

Mansionization: Project at 1001 San Jose Street

Village Laguna's Letter to the Design Review Board, August 8, 2015:

The Board of Directors of Village Laguna supports your efforts to guide new projects to respect the character of the Laguna Beach neighborhoods. An important part of this goal is controlling the size of new structures to both protect views and to keep development in scale with its environmental setting.

The existing house at 1001 San Jose Street is already large for the neighborhood and enjoys unobstructed hillside and ocean views across open space. The project to replace it is even larger and increases its own views at its neighbors' expense. The many windows and the extensive outdoor lighting are likely to encroach onto the adjacent open space with inappropriate light and glare. The required fuel modification and the addition of hardscape and fencing for the pool are inconsistent with the site's environmental setting.

Our city is distinctive for its natural hillsides, and the Open Space Element of the General Plan reminds us to avoid diminishing their scenic value with manmade intrusions. The Land Use Element (Policy 5.2) asks us to ensure that development's impact on natural resources is adequately evaluated and that any mitigation be located on-site, rather than off-site.

Increasingly we're seeing that our hillsides, rather than being respected, are treated as big vacant lots next to which mansions can be built even more intensely than if they were surrounded by other homes. We hope that you'll hold the line on this trend and ask the applicant to bring back a proposal that's site-sensitive, neighborhood-compatible, and doesn't block views.

Sincerely, Johanna Felder, President, Village Laguna