



"To preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach."

Newsletter

THE VILLAGE LAGUNA NEWSLETTER • JANUARY 2005 • ESTABLISHED 1971

Jan. 24 Membership Meeting

Councilmember Jane Egly To Speak at VL Meeting



Councilmember Jane Egly

Newly sworn-in Councilmember Jane Egly will speak at the Jan. 24, 2005 Village Laguna membership meeting about her first impressions from serving on the City Council and her thoughts about the challenges that face the City this year.

Egly was elected in November 2004 with 7,745 votes, along with Cheryl Kinsman who received 6,864 votes, nudging out Wayne Baglin, who received 6,400 votes.

Baglin was targeted by a political action committee that reportedly spent over \$60,000 to unseat him. The L.A. Times reported last month that \$15,000 of that amount came from a donor affiliated with the Montage Spa and Resort, which is now seeking permission to expand the Aliso Creek golf course into the Aliso Canyon Wilderness Park, an action opposed by Baglin. Egly was targeted by Steven Esslinger, owner of the Laguna Terrace Park. ≈

Mansionization: Come Brainstorm on Ways to Stop It!

At the November 2004 membership meeting, Design Review Board (DRB) members Suzanne Morrison and Eve Plumb reviewed the design review process and reasons why mansions continue to be approved throughout the City despite the adoption of the City's mansionization ordinance. On January 24th, 7 p.m., at the home of Phyllis Sweeney, 2775 Temple Hills Drive, VL members will have an opportunity to brainstorm about ways that the City can further limit mansionization — the supersizing of homes that is overwhelming so many of Laguna's neighborhoods.

It has been over two years since the City Council adopted ordinance changes and policy recommendations designed to halt mansionization. Morrison and Plumb explained that architects now design homes to use much of the allowed building envelope, mostly due to owners hoping to gain full value from their investment. DRB members try to reduce building mass and scale whenever possible and appropriate, but they are constrained by zoning laws that are designed to be flexible. These rules apply across the City, despite topographical differences in neighborhoods that can allow homes to expand to their limits. And, as in other areas of life, the threat of litigation has grown. This is despite language that has been part of the zoning code for a long time. The standards for single-family residential development include the following: "All new development shall be compatible with the immediate residential neighborhood with respect to scale, mass, and height."

The result has been, however, that mansionization continues. Three-quarters of the respondents to VL's August 2004 poll considered it important to prevent the building of new homes that are too large for their neighborhoods.

Come join VL members in a discussion of this important issue and share your ideas about how the City could further limit mansionization. Enjoy great refreshments and lively discussion. Don't forget: Monday evening, January 24, 7 p.m., home of Phyllis Sweeney, 2775 Temple Hills Drive. ≈

Holiday Leftovers

Some of the revelers at the holiday party December 13 left serving dishes behind. A glass dish in the shape of a Christmas tree, two nine-inch cake pans and a two-inch ceramic bear carrying a wreath (originally part of the table decoration at the end of the bar) remain unclaimed. If these sound familiar to you, please call Barbara Metzger (494-3624) to arrange to recover them. ≈



Bonnie Hano, Ed Fry, Cathy Fry, Sonia and Bob Meyerhof enjoy holiday fare and conversation at the VL party



JANUARY
General Meeting
Monday, January 24, 7 p.m.

Home of Phyllis Sweeney
2775 Temple Hills Dr.
Councilmember Jane Egly and
Brainstorming to Stop Mansionization

FEBRUARY
Board Meeting
Sat., February 5, 9 a.m.
Home of Barbara Metzger
2669 Nido Way (parking is limited,
so please carpool)

January, 2005

President's Message



By Doug Reilly

THANKS FOR 2004 — AND A GOOD START TO 2005

I was sad to see it go. 2004 was a good year for Village Laguna. We had our most successful Charm House Tour ever, gained new members, waged a spirited campaign to inform voters about Council candidates and saw the election of

Doug Reilly

Jane Egly as our newest councilmember. We can't let 2004 go without a few acknowledgments:



Ginger Osborne, Liza Stewart, Doug Reilly, Helen Krugman and Tom Osborne pause during setup at the holiday party

Thank you, Ginger, for serving as president of Village Laguna for the past two years, and doing it so well. You led VL with a steady hand, winning smile and classy style. We appreciate the extra time you spent attending meetings and

writing columns like this one. Thankfully, we will continue to benefit from your leadership skills on the board.

