

## **Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission Meeting Agenda Announcement**

On September 16, 2021, Governor Newsom signed into law Assembly Bill 361, which allows Brown Act bodies to attend meetings telephonically. Please be advised that some Whittier Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commissioners may attend this meeting telephonically.

Speakers must limit their comments to three minutes. Please note, by order of the presiding officer, public comments minutes may be reduced if at their discretion a surplus of public speakers is present at the meeting.

To submit Public Comments/Questions:

- Email: [gonzalezr@cityofwhittier.org](mailto:gonzalezr@cityofwhittier.org)
- Voicemail: (562) 567-9400
- Live Audio via Zoom: Only those members of the public who have 'raised their hand' on Zoom will be in the queue for speaking.
- In person at City Hall 13230 Penn St., Whittier, CA 90602, City Council Chamber

To view live meetings remotely:

- Video and audio: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86955588397>
- Audio only: Dial 1 (720) 707-2699 (Meeting ID: 869 5558 8397)

Please submit email comments by 5:00 p.m. on the date of the meeting to ensure Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commissioners receive and have time to review them. All emails received by 5:00 p.m. are forwarded to the Commission. Emails received after 5:00 p.m. but before the conclusion of public comments will be entered into the record.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

Disability-related services are available to enable persons with a disability to participate in this meeting, consistent with the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Spanish interpreters are also available. For information or to request services, please contact the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting at (562) 567-9400.

**AGENDA  
CITY OF WHITTIER  
PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSION  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 13230 PENN STREET  
JULY 16, 2025, 6:00 PM**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

**2. ROLL CALL**

Elizabeth Apodaca, Commissioner  
Tiffany Givens, Commissioner  
Don Mrla, Commissioner  
Joseph Westrup, Commissioner  
Victoria Pacheco, Vice Chair  
Robert Sera, Chair

**3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**4. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The public is invited to address the Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Commission regarding any item of business, or any matter within the body's subject matter jurisdiction. Consistent with Executive Order No. N-29-20 public comments can be made via:

- Email: [gonzalezr@cityofwhittier.org](mailto:gonzalezr@cityofwhittier.org)
- Voicemail: (562) 567-9400

Please submit email and voicemail public comments by 5:00 p.m. on the date of the meeting to ensure Commissioners receive and have time to review them. All emails and voicemails received by 5:00 p.m. are forwarded to the Commission. Emails and voicemails received after 5:00 p.m. but before the conclusion of public comments will be entered into the record.

Pursuant to State law, the Commission cannot take action or express a consensus of approval or disapproval on any communications which do not appear on the printed agenda.

**5. STAFF REPORTS**

**6. SECRETARY COMMENTS**

**6.A. Election of Officers**

Recommendation: Elect officers for the 2025-26 FY.

**6.B. Approval of Minutes**

Recommendation: Approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 19, 2025, and April 16, 2025.

**6.C. Subcommittee Assignments**

Recommendation: Assign Sub-Committee members to the Concert selection committee, Youth Sports Affiliates, and the Whittier Beautification program.

**7. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND CONFERENCE REPORTS**

**8. ADJOURNMENT**

Disability-related services are available to enable persons with a disability to participate in this meeting, consistent with the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Spanish interpreters are also available. For information or to request services, please contact the Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) Department at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting at (562) 567-9400.

The agenda packet is available three days before the meeting in the PRCS Department at City Hall (13230 Penn Street), Whittier Central Library (7344 Washington Avenue) and East Whittier Branch Library (10537 Santa Gertrudes Avenue). Additionally, the agenda packet can be viewed on the City's website. Materials distributed to the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission within 72 hours of the Commission meeting are available for public inspection in the PRCS Department's Office.

Los servicios relacionados con la discapacidad están disponibles para permitir que las personas con discapacidad participen en esta reunión, de conformidad con la Ley Federal de Estadounidenses con Discapacidades de 1990. También hay intérpretes en español disponibles. Para obtener información o para solicitar servicios, comuníquese con el Departamento de Recreación y Parques al Servicio a la Comunidad al menos de 24 horas antes de la reunión al (562) 567-9400.

El paquete de la agenda está disponible tres días antes de la reunión con El Departamento de Recreación y Parques al Servicio a la Comunidad en el Ayuntamiento (13230 Penn Street), Biblioteca Central de Whittier (7344 Washington Avenue) y Biblioteca sucursal del este de Whittier (10537 Santa Gertrudes Avenue). Además, el paquete de la agenda se puede ver en el sitio web de la Ciudad. Los materiales distribuidos al Comisión de parques, recreación y servicios comunitarios dentro de las 72 horas de la reunión del Concejo Municipal están disponibles para inspección pública en la con El Departamento de Recreación y Parques al Servicio a la Comunidad.

I hereby certify under penalty of perjury, under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing agenda was posted in accordance with the applicable legal requirements. Regular and Adjourned Regular meeting agendas may be amended up to 72 hours in advance of the meeting. Dated this 10<sup>th</sup> day of July 2025.

/s/ Roxanne Gonzalez

Roxanne Gonzalez, Administrative Secretary



# Agenda Report

Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

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**Date:** July 16, 2025

**To:** Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

**From:** David Montgomery-Scott, Interim Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services  
Erin Hamilton, Community Services Manager

**Subject:** Election of Officers

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Elect officers for the 2025-26 FY.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the beginning of each new fiscal year the Commission elects a new Chair and Vice Chair.

## **DISCUSSION**

Commission will begin with the process of nominating and then selecting new officers for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING GOAL**

Goal 4: Transparent & Open Government

## **ATTACHMENTS**

None.



# Agenda Report

Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

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**Date:** July 16, 2025

**To:** Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

**From:** David Montgomery-Scott, Interim Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services

**Subject:** Approval of Minutes

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 19, 2025, and April 16, 2025.

