



January 2023 newsletter

January Meeting to Feature Alex Rounaghi

The seating of Alex Rounaghi and Mark Orgill on the City Council in December has already raised the level of discourse and lowered the emotional temperature in the Council Chambers.

At our January meeting, we'll meet Alex and learn a bit more about the way he sees the future of the city. We'll gather via Zoom on Monday, January 23, at 7 p.m. The link for the meeting is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85322450198?pwd=VWhCK2g4MVFiZitCbHIUNXYzS3J6Zz09>.

Village Laguna Weighs In on Parking Management Report

A preliminary report of the City Council subcommittee (Kempf and Whalen) on proposals for parking management was met with some concern by the Council and the public at its meeting on January 10. Village Laguna was there to recommend avoiding construction of parking structures and concentrating on (1) robust shuttle services from peripheral parking to the downtown, (2) the development of public-private partnerships for parking on private property, (3) requiring downtown businesses to have their

employees park in peripheral areas (allowing them to clock in when they board the shuttle to town), (4) restoring the parking displaced by parklets, and (5) stopping converting parking spaces in the downtown to pedestrian uses. Other speakers stressed non-car modes of transportation and, with VL, pointed out the difficulties with some of the sites proposed for 20 low-capacity parking lots and structures, including one that would be built under Lang Park, another under the Lawn Bowling Club's field in Heisler Park, and a third on the site of the future restored wetland inland from Aliso Beach. George Weiss argued that the more parking we supply, the more cars will come to fill it. Mark Orgill was struck by the impact that all the additional concrete would have on the character of the city and asked whether we shouldn't focus on a great experience rather than on accommodating as many cars as possible. Sue Kempf said that she didn't buy the "they will come" argument—"They're already here!"—and said that people want the Council to provide more parking. Alex Rounaghi focused on maximizing the use of the private lots in the downtown. In the end, they voted unanimously to fund additional study of funding and implementation issues and a priority list of infrastructure sites as part of the final report.

Via Zoom

January General Meeting
Monday, January 23, 7 p.m.

February Board Meeting
Saturday, February 4, 9 a.m.

Village Laguna Supports Appeal of Staff Decision on Historic House

At the City Council's first meeting of the year, Village Laguna joined the Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Coalition in an appeal of the approval of changes that will destroy the historic significance of a charming 1929 house at 1902 Ocean Way. The house's listing in the city's historic inventory as "a fantastic example of 1930's Normandy Revival architecture" makes it a historic resource that requires consideration under CEQA. The Council, eager to satisfy a very vocal group that opposes preservation, has declared the inventory invalid because of the failure to update it regularly, and staff is now ignoring the inventory altogether in the processing of design review applications. The Coalition pointed out that, to the contrary, the inventory was adopted by resolution and therefore remains a register of historic resources. Its testimony to this effect fell on deaf ears, however, and, except for Weiss, councilmembers accepted staff's assertion that the house isn't historic and denied the appeal. On the plus side, there was some discomfort among Council members (except for Kempf) about the process. Staff says that a planner knowledgeable about preservation is being hired, but we have heard that before. The coalition's suit challenging the ordinance that created this situation is, after two years, still pending but may eventually resolve the issue.

For the Record: Village Laguna Clarifies the Lawsuit Situation

In a letter to the Laguna Beach Independent published November 12, 2022, Village Laguna has written to clarify the situation with regard to the Kirby lawsuit as follows:

"Village Laguna has nothing to do with the lawsuit regarding the project at 369 Hawthorne (Kirby), nor has it ever been involved in that lawsuit. Despite repeated corrections, supporters of the Kirbys have continued to promote the idea that Village Laguna is involved in that lawsuit.

The Historic Architecture Alliance (HAA) and Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Coalition (LBHPC) filed suit against the City to require preparation of an

Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Kirby project. If the City or the Kirbys had agreed to prepare the EIR, to analyze historic resource impacts only, the suit would be over. Instead of preparing the required analysis, a strategy to discredit Village Laguna has been launched, even though Village Laguna is not and has never been a party to this lawsuit. Unfortunately, this strategy has prolonged the process of resolving the case and continues to delay the Kirbys' ability to proceed with the work on the property.

"This fabrication is obviously intended to discredit Village Laguna, an organization that has for more than fifty years worked to ensure that development in Laguna Beach is appropriate to the character and scale of our unique community. Developers and some residents want big changes, and they may think by hitching their cause to the plight of the Kirbys they will fool voters into thinking that Measure Q or residents' concerns about maintaining quality development have something to do with the Kirby project. They do not.

"Village Laguna is participating in a completely different action against the California Coastal Commission and the City of Laguna Beach for changes to the Downtown Specific Plan and Historic Preservation Ordinance, which removed protections for hundreds of historic resources in Laguna Beach and changed invaluable parking incentives for historic properties downtown without studying the environmental impacts of these changes. None of this has anything to do with the Kirby project."

Planning Commission Calls for Hotel Laguna Master Plan

On January 4, the Laguna Beach Company went to the Planning Commission with an application for approval of exterior paint colors and replacement windows and received a polite "no" in response. The Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Coalition and Village Laguna urged the commissioners to require a comprehensive review of all the proposed work on the hotel and especially to reject the wholly inappropriate window treatment. The commissioners decided to do both of these things and went on to establish that the early photographs of the hotel as originally constructed (in the 1930s) were to be used as the models. The hearing was continued to March 1.

Preservation Contracts Signed for Six More Historic Houses

At the same time as staff is neglecting the historic character of Laguna homes, the Council has approved another annual batch of Mills Act contracts (agreements with owners of historic properties to maintain them in exchange for sometimes substantial reductions of their property taxes). The historic properties involved are 375 Flora St., 1086 Glenneyre St., 416 Holly St., 427–435 N. Coast Highway, 2949 S. Coast Highway, and 2767 Victoria Drive.

Council Tables Modification of Permits for Restaurants Downtown

In what may be the first application of a particular new provision of the recently revised Downtown Specific Plan, the City Council has discussed the issues and then declined to act. The plan, in response to concerns about

perceived overregulation, had reduced the number of uses that require a conditional use permit, with the proviso that the Council could modify this decision by resolution if problems arose. With the close scrutiny being given to parking since the plan's adoption, the Council decided last summer to restore the CUP requirement for one of those newly freed uses—restaurants without alcohol service—to allow evaluation of proposals' parking impacts, and on January 10 the ordinance was ready for consideration.

The handful of speakers on the item was split between those who remembered the history, who favored it, and those who saw it as “adding an [unwelcome] extra layer of control.” Councilmembers Weiss and Orgill recognized the importance of fine-tuning of the new DSP to respond to emerging conditions (in particular the reduction of parking downtown), but in the end Rounaghi's suggestion that the item be tabled pending the completion of the parking management plan prevailed (with only Weiss opposed).

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