



Tuesday, May 5, 2026

Dear Whittier City Council,

My name is Brenda Ceja and I am the founder and current director of 562 Arts, a local 501(c)(3) non-profit organization leading free arts workshops for the Whittier community and surrounding Gateway Cities. I also am a former volunteer at Casa Verde LA, which was a small retail shop and community hub in Uptown Whittier. My time at Casa Verde LA showed me **the importance of physical, creative spaces as incubators for local connections to heal the loneliness epidemic in our country.**

I was born and raised in Unincorporated Whittier but have spent countless days and weekends walking up and down Greenleaf in beloved Uptown Whittier. From childhood hours spent reading in Half Off Books, to practicing my poetry as a young adult in front of an audience in Casa Verde LA, my heart breaks at the sight of the current vacant, somber, and bar-centric state of Uptown Whittier. This neighborhood is home to punks, thrifters, music-lovers, visual artists, and dancers who want a space to safely exist and create without having to buy alcoholic drink after drink.

This issue is especially crucial for young people under age 21. I ask you to ponder: if you had an 18-year old teenager, where would you expect them to socialize in Whittier in the evenings or weekends?

The lack of all-ages cultural arts and music spaces in the City of Whittier exacerbates the existing mental health, community development, and economic development issues in our City. Somehow we are proud of our high school marching bands, but don't give these trained musicians any space in the city to write their own music. In fact, Whittier Police and LA County Sheriffs are called for "noise complaints" of young people and teens playing music together in their families' backyards—**because they have nowhere else to play.**

I am proud of the recent election turnout that shows Whittier residents are ready for change and new leadership. As a non-profit professional supporting the personal development of young people ages 16-26 in Whittier through the arts, **I request that the City Council hold a Special Meeting to evaluate the development of a City-funded concert hall, community garden, or similar multipurpose community art studio in Uptown Whittier.** I also ask for increased investment in specialized outreach and paid surveying opportunities for teens, young adults, and creative entrepreneurs in Whittier to assess what is missing in the City, and how we can cultivate a more colorful and interconnected Whittier for this generation and generations to come.

Ideas and local references to consider:

1. South Gate Cultural Arts Division* (*since cut by the City's budget despite community outrage and public comment)
2. Commercial Vacancy Tax to Fund Cultural Arts Programming
 - a. Santa Monica recently approved a Commercial Vacancy Tax to add to City revenue and address the blight of vacant buildings ([Source](#))
3. Minneapolis Arts & Culture Vibrant Storefronts Program:

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Council Meeting: _____

Agenda Item No: _____



- a. “The Vibrant Storefronts Initiative is a city program that provides **rent subsidies for artists**, arts organizations and cultural-focused businesses. The program helps creative groups **lease vacant storefronts** spaces in downtown and other areas of Minneapolis. By lowering rent costs and connecting artists with property owners, the program activates empty spaces, supports the creative community and brings new energy and activity to key areas of the city.” ([Source](#))

Sincerely,
Brenda Ceja
562 Arts
Founder & President