



To preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach

Honorable Mark Orgill and City Council RE: DRB EFFICIENCY ORDINANCE

Village Laguna applauds the changes made to Section 22 incentivizing smaller dwellings and ADU's with a scalable FAR ratio and square footage limitation. Appropriately sized homes will solve many issues: view, privacy, affordability, and hillside preservation. We appreciate the planning staff incorporating these limitations into the DRB streamline process and for conferring with neighborhoods to respond to concerns about specific planning provisions.

Continuing our participation in this process, we recommend additional amendments to the ordinance as follows:

Administrative Design Review: We understand the city's efforts to reduce workloads and simplify the process but there are key revisions to the process that are problematic for public input.

Notices: A 15-day period for notices is too brief for residents to have any meaningful involvement and the provision that projects will be approved unless a recipient of a notice requests a public hearing does not recognize typical responses to notices received from the city. A simpler solution would be to hold the hearing as noticed. If there are no objections the project would be approved at that time. Notices of Administrative Design Review cases should be posted on the city's website at the same time as they are mailed out to those in the noticing area.

Appeals and Referrals The possibility of an Administrative Hearing Officer's referral of an unresolved case to DRB or Planning Commission without requiring an appeal should be spelled out and we suggest clarifying this interim step. *See Attachment.* The Design Review Board or Planning Commission could resolve most issues, avoiding an appeal to City Council. Requiring an expensive and involved appeal process is onerous and unnecessary.

There is a conflict between 25.05.040(B)(3)(b) i 3 which says that Administrative Design Review projects are appealable to the City Council and 25.05.070 (B) (1) (i) that says that decisions on ministerial permits may be appealed to the Planning Commission or Design Review Board. The *Attachment* presents a partial resolution of this conflict.

Section 5 Landscaping: The height of plantings should not be the only consideration in exempting landscape plans from Design Review. The landscape guidelines of the “Landscape and Scenic Highways Resource Document” should be considered. We should not be encouraging landscape plans without trees. They are important components of village character and it would be preferable not to exempt any landscape plans from discretionary review if encouraging treeless landscapes is the only non-discretionary alternative.

Section 22. Landscaping: It provides that trees cannot exceed 4’ in the front yard, 6’ in the rear yard, 15’ within the buildable area. (Can 4’ tall plants really be considered trees?) Provisions to allow trees at normal heights need to be provided in order to maintain our city’s landscape.

General Plan, Section 23: Why is the language of requiring conformance with the city’s General Plan deleted? Projects SHOULD BE in conformance with the general plan with particular emphasis on the open space and conservation element.

Section 25: This limits the offer of open space easement to 21 years. These easement offers should be in perpetuity, or automatically renewed or extended as the language in our General Plan says “offer a **permanent** open space easement.” NOT 21 years.

Historic Resources, Section 45: Historic Resource Assessment report should read: “The Community Development Director may require a historic resource assessment report paid for by the applicant, **with the consultant chosen by the city**, to be prepared prior to the review of the project to evaluate the impacts of the project on the historic resource.”

Luminous Tube Signs, Section 50 We support the city’s sign ordinance that forbids internally lighted signs, including neon-type (now called Luminous Tube). There should be no doubt that the ordinance continues these prohibitions, as recommended by the Planning Commission.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Merrill Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Merrill Anderson
President Village Laguna, Inc.

June 22, 2026

Attachment – Administrative Design Review

Suggested Copy for Section 25.05.040(B)(3)(c)(ii) which spells out the actions the appeal officer can take:

After consideration of all testimony and evidence presented at the public hearing and the Design Review Findings specified in subsection (l) of this section, the Director of Community Development or his or her designee shall determine whether items raised by the public testimony and the applicant have been resolved. In that case he or she can either approve, or conditionally approve, the application in writing. If unresolved items remain, the Director of Community Development or his or her designee shall refer the project to the appropriate hearing body, the Planning Commission or the Design Review Board or deny the project. An appeal of a decision on an administrative design review application is subject to the provisions of Section 25.05.070 and Section 25.07.016 when a coastal development permit is required and may also be appealed to the Planning Commission or Design Review Board at no cost.