Thank you, Verna, for 29 years as an exemplary city clerk, for being a VL member since the beginning, for being such a good friend.

Thank you, Ann and Barbara, for the time and effort you spend providing the voice of Village Laguna. It can keep you from your family and work, but your words and ideas help make us the organization that we are.

Thank you, Anne Caenn, for chairing last year's successful Charm House Tour and agreeing to serve as chair for this year's tour.

And thank you, VL members, for volunteering your time, contributing money, and showing up at important City Council, Planning Commission, DRB and Coastal Commission meetings to support our causes.

2005 dawned with a new spirit of cooperation on the City Council, led by Mayor Elizabeth Pearson-Schneider and Councilmember Toni Iseman. The two were appointed to a Council subcommittee last year to come up with a compromise plan for the Corporate Yard move to the Act V lot, and the Village Entrance. At a January 15, 2005 Council workshop, a facilitator helped to finalize 15 goals that, together,

hold out the hope of allowing both projects to move forward. The subcommittee's earlier discussions provided the basis for the workshop agreement.

Toni compromised by agreeing to a structure at Act V to house some City maintenance facilities. Elizabeth compromised by agreeing to lose parking spaces to include some City maintenance facilities in the Village Entrance parking structure. The questions of which maintenance functions should be moved to the parking structure — and how many spaces would be lost — were left to City staff and the architects for both projects, Studio One Eleven and Peyo Michaels. They are to analyze functions and space requirements and return to the Council subcommittee in the next few weeks. Toni and Elizabeth also agreed to support a bond, to be repaid from existing City tax-revenue sources, to enable both projects to be built sooner than later. The proposed consensus plan will be presented at a Council meeting, probably in February.

Both sides could gain from the plan, although deciding details could still derail the effort. While a structure would be constructed at the Act V lot, it should be pushed back from the road as far as possible and provide as much public parking as possible, with the goal of 250 spaces. Many functions could be included on the ground floor of the Village Entrance parking structure, particularly with that floor's increased height due to the need for maintenance of the sewer pump station residing inside the structure. Even with a reduction of 75-100 spaces, it would leave 550-575 close-in parking spaces to serve the arts district and downtown businesses.

A win-win on this long-festering issue would be a truly great start to 2005. Watch for more details in coming weeks. ≈



Verna Rollinger opens her retirement gift

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Boardmember e-mail addresses are available on our website: villagelaguna.org.

Letter-Writing Campaign against Development in Aliso Canyon Wilderness Park

As part of a coalition of Orange County environmentalist groups, Village Laguna has sent letters to City and county officials and local water districts opposing the Montage/Athens Group proposal to lease publicly owned land along Aliso Creek for the expansion of the Aliso Creek Golf Course. According to preliminary maps published by the Los Angeles Times, the proposed development would extend from the end of the existing golf course to include most of what can be seen of the creek in this panoramic view. The position stated in the letters is as follows:



“We have serious concerns about the potential development of publicly owned open space in Aliso Canyon.

“We understand that the Montage Resort & Spa/Athens Group has presented to County staff and others a preliminary proposal to lease publicly owned land in the canyon adjacent to the Aliso Creek Golf Course for the development of an additional nine holes of golf. Aliso Canyon is one of the last remaining undeveloped coastal canyons in Southern California and the second-largest system of coastal canyons in the state. As part of Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, it is a treasured asset of thousands of Orange County residents. Expansion of the existing golf course into this area would disrupt sensitive habitat, and it is specifically prohibited by the area’s designation as “wilderness park” and by the provisions of the Natural Communities Conservation Program. Wilderness is rare and endangered in the region. We do not want to see dedicated park land developed by private interests.

“County staff has spoken of possible public benefits from the proposal, and we understand that these might include preservation of hillside open space, trail access, and improvements to the quality of the creek. We feel that bargaining with public open space is unacceptable. In any case, there will be opportunities to pursue

such benefits when the developers submit their plans for their newly acquired property to our city’s permit process.

