



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

March 2023 newsletter

Mark Orgill Talks about Laguna's Core Values

At our February 27 meeting, our new councilmember Mark Orgill, a 38-year resident of Laguna Beach who seems to remember how it used to be, listed his top priorities as bringing the community back to City Hall, updating the Open Space Element of the General Plan (including mapping the significant natural watercourses that have long been omitted), and developing a tourist management plan that suits residents. As the council liaison to the Heritage Committee, he said he was heartened by the addition that evening of three houses to the city's historic register. It's his impression that the community has lost its sense of the value of its historic character, and he would like to see that change. He supports parking management rather than parking structures and complete renovation and reuse of the digester tower.

Council Adopts Priorities for 2023

On February 21 the City Council adopted the 2023 priorities that emerged from its recent strategic

planning workshop. Among the 40 projects are new regulations for major remodels and for blufftop development; evaluation of long-term options for outdoor dining, including the Promenade; development of a senior/affordable housing program; establishment of a mobile mental health unit; rezoning of Prop. 12-purchased parcels as open space; and approval of the Downtown Action Plan (the one that will replace the trees in the downtown). Still on the list but unfunded are an update of the Open Space and Conservation Element of the General Plan, adoption of the second phase of the Downtown Specific Plan (the one that would allow more housing downtown), finalization of the parking master plan, and renovation of Main Beach Park. On hold indefinitely are a new community pool, art-in-public-places for the Village Entrance, and repaving Forest Alley. The Community Choice Energy Potential analysis has concluded that there are no viable options for the City Council to consider. The long-postponed work on renovating the digester tower will be discussed in the budget hearings in May.

Hybrid

City Council (tentative)

Changes to Village Entrance
Landscaping

Tuesday, March 21, after 5 p.m.

In Person

Final Promenade Workshop

Susi Q Center

Thursday, March 23, 6:30 p.m.

Via Zoom

April Board Meeting

Saturday, April 1, 9 a.m.

“Open Season” on Historic Structures?

City staff, enthusiastically enforcing the new ordinance that considers a house historic only if its owner says it is, seems to be going out of its way to discourage any mention of historicity in the design review process. In one of these cases, at 434 Aster St., the applicant, who had been making a serious effort to preserve at least the distinctive façade of his historic house, said that staff had encouraged him to “design the kind of house he really wanted,” and eventually he had decided to do that. In another case, at 1902 Ocean Way, approval of a complete change in the appearance of a historic house was acquired over the counter and followed by approval at a regular design review hearing of the removal of an original stone wall in the front yard. (This procedure is known as “piecemealing,” and because it limits the board’s information on a project there are rules against it.) This house had only months before been described in a real estate ad as “an incredible Norman Revival Tudor-style home” with “only two owners since built,” “meticulously renovated and maintained. . . . beyond charming.” Both houses were on the historic inventory (which the City wrongly insists on calling “invalid,” and in both cases staff rejected clear evidence of their historic character. Both projects are headed for Council hearings. We look forward to the eventual hearing of our lawsuit challenging the new ordinance, which should make it clear that this is no way to preserve historic resources.

Code Changes Expected to Increase Development on Bluffs

Changes in the zoning code with regard to building on coastal bluffs were welcomed by the board of realtors, a property-rights organization, and a local architect but met with concern by others for the vagueness and the

complexity of the information we were provided. Pointing to the results of a study showing that Laguna’s coastline is largely erosion-resistant (with erosion recorded at less than .2 feet per year), staff proposed applying a “bluff overlay district” to determine setbacks on a case-by-case basis instead of using the standard 25-foot blufftop setback on lots in low-erosion zones. To their credit, Councilmembers asked a lot of questions, apparently recognizing the growth-inducing implications of the system, and even wondered if an initial study under CEQA was called for (without, in the end, requiring one). The overlay, along with a new set of criteria for a major remodel, was passed to a second reading on a 4–1 vote (Weiss dissenting). The proposed use as a baseline for measuring cumulative enlargement not the actual age of the house but either the year of the adoption of the Local Coastal Plan, 1993, or, for properties with sea walls, the date of the passage of the Coastal Act, 1977—is also expected to be growth-inducing.

Final Promenade Workshop Scheduled for March 23

The second (and last) workshop of the planning process for the permanent Promenade on Forest Avenue will be held on Thursday, March 23, at 6:30 p.m. at the Susi Q Center. The public is being invited to review and comment on the conceptual plans prepared by the design consultant since the earlier workshop in the fall. The objective of the process, according to staff, is “to preserve and enhance the unique character of downtown Laguna Beach, transforming the temporary Promenade into a strong City center and . . . an iconic destination that meets the needs and desires of residents, employees, and visitors.” Whether the data provided by the first workshop, which was widely regarded as disappointingly superficial, will prove a sufficient basis for serious decisions remains to be seen.



Renew Your Membership?

If your mailing label still says “1/2023” or earlier, please consider writing us a check and rejoining us for the rest of the year.

Is Our Open Space Safe for Kids in Sourgrass Season?

The week of February 13, South Laguna residents were alarmed to observe the widespread application of a blue herbicide to the entire hillside of the Valido Trail and to large areas behind the hospital and elsewhere. One dad reported that his daughter had been chewing on sourgrass in the area just the day before. A meeting with the Fire Department, city officials, and the Laguna Canyon Foundation (which is implementing the South Laguna Fuel Modification Project) revealed that the herbicide was Roundup (glyphosate), that it was part of the fuel modification project, and that the City planned to continue applying it at that scale. The documents for the project specify, however, that the herbicide will be used “for spot treatment of invasive species” and not “on a landscape scale to defoliate large expanses of vegetation.” Discussion at the Council meeting of February 21 led to a Council decision to look into the matter, and meanwhile South Laguna neighbors are assembling detailed scientific information on the hazards of this herbicide, which the World Health

Organization has classified as probably carcinogenic to humans, is banned or restricted in more than 20 countries, and cannot be used on public lands in Los Angeles County, Irvine, and Malibu.

City Enters into Agreement to Start on Trail from Wilderness Park to Ocean

The City has just signed a memorandum of understanding with the Laguna Canyon Foundation and the Coastal Commission to pursue the permitting and construction of a trail linking the Aliso Woods Canyon Wilderness Park and the ocean. The trail project was part of the Commission’s approval of the development of the Ranch at Laguna Beach in 2015 and included, instead of an easement across the golf course (which was generally recognized as inappropriate), the setting aside by the property owner of \$250,000 toward the construction of a trail and some “floating easements” that might accommodate such a trail somewhere else on the property. The Foundation is being awarded \$30,000 of the money to conduct a feasibility study of several options.

Renew your membership

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____ **Email** _____

(please send me my newsletter by regular mail_____by e-mail_____)

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+) |

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FIRST CLASS MAIL



Arbor Day in Laguna Beach: Darrylin, Johanna, and Janet at the Village Laguna table, March 9.

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