## **BACKGROUND**

None.

## **DISCUSSION**

Staff prepared draft minutes and hereby submit the minutes for the Commission's approval.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

None.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING GOAL**

Goal 4: Transparent & Open Government

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 19, 2025
- B. Minutes of the Regular Meeting of April 16, 2025

**MINUTES  
CITY OF WHITTIER  
PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, 13230 PENN STREET  
MARCH 19, 2025 – 6:00 P.M.**

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Sera called the regular meeting of the Parks, Recreation & Community Services Commission to order at 6:05 p.m. in the Council Chamber of Whittier City Hall, 13230 Penn Street, Whittier, California.

**2. ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:**

Elizabeth Apodaca, Commissioner  
Tiffany Givens, Commissioner  
Don Mrla, Commissioner  
Joseph Westrup, Commissioner  
Victoria Pacheco, Vice Chair  
Robert Sera, Chair

**ABSENT:** None.

**STAFF PRESENT:**

David Montgomery-Scott, Interim Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services  
Erin Hamilton, Community Services Manager  
Arturo Soriano, Park Manager  
Wayne McBurney, Tree Maintenance Supervisor  
Roxanne Gonzalez, Administrative Secretary  
Teresa Maruffo, Administrative Secretary

**3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Commissioner Mrla led the Pledge of Allegiance.

It was motioned by Commissioner Mrla, seconded by Commissioner Givens and unanimously agreed to adjust the agenda to discuss the agenda item 6.C. Freedom Church Special Event Permit Application prior to the public hearing.

**4. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were three submitted public comments received via email prior to the 5:00 p.m. time frame and were sent to the Commission following receipt from:

Patti McCarthy

Jill Frieze Prado

Stephanie Vallejo

## **5. PUBLIC HEARING**

### **5.A. Tree Appeal – Parnell Park Renovation and Improvements Project**

Chair Sera opened the Tree Appeal Hearing by stating that public comments are limited to three minutes per speaker, with the exception of the applicant and the appellant. The applicant (City) is allotted up to 20 minutes for their presentation and an additional 10 minutes for rebuttal. The appellant may speak for up to 10 minutes.

Chair Sera advised that those wishing to challenge the proposed action in court may be limited to issues raised during the hearing. He then invited Interim Director David Montgomery-Scott to introduce the item.

Secretary Montgomery-Scott confirmed this as the duly noticed time and place for a Tree Appeal Hearing under Chapter XII of the City's Parkway Tree Manual. The purpose was to consider four appeals regarding the proposed removal of 178 trees at 15390 Lambert Road (Parnell Park).

Chair Sera outlined the hearing procedure: Commissioners would disclose any site visits or ex parte communications. The applicant would present their case, followed by speakers in support. The appellant and those opposed would then speak, followed by applicant rebuttal.

#### **Applicant Presentation:**

Community Services Manager Hamilton explained that the City is seeking approval for the removal of 178 trees to accommodate the Parnell Park Renovation Project. A representative from SWA Group, the project design firm, would be joining to provide input. Hamilton described the park's history, current features, and the community-driven renovation effort. The project was shaped by community input, survey results, and the Parks Master Plan. Outreach included public meetings, online surveys (with over 1,200 responses), and social media engagement reaching over 51,000 accounts. In response to overwhelming community support (81%), the design includes new amenities such as sports fields, a splash pad, and an all-abilities playground. A certified arborist's assessment determined that 178 trees would be impacted. Of those, 50 are to be preserved or relocated, and 196 new trees will be planted—33% of which are large 48" and 60" box trees—resulting in a net gain of 18 trees. Public notice requirements were met, including the posting of 18 signs and tree markings throughout the park.

Hamilton then introduced Stephen Rydzon, Principal Landscape Architect with SWA Group. Rydzon explained the firm's design approach, which was rooted in community feedback. Many existing trees were poorly located relative to new amenities and accessibility requirements. The redesign balances maximizing recreation space with enhancing the tree canopy over time. Though the initial canopy will decrease, the diversity and maturity of replacement trees—many 10–15 years old and boxed—will help rebuild coverage.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions regarding tree quantities, maturity, and feasibility of alternative designs. Rydzon confirmed approximately 175–178 existing trees, with 48 retained. He emphasized that the current plan is the most effective in meeting programming and compliance needs while offering long-term canopy restoration.

Chair Sera asked applicant supporters to come up and speak.

- Omi Martinez, a 10-year-old WAYS player, shared her love for soccer and asked the Commission to support new fields so more kids can play in a safe, fun environment.
- Thaddeus, age 8, described how soccer has become a second home and a source of valuable life lessons. They urged support for new fields as an investment in Whittier’s youth.
- Veronica Islas, speaking on behalf of WAYS, highlighted the league’s growth (1,300 players, ages 4–11) and the urgent need for more field space. She emphasized that youth sports foster community and personal development and encouraged the Commission to approve the proposed plan.

Chair Sera then invited the appellant(s) to present their case, allowing up to 10 minutes, and instructed other speakers in support of the appeal to line up or raise their hand via Zoom. All speakers were asked to state their name and address and limit comments to three minutes.

**APPELLANTS:**

Monica Sena, a 30-year Whittier resident and appellant, voiced support for youth recreation but raised two key concerns:

1. Removal of 178 mature trees, which she said contradicts the City’s General Plan goals related to urban forestry, air quality, and green space preservation.
2. Use of artificial turf, citing health risks (toxins, abrasions, heat) and environmental harm (soil degradation, lack of recyclability, loss of habitat).

She emphasized that tree removal will necessitate field lighting due to lost shade and urged the City to prioritize long-term climate planning. “I support kids playing,” she said, “but not at the expense of their health or the environment.”

