



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

October

2017 newsletter

The "SUPER Project" Returns: Long-Dormant Plan for Aliso Creek Channelization Gets Environmental Review

The Army Corps of Engineers' proposal for getting control of Aliso Creek and protecting the sewer pipes that run alongside it in the Wilderness Park is back on the County's agenda. A 500-plus-page environmental impact report is being circulated this month, with a deadline for comments of Nov-

ember 13 (<http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Projects-Studies/Aliso-Creek-Study/>). A public hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, October 17, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Laguna Hills Community Center, 25555 Alicia Parkway, Laguna Hills.

Village Laguna has been opposing versions of this proposal for about a dozen years. What's involved is grading Aliso Canyon from Alicia Parkway to the coastal sewage treatment plant; raising the creek bed 7–21 feet and recontouring the slopes; introducing "sinuosity" to the channel: disciplining the flow with 46 dams (now called "riffles") built of riprap, some of it grouted; and then replanting the whole area with native vegetation, at which point the displaced wildlife, including several threatened or endangered species, will ideally return. The work will produce 300,000 cubic



yards of excess excavated material to be disposed of on the canyon slopes.

The work is to be divided into four stages beginning in consecutive years. Since the project was first proposed the cost has, of course, more than doubled (from \$45 million to \$96 million) and the County's share of it has tripled (from \$11 million to \$33 million). An alternative approach proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that would raise the creek bed while preserving the existing riparian vegetation in place is briefly described in the report but considered "probably not cost-effective."

Derek Ostensen of the Laguna Canyon Foundation has been monitoring the development of the plan and is prepared to share what he knows with us at our October meeting. We'll gather at 7 p.m. on Monday, October 23, at the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship, 429 Cypress Drive.

October General Meeting
Monday, October 23, 7 p.m.
Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship
429 Cypress Drive

November Board Meeting
Saturday, November 4, 9 a.m.
Home of Kate Clark

Local Businesspeople Share Ideas on the Downtown Specific Plan Update



Back in 1989, Laguna's downtown was beginning to lose resident-serving businesses to competition from neighboring malls, and people worried that ice cream and T-shirts might soon be all you could buy there. The Downtown Specific Plan was developed to protect the town's special character by giving the City some control over the mix of stores. It identified zones on the basis of the kinds of businesses that prevailed in them ("resident-serving" on Ocean, "downtown commercial" on Forest and Broadway, "office" on Second, Third, Mermaid, and Glenneyre, "visitor-serving" on the Coast Highway) and listed for each zone the businesses that would be permitted outright and those that would be allowed with a conditional use permit. Most types of businesses required a permit, and the approval process gave the Planning Commission a chance to maintain an appropriate mix of resident- and visitor-serving businesses and to favor businesses that were distinctive, attractive, and, in general, independently conceived and owned.

The plan seems to have worked rather well over the years (despite the loss of resident-serving businesses, downtown Laguna is still unlike anyplace else), but nationwide changes in retail habits have made it increasingly difficult for businesses to survive there. As the downtown businesspeople who spoke at our September meeting explained, brick-and-mortar stores are in trouble all over the country because of a huge increase in online shopping, a shift from buying things to spending on "experiences" such as meals and entertainment, and a rise in rents. Retailers David Rubel and Kavita Reddy, realtor Bob Chapman, property owner Kent Russell, and former planning commissioner Norm Grossman argued

that stores that are designed to complement online sales don't need a large inventory and can do better in smaller and therefore cheaper spaces. Getting customers to stay in stores longer may require offering coffee or perhaps a class. Under the current plan, doubling up in existing spaces is hampered by the requirement for each business to provide its own parking, and rigorous avoidance of saturation with regard to particular types of stores has drastically reduced the possibilities for new arrivals.

The Planning Commission is working through the suggestions of the City's consultant for revision of the plan in response to this changing picture, and a subcommittee including Village Laguna members and the downtown businesspeople just mentioned is meeting regularly to contribute ideas to the planning process.

Elizabeth Toomey Joins VL Board

Elizabeth Toomey has joined our board of directors to fill Roberta Kansteiner's unexpired term. Liz is a 22-year resident of Laguna Beach, first in Temple Hills and then moving to Pearl Street with her wife Carolyn and their two dogs, Max and Lola. She retired five years ago from UC Irvine after serving 25 years as its government and community relations officer. She was happy to agree to join our board when she discovered that our Village Laguna mission coincided with her own concerns, notably historical preservation and the current Downtown Specific Plan revision. She seeks long-term positive and productive solutions to issues such as parking and traffic and the ideal of rehabilitating structures without impinging on the neighborhoods' peace. In addition to her political interests, she finds time to do other things she enjoys: spending time with their children and grandchildren on both coasts, traveling, and reading. Please welcome her at our next meeting!

