



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

February 2024 newsletter

February General Meeting

Monday, February 26, 2024

7 p.m.

Home of Johanna and Gene
Felder

2680 Park Ave

Via Zoom

Village Laguna Board Meeting

Saturday, March 2, 2024

9 a.m.

Pending City Issues Focus of Membership Meeting

In a return to the traditional Village Laguna meetings when we gathered monthly in members' homes and collaborated on how to address the issues of the day, we will be meeting in the home of Gene and Johanna Felder, to do just that. Recent hearings on the Promenade and on Phase II of the Downtown Specific Plan will be highlighted, but the floor will be open to members to discuss other issues and questions. Bob Borthwick will update us on the Promenade and John Thomas will talk about the housing and height limit changes the City has in mind for the Downtown. We will also be reviewing and approving the budget for the coming year.

Will we be fighting Height Limit Battles Again?



Village Lagunans Anne Caenn and Johanna Felder retrieved this Anti-High Rise poster from Barbara Metzger's archive with the help of her daughter Claire and son-in-law David Stoneman.

There were several controversial components of the revised Phase I of

the Downtown Specific Plan as approved by the Council and Coastal Commission. These include significantly reducing the required parking for all businesses Downtown, and recognizing only 27 historic buildings instead of the 65 that were in the previous version of the plan. These matters are part of the historic preservation lawsuit that is proceeding through the courts.

On February 7 the Planning Commission considered staff's suggested approach to Phase II of the Downtown Specific Plan which includes controversial increases to building height limits—up to three stories—and further reductions in required parking. The existing Downtown plan limits most of the buildings to one story while retaining the existing two-story buildings. This has the effect of preserving the small-scale character of the Downtown and prevents intensification of use and increased demand for parking. The argument for change is to allow for new residential apartments, although testifiers at the meeting pointed out there is no provision for new units to be affordable. Village Laguna questioned why Downtown, the most successful commercial area in our city, and one that represents the iconic image of Laguna Beach, is being proposed to be transformed into a different place altogether. See the villagelaguna.org for the full text of our remarks.



Plans for Promenade Rejected

On January 25 the City Council rejected the staff report recommendation to approve the "Forest Stroll" concept for the lower Forest Avenue "Promenade" area and unanimously voted to form an ad-hoc council subcommittee (Mayor Sue Kempf and Council Member Mark Orgill) to explore options for going forward, including a possible design competition. They are to report back to the council in 90 days. The council heard from almost two dozen residents and business owners, almost all critical of the design and planning process. Some retail shop owners testified that their businesses have been seriously harmed since the street was closed and curbside parking was removed. Other residents expressed a strong desire for the street to be re-opened, and spoke of the loss of downtown's history and authenticity by the removal of the street and its trees. (10 of the 19 trees on lower Forest Avenue were slated for removal in the recommended design.)

The City first closed lower Forest Ave. in 2020 in response to COVID-19 as a temporary measure to allow the restaurants to use the street area for outdoor dining. In 2021 the Council voted to make the street closure "permanent" and hired a consultant to prepare the plans. Due to COVID meeting protocols, there was little public input or discussion on these decisions.

Public "workshops" were held in Sept. 2022 and May 2023 to elicit feedback from residents and business owners. Both of these workshops were widely criticized for not allowing meaningful public dialog. Hopefully

this "pause" in the planning process, as suggested by interim City Manager Sean Joyce, will result in an opportunity for residents to give their opinions on the future of Laguna's traditional and iconic "Main Street."

Encouraging Decisions on Historic Preservation

Hobie Alter House Approved for Historic Register--

The garage of the house at 1073 Gaviota where Hobie Alter built and refined his light-weight surf boards in the 1950s "is sacred ground" according to Mark Christy of Hobie's on Forest Ave. The historical report agreed on the property's importance, emphasizing Hobie's role in the development of the surfing culture and industry and found the property eligible for both the Laguna Beach and California Historic Registers. As part of the Heritage Committee members' approval of the application to list the property on the Laguna Beach Historic Register they worked with the owners and their architect to make changes to the project that would preserve the integrity of the garage, and restore the 1950s appearance of the house.