Stephanie Vallejo, appellant, expressed procedural concerns about an unaddressed request for a Commission recusal and outlined three objections:

1. Flawed Community Survey – She claimed the 2020 survey never mentioned tree removal or soccer fields and that community feedback was misrepresented.
2. Lack of Mitigation in Design – She urged redesigns to preserve more trees, referencing SWA’s acknowledgment that minor changes wouldn’t compromise the layout.
3. Inadequate Public Notice – She argued tree removal notices failed to mention the right to appeal, unlike past City postings, and requested reposting with accurate information.

Paul and Cindy Feinzimer, co-appellants, opposed the removal of 178 out of 228 trees, stating it violates the City’s park and resource management goals.

- Paul cited specific General Plan goals (e.g., RM 2.2, RM 4.2, RM 4.3), arguing the plan undermines Whittier’s commitment to enhancing its urban forest.
- Cindy emphasized that the removal of heritage trees violates the City’s goals (RM 10.3 and RM 11.7) and called for redesigns that preserve tree canopy. She echoed concerns about artificial turf, aligning with Sena’s arguments.

David, a resident near Whitwood Mall, expressed frustration with outreach and transparency. He questioned the need for three soccer fields and criticized the plan as “overcrowded and unbalanced.” He felt the City increasingly prioritizes rapid development over community consensus and environmental preservation.

Joanna, a lifelong Whittier resident, supported youth programming but said the City can pursue it without sacrificing 178 healthy trees. She cited Citywide tree loss and urged alternatives, including use of underutilized spaces like Rio Hondo College, Whittier College, and the Sierra Education Center. “Urban canopy is critical infrastructure,” she said.

Jill Freeze Prado stressed the need for transparency, collaboration, and strategic planning. She pointed to the 44-acre Sierra Education Center as a viable space for sports expansion without tree removal. Jill urged the City to honor the sustainability commitments in its Parks Master Plan and include more families and youth groups in future planning.

Austin Cormick, a Whittier resident since 1996, expressed deep love for soccer but lamented the repeated loss of Whittier’s tree canopy. He described public participation as limited and powerless, calling urban forests essential to public health. “This matters to our city and to Southern California,” he said.

Tom Bihl, a licensed landscape architect and 65-year Whittier resident, questioned the decision to post removal notices before bids or final plans were approved. He cited a six-month-old arborist report that had not been publicly reviewed and urged the City to pause and reevaluate, emphasizing preservation and transparency.

Connie McCormick, a member of SaveOurTreesWhittier.com, shared a letter from landscape architect Fred Haberek, who criticized the plan's disregard for ecological design principles. He argued that the City is greenwashing the tree replacement plan and ignoring long-term sustainability goals. Connie highlighted over 7,000 petition signatures opposing tree removals.

Jenny Martin, a 20-year resident and social media professional, questioned the City's outreach claims. She noted low survey participation, poor visibility of public events, and widespread resident confusion. She supported compromise—not removing mature trees while still supporting youth sports—and stressed the health and environmental value of the existing canopy.

Chair Sera asked the Applicant if they would like to make any final comments.

**APPLICANT:**

Community Services Manager Hamilton clarified that the Parks Master Plan, developed over 18 months with Commission input, identified a lack of sports amenities in East Whittier—specifically, a sports park. This finding shaped the design direction starting in 2021, with the ad hoc committee providing input on including soccer fields. As the design progressed, it became evident that preserving existing trees was not feasible given space and layout constraints. To offset the impact, 196 new trees will be planted, as previously described by SWA's Stephen Rydzon.

Regarding synthetic turf, Hamilton noted that only the 10U and 12U soccer fields will feature it; the rest of the park will retain natural turf and green space to support multipurpose uses. On public notification, she confirmed the City followed Tree Ordinance guidelines, which led to the submission of four appeals during the 30-day notice period. She then introduced staff available for questions, including Director Montgomery-Scott, Parks Manager Arturo Soriano, City Arborist Wayne McBurney, and Public Works Director Kyle Cason.

Commissioner Mrla asked about the timeline for tree removal. Public Works Director Kyle Cason explained that removal will occur only after the project is awarded to a contractor. The City has approved plans and specs; once the bid process (4–6 weeks) concludes and Council awards the project, mobilization and construction will begin anticipated to take about one year.

Commissioner Givens inquired whether alternate designs were explored to preserve more trees. Public Works Director Cason stated SWA explored options but prioritized maximizing field use and addressing complex drainage

issues. The current design allows flexibility for example, fitting multiple U6 and U10 fields within a U12 field footprint while still meeting programming needs.

Vice Chair Pacheco confirmed that the playground will be ADA-compliant, improving accessibility for diverse families. Public Works Director Cason affirmed this. She also asked about turf locations and canopy coverage post-renovation. He indicated turf will be limited to designated soccer fields, with surrounding areas remaining grass. Drainage systems will collect and reuse stormwater. He acknowledged the canopy will be reduced temporarily but emphasized clusters of new trees in key areas, particularly near picnic zones, will restore shade over time.

Chair Sera asked whether the 33% ratio of large box trees (48" and 60") could be increased to accelerate canopy restoration. Public Works Director Cason responded that while plans are finalized, staff can consult SWA and recommend changes to Council if the Commission desires. However, larger trees require more space and may affect construction. Chair Sera emphasized that Whittier's identity is tied to its urban forest. Reflecting on his 60 years in the city, he recalled when current mature trees were young and urged minimizing even short-term canopy loss. He acknowledged the importance of youth development through recreation and asked that tree impact be mitigated as much as possible. He also mentioned challenges with school district joint-use agreements, particularly with the Sierra Education Center, where access has declined in recent years.

