



Established 1971 To preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach

# October 2021 newsletter

## Hybrid

### City Council:

#### Safety Element Update?

Tuesday, October 19,  
after 5 p.m.

### Via Zoom

#### October General Meeting

Monday, October 25,  
7 p.m.

#### November Board Meeting

Saturday,  
November 6,  
9 a.m.

### October Meeting to Focus on the Brown Act and the Initiative

At our October 25 meeting we'll hear first from attorney and board member Kurt Wiese about the Brown Act and Village Laguna's role in the story of the Council's recent violation of it. Next, Gene Felder will talk about the initiative for voter approval of major commercial projects, the recent counterproposal submitted to the Council, and the staff analysis of fiscal and other impacts. Following the discussion, there will be a vote of members (paid-up as of September 25) on whether to endorse the initiative. The meeting, via Zoom, will begin at 7 p.m., and the link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83138064083?pwd=QWF6VzNLY-1UwdW0zK0VrbWlYNWtPZz09>.

### Summit Draws Lagunans to Discuss Preserving the Village

The September 27 community summit assembled some 50 Lagunans to talk about historic preservation, the environment, and overdevelopment. Several of the small-group discussions that followed the presentations by Cathy Jurca, Bob Borthwick, and David Raber focused on the current assault on the City's trees, especially as represented by the recent proposal for the reconstruction of the flood control channel at the Village Entrance and the Fire Department's defensible-space regulations. A number

of them mentioned the importance of getting good information about what's going on. The presentations were recorded and have been posted on the Village Laguna website ([villagelaguna.org](http://villagelaguna.org)), and eventually a summary of the discussions will also appear there.

### Defensible Space Regulations Adopted Despite Public Concerns

After two hearings in which public input featured accolades from members of the Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Committee and concerns from residents and landscape professionals about the ambiguity, subjectivity, and radical nature of the Fire Department's regulations for defensible space around homes in the very high fire hazard severity zone (most of our homes), the City Council adopted the program with a 3-2 vote (Iseman and Weiss opposed) on October 5. (Blake described the concerned speakers as merely "activists" and said that he "saw no reason to keep a couple of hundred tree people happy.") The only concessions were a year-end review of the results (probably not, however, including before-and-after photos, which the City Manager said would require authorization from the homeowners) and the possibility of amendment by resolution if the Fire Department has second thoughts.

## October's Historical Home Walk

For October's walk we'll continue in "Laguna Village." Much of the southern portion of Laguna Beach was originally known as Arch Beach, first subdivided in 1887 by William Brooks for use as farmland. In the late 1880s, the first attempt at establishing the area as a destination resort was made with the construction of the Arch Beach Hotel. While the success of this hotel was short-lived, it did ultimately give rise to the blossoming of Arch Beach into a beach house community. It was not until approximately 1915 and the attraction of Laguna Beach as an art colony that considerable construction took place there. Through the 1920s, Arch Beach saw the building of many summer cottages, artists' studio homes, and dream houses that established the character of future development in the neighborhood.

### 500 Oak (1939)

This Tudor-influenced home is remarkable for the way in which the house and garage are connected by a covered bridge straddling a gully. The house was designed and built by Carl Abel, a local woodworker and craftsman. Upon coming to Laguna from Denmark, he engaged in the skill he knew best, woodworking, in the field that was most lucrative at the time—house building.



### 554 Oak (1931)

This eclectic board-and-batten cottage is a pleasant marriage of brick, wood, and multipaned windows. Surrounded by trees and vines, it has a magical fairy-tale quality—the product of someone's creative architectural imagination.



### 571 Brooks (1938)

This Tudor-influenced bungalow is like many of the free-style designs that were originally built as vacation homes. J. W. Bowman of Victoria, British Columbia, made this his seasonal home during the 1940s. The house embodies the charm that contributes so much to the village quality of Laguna Beach.



### 1166 Gleneyre (1930)

This unusual commercial building is the only one in the Chateau style in Laguna. For many years a landmark in the downtown area, it first housed the dental office of Dr. Irv Watkins and later served as the home of the Barbara Weber studio. In 1974 it was moved and refurbished at this location.



### 315 Mountain (1939)

This finely crafted house was first owned by Durlin Brayton, artist and potter. Brayton established the first and leading pottery factory in Laguna during the 1920s, and his outstanding works were sold internationally. Known as Brayton's Laguna Pottery, the factory and showroom were on Coast Highway between Mountain Road and Calliope Street.

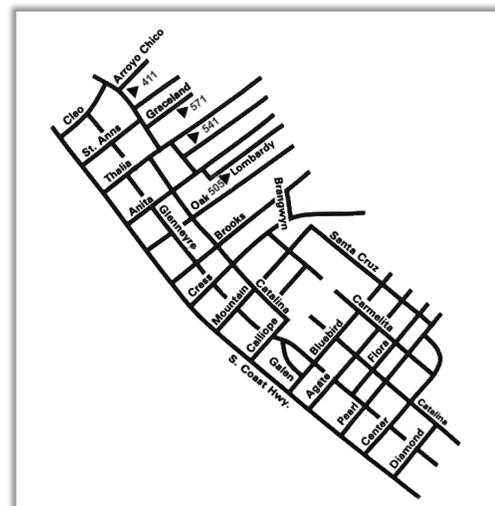


### 530 Mountain (1920)

This grandiose house was originally the home of Hollywood film star Polly Moran. As an American vaudeville comedienne, she was one of several who came to Laguna during the course of shooting a film and decided to live here. Her notable films are *Hollywood Review* (1929), *Alice in Wonderland* (1933), and *Adam's Rib* (1949).



