



# October 2024 newsletter

## Village Laguna Board Meeting

Saturday, November 2  
9 a.m. By Zoom

## Design Review Board

Thursday, November 14, 5 p.m.  
Egan homestead house  
31526 Valido Road

## Marine Resources Committee Fish and Game Commission

November 5 and 6  
Marine Protected Area  
Expansion  
<https://fgc.ca.gov/Meetings/2024>

## Village Laguna Radio Show

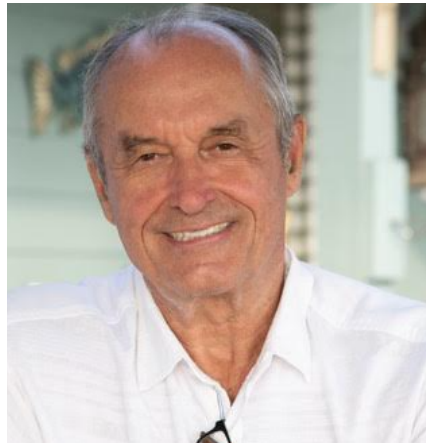
KXFM 104.7  
Friday, November 15, 12 noon

## Holiday Party

Coming up in December!

### Our City—Change or More of the Same?

Election season is our time to let our candidates know what is important to us and Village Laguna started off the City Council campaign with a forum on August 27 with candidates Hallie Jones, Judie Mancuso, George Weiss and Bob Whalen. Whalen is a long-time Councilmember and former Mayor. He endorses Hallie Jones, as does the rest of the City Council majority. Judie Mancuso is an environmental advocate hoping for a seat on the Council. George Weiss is an incumbent City Council member seeking re-election. On the 29th



*Council member George Weiss*

our members discussed the candidates and voted to endorse George Weiss. Judie Mancuso was supported by a significant number, but lacked the required 2/3 votes for endorsement.

What's important? Listening to residents and not plowing ahead with expensive projects like acquiring

Laguna Canyon Road, building a parking garage and closing off Forest Avenue without developing a community consensus first. George respects public input.

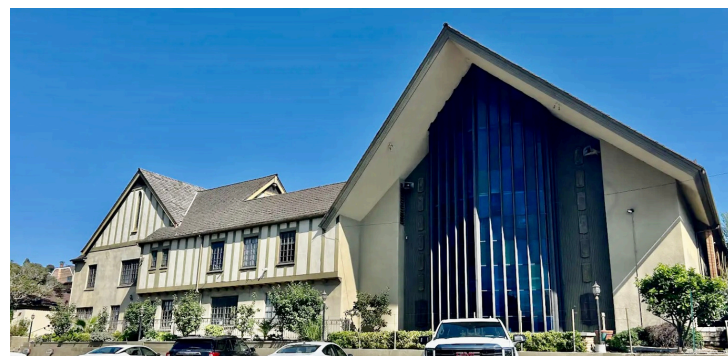
George pushed back against former councilmember Peter Blake's attacks on members of the public who were trying to testify. George understood early the unwise decision of the Council majority to hire the former city manager. Unfortunately it took the drama of an armed attempted takeover of the Hotel Laguna, and the city manager's failed coverup of the repercussions of a traffic stop, for the rest of them to finally make a change. That Council majority doesn't need another supporter, it needs a voice—George's voice—to bring moderation to the discussion and bring forward residents' points of view.

Village Laguna's September 23 School District forum with candidates Lauren Boeck, Howard Hills, Jan Vickers (incumbent), Sheri Morgan, and Margaret Warder, focused on improving student test scores and the controversial proposal to enlarge the pool at the high school. While Village Laguna did not make an endorsement in the School Board race it was clear that members want the district to work with the City on a pool decision that serves community needs and causes minimal impact on the surrounding neighborhood. It seems that the present Board has not made those factors a priority.

## Neighborhood Congregational Church Housing Proposal



*Proposed affordable housing project and new spiritual center as viewed from Glenneire and Cleo.*



*Neighborhood Congregational Church buildings that would be demolished. Photo: Aaron Schrank/KCRW*

On Monday, October 7 Church representatives and Bill Witte of Related Company (the developer) presented their proposed preliminary plans for building affordable apartments at a community meeting at Top of the World School. See [VillageLaguna.org](http://VillageLaguna.org) for video. The project still proposes demolition of the existing church complex including the Montessori school, Bridge Hall and the Sanctuary. When we suggest that they work with the existing buildings the only answer we get is, “We looked at it, but it just didn’t work out.”

Although the project now involves 51-55 apartments instead of the 72 originally proposed, it is still massively impactful on both the neighborhood and the city. See [nccproject.org](http://nccproject.org) for project information.

The City’s housing plan projects 31 units for the NCC site. If they started with that reduced number perhaps they could fit a reasonable project over the existing parking lot--reducing impacts on the neighbors and preserving the historical and well-loved buildings.

As explained in the meeting, there are complicated financial arrangements with the Related Company. There will be a 99-year lease to Related, and the Church will use the lease payments to build a “Spiritual Center” where the Sanctuary is now.

The church representatives say they have the support of the congregation for this plan but that congregation is diminishing. People don’t go to church to argue about development plans--they go for peace, inspiration and a spiritual connection. With conflict and controversy, members drop out and go to church elsewhere rather than protest the direction the church is taking now. How many years will it take to re-create the new spiritual center after all the buildings are demolished? Wouldn’t keeping the existing buildings allow for better continuity for spiritual use?