Community Services Manager Hamilton confirmed the City works closely with schools to maximize field use, but space remains limited. Parnell Park offers a unique opportunity to meet demand. Commissioner Mrla thanked the public for their participation and emphasized that community trust in the process is critical. He hopes everyone felt heard. Commissioner Givens called the decision "conflicting," balancing the need for youth sports infrastructure with tree preservation. She raised concerns about setting a precedent of removing trees while claiming Tree City USA status, noting inconsistencies in policy enforcement. She questioned whether long-term consequences are being fully considered, especially with other underutilized or vacant sites citywide. Commissioner Apodaca praised the City's thoughtful approach to replanting and encouraged continued expansion of the urban canopy in other areas, such as Uptown and future City-owned parcels.

Commissioner Mrla acknowledged the formal recusal request received and asked how such matters should be handled in future. Interim Director Montgomery-Scott clarified that recusal decisions lie with individual Commissioners and that no conflict appears to exist in this case. All Commissioners, like the public, are allowed to hold personal opinions on City projects. Only the tree removal appeal is under consideration. Regarding next steps, Interim Director Montgomery-Scott stated that the appeal decision will go to City Council at its April meeting. If Council rejects the appeal, the City will

proceed with bidding. Once awarded, construction will begin after a brief mobilization period—likely months away.

Chair Sera asked for a motion on this item.

It was motioned by Vice Chair Pacheco, seconded by Commissioner Mrla and carried 4-2 (Givens and Wenstrup voting Nay) to recommend to City Council to deny the appeals and uphold the removal of 178 trees within the park posted in accordance to Section IX of the Parkway Tree Manual. Motion passed.

## 6. STAFF REPORTS

### 6.A. Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Commissioner Mrla, seconded by Vice Chair Pacheco, and carried 3-0 to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of February 19, 2025 (Abstained: Commissioner Apodaca, Commissioner Givens, Commissioner Mrla).

### 6.B. Summer Concert's Subcommittee Update

Community Services Manager **Hamilton** provided an update on the Summer Concert Series subcommittee. She shared that the City recently hosted a showcase at the DoubleTree, where bands met with representatives from multiple cities. This event—previously hosted by other cities—allows vendors and performers to share press kits and connect with potential bookers. Hosting the event this year also generated some revenue for Whittier.

Following the showcase, staff prepared a band portfolio for review by the subcommittee, which included two commissioners from the Parks Commission and two from the Cultural Arts Commission. The group reviewed a wide range of musical genres over dinner and selected 12 bands for the summer series. We will also have the Whittier Regional Symphony perform this summer.

Concerts will be held:

- Monday nights at Central Park
- Thursday nights at Parnell Park, or York Field if Parnell is closed for renovations. Community Services Manager Hamilton noted that York Field successfully hosted the series during the pandemic and is a viable backup venue with adequate parking and capacity.

Concert Lineup Central Park (Mondays):

- Electric Vinyl – Classic rock
- The Dreamboats – 1950s & '60s hits
- Four Lads from Liverpool – Beatles/British rock tribute
- Upstream – Caribbean/Reggae
- Journey Through Time – Journey tribute and classic rock

- City Beat Band & The Main Street Horns – '70s rock with a horn section (Chicago-style)

Concert Lineup Parnell Park / York Field (Thursdays):

- Big Jukebox – '80s music
- Bruno Mars Tribute
- Y2K2K – '90s experience
- Taylor Swift Experience
- Radio Royalty – Top 40s and radio hits (past & present)
- Mariachi Jalisco

Alternate bands have also been selected in case of scheduling conflicts. Agreements are pending, but all main acts have been tentatively confirmed. Commissioner Apodaca praised the quality of the portfolio and expressed excitement about the selections, noting the lineup will be lively and entertaining. Commissioner Westrup inquired about the 4th of July band, and Hamilton confirmed **Legacy** has been selected for that performance.

It was moved by Commissioner Givens, seconded by Chair Sera and carried 6-0 to receive and file the Summer Concert Series Subcommittee update.

### **5.C. Freedom Church Special Event Permit Application**

Community Services Manager Hamilton introduced the Special Event Permit Application submitted by the Freedom City Church who would like to host a Children's Outreach event at Michigan Park on April 12, 2025. She noted that the insurance is currently pending. The local church plans to have food booths, music, and giveaways. They are a passionate children's ministry and want to expand their outreach to the Whittier community.

Chair Sera noted that the application went through the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department and asked if only acoustic music would be played. He highlighted that the application indicates there will be music, but it will not be amplified. The representative from the Freedom City Church responded that speakers will be used but music will be played at a reasonable level. Chair Sera asked if there would be some amplified music. The representative from the Freedom City Church responded yes. Chair Sera noted that the checklist does not show insurance documents checked off, but the application includes the insurance documents. Community Services Manager Hamilton responded that insurance is pending review, and the applicant has 30 days to be approved. Commissioner Givens asked who is allowed to attend the event. The representative from the Freedom City Church responded that anyone is welcome to attend the outreach event. Commissioner Givens asked if only this group will be allowed to use the group or will other patrons be at the park. Community Services Manager Hamilton responded that other park patrons will be at the park.

It was moved by Commissioner Mrla, seconded by Commissioner Westrup, and carried 6-0 to approve the Special Event Permit Application from the Freedom City Church Children's Outreach event on April 12, 2025, at Michigan Park as submitted but under the provision that the insurance is approved.

## **7. SECRETARY'S COMMENTS**

Secretary Montgomery-Scott shared the following updates:

- Spring swim lessons registration opened on Monday and filled up quickly. Spring sessions will kick off in April.
- Spring day camp will be held at the Whittier Community Center and Guirado Park. It will run Monday through Friday next week from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Arbor Day was postponed to next Tuesday, Central Park, 10:00 a.m.
- Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup> we will hold our annual Extravaganza from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be a variety of activities like inflatables, egg hunts, arts and crafts, and face painting.

