



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

# October 2023 newsletter

## Via Zoom

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

### **Hospital Administrator Reports to Council on Planning Process**

At the request of Bob Whalen, who is the City Council's liaison to the hospital and has been pressed by community members for information about its plans, Seth Teigen of Mission Hospital Laguna Beach appeared at the October 10 Council meeting (as a "Presentation," no Council or public discussion) and spoke briefly about what he called "the future of health care in South Orange County." When in the end he had made no mention of the persistent reports from the hospital community that it's going to close, Bob asked him about them and received a response simply minimizing the reports as "just rumors." Teigen explained the closure of the lab in terms of staffing problems and said that he would return to the Council in January if there were changes to be reported.

### **Holiday Party Set for December 18**

We'll skip the general meeting and newsletter for November and look

forward to the holiday party and election at the Congregational Church on December 18. Save the date!

### **Interim City Manager to Speak October 23**

Sean Joyce, who retired as Irvine city manager in February 2018 and has since served as interim city manager in Huntington Beach, San Clemente, and South Pasadena, will join us for our next general meeting. He will serve as city manager in Laguna Beach for some months while the City undertakes a nationwide search to fill the position permanently. One innovation since his arrival is the addition to the City's homepage of a button marked "THE WEEK THAT WAS" that provides access to his regular reports to the Council on city business. (Visit it, for example, to find out what's being planted in the Laguna Canyon Road median or how to get access to archived minutes of old Council meetings.) We'll gather via Zoom at 7 p.m. on Monday, October 23. The link is <https://us02w.zoom.us/j/81924989195?pwd=OXVXekVEWVZHV09iTHZib25ZUH01QT09>.

## ADU Discussion Sparks Lively Discussion with Wiener, Dixon

The state legislature’s continuing efforts to preempt local decision making on housing are beginning to have visible effects on the fabric of the city. A recent modification whereby an addition attached to the existing house can be as tall as the existing without any review is causing distress in a neighborhood in North Laguna (where the by-right addition will block views that the design review board attempted without success to preserve). A further modification that will go into effect in 2025 will extend the by-right permission for construction of ADUs to short-term rentals (now prohibited by Laguna’s ordinance).

At our September general meeting, Community Development Director Marc Wiener reported that so far this year the city has processed 159 applications and granted 92 permits and estimated that 300–400 applications have been received since the program began. While the early applications caused few problems, he said, it is becoming apparent that the purpose of much of the activity is to increase living space for the applicants. The housing committee is studying the uses of the ADUs approved so far, and staff is working with attorneys on strategies that respect the city’s local coastal plan’s long-standing concerns about neighborhood compatibility and view preservation and the realities of parking scarcity, fire hazards, and difficulties in disaster response.

Two ballot initiatives are said to be circulating statewide to remedy problems with the accumulated legislation, which purports to serve the public but doesn’t even require that the new housing provided be affordable or be rented. Participants suggested that we urge the City Council to take a position on the issues.

Assemblywoman Diane Dixon, also present at the meeting, was sympathetic to our concerns and encouraged us to keep her up to date, recommending that the City ask its consultant in Sacramento to help with that.

## Coast Liquor Paint Issue Remains Unresolved

While we wait for the memo on the subject that staff was tasked with preparing at the Council’s July meeting, we are learning that, despite what many of us heard in several recorded meetings about what the Coast

Liquor store should look like when it is considered appropriately restored, the City’s historic preservation consultant says that “it was always painted red” and staff is taking the position that “the Council voted for red paint.” Getting an accurate answer to this question has consequences, and not only aesthetically, because granting the restored building historic status comes with a substantial parking requirement reduction and the associated intensification of use from which the applicants are already benefiting. Ideally the memo will clarify the situation.