## Extend Marine Life Protections



There was this beautiful (but dead) fish on the asphalt at the feet of two spear fishermen. “You know that is a Marine Protected Area (MPA) out there,” a resident told them. “We know, but there is a line (they pointed to Table Rock beach) and we make sure we swim out beyond the line. We were just swimming out there and this one swam up behind my partner to see what we were doing and so that’s how we caught him.” How sad, the fish in the protected area have learned to be friendly with swimmers because they haven’t been harmed. But this one didn’t know about the man-made border where they are no longer protected.

Between Table Rock Beach and Three Arch Bay, the state Marine Protected Area (MPA) allows “take” of many fish species. There is a “No take” zone in the rest of the Laguna Beach’s MPA that extends from Table Rock to Crystal Cove.

In order to protect and restore all of Laguna's marine life, the Laguna Bluebelt Coalition (that includes Village Laguna) has petitioned Fish and Game Commission (FGC) to extend the boundary of Laguna’s “no take” MPA to the city limit at Three Arch Bay. The Marine Resources Committee of FGC will meet November 5 and 6 to discuss the Bluebelt Coalition’s petition. See link to participate. <https://fgc.ca.gov/Meetings/2024>

Protect all of Laguna's marine life and enhance the successful restoration of the marine habitat off our coast.



## Historic Preservation

**Egan Homestead House, 31526 Valido Road**—The demolition and replacement of this house was on the Design Review Board’s agenda on September 26, but information regarding its historic status was submitted and the project was continued to November 14 to allow for preparation of a historic study.

Around 1912, William and Bertie Egan built this house as a part of their homestead. It may be the only surviving residence of a homesteader in Laguna Beach. Forty three homestead claims were filed in the area that became Laguna Beach between 1871 and 1916.



*Esther and Frances Egan, homestead house and the beanfields of the family’s farm.*

**Villa Rockledge**—This estate is one of four properties in our city to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the highest recognition for historic significance. It was built by Frank Miller, who also built the Mission Inn in Riverside. Shocking information has come to light—pictures of deterioration of the property, vandalism, broken windows have been circulated. Village Laguna reported this information to the city. President Anne Caenn commented, “Village Laguna is astounded that our city has allowed the deterioration of Villa Rockledge to take place without city intervention.” It is critical that the damage be repaired and the property be restored.

**1110 Gleneyre**—On October 2 the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to deny the Dornin Investment Group’s proposed remodeling of this Chris Abel-designed office building. They proposed to remove all the crazy quilt brick work and

half timbering, “updating” it to charred wood (shou sugi ban), fluted concrete panels and white stucco—“A black and white building,” one commissioner commented.

Commissioner Steve Kellenberg described the existing building as a “Chris Abel interpretation of a Tudor design.” The historical report found that it met the criteria for the local Historic Register, but dismissed its value as a Tudor revival. Kellenberg disputed that, “What matters is that one of the best architects that’s ever practiced in the city has interpreted it in this way, (and) in a very unique way.” He also inquired about whether the Commission could consider the building’s historic significance even though the applicant hadn’t voluntarily put it on the City’s Register. The city attorney said it could be considered and city staff added that “voluntary” applies to the Register, but not to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) findings. Thank you, Planning Commission.



*Chris Abel’s “interpretation of Tudor Revival” saved from transformation. They were even going to remove the chimney.*

## Tune in to Radio with Village Laguna

Village Laguna has our own program every third Friday of the month at noon on our community radio station KX FM 104.7. Gene Felder hosts for Village Laguna presenting important issues in our town and interviewing involved Lagunans. Billy Fried has recruited 80 volunteers to present a wide variety of programs on the newly formatted station. As Billy says, “Turn on, tune in!” Go to [villagelaguna.org](http://villagelaguna.org) to hear Gene Felder’s interview with Harry Huggins on the 35th anniversary of the Walk in the Canyon, comments on Prop 4 and Eric Jessen’s discussion about Villa Rockledge.

**Renew your membership and donate at [VillageLaguna.org](http://VillageLaguna.org).**



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### **Community Development Department Back on Track?**

On October 2 city manager Dave Kiff, director of community development David Contreras, city attorney Megan Garibaldi and deputy city attorney Jane Abzug met in council chambers with members of the public concerned with the functioning of the department. A similar meeting was held by previous director Mark Wiener November 2, 2022 reporting on efforts to address similar concerns regarding plan check delays. Wiener said then that when he started with the city three years prior he thought he could clear up the problems in a year. But at that meeting he said it could take five years. This new group of courageous public servants is now tackling the problems of delays, hampered by the loss of experienced

staff. Newer staff members have yet to learn the intricacies of the code and the interpretations that have become a part of plan checking over the years. Part of the city attorney's answer is to revise the zoning code, a tremendous job. Let's remember that staff has been dealing with this code for years, architects understand it. The code is not the problem. All new staff, city, manager, and city attorney are all unfamiliar with how the city worked when it functioned in a predictable manner. Two retired staffers have been hired back to help, Nancy Csira and Monica Tuchscher. Let's hope their institutional memory will help to get the department processes back on track.