## **8. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS**

Commissioner Westrup stated his opposition was not rooted in being against youth sports as he strongly supports them but was torn between that and the importance of protecting trees and green space. Having lived in Whittier for 23 years, he acknowledged how vital nature is to the city's character. Ultimately, he made the difficult choice to oppose the project out of concern for long-term environmental impact.

Commissioner Apodaca expressed that she felt the Commission made a meaningful contribution. She looks forward to seeing children enjoy the open space at Parnell Park and believes the east side of the city deserves enhanced recreational facilities. She also thanked staff and the public for a respectful and civil discussion.

Commissioner Mrla emphasized the importance of ongoing community participation in public meetings. While intense public interest is rare, he believes this type of civic engagement should be the norm, not the exception.

Vice Chair Pacheco appreciated the professionalism of the public and appellants. She addressed the recusal question, explaining she sought guidance from a mentor and felt transparency was important. Acknowledging the difficulty of the decision as someone with asthma who values nature, she ultimately supported the plan, trusting the judgment of city arborists and park staff. She emphasized the value of public understanding and participation.

Commissioner Givens thanked staff for their efforts and recognized the challenges of balancing data-driven recommendations with public sentiment. He noted a recurring

theme across the city residents concerned about tree removals and called for better upfront communication about what will be lost, not just what will be added. Givens expressed hope that future projects are approached more holistically, learning from community concerns.

Chair Sera thanked city staff for their comprehensive planning and recalled his involvement in the Parks Master Plan and past community outreach. He acknowledged the challenge of presenting plans that highlight benefits while also being honest about trade-offs. While supportive of the project moving forward, he stressed the need for transparency and reflection on the community's concerns. Sera concluded by praising the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department for their commitment to creating quality programs and spaces for residents of all ages.

## **9. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Approved and adopted by the Parks, Recreation and Community Service Commission  
on \_\_\_\_\_.

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Virginia Santana, Secretary

**MINUTES  
CITY OF WHITTIER  
PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, 13230 PENN STREET  
APRIL 16, 2025 – 6:00 P.M.**

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Sera called the regular meeting of the Parks, Recreation & Community Services Commission to order at 6:04 p.m. in the Council Chamber of Whittier City Hall, 13230 Penn Street, Whittier, California.

**2. ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:**

Elizabeth Apodaca, Commissioner  
Tiffany Givens, Commissioner  
Don Mrla, Commissioner  
Joseph Westrup, Commissioner  
Victoria Pacheco, Vice Chair  
Robert Sera, Chair

**ABSENT:** None.

**STAFF PRESENT:**

David Montgomery-Scott, Interim Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services  
Erin Hamilton, Community Services Manager  
Arturo Soriano, Park Manager  
Wayne McBurney, Tree Maintenance Supervisor  
Roxanne Gonzalez, Administrative Secretary  
Teresa Maruffo, Administrative Secretary

**3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Commissioner Mrla led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**4. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There was one submitted public comments received via email prior to the 5:00 p.m. time frame and were sent to the Commission following receipt from:

Daniel Martinez

Whittier resident and business owner Javier Garcia addressed the Commission regarding two deteriorating trees on Greenleaf Avenue, which he believes are dying due to asphalt used during City repairs on January 15. Citing 28 years of roofing experience, he claimed the asphalt contains toxic petroleum products that are

poisoning the trees from within. He presented a photo and tree sample as evidence. Mr. Garcia stated he had spoken with multiple City officials, including the Parks and Recreation Department, Public Works Director Kyle Cason, and former City Manager Brian Saeki, but received no corrective action. He offered to fund the asphalt's removal if budget was an issue. He criticized the City's inaction, raised safety concerns if the trees fall, and questioned Director Cason's decision to use asphalt. He expressed frustration that a tree specialist was only recently scheduled, months after initially reporting the issue. Mr. Garcia emphasized the damage and poor appearance caused by the asphalt, stating it reflects poorly on the City. He urged accountability, transparency, and a halt to any potential tree removal, calling on the Commission to act decisively to protect public safety and the City's image.

Tom Hall, a Whittier resident who resides on Friends Avenue, addressed the Commission about the trees in Uptown Whittier. He stated that we are ruining this perfectly beautiful town by cutting down the trees. He added that everyone is against it and the money answers all things. Mr. Hall stated that he knows that is why the City wants to have it done and that it's in the book of Proverbs. He stated that the trees can definitely be saved and that it would be a real shame if all those trees were cut down. Looking at the bare building would not be good at all.

## **5. PUBLIC HEARING**

### **5.A. Tree Appeal – Parnell Park Renovation and Improvements Project**

Chair Sera announced that the Commission will conduct a public hearing to consider ten appeals regarding the proposed removal of Aleppo Pine trees along Palm Avenue, from Beverly Boulevard to Whittier Boulevard. The recommendation is to deny the appeals and proceed with tree removal as authorized by City Council under Section IX of the Parkway Tree Manual. Community Services Manager Hamilton introduced the hearing, reiterating the recommendation to deny the appeals and authorize tree removal per the Parkway Tree Manual.

Chair Sera then outlined the hearing procedure:

- Commissioners will disclose any site visits or outside information.
- The Applicant (City) will present for up to 20 minutes, with a 10-minute rebuttal at the end.
- The Appellant will have 10 minutes to present.
- Public comments will follow, with speakers limited to three minutes.

Chair Sera disclosed that he reviewed the site via Google Maps and compared it to the agenda packet photos. He invited Interim Director David Montgomery-Scott, representing the Applicant, to begin. He reminded attendees to follow City Council's rules of decorum and noted that while the Commission does not control public comment content, attendees may leave the Chamber at any time.

