



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

May 2025 newsletter

Council Meetings

Tuesday, May 6 & 20, 5 p.m.

Council Budget Workshop

Tuesday, May 13, 3 p.m.

Heritage Month Activities

Kickoff Reception

See schedule here:

www.lagunabeachcity.net/home/showpublisheddocument/21988

Gate and Garden Tour

Saturday May 3, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

lagunabeachgardenclub.org

Charm House Tour

Sunday, May 18, noon-5 p.m.

Board buses at the
Festival Grounds

Noon- 3 p.m.

Charm House Tour May 18

Participate in Village Laguna's signature event! Our enthusiastic guests always enjoy the distinctive "village character" homes on the Charm House Tour. Members have the opportunity for a behind the scenes experience as we serve as docents, guides and refreshment hosts.

Houses on this year's Tour include delightful historical cottages, some outfitted for raising the next generation of Laguna lovers or for reliving summer beach memories; another features a mermaid fantasy. All convey a deep love for Laguna Beach's heritage and lifestyle.



Sunday May 18, 12-5 p.m.

Tour begins in front of the Festival. Last bus leaves at 3 p.m

Buy tickets now at villagelaguna.org or at these helpful businesses, Fawn Memories, Laguna Nursery and Cottage Furnishings. Bake cookies and deliver to 600 Brooks St. Saturday the 17th 3-5 pm. or Sunday before 10 am. To help with the tour contact Anne Caenn at villagelagunainfo@gmail.com



Art and Activism Preserve a Coastal Landscape

A full house of activists celebrated Laguna Beach as a Treasured Historic American Landscape at the Rivian South Coast Theater on March 31. Video of the program can be seen at villagelaguna.org



Speakers Tom Lamb, Bob Borthwick, Eric Jessen, and Ann Christoph flank Ron Chilcote, center, who spearheaded the documentation for the National Park Service and the publication of the book by Laguna Wilderness Press.

Neighborhood Congregational Church

Speakers to the Council during public comment have been objecting to the impacts of the proposed affordable housing project at the Neighborhood Congregational Church property at 340 St. Ann's Drive. An application and project design drawings were submitted on March 10 with the goal of qualifying for the relaxed permit criteria of the state's SB4. On April 9 staff determined the application was incomplete. There are many complicated issues to resolve, not the least of which is the demolition of the beautiful historical Bridge Hall and Sanctuary, and the proposed construction of new religious buildings. These are designed to be 48 feet tall, 12 feet taller than the city's height limit of 36 feet.

The state has decreed that affordable housing projects that meet SB4 criteria can be exempt from some city ordinances and from CEQA. But do new religious buildings qualify for the exemption that is intended for affordable housing? Village Laguna and neighbors have asked for answers and requested the project be staked.

Montessori School has operated a pre-school on the church campus for 50 years. Parents, teachers and former students have pointed out the community benefits to young children the school provides and decried the

uncertainty surrounding their school's future. The objections and discontent continues to grow. Council response is, "The project application is incomplete." Will a completed application change the plan and address community concerns? We hope so.



New religious buildings designed on the corner of Glenneyre and St. Ann's are proposed to be 48' tall plus the elevator shaft seen in black in the rear of the upper image.

South Laguna Fire Station

On March 19 the Planning Commission and members of the public asked the public works department to go back to the drawing board on the design of the South Laguna Fire station. The Commission appointed Commissioners Jorg Dubin and Steve Goldman to work with staff and the public on revisions to the design and return in approximately 60 days. A well-attended public meeting on site at 5th Avenue and Coast Highway was held on April 3. Subsequently staff and the architect have been meeting with the most affected neighbors, architect Morris Skenderian and other interested residents to improve the design. Unfortunately public works staff have not been open to major revisions to the site plan that would increase setbacks from 5th Avenue and Coast Highway and change the entrance and exit route for the fire trucks. A changed site plan could eliminate the fire trucks exiting across the Coast Highway sidewalk and improve view prospects for neighbors. The work is still in progress and revised staking will be part of ascertaining how much the project has been improved.

Lower Forest Avenue—Will we get our main street back? Or will it be a Promenade/Mall forever?

Mark your calendars: Tuesday, May 20, 2025, the City will review ALL decisions regarding the closure of Forest Ave. and the Promenade Project in response to appeals by Village Laguna. Prevail upon Council to cancel the permanent Promenade. The Council needs to hear from you!



The plan for a permanent Promenade drastically changes lower Forest Avenue from a small-town tree-lined street with unique shops to an enclosed plaza focused on restaurants and an unprecedented open consumption area for alcoholic beverages. Before the street was closed during Covid, Forest served as the main vehicular entrance to the downtown from Coast Highway. Closing that entrance affects the viability of business in the entire downtown.

Not only are we losing 48 parking spaces in this prime location, but businesses are also losing visual exposure as potential customers enter the downtown area.

Alternatives to complete closure of lower Forest have never been considered in over three years of City Promenade planning. And even now the City doesn't have to evaluate alternatives because they found a way to exempt the Promenade project from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). State law exempts "Slow Street" pedestrian associated street improvements from CEQA. Under that exemption they also don't have

to disclose and mitigate environmental impacts like traffic, flooding, and aesthetics.

On April 2, staff told the Planning Commission they could approve the Promenade project with a "Slow Streets" CEQA exemption even though the Council hadn't adopted the required ordinance. The public objected to this premature exemption. Speakers also pointed out hydrology studies must be prepared in advance to ensure that the project can comply with the rigid FEMA requirements for construction within a floodway. Still the Planning Commission approved Design Review, a Coastal Development Permit, and a CEQA exemption for the Promenade project.

On Tuesday, April 8, the City Council voted to approve a Slow Streets ordinance. But thanks to testimony from the public and Bob Whalen's concerns about a poorly handled process—including a failure to wait the usual thirty days for a new ordinance to go into effect—Council voted to postpone a final decision on the permanent closure of Forest Ave. until May 20.

On April 9, the Director of Community Development approved a second Coastal Development Permit for the permanent closure of lower Forest Ave., despite the Council postponement and despite substantial evidence that the process was fatally flawed and the necessary findings for the permit cannot be made.

Village Laguna filed Council appeals for both the Director's and the Planning Commission's decisions on the Coastal Development Permits and Design Review approval, as well as the CEQA exemptions. The City waived the appeal fee, agreeing that consolidating all of the permits into one discussion is in the larger public interest. "The result is a more transparent, clear, direct and orderly process for a decision and direction," City Manager Dave Kiff stated.

To better understand the reasons the project should not be approved, see Village Laguna's appeals at VillageLaguna.org. We will update you with more information as the date approaches.

Please plan to email, attend the May 20 meeting, and speak to Council. Request a meeting with your Council members now. Ultimately, it is individuals, not organizations, that carry the day.



PO Box 1309
Laguna Beach, CA 92652

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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Your participation and dedication are so important in keeping Laguna Beach the city we love.
Please join, donate funds, and get involved.

If your address label says 2026, it means you have paid membership until Jan. 2026. Thank you.
If the label says 2025 or earlier, please renew--by check mailed in the enclosed envelope or at
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I have enclosed my check for the following membership. I understand the amount is not tax-deductible.

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To satisfy campaign reporting regulations for contributions of \$100 or more, I am supplying the name
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