



# March 2026 newsletter

## General Meeting

Monday, March 30, 2026

7 p.m.

Zoom

Guest Speaker

Matt Schneider

Director of Community  
Development

## Council Meeting

Tuesday, March 24, 5 p.m.

Tree Removal Issues

## Council Appeal Meeting

Wednesday, May 13, 3 p.m.

Egan Homestead House Appeal

31526 Valido Road

City meetings all at  
Council Chambers  
City Hall

## Arbor Day

Thursday, April 24, 3-5 p.m.

Alta Laguna Park

## Charm House Tour

Sunday, May 17

12 noon-5 p.m.

## Meet our Community Development Director Matt Schneider

General Meeting Monday, March 30,  
7:00 p.m. on zoom [https://us02web.  
zoom.us/j/82621833031pwd=CKqkr3N  
Vz djAo4Sp oIpiVglKmJJ WjH.1](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82621833031pwd=CKqkr3N Vz djAo4Sp oIpiVglKmJJ WjH.1)

Please join us as Matt shares his  
perspective on the challenges facing the  
Community Development Department.  
Among these are proposed revisions to  
the Zoning Code and the General Plan,  
which set policy and regulations on  
most decisions that guide Laguna's  
future.



*Matt Schneider, Community  
Development Director*

## Village Laguna Transition

In accord with the direction of the  
membership at our holiday meeting,  
Village Laguna has reorganized as a  
501 (c) (3) organization, marking a new  
chapter in our enduring commitment to

the Laguna Beach community. We  
await review by the IRS, and after that  
is complete, contributions to Village  
Laguna will be tax deductible. Village  
Laguna will no longer endorse political  
candidates, instead concentrating on  
building partnerships and informing  
residents and city government about  
important issues facing our city.

Village Laguna has a storied history of  
advocating for Laguna Beach's unique  
and small-scale village character. It  
was founded in 1971 by local residents  
determined to stop plans for high-rise  
development along the town's  
oceanfront. That grassroots movement  
culminated with the 36-foot height  
limit that still protects the Laguna  
community today.

In the years since, Village Laguna has  
become a critical resource for residents  
seeking to get involved in important  
local issues to protect and celebrate the  
village character, natural resources and  
beauty that led the National Park  
Service to document all of Laguna  
Beach and its Greenbelt as a Historic  
American Landscape.

"Transitioning to a 501(c)(3) marks a  
major milestone in our group's  
history," said Merrill Anderson,  
President of Village Laguna. "It will  
allow us build on our reputation as a  
go-to source for those who love  
Laguna and want to help find a better  
way forward."

## **Mission Hospital Laguna Beach in Jeopardy**

Our beloved hospital, a critical lifeline for our coastal communities, is now in jeopardy of losing the very services that make it essential.

Since 1959 the hospital has cared for residents and visitors in Laguna Beach and neighboring communities. Now it's facing an uncertain future, raising alarm about what could happen if vital emergency and inpatient care disappear. Providence CEO Seth Teigen has opened the door to discussions about what comes next, and the city council has appointed council members Alex Rounaghi and Bob Whalen to head an effort to work with the community and with hospital leadership to explore possible paths forward. The council will appoint task force members from the community to work on an action plan.

It's time for all of us to get involved and help to keep our town safe and vibrant with state of the art health services!

## **Neighborhood Congregational Church Revises its Housing Proposal—a win for Historical Preservation**

At the church's community meeting January 22 affordable housing developer Bill Witte of Related California and Pastor Rod Echols presented their revised plan for affordable housing at the 340 St. Ann's Drive campus. They no longer propose to demolish the existing Sanctuary designed by William Blurock, or Bridge Hall by Aubrey St. Clair, and have reduced the apartment count to 29 from the original 72. The Montessori School is planned to remain.

These changes not only respond to reduced potential for Federal funding as explained by the presenters, they are a welcome response to the concerns about views, density, traffic, neighborhood character impacts, and loss of the school and historic buildings raised by neighbors and Village Laguna.

Revised plans are in the process of being submitted to the city. There are still view and other neighbor concerns which the architect seemed willing to address. In addition, the church is hiring a separate architect to do as yet undefined work on the existing buildings. It was explained that Related intends to pay the church upfront for the 99-year lease on the parking lot portion of the property where the housing will be built and the church will use those funds to work on the existing buildings.