Solana Way House Recommended to Remain on

Register--In reviewing owners' request to remove their beach cottage at 2756 Solana Way from the City's Historic Register, the Heritage Committee pointed out advantages of the Historic Register listing which include relief from code requirements imposed on new construction. The historic assessment found that the property met two of the City historic resource criteria and the Committee unanimously recommended that the property remain on the Register. Owner consent provisions do not apply to properties already listed on the Register.

337 Hawthorne Approvals Set Aside--In response to a ruling by the Orange County Superior Court, on January 23 the Council "vacated and set aside" prior City approvals for the extensive remodel of this Historic Register house. The Court found that the project should have required an environmental impact report (EIR); instead the City had relied on a negative declaration stating the project would not have a significant adverse impact. The court's action was in response to a suit filed by the Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Coalition. This ruling, and the Council's subsequent action, validates concerns that the City's environmental review and historic preservation efforts have often been inadequate and haven't complied with the California Environmental Quality Act.



Edison Bulldozed Open Space—No Permits

Beginning January 8 Southern California Edison (SCE) bulldozed paths up to 15 feet wide through open space west of Alta Laguna Boulevard and north of Park Avenue including a portion of Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park as well as City-owned park land. As this was occurring residents and Village Laguna board members became alarmed and contacted city officials to stop the destruction of habitat. They learned that Edison has a project to replace wires and five utility poles, and SCE deemed it an emergency due to a potential fire hazard.

Completing projects to assure reliable electrical service and fire safety is important. However, Interim City Manager Sean Joyce states that SCE “acknowledged, that the work was, in fact, being performed without issuance of a City permit—or that of Coastal Commission staff.”

After significant damage the bulldozing is halted and there is a commitment to use helicopters to replace the wires and five utility poles and to restore the damage done to the open space.

Issues remain: It is important to establish the City fire department’s role in assessing fire risk in advance of projects like this one and to develop a procedure for proper permitting. Signage and fencing is needed to discourage the public from using the SCE graded paths as new trails in the open space. The City and County should be involved in monitoring the restoration of the damaged open space. Village Laguna will follow up and track the progress on restoration.

Save Our Downtown Trees

In March of 2020, concerned citizens started “Save Laguna Trees” with a petition to prevent removal of 150 trees downtown as proposed in the City’s Downtown Action Plan (DAP). Nearly 5000 people signed initially, and the council chamber was filled with past and present Laguna Beach citizens. Some even traveled from Oregon to protest the removal of their beloved trees. The DAP was put on hold. In the past few weeks, petition signers have increased by 700 as we continue to fight the proposed removal of trees on Forest Avenue as part of the Promenade designs. Please sign the petition and receive updates.

<https://www.change.org/p/city-of-laguna-beach-save-our-downtown-laguna-beach-trees>

Renew your membership

If the date on your mailing label is 2025 you are paid up. Thank you! If it’s 2024 or earlier please renew at VillageLaguna.org or by mail

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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In Appreciation of Barbara Metzger



Barbara Metzger(center) with fellow Village Laguna board members Meg Monahan at left and Verna Rollinger 2013.

Village Laguna corresponding secretary, and Newsletter editor Barbara Metzger died December 10, 2023, just days after attending our monthly board meeting. We are missing her personally, with her consistent thoughtful and thorough approach. Her work for Village Laguna was prodigious and her conscientious dedication to planning for Laguna's future while respecting its history was so

important to our efforts to preserve the village character. Professionally she edited the academic journal "Latin American Perspectives" for the past thirty years. Ron Chilcote, managing editor, says it has taken, at least temporarily, five people to do what she had been doing. A similar number of Village Lagunans will be needed going forward to accomplish work she reliably contributed for so long. Barbara's granddaughter, Twyla Mount, has generously volunteered to continue to design the layout of the Newsletter, and instead of one writer (Barbara) the articles in this newsletter have been written by Gene Felder, Bob Borthwick, Ann Christoph, and Carly Sciacca. Tenko Cherub and Mary Ives assist in getting the newsletter in the mail.