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City of Santa Ana
Public Works Dept
20 Civic Center Plaza
Santa Ana CA 92701

Subject: Urgent Appeal to Protect the Ficus mysorensis Tree at the City of Santa Ana Library

Dear Public Works Department,

We are writing you as both concerned citizens of this city and as passionate advocates for the preservation of trees in our urban forest. We would like to request your immediate attention and intervention in safeguarding the magnificent and rare Ficus mysorensis located at the City of Santa Ana Library for what may not have been understood as a treasure in our midst. We heard there may be an effort to remove the tree because of an interest to expand this area into a parking lot. The age-old song by Joni Mitchell rings a sad truth and it would be a shame to realize this after the tree is gone.

My husband and I moved to this community 13 years ago because of the tree canopy and abundance of nature in the city. We both recently retired from the Disneyland Resort where we cared for over 16,000 trees for 25 years as the Urban Forester and Arborist Manager, so we know just how hard it is to protect trees within a concrete jungle. We thought we could provide some information that may help in reconsidering the design of the project to protect the tree in place.

Although the tree isn't currently accessible to city residents, the value the tree provides to this community is more than one can touch. This tree provides a feeling, a sense of place-making, in addition to the numerous eco-benefits that you all know. It's not just one tree, but it is part of a forest of trees within our community that shield our assets such as the library and downtown city center from the heat island. It also provides a highway in the sky to our bird population including the parrots that are beloved by many residents for their cultural significance.

Now although the Ficus mysorensis and Mexican parrots are not native to this area, not much is, in terms of trees. The history of Orange County was built on planting trees that would grow quickly and give our community a sense of identity, as well as a comfortable place to live and visit. As a result, our iconic landscape has become world renowned for the California lifestyle it is today. This Ficus mysorensis is a plant that someone carefully selected for this location as a specimen tree. At Disneyland, this species is so rare that only a couple exist amongst the Jungle Cruise attraction, in which Disney Legend and original landscape designer, Morgan "Bill" Evans introduced the species to diversify the Ficus population.

As the former Urban Forester, I can tell you that this species is considered a hero/legacy tree, not just because it may have been planted during the original build, but because of the rarity of the species, the size and legacy that it holds over a time where it has watched over such a place. The Disneyland Ficus mysorensis were likely not planted on day one in 1955 due to availability and instead were added later when the species was introduced into the area by Bill Evans through professional colleagues.

Although I cannot say for sure, I suspect that the *Ficus mysorensis* at the Santa Ana Library and the *Ficus mysorensis* at Disneyland may be linked. I suspect this may be the case based on how our communities grew at the same time and how the landscape professionals in the area looked to Disneyland as a place to get ideas for planting trees so communities could have their own Disneyland Forest to enjoy. I also suspect the availability of the species at that time was limited and may have come from the same source. If you were to look for this species today, it may only be found in the rarest of ever-dwindling specialty sub-tropical nurseries, if at all.

Now for the tough facts of working with trees amongst concrete. Although this tree is surrounded by pavement and should be suffering, the tree is incredibly healthy! The tree has an abundance of rooting space under the concrete away from the building where it has found a source for water and aeration. With some careful design, this tree can be worked around and even made a focal point by moving some of the concrete away for the prevention of trip hazards and the future health of the tree, along with designing seating locations that may have an extra protection against seasonal fig drop.

Disneyland has hundreds of *Ficus* that produce figs and although the figs dropping are an annoyance, the benefits the trees provide make the seasonal occurrence a manageable thing to work around just by adding umbrellas or awnings to the area. Imagine if Disneyland removed their large *Ficus* trees for this reason and how drastic the temperature and feel would change by doing this. By preserving mature trees that have taken 50 years to grow in the landscape, people can enjoy 20–45-degree cooler temperatures during peak times.

If more parking spaces are desired, there also may be some ways to do this all while still protecting the tree in place. A qualified consulting Arborist can help advise the design team on how to do this so all goals can be accomplished.

With all that said, we implore you to prioritize the preservation of this magnificent *Ficus mysorensis* tree, exploring all possible options to protect it from unnecessary harm. By doing so, you will demonstrate your commitment to environmental stewardship, maintain our city's unique character, and provide future generations with the opportunity to experience the beauty and benefits of this extraordinary tree.

Thank you for considering our appeal. We trust that the City of Santa Ana Public Works Department will act responsibly and diligently in making a decision that aligns with the best interests of our community and the preservation of our natural heritage. We are available if you require any further information or assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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