



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

March 2024 newsletter

March General Meeting

Monday, March 25, 2024

7 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

Free, reservations required on
line

<https://events.rivian.com/sawdustandsand>

Rivian South Coast Theater

162 South Coast Highway

Village Laguna Board Meeting

Saturday, April 6, 2024

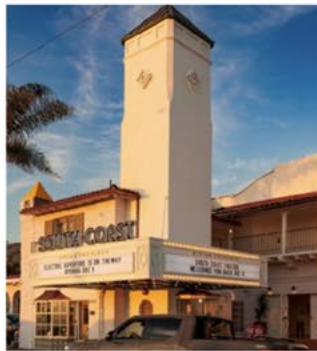
9 a.m.

Home of Ann Christoph

31632 Wildwood Road

“Sawdust and Sand” Doug Miller documentary at Rivian

Village Laguna presents a special
showing of “Sawdust and Sand:
Douglas Miller’s Laguna Beach” at
the Rivian South Coast Theater.



Don’t miss this opportunity to
experience Doug’s photography and
his recording of Laguna as it
transitioned over 50 years, in the
theater that has just been returned to a
new version of its former self.

Doug and cinematographer, producer
and director Jason Blalock will
introduce the film and comment, and a
representative of Rivian will point out
highlights of their restoration efforts.

Photographer Doug Miller, ever-
present at Laguna Beach events, has
documented the days of our lives since
arriving here in 1970, taking over
500,000 photographs, all accompanied
by meticulously recorded
identifications. A Sawdust exhibitor,

he has painted over 20,000 canvases.
A talented violinist with the “Moon
Police,” he plays where inspired,
always appreciated.

Cinematographer Jason Blalock
produced this documentary featuring
Doug and his work. In total it
presents “a profound portrait of
Laguna Beach and its people,”
according to critics.

Jason Blalock works as a
cinematographer on a variety of
documentary projects, for CNN,
Discovery, HBO, Hulu, Netflix,
Time, and Vice. He grew up on El
Bosque in Laguna Beach, and now
lives in Oakland, CA. He states
appreciatively, “The opportunity to
share Doug Miller’s art is an honor.”



Photographer, artist and musician Doug Miller

Time to Consider Promenade Costs

We have seen very little information from the city about the cost of the Promenade, either the present temporary one, or the proposed permanent one. The city estimates we have spent over \$400,000 to date on temporary facilities. Maintenance, private security, and lost parking revenue have cost taxpayers about \$500,000 per year. This doesn't include the Promenade's share of the larger costs of providing services downtown which could add \$1 million to that estimate.

Construction of the permanent Promenade has been estimated by the city to cost \$3.3 million, but that is a preliminary number and without a final design. Without a better understanding of what the contractor may run into underground, an estimate of cost is tenuous at best. Then there is the unanswered question of replacing the parking spaces lost to the Promenade and provide more spaces to meet the increased demand of the added outdoor restaurant seating. If required, the cost of constructing a parking structure could dwarf the cost to build the Promenade and could add \$10 million or more to the total cost.

Another aspect that has not been clearly addressed is the physical and financial impact during construction on the businesses along the Promenade.

Finally, it has not been shown that revenue the city receives from dining fees charged to the Promenade restaurants, sales tax from retailers, or the city's share of property tax from the buildings on lower Forest, will come close to covering the construction costs and ongoing expenses attributable to the project. Should the cost to the taxpayers be a factor in the decision to proceed with the Promenade?

Costs of Adding Housing Downtown

The city is working on Phase II of the Downtown Specific Plan (DSP) which proposes to create more housing by changing the height limit to allow more 2 and 3 story buildings. This coupled with reduced parking requirements—a half space per residential unit has been suggested-- would change the character of the downtown and make it impossibly congested. These factors alone argue against pursuing these changes, but the financial arguments are just as compelling.

Because of the difficulty of adding a level to an existing

building in a confined area, where extensive retrofitting of the first level will be required, the costs could be so high as to make such projects economically unattractive, and beyond “affordable.” One estimate of the monthly rent needed to cover costs exceeds \$7.00 per square foot. That is probably more rent than for the commercial use below. At that rate rent for a small 400 square foot apartment could easily exceed \$2,800 per month. For comparison, a truly affordable 400 square foot apartment at Alice Court rents for less than \$1,000 per month. If larger units were created, rents could easily be \$4,200 for a 600 square foot unit or \$7,000 for a 1,000 square foot unit.