## Planning Commission Seeks Change in Direction for Downtown Action Plan

The Planning Commission’s review on September 20 of the Downtown Action Plan—a 600+-page accompaniment of the Downtown Specific Plan that details the landscape and hardscape treatment of the downtown and conflicts in a number of ways with the City’s existing planning documents—unexpectedly produced a change in approach to the project. Shelved during the pandemic, the plan had been controversial in its first outing, mainly for proposing to remove and replace most of the downtown’s trees. Steve Kellenberg said that the issue should have been to what extent we want a change in the character and said that the right choice would have been to “treasure and nurture what exists,” with advice from local experts through a community task force. A subcommittee to work on the issues was recommended but apparently has not yet been set up.

## LCAD Student Center Gets Planning Commission Nod

The big new building for LCAD’s property at the Big Bend was conditionally approved by a three-member Planning Commission on September 20 on condition that the color be modified, the landscaping be made more locally compatible, a lighting plan be included, and a pre-construction meeting be held with OC Parks. The hearing revealed that the relevant local environmental groups (in particular the Coastal Greenbelt Authority) had not been consulted but also that the building had been approved in concept as part of the college’s master plan and its capacity was needed for the institution’s accreditation. The failure of the building to match the original LCAD in aesthetics, disappointing to some, had to do, we were told, largely with changes in building codes over the years. A final hearing is scheduled for November 1.

## VL Scholarship Goes to Uma Bhatia



Barbara Dresel and Uma Bhatia

Every year since 1978, Village Laguna has awarded a scholarship to a Laguna Beach High School graduating senior who shows leadership and involvement in activities that protect the environment and promote humanitarian goals. For the 2022–23 school year, we were pleased to present our scholarship to Uma Bhatia.

Uma has been very active in her school and community.

In addition to being an outstanding scholar, she was president of Zero Trash Laguna, which spearheaded environmental initiatives on campus and in the city. She showed her involvement in environmental and humanitarian activities by participating in a marine conservation service trip to the Dominican Republic, rebuilding coral reefs, maintaining mangrove forests, and protecting existing coral. Uma rounds out her profile with volunteer experiences at the Laguna Beach Animal Shelter, No Square Theater, and tutoring elementary and middle school students. She was editor-in-chief of the high school newspaper and participated in sports and music groups.

We were fortunate to have Uma speak at our June general meeting, where she thanked us and informed us that she would be attending Johns Hopkins University with the goal of attending medical school.

The VL scholarship committee is pleased to have had one of the largest groups ever of very qualified scholarship applicants. We look forward to hearing of their future endeavors and achievements and thank them for their applications.

## 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.

Student \$20

Sustainer \$250/family

Basic \$40/individual, \$60 family

Preservationist \$500/family

Supporter \$150/family

Villager Extraordinaire (\$1,000+)

To satisfy new campaign reporting regulations for contributions of \$100 or more, I am supplying the name of my employer (or specifying that I am retired): \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Village Laguna PO BOX 1309 Laguna Beach, CA 92652



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## Remodel of Real Estate Office Continued Indefinitely

The real estate office at 1110 Glenneyre Street that has a good argument for being historic may have been spared the drastic excision of all of its defining features by the Planning Commission's postponement of action on October 4. Village Laguna's review of the proposal at the hearing pointed out that the object of the original design review approval on November 11, 1976, was "to make the commercial building look . . . like the surrounding residential area." Commissioners were reminded that the architect, Chris Abel, was responsible for many distinctive buildings in Laguna Beach. The current proposal, intended simply to make the building look more up to date, would alter roof lines, eaves, gables, and the shape of the building and remove the distinctive "crazy-quilt" brickwork and all of the existing trees (replacing just two of them with trees of another kind). Alerted to this building's likely historic value,

commissioners discussed asking for a historic report, but when one of them argued that this would add several months to the approval process they didn't persist. Eventually the project was continued to a date uncertain for some revision.

## Removal of City Tree Postponed for Initial Study

A city tree at 387 El Camino del Mar received at least a brief stay of execution on October 10 when the Council recognized the need for an initial environmental study and voted to obtain one. Review was requested by Councilmember George Weiss under the City's tree removal regulations, and members of the public took the opportunity to argue that recent photos of the tree failed to show the distress that the arborist was using to justify its removal and that the tree was important as part of a group, still largely intact, that was planted in connection with an early housing tract by the landscape architect Florence Yoch.