Two Short-Term Lodging Applications in R-1 Zone Denied on Appeal

While waiting for Coastal Commission certification of the City's new short-term lodging ordinance, which would prohibit short-term lodging in residential zones, staff is continuing to process applications under the old one. An administrative use permit for short-term lodging is granted or denied after a noticed hearing before the director of community development, and his decision is appealable to the City Council. Two recent such denials were appealed to the Council on September 12. Both of them would have required variances for substandard lot size

(less than 6,000 square feet), and one of them was also deficient in parking and street width. Councilmembers were unable to find justification for the variances and denied both applications.

Planning Commissioners Unanimous in Opposition to Coast Inn Project

The proposal for the redevelopment of the Coast Inn returned for a third hearing before the Planning Commission on October 4 and was resoundingly rejected. After hearing another two-plus hours of public testimony mostly opposed to the project, planning commissioners listed all the things they found problematic about it (citing all the issues raised by the public and some others) and voted to recommend denial by the City Council. All but one of them rejected the rooftop deck that had been of particular concern to Village Laguna, which would have violated the Secretary of the Interior's standards for rehabilitation of historic structures and required a variance from the City's 36-foot height limit. The combination of extreme intensification and the failure to provide more than "virtual" parking (through grandfathering and historic preservation credits) for the many new elements was generally seen as key. Neighbors pointed to parking, traffic, noise, trash pickup, and view impacts, and several commissioners raised issues about the proposal for rehabilitation of the hotel.

Anne Johnson reminded her fellow commissioners that the original "C" rating for the building was based not on its historic architecture but on its somewhat more recent association with the City's gay community. Susan Whitin described the rating of the building as a "moving target" and worried that the upgrading to "E" for the building envisioned was not based on a rigorous comparison of historic elements. Roger McErlane argued that the postcards and renderings offered as representing

the building's 1930s appearance were inconsistent among themselves and with the plans. Ken Sadler identified as "a stake through the heart of the project" the fact that if, during construction, the percentage of demolition goes beyond the current estimate of 49% (as is likely and has happened more than once with historic projects) and the project therefore becomes "new construction," all of the virtual parking on which it depends will go away.

Because the City Council must vote on the parking credits requested, it will go directly to the Council at once rather than awaiting a possible appeal by the applicant.

More on Our Downtown in the 1960s

Ann Christoph has sent us another news flash from the past (*South Coast News*, October 11, 1960): "Laguna's downtown parking ordinance—which requires developers to provide off-street parking facilities—is stifling development in the opinion of City Councilman Harold Ellerby." Pat McGill had approached the Planning Commission for a variance to allow the building of a professional office building with underground parking on Cleo, in the ravine across from the All American Market (now Ralph's), which was zoned residential. Arguing his case before the City Council, McGill said that land in the downtown was too expensive because of the parking requirement. "City Planning Director Robert Lawrence, speaking for the Planning Commission, insisted that the City has ample commercial building sites in areas already zoned for that use and 'they should be used.'" McGill agreed that there were properties available in the downtown area but said that the cost of land and the cost of providing off-street parking as required by the City would raise rental prices "beyond the ability of tenants to pay." Judging from what's on the site today, he apparently didn't get his variance.

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):

- Basic - \$40/individual, \$60/family
- Supporter - \$150/family
- Sustainer - \$250/family (includes 2 Charm House Tour tickets)
- Please send me my newsletter electronically instead of by mail.

Contact Treasurer Richard Picheny at 295-0545 or rpicheny@gmail.com to arrange for automatic monthly or quarterly payments.

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



P.O. Box 1309

Laguna Beach, CA 92652

FIRST CLASS MAIL

My Favorite Local Business

by Scott Borthwick

Whenever I need to get a court form notarized or make copies of a report or get an exhibit printed up and bound, I go to Mehdi's Copy and Print Center (240 Beach Street). I'm always greeted



with a warm, friendly smile (see photo, with Oliver Borthwick). It seems like Mehdi's always in good spirits. Occasionally there will be another customer in there who is a little cranky or frustrated with some City Hall red tape/requirement, and I've watched Mehdi handle these situations with grace. I've often thought that I could really learn something from him when it comes to dealing with people. Sure, you might be able to save 4 cents a copy by driving to Kinko's in Fashion Island, but you'd be missing out on supporting a local business that will leave you walking out of there in a better mood than you had had walking in. You can't put a price on that.

2017 Board of Directors

Johanna Felder, President
Verna Rollinger, Vice President
Kate Clark, Recording Secretary
Barbara Metzger, Corresponding Secretary
Richard Picheny, Treasurer
Ginger Osborne, Immediate Past President
Scott Borthwick
Rosemary Boyd
Ann Christoph
Jackie Gallagher
Darrylin Girvin
Bonnie Hano
Mary Ives
Gary LeFebvre
Jahn Levitt
Charlotte Masarik
Liz Toomey

Web site: www.villagelaguna.org

Phone: (949) 472-7503