Aside from the numbers, realize that the construction would totally disrupt the business in the lower level, probably requiring it to be closed for the duration. If the consultants who prepared DSP Phase I acknowledge that buildings taller than two stories change the atmosphere of the downtown, if producing any new housing units by adding second and third stories to existing buildings is so economically questionable, and if the financial feasibility of adaptive reuse of existing retail and office space could be a better opportunity, why is the city going down the path it is on?

Wireless Facilities impact Radio Station/Wine Gallery Building and the Public

The recent installation of a second 5G wireless facility on the roof of 1833 Coast Highway has raised concerns regarding exceeding the allowed height of the building and the lack of proper approval procedures. City approval of this installation without notice or staking is troubling, especially considering the potential exposure to members of the public to radiofrequency RF radiation emissions beyond legal limits.

The attorney for nearby residents who noticed the large protrusion above the roof of the radio station/wine gallery building has highlighted the necessity for planning commission approval rather than administrative processing for such installations and is alarmed with how the facility is documented to be exceeding lawful radiation levels.

This is only one of many facilities and more are to come. On March 20th Planning Commission will discuss Laguna Beach Wireless Municipal Code provisions and practices. Please attend. We must ensure our city upholds FCC standards and our city standards to protect our community.



Hotel Laguna circa 1930.

“Compromise” the Watchword of Hotel Laguna Hearing

Years in the making (mostly out of the public eye), the Hotel Laguna project went to the Planning Commission on March 6. After robust discussion, the Commission continued the item to April 3 to give the applicants a chance to improve the project. Unfortunately, the Commission was prepared to reject the Heritage Committee’s unanimous recommendation for wood windows matching the originals at the guest rooms, rather than the ultra-contemporary bronze Marvin fiberglass window units proposed by the applicants.

The Commission did, however, ask for good changes to bring the hotel back closer to its 1930s glory, acknowledging its import to the community. As a “compromise” for the fiberglass windows on the upper floors, they asked for a more faithful restoration of the ground floor, particularly at the Coast Highway elevation. The applicants had proposed to restore the original arched openings at the prominent northeast corner; the Commission asked for wood windows to be installed and restoration of the original corner detailing. Other requests included: restoration of the altered retail spaces along Coast Highway including the pilasters between them (which Heritage also recommended) and new wood windows and doors; restoration of historic detailing at the cupola and curved parapet above the front entrance; restoration of decorative balconies; elimination of the non-historic planter; a historically appropriate front door; and single-color awnings. They also asked the applicants to consider solutions to the “seedy” and dilapidated northwest side of the building.

These changes by no means add up to a full restoration, but they represent a thoughtful approach to Laguna’s most iconic historic building. Commissioners waffled a bit at the end, inviting the applicants to explain next month why these excellent suggestions cannot be implemented. We hope the Commission will be firm and ensure this project, after so much community consternation, is what this historic property and the community deserve.

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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Laguna Beach, CA 92652

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Council Votes Again to Remove Lemon-scented Gum Tree at Roundabout

The circle of lemon-scented gum trees at the roundabout at Catalina and El Camino del Mar is a memorable landmark of the El Mirador neighborhood and the city. The removal of one of them will diminish the beauty and drama of the whole crescent and become a precedent for removal of others. In November council authorized special testing and analysis of the tree that the city arborist had recommended for removal. On February 29 four members of the city council still decided to remove it even though staff had not allowed the arborist who had performed the tests to write a report of his findings and recommendations. Instead they hired a third arborist to write their own opinion which agreed

with the city arborist original view. George Weiss supported preserving the tree, along with public testifiers. The testing arborist Peter Harnisch pointed out that with a 15% reduction in height, the tree could be calculated to be safe with 90 mph. The highest recorded winds in Laguna Beach are 67 mph, yet the council did not take this option to save the tree.

Charm House Tour Sunday, May 19

Be a part of this year's Charm House Tour! Tickets are already available on line at VillageLaguna.org. What an opportunity to experience the hidden heart of Laguna Beach—our home environments. Each resident has a different take on what it means to make a home in our special town. Can you help with the tour? Please contact Anne Caenn at anne@lagunaemail.com.