## **Egan Homestead House**

On September 25, 2025 the Design Review Board voted 4-1 to allow demolition of the Egan Homestead House. Neighbors, Village Laguna, and South Laguna Civic Association appealed.

The Egan Homestead property at 31526 Valido Road includes the original historical one-story homestead house, started in 1907 and completed in 1928, and adjacent garage. Egan's is the only surviving homestead house in Laguna Beach and the only known example in all of Orange County. See additional information at [villagelaguna.org](http://villagelaguna.org)

We have a case of dueling historical consultants—two hired by the city and two hired by the developer. The latest historical report was submitted by the developer in January. The city's consultants are in the process of doing another review. The city has continued the appeal hearing date to **Wednesday May 13, meeting starts at 3 p.m.**

With all this documentation and now the opportunity for broad community input, surely the council must find its way to declaring the obvious and find the property a historic resource. Please speak out! Preventing demolition is the first step toward finding the best use for this property which has so many stories to tell.



## **Charm House Tour Sunday May 17**

The House Hunting Committee has whispered that we have some wonderful charmers and impressive Laguna masterpieces in store. Tickets will be on sale at [VillageLaguna.org](http://VillageLaguna.org)

To volunteer contact Anne Caenn at 714-501-1816 or [anne@lagunaemail.com](mailto:anne@lagunaemail.com).

## Historic Buildings under Siege

Our historic properties are not faring well these days.

Villa Rockledge, on the National Register of Historic Places, has been vandalized as messages on the internet encouraged trespassing.

The Halliburton House a 1938, National Register eligible concrete monument to brutalist architecture and home to famed lecturer and adventurer Richard Halliburton was recently defaced by taggers.



The Builders Guild at 1199 S. Coast Highway (Sandpiper) also a National Register eligible building by Aubrey St. Clair has been victimized by unpermitted demolition and inappropriate repairs. Most recently the beautiful slate roof was removed and discarded without permits. The city is repeatedly trying to catch up and correct the unpermitted work.



The bungalow at 290 Diamond at the corner of Gleneyre and Diamond owned for many years by esteemed reporter Barbara Diamond, is also suffering the impacts of unauthorized demolition. It was built in 1906 by the Warlings, relatives of the Rogers family who lived in a ranch house where city hall is now. They moved it around 1924 from downtown to make way for Coast Highway. The

contractor had permits which involved “no exterior changes.” Yet see the damage that has been done. A stop work order has been issued.

Constant vigilance is the price of saving the historic character of our town.



## General Plan Protects Our Hillside?

The Laguna Beach Coalition for Environmental Protection (LBCEP) sued over city approval of a new house to be built on a severely sloping lot—the slope exceeds 45% using standard engineering methodology. 45% is 1.5 times steeper than the Third Street hill! The General Plan, the controlling document for development decisions, includes this mandatory policy, “Prohibit hillside development on slopes of 45% or greater.”

The trial court judge found in LBCEP’s favor and clearly stated that the approval violated the General Plan. The city maintains that another part of the code “slope in percent” prevails, even though that method only deals with determining building height after the site is found to be suitable for development under the General Plan provision —ie the lot is less than 45%)

The city maintains they should have the discretion to choose the methodology they want because using the trial court’s approved standard engineering methodology “would render potential applications on lots throughout the City—unapprovable.” Isn’t that the logical result if there are other lots with slopes exceeding 45%? Isn’t that the point of saying “prohibit”? This is why this case could have wide reaching impact on future development decisions on our hillsides and canyons.

Village Laguna is working to educate residents regarding this issue and is encouraging the city to drop their appeal and follow the policies of the General Plan.



PO Box 1309  
Laguna Beach, CA 92652

FIRST CLASS MAIL

### Support Village Laguna—2026

Your participation and dedication are so important in keeping Laguna Beach the city we love. Please join us in preserving our village character and protecting our historic and natural resources.



Donate at VillageLaguna.org or complete the coupon below and send your check to Village Laguna



**Name(s)** \_\_\_\_\_

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(please send me my newsletter by regular mail\_\_\_\_by e-mail\_\_\_\_)

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Mail to: Village Laguna PO BOX 1309 Laguna Beach, CA 92652

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