**APPLICANT:**

Interim Director Montgomery-Scott, representing the City as the applicant, explained that the project spans Palm Avenue from Whittier Boulevard to Beverly Boulevard. Approved by City Council in March 2023, construction began in June and includes new water and sewer mains, asphalt paving, curb and ramp reconstruction, new cross gutters, speed humps, and sidewalk repairs. Work is currently paused pending resolution of these tree appeals, as several trees are located within the project area.

Two independent arborists—V&E Tree Service and the City’s own arborist—assessed the site and identified 14 Aleppo pines with moderate to high risk of failure due to dieback, root girdling, decay, fungal growth, and significant trunk lean. One tree has already been removed due to imminent failure. The remaining 13 trees pose safety risks, especially given their age (approximately 85 years), size (over 80 feet tall), and root integration with nearby hardscape. Planned construction would further compromise their structural integrity.

Tree removal is recommended under Section IX of the Parkway Tree Manual, which allows removal when hazardous conditions exist or when necessary repairs would cause significant root damage. Notices were posted on January 21, initiating a 30-day comment period. Ten of the trees received formal appeals, prompting tonight’s hearing. Affected property owners and appellants were notified by mail in early April.

Based on both arborist reports, the Department recommends denying the 10 appeals and proceeding with the removal of the remaining 13 trees. Montgomery-Scott emphasized the City’s commitment to protecting its urban forest of over 23,000 trees, but noted that safety, infrastructure needs, and public access sometimes necessitate removals. He thanked the Commission and offered to answer questions, along with Public Works staff Philip Wang and Lucila Martinez.

**APPLICANT’S SUPPORTERS:**

Chair Sera invited speakers in support of the applicant. Daniel Martinez, a Whittier resident and affected homeowner, spoke in favor of removing the Aleppo pine in front of his home. He noted the tree is likely 80 years old and has severely damaged his driveway, making it unusable for two cars. Photos were submitted via email for the Commission’s review. Martinez shared that the tree leans toward power lines, has damaged the street and sidewalk, and creates excessive noise that disrupts his household—especially with a newborn at home. He also reported structural damage to his house from heavy vehicle vibrations, falling branches, and nuisance birds. He supports removing this specific tree, citing safety and quality-of-life concerns, and emphasized that many other large trees remain on the street. He urged the Commission to keep this tree on the removal list.

Chair Sera then invited the appellants and supporters of the appeal to speak, reminding them of the time limits: 10 minutes for the appellant, 3 minutes for others.

**APPELLANT – JAMES BECERRA:**

James Becerra, co-appellant for agenda item 5A, also serves as Chair of the Historic Resources Commission and is a retired faculty emeritus from Cal Poly Pomona’s

College of Environmental Design. A former landscape architect, he worked in private practice and with cities like Santa Paula and Irvine to update Parks and Recreation Master Plans and supervised landscape construction alongside infrastructure projects. Mr. Becerra challenged the City's claims that trees cannot be saved, alternatives are unfeasible, and quality of life conflicts with project goals. He argued this reasoning is flawed, directing staff to slides 1-4. On page 2 of the report, under "Discussion," it notes water, sewer, and pavement reconstruction, but Becerra clarified the water and sewer lines are already installed and operational, so curb and gutter work doesn't affect them. He questioned the "Risk Assessment" by arborist Mr. Gorsuch for 11 "common" trees, noting Attachment A's "Tree Plotter Inventory" and "Palm Avenue Initial Report" lack formal risk metrics or a conclusive hazard summary.

He highlighted a report admission on page 2: "Some parkway trees currently show no signs of decline," urging caution. For Tree #1, rated "fair" and "over-pruned," he noted the City directed the pruning, sharing some blame for its condition, and said "dieback" in mature trees doesn't justify removal. For Tree #3 (page 6 of the appeal, page 27 of the City's report), the City claims a "heavy lean" of 15-25% without evidence. Becerra countered that Aleppo pines naturally lean, tolerating wind well, and are adaptable, even in bonsai. He presented photos of Ficus trees near the Quaker Church, once deemed unsalvageable, now thriving after root management (slide 4). On page 17 of the staff packet, Mr. Gorsuch claims trees pose a "moderate to high risk of failure," but Becerra questioned the lack of data or peer review, calling a sentence about aligning the arborist's report with the City's findings a "paid endorsement."

Citing page 34 of the tree manual, the City's policy is to preserve healthy trees for environmental and quality-of-life benefits. Slide 5 showed what's at risk: mature canopy trees offering shade, carbon sequestration, and neighborhood character, traded for more concrete and runoff. Becerra acknowledged the need for utilities but stressed trees are vital infrastructure, especially amid climate change, citing fires in Eaton Canyon and Pacific Palisades worsened by wind and rising temperatures. He urged the Commission to act ethically, preserve mature trees to combat heat and capture carbon, and make Whittier a model for balancing utilities and urban forests. He called for policies treating trees as equal to storm drains and sidewalks, sending a message to the City Council to save these trees and do things differently.

**APPELLANT – CONNY MCCORMACK:**

Connie McCormick, co-appellant for agenda item 5A, a 29-year Whittier resident and leader of Save Our Trees Whittier, thanked the City and co-appellant James Becerra for their presentations, noting his passion and extensive expertise as a landscape architect. As a resident, she advocates for the urban forest, emphasizing that parkway trees are public assets belonging to all Whittier residents, deserving careful scrutiny before removal. Focusing on the tree at 6307 Palm Avenue, she noted its inclusion in the packet with a photo of a five-foot, non-ADA-compliant sidewalk segment. She argued this minor repair doesn't justify removing a mature, healthy tree, calling it frustrating to see small fixes harm the canopy.

