



February 2022 newsletter

Via Zoom

February General Meeting

Monday, February 28,
7 p.m.

March Board Meeting

Saturday, March 5,
9 a.m.

In Person

Arnold Hano Celebration of Life

Saturday, March 12,
2-4 p.m.

Neighborhood Congregational Church

Newport Greenlight Campaigner to Speak on Effort to Overturn SB9

Part-time Lagunan Susan Skinner, who describes herself as a doctor by profession and a political activist by avocation, will talk about the statewide initiative to overturn SB9, which eliminates local control over zoning for housing, at our February general meeting. She is a veteran of the successful Newport Beach initiative campaign to control development and wants to help protect Laguna from the intensification of development that has occurred there. Also on the program is a vote on the board's proposed budget for 2022. We'll gather (virtually) on Monday, February 28, at 7 p.m., and the link for the meeting is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81747078483?pwd=MXFNalowSEJseUNZTFVPCHVGYzM0QT09>.

Initiative by Laguna Residents First Qualifies for Adoption or Vote

The Orange County Registrar of Voters has announced that the Laguna Residents First initiative has qualified for the ballot, filing 2,659 signatures of which 2,001 were certified as valid. (The 10% threshold was 1,835 Laguna Beach registered voters.) The measure would require voter approval of developments within 750 feet of Coast Highway or Laguna Canyon Road that are defined as "major developments" in terms of lot size, square footage, traffic impacts, failure to meet

existing parking requirements, exceeding existing height limits, or contributing, with other recent developments, to a cumulative negative effect. The City Council will be asked on February 15 to decide whether to adopt the initiative as law, hold a special election, or consolidate an election with either the primary or the general election.

Coastal Commission Certifies City's Historical Preservation Ordinance

At a hearing on February 10, the Coastal Commission certified the City's revised historic preservation ordinance with minor modifications that do nothing to mitigate the disaster it represents for Laguna's village atmosphere. After 90 minutes of testimony, the vast majority of it opposed to the ordinance, the commissioners, after a few questions and very brief discussion, simply voted 8-2 for the staff's recommendations. The ordinance violates the California Environmental Quality Act by eliminating Laguna's historic resources inventory and making owner consent a condition for Laguna Beach historic register eligibility. According to Anne Caenn (quoted in *StuNews*, February 11), "Village Laguna and other concerned groups are already pursuing an important legal challenge against the city. Today's disappointing commission action will now need to be added to that case."

Housing Committee Members Discuss Prospects for Affordable Housing

At our January meeting, Alex Rounaghi and Laura Sauers, chair and vice chair of the city's Housing and Human Services Committee, talked with us about what the committee is doing toward the creation of actual affordable housing in Laguna Beach. Both of them stressed the erosion of our town's former economic diversity, saying that the social fabric is coming apart and that people who work here ought to be able to live here. The housing on city-owned sites that is the focus of the recent update of the Housing Element (none of which is in fact required to be built) would be expensive, complicated to create, and in the end not Laguna's style. For example, putting enough low-rent units to "pencil out" financially on the School District's property in Laguna Canyon is anticipated to require (1) building the district a replacement facility at ACT V and then (2) building a replacement for the lost parking spaces somewhere else, eventually moving more parking into the downtown and leaving the new residents isolated and densely concentrated in an industrial zone. The committee is exploring instead programs such as ADUs, legalization of illegal existing units, infill redevelopment on small lots throughout the city, and the establishment of a housing trust to raise money for and administer small projects that would integrate the new residents into the community. (One thing that a housing trust could do is accept donations of houses from people with no heirs.) A participant in the Q&A after the talks pointed out that the city's General Plan, which is essentially a blueprint for a community, appears to call for this sort of approach. We will be watching for opportunities to support the committee as it pursues its work plan for 2022.

[Meeting video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrf-nF7MEFk&list=PLri6aeyXHv5U7nwqOOKDqyvZnTx-8PoRPo&index=1&t=14s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrf-nF7MEFk&list=PLri6aeyXHv5U7nwqOOKDqyvZnTx-8PoRPo&index=1&t=14s)

Proposed Change in Procedure for Adding to Council Agenda Rejected

Apparently in connection with recent difficulties the two Councilmembers in the minority have had with getting their issues onto the Council agenda, last month the City Manager proposed a modification of the procedure for doing that. For some years, when a Councilmember asked to have an item included on the agenda for consideration, it was, at which point the Council would decide whether to schedule the item for full consideration at a later meeting. The City Manager's proposal would have changed two

things: giving her 45 days in which to place the item on an agenda and limiting Councilmembers to four agenda items a year. The public input was loud and clear; twenty-five people spoke, all of them against the idea and many of them citing the rights of the minority and the perception that the people aren't being heard. The vote was 4-1 (Blake opposed) to make no changes.

