both address the implementation of a streetscape plan, including a street tree succession plan. The Specific Plan describes the street trees in Section 2.2.2, phasing for the project in Sections 3.1.2, 3.1.3 and 3.1.4 and the tree selection criteria in Appendix A, beginning with Section A.1.1. The Uptown Whittier Specific Plan EIR provides an analysis of impacts relating to the streetscape modification under Aesthetics within Section 5.2 and Section 6.0 Growth-Inducing and Significant Irreversible Effects. The EIR determined that the strategies outlined within the Uptown Whittier Specific Plan, including the streetscape and tree succession plan would not adversely impact the aesthetic quality or character of Uptown and would generally benefit the area. The EIR further determined that the implementation of the Specific Plan would alter views in the planning area as new buildings and other improvements are constructed. However, the Specific Plan includes guidelines and code language which ensures the development will not detract from existing views. None of the secondary impacts of increased urbanization is considered a significant irreversible adverse environmental impact.

Whittier, as lead agency, may employ a single EIR to describe more than one project if such projects are essentially the same in terms of environmental impact. Further, the lead agency may use an earlier EIR prepared in connection with an earlier project to apply to a later project if the circumstances of the projects are essentially the same. The Uptown Whittier Streetscape Beautification Plan is similar to what was envisioned in the 2007 Specific Plan and as amended in 2014 and accompanying EIR that addressed the modification to the roadways, street trees, pedestrian paths and landscaping. The Specific Plan identified a series of streetscape improvements to define public spaces and streets. The Streetscape Beautification Plan, with the Greenleaf Promenade Amendment, will implement those improvements. The mitigation measures from the Uptown Whittier Specific Plan EIR will apply to this implementing project. There are no new mitigation measures because of the Greenleaf Promenade Amendment. The completed and approved Negative Declaration associated with the Streetscape Plan states the plan could not have a significant effect on the environment.

The design elements for the Greenleaf Promenade Amendment necessitate an Addendum to the approved Negative Declaration (Attachment C) for the Streetscape Plan. It is recommended that the City Council adopt Resolution No. 2023-XX, approving the Addendum to the approved Negative Declaration, along with the Greenleaf Promenade Amendment to the Streetscape Beautification Plan.

A public hearing is not required under the California Environmental Quality Act for an Addendum to an approved Negative Declaration. However, to increase transparency and public engagement in the process, City staff has agendaized the City Council's consideration of the item as a public hearing rather than a staff report, and a 10-day notice of the public hearing was provided by posting and publishing the notice in the *Whittier Daily News* on December 2, 2023. (Attachment D).

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

STRATEGIC PLANNING GOAL

- Maintain & Enhance Quality of Life
- Transparent & Open Government
- Promote a Strong Local Economic Base

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Resolution No. 2023-86
- B. Greenleaf Promenade Amendment to Uptown Streetscape Plan
- C. Addendum to Negative Declaration
- D. Notice to the Whittier Daily News