



To preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach

Village Laguna Appeals Promenade Approvals

Urges City to void permits for a permanent promenade.

Laguna Beach, April 22, 2025

On April 16, 2025, Village Laguna appealed the approvals granted by the Laguna Beach Planning Commission and Director of Community Development for the “Promenade” project (which requires permanent closure of Lower Forest Avenue), urging the City to address the flaws inherent in the project, recognize that proper approval processes have not been followed, and void the permits.

Lower Forest was closed to traffic in 2020 as a temporary measure, to allow restaurants outdoor food service while indoor gathering was prohibited due to Covid. The community supported temporary closure.

By contrast, subsequent efforts to build a permanent pedestrian mall in that location have been controversial and driven by City officials and staff with little concern for the problems pointed out by residents and retailers.

Valid concerns have notably been raised about 1/ feasibility (Lower Forest’s location within a floodway means hydrology reports must be completed prior to beginning design), 2/ cost to taxpayers (no cost estimates), 3/ major disruption to traffic and parking during and after construction (48 spaces permanently lost, months of disruption for businesses while the street is demolished and pavement is replaced), 4/ aesthetics (transformation of a 100-year-old iconic, tree-lined “Main Street” into a food and entertainment court that blocks the main vehicular entrance to the downtown), 5/ fairness (public subsidies enjoyed only by a handful of restaurants while other businesses lose vital customer parking), and 6/ the City’s failure to adhere to standard processes and governing documents (end-run around CEQA requirements, noncompliance with the General Plan and Local Coastal Program.).

The Laguna Beach loved and celebrated by residents is the product of thoughtful planning. The rushed and piecemeal manner in which the Lower Forest project has been handled breaks with that tradition. It also puts taxpayer dollars at risk since the project has moved forward with no information on construction costs or hydrology studies.

Village Laguna has therefore asked the City Council to grant both its appeals and consider all elements of the Lower Forest closure as a single project over which it alone has oversight. The group urges the Council to base any future approvals related to this project on public input, hydrology studies, thorough fiscal analysis, examination of alternatives and adherence to all the City’s standard processes and governing documents.

Village Laguna was founded in 1971 to celebrate the unique character and cultural heritage of Laguna Beach, to foster community spirit and address social needs, and to restore and protect local ocean and coastal habitats. Its board and the community members who support the organization are committed to preserving and enhancing all that makes Laguna Beach special and to helping the City find a better way forward.