*Drawings by Karen Wilson Turnbull*



## **Fifty Years of Village Laguna: Part 3, Advocacy for the Village**

In response to the Irvine Company's 1989 proposal to develop Laguna Canyon, Village Laguna cosponsored the Save Laguna Canyon Walk, supported the "Tell" (an assemblage of photographs by Mark Chamberlain drawing attention to the proposal), and gathered signatures for the bond measure that allowed the city to buy much of the canyon for preservation as open space. Later it contributed to the initial operating costs of the Laguna Canyon Foundation, established to raise funds for completing the purchase. It cosponsored the 1991 Toll Road Awareness Day, a demonstration in opposition to the toll road proposed to bisect our canyon that included covering a swath of land the width of the proposed roadway with bedsheets. It also raised funds for a legal challenge to the toll road EIR.

In the following years Village Laguna helped sell inscribed bricks for the improvement of Forest Avenue Alley, "adopted" 38 survivor families of the 1993 fire and raised \$4,000 for injured firefighters, opposed the proposed airport at El Toro, and gathered signatures for a successful Laguna Greenbelt initiative to protect 1,100 acres of publicly owned land as open space. It produced three issues of a local newspaper called the *Pelargonium* edited by Becky Jones. It produced a "Self-guided Tour Laguna by Bus" and, jointly with the City's Heritage Committee, a companion brochure identifying historic houses along the routes that was intended to boost ridership and celebrate Laguna's heritage.

When plans for a resort at Treasure Island surfaced in 1996, Village Laguna advocated for lower buildings, ample green space, no exemptions from city land-use standards, and priority for park over residences. With the South Laguna Civic Association, it mounted a referendum on the proposal that produced a 45 percent vote against it and then continued to monitor the planning in an effort to secure view corridors and more public space. (Public pressure is the reason that there are, for example, two view corridors across the property and picnic tables in the oceanfront park.)

Village Laguna was part of the 1995 task force on the Village Entrance and for the next nearly 25 years continued to promote maximizing green space and restoring the historic

sewage digester. Eventually members joined a campaign called "Let Laguna Vote" that eliminated the proposed parking structure. The ultimate design emerged from an informal committee on which Village Laguna members worked with members of the Beautification Council. (Unfortunately, the widely praised completed project is now threatened by the revival of the idea of a parking structure there.)

During these years Village Laguna, inspired by Jeannette Merrilees, helped to persuade the state to abandon its plans for a resort hotel at Crystal Cove. It also lobbied successfully for acceptance of a beach access easement at Smithcliffs, led a fund-raising campaign to restore the rocket-ship slide at Bluebird Park, and, with other environmental organizations, defeated a proposal to extend the golf course on Aliso Creek into the Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park. It raised \$4,000 for survivors of the Bluebird Canyon landslide and supported a temporary sales tax to pay for landslide repairs. It contributed \$1,650 to help residents displaced by the December 2010 flood. When the Athens Group announced its plans for development on Aliso Creek in 2007, Village Laguna held a workshop producing consensus that any development there should preserve local access and be appropriate in scale and density to the natural setting and then arranged for an informational open house on the property that drew some 800 participants. Later, commenting on the EIR for the proposal, it advocated consideration of an alternative excluding residential development, confining new construction to the existing footprint, and conforming to the General Plan. When the property changed hands and the new owner's coastal development permit for renovations was appealed to the Coastal Commission, Village Laguna wrote supporting his project (now The Ranch), pointing to its improvement of the existing facilities "in a rural/rustic manner in keeping with the character of the canyon and Laguna Beach" and the preservation of the low-cost public golf course.

In response to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' SUPER Project, a proposal to build 26 dams along Aliso Creek to protect the sewer pipes alongside it from erosion, in 2009 Village Laguna organized a bus tour in Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park to give participants some idea of how the park would be impacted by the project.



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### **News Briefs**

1–The updated Safety Element, tentatively scheduled for hearing October 19, changes “Encourage” to “Require” in the policy on defensible space and “wildland/urban interface” to “VHFHSZ.” In light of this, it’s the more regrettable that the Council chose not to take the time to get these regulations right.

2–The Historic Preservation Coalition’s CEQA lawsuit against the revised historic preservation ordinance has been postponed until after the Coastal Commission has heard an appeal of it. For the commission hearing (probably in November), public input will be important for explaining the negative effects of the proposed ordinance on the character of the City as a tourist attraction. Information about how to write the commission will be circulated when the time comes.

3–Despite the Laguna Canyon Task Force’s rejection of the idea and the assessment of the report on evacuation times that reversing traffic is too dangerous, the Council has allocated \$200,000 for a study of a reversible transit lane on Laguna Canyon Road. In a related action, it has committed to pursuing negotiations for the acquisition of the road from the state once funding for planned improvements has been identified.

4–The winners of the annual Bluebelt photo contest are available for viewing online at [lagunabluebelt.org](http://lagunabluebelt.org).

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