She highlighted sidewalk repairs near the Quaker Church on Washington and Philadelphia, where she, Becerra, and the City's arborist trimmed large roots,

successfully preserving trees. She urged the Commission to assess each tree individually, as filed in the appeal, noting Palm Avenue's stunning 70- to 80-year-old canopy, including resilient Aleppo pines that can live 150 years. She pointed out curbs already redone without tree removal, proving repairs can spare the canopy. Echoing Becerra, Ms. McCormick, a 40-year public servant, including 12 with Los Angeles County, thanked the Commission for their time, commitment, and willingness to listen while balancing community needs.

**APPELLANT SUPPORTERS:**

Chair Sera invited the public to speak in support of the appellants.

Jenny Martin, a Whittier resident on Monte Vista, spoke of her advocacy for Whittier's trees at Parnell Park, Greenleaf Promenade, and now Palm Avenue. For 20 years, she's driven and walked under these trees with her children and dog. After learning of their planned removal, she urged homeowners to reconsider, emphasizing these "people's trees" belong to the community. She highlighted Palm Park's 1930s historic character, matching her adobe home, and urged the Commission to protect this legacy for future generations, inviting residents to experience Palm Avenue's majestic canopy.

Javier Garcia, a longtime Whittier resident and business owner, criticized the Mayor's chosen arborist as untrustworthy and incompetent, citing mismanaged trees on Greenleaf Avenue. He distrusted the Parks Department, arborists, City Manager, and City Engineer, arguing that removing trees for construction amid poor tree care shows incompetence. He urged the Commission to oppose corruption, honor Whittier's Tree City status, and prioritize preservation, saying, "We can repair driveways, remove hazardous trees, but keep the rest." He linked rising heat to climate change, asking to protect trees for children's futures.

Diane Montano, a Whittier resident, urged prioritizing tree care, noting street trees boost beauty, property values, air quality, and reduce heat and flooding. She called removal a last resort, advocating for planning to balance infrastructure and environmental duties. She urged preserving trees for future generations and thanked the Commission.

Tom Bihl, a licensed landscape architect, questioned the project's long timeline, designed in 2016, with trees unevaluated for 13 years. The first arborist report, from October 2024, was hard to access. He called for transparency and case-by-case tree assessments, citing a tree at Monte Vista and Palm Avenue fixable by root shaving or curb adjustment. He noted wide parkways near Whittier Boulevard offer preservation flexibility, unlike Uptown's narrow ones, and urged individual evaluations.

Helen Rader, former Council member and eight-year Planning Commission veteran, thanked the Commissioners and shared the City's Tree Manual, a legally binding part of the Tree Protection Ordinance she helped draft 25 years ago. She criticized the packet's two-page excerpt, noting tree removal requires prior mitigation. Infrastructure is in place; this is now about saving healthy trees. She disputed claims of imminent risk, saying root severing isn't required, and cited the manual's curb and gutter rules,

urging mitigation before removal. She asked the Commission to walk the trees before deciding, as the manual and arborist confirm their health.

Veronica, a Whittier resident and mother, was shocked by photos of 1940s trees in fair condition being cut. She stressed shared duty to the urban forest, valuing seasonal beauty as a walker. As a mental health specialist, she noted trees' benefits for stress and anxiety. She criticized late resident involvement, urging improvements that enhance, not harm, Whittier's character and nature for community well-being.

Chair Sera asked if the applicant would like to make any final comments.

Secretary Montgomery-Scott, Interim Director of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services, representing the City, delivered his final remarks. He praised the City's Parkway Tree Manual as a comprehensive guide but noted it allows for tree removal when mitigation isn't feasible. After personally inspecting Palm Avenue with the Parks Manager, he described the trees as majestic but stressed that removing any, especially 85-year-old ones, is a serious decision. Addressing appellant's concerns, he noted that of over 150 trees along the one-mile stretch of Palm Avenue between Whittier and Beverly Boulevards, only 13 were identified for probable removal due to structural failure risks. An independent arborist's October assessment was validated by the City's follow-up, which identified three additional at-risk trees. The risk ratings, ranging from moderate to high, were acknowledged in the appeal and detailed in provided materials. He emphasized the 50+ years of expertise among the assessing arborists, whose priority is preservation but recognize when it's not possible.

Montgomery-Scott explained that these trees exist in a built environment where hardscape elements like sidewalks and streets were installed first, leading to inevitable conflicts as roots damage infrastructure. The trees also compete for water and sunlight, causing some to falter. He concluded that the 13 trees no longer fit safely within the space or infrastructure upgrades, noting that while most related construction is complete, work near these trees awaits resolution of the appeal due to safety concerns.

Chair Sera closed the public hearing. He asked if the Commission had any questions for staff or if they would like to discuss further.

Commissioner Mrla asked about the timeline of a project initiated 13 years ago, specifically when tree evaluations typically occur and how recent tree discoveries fit into the project's development. City Engineer Phil Wang explained that the project, involving concrete removal, asphalt replacement, and water/sewer upgrades, faced delays due to design changes. Tree evaluations occurred when the contractor began concrete work, identifying 13 trees for potential removal due to root conflicts.

Mrla inquired about when tree impacts are usually identified in such projects. Wang noted that impacts are typically assessed during the design phase, but these trees were flagged during construction due to unforeseen curb and gutter issues. This led to an October assessment by V&E Tree Service, confirming the trees' structural risks.

Commissioner Westrup asked if uneven road conditions were caused by tree roots. City Arborist Wayne McBurney clarified that this wasn't the case. Chair Sera asked about the project's progress, noting 90% completion. Wang explained that this refers to curb and gutter work, with over 30% of the street replacement still pending due to tree-related delays.

Commissioner Apodaca sought clarification on a staff report stating some parkway trees showed no decline. Secretary Montgomery-Scott confirmed this referred to trees not slated for removal, but stressed that even healthy-looking trees can be structurally compromised, citing examples of trees failing due to hidden decay despite appearing healthy.

