



Agenda Report

Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

Date: March 19, 2025

To: Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

From: Virginia Santana, Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services

Subject: Tree Appeal – Parnell Park Renovation and Improvements Project

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Commission:

- 1) Pursuant to Chapter XII of the City of Whittier's Parkway Tree Manual, conduct a Public Hearing to consider appeals (4) received regarding the proposed removal of 178 trees located at 15930 Lambert Road and make a determination.

BACKGROUND

Parnell Park, originally at 10711 Scott Avenue, is a 12.8-acre park in a residential neighborhood between Lambert Road and Mulberry Drive. The park was originally developed in 1967. The current Parnell Park Community and Senior Center resides at 15390 Lambert Road and includes standard amenities such as picnic tables, barbeques, a play area, one basketball court, restrooms, and three parking lots. In addition, there is a softball diamond, a spray pool, a farm animal zoo, and a recreation facility offering classes, training, events, and sports classes. There is minimal security lighting in and around the park. The playground and rubberized safety surfacing, last upgraded in 2009, served 8,000-10,000 children annually. The equipment, no longer repairable, and safety surfacing, which was in significant disrepair and no longer met requirements for fall zone heights, were removed in 2023.

In March 2021, City Council approved the filing for a statewide park development and community revitalization program grant to seek funds to renovate Parnell Park. The application process was multifaceted and required significant community outreach for the project. Community surveys showed that sports fields, an 'all-abilities' playground, splash pad, new restrooms, fitness equipment, walking path, lighting, and an updated landscape/irrigation system were the most requested items. The City was subsequently notified that the project application was not selected for funding.

However, in October 2021, State Senator Bob Archuleta presented City Council with the official notification that through the state budget process, budget trailer bills AB 170 and SB 170 included \$5,019,000.00 as designated grant funds to be awarded to the City of Whittier through the State of California, Specific Grant process for the Parnell Park Renovation and Improvements Project.

From February 2022 through December 2024, the project moved through various design phases from concept to completed plans and specifications. The process was guided by ongoing public input and City Council oversight, including an Ad Hoc Committee comprised of Mayor Vinatieri and Council Member Warner. The current engineer's estimate for construction is \$16,503,560, with a 15% contingency of \$2,475,534, for a total project cost of \$18,979,094. The project includes the following major improvements:

- ADA compliance
- Concrete work
- New basketball/pickleball courts
- New shaded food truck grove
- New picnic pavilion
- New bandshell
- New inclusive playground with rubberized safety surfacing
- Removal of existing restroom and installation of new modular restroom
- Construction of new splash pad
- Renovation of zoo area
- Construction of new sports fields
- New sports field lighting
- Expanded parking to include EV charging stations

To facilitate the planned improvements for Parnell Park, it is necessary to remove 178 trees (Attachment A). However, 50 existing mature trees will remain in place and the project provides for the planting of 196 new trees, 33% of which are specified as 48" and 60" box trees. This will result in a total 246 trees in the renovated Parnell Park, ultimately expanding the City's urban forest by 18 trees.

As Whittier prides itself on its recognition as a Tree City USA for 41 consecutive years and given the importance of its urban forest to the community, the City has persisted in its efforts to engage the community about the project. More than 700 online and in-person survey responses have been received through the fall of 2024 with 81% (573) of respondents wanting the project to move forward and 6% (45) opposed to it, with some concerns expressed about removal of mature trees.

DISCUSSION

On January 14, 2025, City Council approved the plans and specifications for the Parnell Park Renovations and Improvements Project, authorized the City Clerk to advertise for construction bids, and authorized the Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Service to facilitate the posting of trees specified for removal.

On January 23, 2025, in compliance with the Parkway Tree Manual, 18 notices, 24" x 36" in size, were posted throughout the park and colored ribbons placed on all trees designated for removal following the mandatory 30-day notification (Attachments B and C). Additionally, an information station was set up inside the Parnell Park Community Center which included a large notice and flyers of the notification and encouraged

residents to ask project-related questions of staff. These efforts ensured that park and community center users would be made aware of both the project and the proposed removal of trees.

During the 30-day notification period, the City received four appeals objecting to the planned tree removal (Attachment D). The appeal process, as outlined in Section XII of the Parkway Tree Manual, encompasses the following criteria:

- The appellant must reside within the City of Whittier.
- The Appeal must be filed within the thirty (30) day posting period.
- The completed appeal form must be submitted to the Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department.
- The appeal hearing will be included on the first available Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Commission Agenda.

To ensure a fair and transparent process, the appellants were formally notified of the scheduled hearing on March 19, 2025, through standard mail.

Section IX of the Parkway Tree Manual (Tree Removal Guidelines) makes provision for the removal of trees for construction projects on city property as follows: “if all mitigation measures have been exhausted and/or deemed impractical, the tree may be removed pending a written evaluation by a certified arborist stating that the tree must be removed in order to proceed with the project.”

An evaluation of all trees specified for removal was conducted by West Coast Arborists, Inc. (WCA) and a written report provided to the City on September 18, 2024 (Attachment E).

Following the conclusion of the appeal hearing, the Commission will provide a recommendation to the City Council. This recommendation will then be presented on the first available City Council Agenda as a consent item, culminating in the final determination of the appeal by the City Council.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

STRATEGIC PLANNING GOAL

Goal 4: Transparent & Open Government

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Project Tree Maps
- B. Section IX of the Parkway Tree Manual
- C. Photos of Removal Notice
- D. Public Appeal Forms
- E. WCA Tree Evaluation