“We strongly urge you to join us in opposing any proposal to develop this vital public open-space resource.”

Village Laguna members are encouraged to write to the County supervisors (County of Orange, 10 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana, CA 92701) and to the City Council (505 Forest Ave., Laguna Beach, CA 92651) expressing their

own concerns about the proposal. ≈

Renew Your Membership in January!
Don't forget that Village Laguna's annual membership dues are payable in January each year. Please check the membership date above your name on the address label. If the date is 1/1/05 or earlier, please clip the payment coupon in this newsletter and mail it with your check today in the enclosed pre-addressed envelope to Village Laguna, P.O. Box 1309, Laguna Beach, CA 92652. You will continue to receive our informative newsletter and help Village Laguna continue our efforts to preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach. Your early payment will also save the cost of mailing reminders. Thanks! ≈

Join Village Laguna! Pay annual dues of only \$20 per member or \$35 per family and receive our informative monthly newsletter, attend fun parties, stay informed at our monthly meetings, participate in our annual Charm House Tour, and support local city and school board candidates. (If you are already a member, check your membership status on your mailing label. For example, 1/1/2004 means your membership expired in January of this year.)

If you would like to join Village Laguna or if you need to renew, please clip and return this form with your check. If you are already a member, why not share this application with a friend or neighbor?

Name(s) _____ Phone # _____

Street Address _____ Email _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP Code _____

I would like to volunteer for _____

I have enclosed my check in the amount of \$ _____ (\$20/person, \$35/family)

Mail to: Village Laguna, P. O. Box 1309, Laguna Beach, CA 92652



P. O. Box 1309
Laguna Beach, CA 92652

FIRST CLASS MAIL

**Come hear new
Councilmember
Jane Egly!
Monday, Jan. 24, 7 p.m.**

Montage Receives Approval for Employee Parking Lot

Declaring that it is “already City policy to allow parking” on the site of the old UNOCAL station in South Laguna, Norm Grossman defended the decision of four of the five Planning Commissioners to approve a permanent parking lot for Montage employees there at its December meeting. He argued that the original Council action of placing a moratorium on development of the property was designed to give the Montage/Athens Group time to purchase the property for such use. Rob zur Schmiede was the sole commissioner to feel that the site is “not the right place” for excess employee parking for the hotel. Accordingly, very few questions were raised about the proposal. At the same time, commissioners approved an extension of the temporary use permit for parking on the narrow strip of land below the mobile home park, which the Montage has so far been unable to purchase.

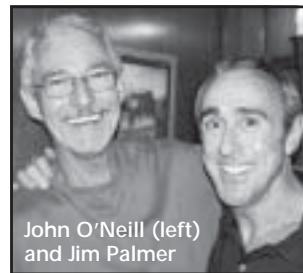
Given the uncertainty of future use of the strip for access, the parking lot proposal will require entry from the road that leads to the mobile home park to avoid the hazard of stacking of cars waiting to enter from the highway. Since the road belongs to others, the project will require a variance for indirect access, which the Commission, usually averse to granting such variances, accepted without comment.

Village Laguna continues to believe that the Montage should be required to provide sufficient parking for its em-

ployees in its own garage and to reduce the demand for parking as the management plan specifies. The developers assured the City that its figures for employee parking were appropriate because most employees would be arriving at work by bus, and it seems appropriate that the hotel be held to that original commitment. In addition, legal justification of the indirect-access variance requires the finding that the property has some special feature that deprives the owner of use comparable to that of others in the same area and zone, and this is an argument that is impossible to make with a lot that has been profitably used for years without such a variance.

Jane Egly has appealed the Planning Commission’s decision, and it will be heard by the Council February 1. ≈

IN MEMORIAM



John O'Neill (left)
and Jim Palmer

Jim Palmer, life partner of John O'Neill, passed away suddenly on the night of January 8, 2005. He was a great friend and supporter of numerous Laguna Beach charitable and civic organizations. Jim and John were the consummate hosts, throwing open their homes for fundraisers

and parties, making everyone feel welcome. He will be greatly missed.

In lieu of flowers, please make donations in his memory to AIDS Services Foundation, Orange County (www.ocaf.org). ≈