Commissioner Givens noted that appellants agreed to remove 4 of 14 trees, contesting 10. Montgomery-Scott confirmed this and explained that root integration with hardscape makes removal necessary, as root pruning risks structural failure. Givens asked about city liability for falling trees; Montgomery-Scott affirmed the city's responsibility for parkway trees. McBurney added that alternatives like meandering curbs were considered but unfeasible due to the street's narrow 30-foot width and flow line changes requiring driveway realignment.

Mrla asked about the impact of not completing the remaining work. Wang explained that leaving the street as-is would result in open trenches, uplifted curbs, and an uneven road, failing to meet project objectives. Westrup asked about liability for accidents due to uneven streets; Montgomery-Scott noted the city could be liable. Givens asked if disrupted street flow could cause water accumulation; McBurney said yes.

It was motioned by Commissioner Apodaca, seconded by Commissioner Givens, and carried by roll call vote 5-0 to recommend to City Council to deny the ten appeals and uphold the staff's recommendation to remove the Pine Trees located on Palm Avenue between Beverly Boulevard and Whittier Boulevard. Motion passes. (Absent: Vice Chair Pacheco)

Mrla acknowledged the appellants' disappointment but stood by his vote, emphasizing the decision's complexity. Chair Sera noted the City's efforts to mitigate but prioritized public safety and infrastructure integrity, citing the need for full street reconstruction. He expressed hope for future preservation strategies but noted that state codes and design standards limit flexibility, requiring compliance for safety.

## **6. STAFF REPORTS**

There were no staff reports submitted.

## **6. SECRETARY'S COMMENTS**

Commissioner Services Manager Hamilton shared the following updates:

- Last Saturday, we hosted a highly successful Extravaganza Egg Hunt at Parnell Park, drawing an estimated 6,000–7,000 attendees. Leading up to the event, our Special Events Division launched a promotional “Golden Egg Hunt” across Whittier. Ten golden eggs, each containing a certificate for five wristbands and a gift basket sponsored by local businesses, were hidden in parks and landmarks. Clues were shared on social media, and community engagement was high, with some eggs found in under five minutes. On the day of the event, families redeemed their certificates and enjoyed the festivities, which included age-grouped egg hunts (expanded due to record attendance), giant Peeps displays, face painting, crafts, LEGO building, the library bookmobile, and a family fair with local sports affiliates. The event was held under perfect weather and received overwhelmingly positive feedback.
- Our spring swim lesson started this last Monday. We have three sessions going on and we're going to be using the pool at Whittier High School to conduct swim lessons.
- Summer camp registration opened this week and filled quickly, with most spots at Whittier Community Center and Palm Park already waitlisted. Camps begin June 9 and accommodate about 60 children each, offering field trips to destinations like Knott's Berry Farm and local beaches.
- Summer WYN Club, our free drop-in summer program for ages 7–13, opens this Monday at four park locations: Parnell, Palm, Anaconda, and Michigan Park.
- Additionally, registration for all other summer recreation classes begins Monday, May 5.

## 7. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Givens thanked residents for speaking on an issue they care deeply about. She expressed a heavy heart but emphasized that public safety weighed heavily in her decision. She acknowledged the need to prioritize trees earlier in project planning and shared concern that many residents may not realize the visual impact of the removals until it's too late. She praised the community engagement from the Golden Egg Hunt and noted the popularity of summer camp programs, raising concerns about limited east-side options due to Parnell Park's future closure. Staff clarified that Parnell will host summer WYN Club, not day camp.

Commissioner Apodaca thanked her colleagues and acknowledged the difficulty of the decision, expressing gratitude to serve in such an important process.

Commissioner Westrup thanked staff for their hard work, especially in managing complex projects. She acknowledged the emotional toll the issue has had on residents and emphasized the importance of safety and thoughtful decision-making.

Commissioner Mrla noted that tree appeals are a normal part of the Commission's duties and encouraged community participation. He emphasized that resident engagement, like that seen in the Golden Egg Hunt, is vital to city decision-making.

Chair Sera reflected on how standards and priorities have evolved since the project began in 2016. He stressed the need to adapt processes to reflect modern environmental values and incorporate more sustainable planning. Sharing a personal story about reforestation, he reiterated that tree removal should always be a last resort. He thanked staff for their exceptional efforts and encouraged expanding creative programs like the Golden Egg Hunt to boost community engagement.

## **8. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Approved and adopted by the Parks, Recreation and Community Service Commission on \_\_\_\_\_.

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Virginia Santana, Secretary



# Agenda Report

Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

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**Date:** July 16, 2025

**To:** Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission

**From:** David Montgomery-Scott, Interim Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services  
Erin Hamilton, Community Services Manager

**Subject:** Subcommittee Assignments

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Assign Sub-Committee members to the Concert selection committee, Youth Sports Affiliates, and the Whittier Beautification program.

## **BACKGROUND**

Traditionally, the Commission has selected subcommittee assignments at the start of the Fiscal Year, for the Summer Concerts in the Park, and the liaisons to the Youth Sports Affiliates committee. In 2022, a subcommittee was formed to assist with the new Whittier Beautification program, requiring the Commissioners to assist with the selection process.

## **DISCUSSION**

Commission members will discuss and nominate new members to sit on the subcommittees for the upcoming fiscal year.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

No Fiscal Impact

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING GOAL**

Goal 4: Transparent & Open Government

## **ATTACHMENTS**

A. Sub-Committee Assignments FY 2024-2025

**CITY OF WHITTIER  
PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSION  
SUBCOMMITTEES**

<b>Sub Committee</b>	<b>Commissioner 1</b>	<b>Commissioner 2</b>	<b>Alternate Commissioner</b>
Concerts in the Park	Apodaca	Westrup	
Youth Sports Affiliates	Pacheco	Hao	Sera
Whittier Beautification Program	Sera	Hao	Westrup