October 2026 newsletter

Village Laguna meeting
Norm Grossman
Wildlife Corridor
Monday, October 12, 7 p.m.
Zoom

Council Meetings
Tuesdays, October 13 & 27, 5 p.m.

Council Candidate Forums
Tuesday, October 6
South Laguna Civic Association
6-8 p.m.
St. Catherine's

Thursday, October 15
Chamber of Commerce
6-9 p.m.
City Hall

Lagunatics
September 25- October 11
Legion Hall
https://www.nosquare.org/lagunatics

Election Day
Tuesday, November 3

Village Laguna meets October 12, 7 p.m.
Zoom link https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88031508293?pwd=9AsaHhQVY7P0ikXHnYxiXDM2LbvMpV.1

Issue Update
Important current issues will be discussed at the beginning of the meeting, since there will be a council meeting the following day, and discussions at forums have been raising important concerns as well.

Wildlife Corridor Essential for Health of the Greenbelt
For our main program Norm Grossman, president of Laguna Greenbelt Inc., will share progress that has been made in creating a wildlife corridor connecting the Greenbelt with the Cleveland National Forest and Santa Ana Mountain foothills.

As Orange County has developed, the open space link between the mountains and the sea has been broken. The Greenbelt has become a natural habitat island, and if our wildlife is to stay healthy into the future a reconnection must be made. Fortunately, a possible wilderness linkage has been found and Norm will tell us about it.

Norm Grossman is a longtime Laguna Beach civic and environmental advocate, land-use consultant, and for many years a Laguna Beach Planning Commission member. He is especially associated with protecting Laguna Beach open space and with local planning and growth-management issues.

Council Candidate Forums
Merrill Anderson and John Thomas skillfully managed the Village Laguna Forum, conducted in the Council chambers on August 31. Watch that video here: https://vimeo.com/showcase/10695034?share=copy&fl=sm&fe=fs

Several forums have been held raising a comprehensive list of questions, answered by the candidates in 30 second-1 minute sound bites.

Village Laguna no longer endorses candidates, but we present the information from the latest campaign reports.

LB City Council Candidate Summary from FPPC 460 for 1July-19Sept2026				
Candidate	Donations/Loans	YTD Donations	Spending	YTD Spend
Rounaghi	$65,242.00	$65,742.00	$22,029.00	$25,728.00
Kempf	$38,752.00	$38,752.00	$5,050.00	$5,050.00
Orgill	$28,935.00	$28,935.00	$8,834.14	$8,834.14
Cintas	$12,763.00	$12,763.00	$8,855.00	$8,855.00
Cintas (loans)	$14,000.00			
Berry	$11,689.00	$11,689.00	$1,043.02	$1,043.02
Aronoff	$7,725.00	$10,575.00	$3,928.00	$4,852.00
Martin	$1,599.00	$1,599.00	$1,169.37	$1,169.37
Parisi (only filed short form)	none			
Bayuk	none			

Do the candidates with the highest donations and expenditures align with your views and choices? Will those dollars make all the difference on election day? Make the best choice for our city's future.

Upcoming forums are scheduled for October 6 and 15th—see list on page 1. Use these opportunities to meet candidates in person.

Appeals Court Rules City Violated CEQA When It Deleted the Historic Inventory

Five years after our City Council dropped the 1981 Historic Resources Inventory from its historic preservation program, the Orange County Court of Appeal reversed the City's actions in a published opinion. Historic preservation attorney Susan Brandt Hawley helped the court understand that Council's adoption of the Historic Resources Inventory in 1982 as "the best representative examples of historically significant architecture within the City of Laguna Beach" established a register that could not be summarily deleted. The Court found that every property listed in the Inventory is a presumptive historic resource.

The Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Coalition, Village Laguna, and Preserve Orange County filed a lawsuit in 2021, arguing that the City could not remove the Inventory from its General Plan and eliminate environmental protections for the historic resources listed in it without preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

Starting in 2014, Village Laguna and other historic preservation advocates urged the city to improve its historic preservation ordinance by updating the Inventory, improving historic preservation incentives, and clarifying how the City will integrate the Inventory and other historic documentation with CEQA. Instead, against their own counsel's initial advice, the City chose to embark on a path that was even less clear than before. In addition to deleting the Inventory, they rewrote the ordinance to make a property's historic significance dependent on owner consent. There is a second, pending lawsuit against the California Coastal Commission as the final decision-making authority for the owner consent provision, which the organizations claim likewise violates CEQA.

Over time the city has acknowledged the need for evaluation of some properties by historical consultants, but **losses have been significant**, and the process is still murky.

The Council approved demolition of these historic properties citing the deletion of the Inventory. [1]

634 Aster

1902 Ocean Way

369 Third Street

Restoring the status of the Inventory is one step in improving the effectiveness of the historic preservation program, but there's more to work through. After all, the goal should be to establish historic preservation as an important part of keeping Laguna Laguna—something all of us should enthusiastically embrace, especially now that state mandates compel local agencies to approve many projects that blow up local development standards. Historic resources are often exempt from these mandates. The current legal wrangling is an unfortunate diversion from all the positive benefits of preservation that both owners and the public can enjoy.

[1]Mayor Orgill and Councilmember Hallie Jones voted to preserve 359 Third Street, but the other 3 councilmembers voted for demolition. Councilmember Bob Whalen joined Orgill and Jones to preserve the Egan homestead house. Councilmembers Alex Rounaghi and Sue Kempf consistently voted against preservation.

What's with the Staff Reports These Days?

The "almost anything goes" staff recommendations for variances and design review have not gone unnoticed.

The South Laguna Civic Association emphasized the concern in their letter to the City Council. "The city seems to have drifted from staff helping applicants shape their proposed projects to conform to the rules to staff trying to shape the rules to conform to the project."

At the September 22 Council meeting Mayor Mark Orgill had scheduled a review of a Design Review Board approval in South Laguna's Village Community zone. This was a small addition on a house on a small lot, where all the lots are small, and so are most of the houses. The owner requested setback and size variances.

What was the problem? There are legal findings that must be made to grant variances. They are not just given out because the applicants are nice people and we are supposed to be helping applicants to get through the city processes more easily.

This lot was the exact size as other corner lots in the tract, yet staff made the finding that there was a "special circumstance" reason for a variance—a small lot. Almost all the lots in the zone have a private street easement—which means they can't build in the street. Staff also found that to be another "special circumstance."

Orgill dropped his review so these points were never discussed in public, but the Council did set up workshops which Orgill explained, "are intended to examine our approach to variances broadly. That includes why we're seeing recurring requests, whether the required findings are being adequately supported, and where we need to uphold existing standards and require projects to comply."

At the "Greater Laguna GOP" forum the following evening they questioned whether staff reports should be making recommendations or just presenting pros and cons. Council memeber Sue Kempf's response was revealing, "I have a lot of discussions with staff, both after the staff report has been written, with my comments, or before." Are the staff reports written to be tailored to what staff believes (or is told) the Council wants to hear? All we know is that the approach of staff recommendations has changed significantly, yet there have been no public directives to urge that to occur.

Lagunatics Spoofs Promenade Tree Loss

Lagunatics writers and performers know how to make us laugh even in the face of tragedy. According to VL Board member and tree performer Regina Hartley one of their skits this year brings the Promenade trees back to life, at least temporarily. She urges, "Well you all just better get on down to Lagunatics for our Eucalyptus post-mortem." Performances are weekends until October 11.

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

Names(s) _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____ **Email** _____

Cell Number _____

May we contact you via Text Message ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Please send me my newsletter by regular mail. ☐ **Email** ☐

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- ☐ Supporter $150/family
- ☐ Sustainer $250/family
- ☐ Preservationist $500/family
- ☐ Villager Extraordinaire ($1,000+)

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Villlage Laguna, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non profit.

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