Eight Historic-Home Owners Sign This Year's Mills Act Contracts

While the City is dismantling its historic preservation program, some Laguna property owners continue to pursue the benefits of preservation provided by the state's Mills Act. Owners commit to a ten-year maintenance plan in return for reduction of property tax, and as a result we all benefit from the continued existence of these structures in our neighborhoods. The annual list of approvals by the City Council of agreements under the law includes eight additional properties: 31637 Second Avenue, 854 Wendt Terrace, 139 Moss Street, 360 Aster Street, 357 South Coast Highway, 154 Pearl Street, 250 High Drive, and 1476 Santa Cruz Street. The City's historic preservation ordinance, just certified by the Coastal Commission, will destroy the historical record that alerts owners to the possibility of qualifying for these benefits.

Hotel Laguna Concept Review Judged "Needlessly Vague"

A concept review hearing by the Planning Commission in early December of the plans for the historic restoration of the Hotel Laguna shed very little light on what is intended. Commissioners were critical of the lack of historical documentation for the proposed changes and those already made. One of them described the presentation as "needlessly vague" and another said that it provided "nothing to review." Another pointed out that the comprehensive review required months ago by the city had still not been produced. The proposed roof sign that appears on some old postcards, defended by staff as iconic and approvable, was shown by a member of the public to be absent from 1930s photos and considered by one commissioner to "compromise the integrity of the building." Also controversial was the naming of the former event space on the oceanfront (which now has upgraded food service facilities and glass doors opening onto a deck on the beach but is reportedly **not** to become a restaurant accessible to the public), the "Marine Room" when the city already has one.

Hikes in Fees for City Services Postponed for Further Study

A recent study of the cost of city services that proposed a dramatic increase in fees has been discussed at length and by the Council and returned to staff for further work. Arguing that Proposition 13 proved that the people of California want government to operate like a business, the consultants advocated 100% recovery of costs for what they called "personal-choice services," recommending, for example, the following increases: design review, from \$1,884 to \$4,075; coastal development permit, from \$664 to \$1,484; and City Council appeal, from \$748 to \$5,707. Village Laguna argued that these services were required by the General Plan and benefited all of us by helping to maintain property values and the enjoyment of our neighborhoods and our views. It also pointed out that the survey was based on interviews rather than on time logs and that no consideration was given to the possible effects of improving service. Councilmembers, some of them mentioning the correspondence they had received on the subject, rejected the idea of total recovery of costs and

variously recommended limited increases focused on major projects, increasing efficiency, and seeking public input before any increases are made. No vote was taken.

Save the Date for Arnold Hano Celebration of Life

A celebration of life for Arnold Hano will be held on Saturday, March 12, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Neighborhood Congregational Church.

Time to Renew Your Membership!

Some of you have yet to renew your membership for 2022. This year more than ever, it's important for everyone to be on board and informed. If you haven't yet got around to re-upping, you'll find a reminder in this newsletter and an envelope to put your check in. (If you usually read the newsletter online, we're sending you a paper version just this once to be able to include an envelope for your reply.) Please stay with us by resubscribing today!

Renew your membership

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____ **Email** _____

I have enclosed my check for the following membership. I understand the amount is not tax-deductible.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainer \$250/family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basic \$40/individual, \$60/family | <input type="checkbox"/> Preservationist \$500/family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter \$150/family | <input type="checkbox"/> Villager Extraordinaire (\$1,000+)* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Please send the newsletter by email | * Includes two Charm House
Tour tickets |

Contact Treasurer Mary Ives at mives@gmail.com to arrange for automatic monthly/quarterly payments.

Mail to: Village Laguna PO Box 1309 Laguna Beach CA 92652



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FIRST CLASS MAIL

Downtown Specific Plan Update Proceeds to Second Reading

The City's revised Downtown Specific Plan, including relaxed parking requirements and a provision that will allow adjustment of permit requirements by resolution of the Council, was approved by the Coastal Commission in November provided that it be modified. Among other things, the commission wanted clarification that the adjustment of permit requirements did not apply to coastal development permits (where structural changes to the building are involved) and that adaptive reuse of parking spaces for partial street closures and parklets when the 85% target occupancy requirement has been met must be limited and temporary. The Council passed the plan to a second reading 3-2 (with Toni Iseman and George Weiss dissenting) and will hear it one last time on February 15. Village Laguna has objected to the relaxation of parking requirements, the omission of any reference to the Landscape and Scenic Highways Element (which contains detailed proposals for downtown streets), the deletion of a long list of historic structures in the downtown, and the inclusion of a description of the Village Entrance as if it were unfinished.

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