



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

Newsletter

THE VILLAGE LAGUNA NEWSLETTER • APRIL 2006 • ESTABLISHED 1971

Revision of the Land Use Element of the General Plan: Progress Report

At this month's general meeting, we'll be discussing the current draft of the Land Use Element of the City's General Plan. A subcommittee consisting of Norm Grossman, Linda Dietrich, and planner Carolyn Martin has been assembling the comments of community members to produce the draft and has reached the stage of identifying actions to implement the policies developed over the past few months. Community members who have been able to attend the subcommittee's hearings (all of them, for some reason, held from 3 to 5 in the afternoon) have expressed concern about the weakness of the language of the draft as it stands and especially about the absence from it of any mention of the house-size limits for which there seems to be broad community support. In an effort to understand the thinking involved here and out of concern that the plan element be as strong as it can be, we've asked Norm Grossman of the Planning Commission and Becky Jones, Wayne Peterson, and Arnold Hano, who have been attending the meetings, to participate in a panel discussion. Discussion will begin at 7 p.m. on Monday, April 24, in the Wells Fargo meeting room. ≈

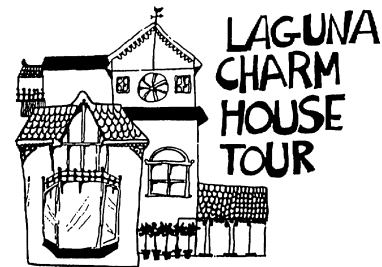


Greenbelt Walk Saturday, April 22

Ed Fry has once again agreed to lead Village Laguna members on a hike in the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park. Hikers should meet in the parking lot just this side of the El Toro Road intersection at 10 a.m. on Saturday, April 22. Water, lunch, sunscreen, hats, and sturdy walking shoes are recommended. Rain or the expectation of more than 80-degree heat will cancel. If you plan to come, please call 494-3624 to say so. ≈

Committee to Pursue the Good Governance Process

The second round of discussion on Village Laguna's concerns about governance at our March 27 general meeting was as lively as the first and resulted in the identification of a number of possible themes for the campaign. A committee has been appointed to draw them together and propose a strategy for using them to help frame the debate in this election. Tom Osborne has been asked to convene this committee. ≈



34th Charm House Tour Coming Up May 21

Preparations for the Charm House Tour are well underway. Invitations were mailed to past participants after a mailing party at the Caenns' April 4. Anne Caenn is chair again this year and will be happy to find you a job—hostessing in the houses, helping with the refreshments, etc.—if you call her at 376-5188. ≈

APRIL
General Membership Meeting
Monday, April 24, 7 p.m.
Wells Fargo Bank

MAY
Board Meeting
Saturday, May 6, 9 a.m.
Home of Ann Christoph
31632 Wildwood Rd.

Aliso and Woods Canyon Wilderness Park: Next Public Workshop

A workshop to evaluate management alternatives for Aliso and Woods Canyon Wilderness Park is scheduled for May 24 at Soka University Founders' Hall Art Gallery.

The time hasn't been announced, but information will be available when the time comes at www.ocparks.com. ≈

Village Voices

By Arnold Hano



'MIND-BOGGLING'

The most vivid image of the City Council meeting of April 4 has councilmember Cheryl Kinsman sitting, head bowed, her face a mask of bewilderment. She tries to speak, falls silent, and finally murmurs, "Wow. This is mind-boggling."

What wowed and boggled the Kinsman mind? A project that transmogrifies the once-approved Village Entrance project into a cash cow that is illegal, immoral, and fattening—literally, all three.

First, illegal: Right now Laguna's Downtown Specific Plan prohibits privately owned buildings in the Civic-Arts District from being taller than 12 feet. This new project, envisioned by paid consultant Paul Freeman and supported by a combination of arts constituencies, would rise to 36 feet. Freeman is gambling on three votes for a change in the rules.

Second, immortal: The whole shameful business violates the community's pride in its village character, its modest dimensions, its sense of serenity and peace. Village values inform the town's moral fiber, and we don't like government business conducted behind closed doors, meetings shrouded in silence, small pockets of secrecy. We like the sunshine to light up our town hall. Lincoln spoke of our government of the people, by the people, and for the people. I would add that government is people, and, while I am cherry-picking my Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, let me toss in Harry S. Truman: "Secrecy and a free, democratic government don't mix."

Finally, fattening: The Freeman project takes the open space of the original Village Entrance concept and stuffs it with—well, stuff.

The Laguna Art Museum, apparently in a state of disrepair, would be sold, and the museum, now a good bit bigger than its predecessor on Coast Highway, would move to the Village Entrance site. Right next to it would be a 450-seat amphitheater. And, worst of all, there would be 34 townhouses on the roof of the parking garage, with 500-600 cars running around beneath their bedrooms. Think of it all as the Penthouse of the Absurd. Across the street, the Playhouse would be torn down, to be replaced on its present site by a larger theater with a 350-car garage behind it.

The entire project would appear to be geared toward making our arts community happy. We must nourish our artists—support them and their lovely products—but let this not become the tail that wags the Laguna dog. We are an art colony, not an art continent.

There is more, but my gentle nature doesn't permit me to gag you with it. The above is the essence of what boggled minds other than Kinsman's. The cash cow must be mentioned. The townhouses would be sold for \$2 million each, raising \$68 million to pay for the whole Village Entrance project. Whoopee! >

In a larger sense, the village itself is at stake. I cherish this village. When Bonnie and I left New York in 1955, we left behind high-salaried careers in publishing, I as editor-in-chief of a paperback house and Bonnie as production manager of Timely Comics (later Marvel Comics) as Stan Lee's right-hand person. Bonnie put it perfectly a few weeks ago: "We bartered material success for a better quality of life."

The Charm House Tour is soon upon us. On Sunday, May 21, we in Village Laguna serve up our town in a single afternoon. This year's tour features five houses, not one of them a mansionized monstrosity — three uniquely charming, steal-your-heart-away cottages and two stunning houses designed by Laguna's master architect of 50 years ago (and still going strong), J. Lamont Langworthy. It is the village itself on display. See it in all its fresh and enduring beauty. Let it take the taste of 34 townhouses, squatting like so many toads on the roof of a garage, out of your mouth. ≈

Harman Leads State Senate Race

In the April 11, 2006, special election for the 35th district state senate seat, Republican Assemblyman Tom Harman came out narrowly ahead. He will face Democrat Larry Caballero in a June 6 runoff election. Harman was supported by a plurality of Laguna Beach voters in part because of his support for environmental causes. He has long supported preservation of Bolsa Chica and opposes the building of the Foothill-South Toll Road through San Onofre State Park. ≈

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Appeal Of Three Feet Higher House to Be Heard May 2

A tragedy of errors continues

to play out in the bizarre case of a house at 31629 Second Avenue that was raised three feet in a day. Neighbors who had an ocean view in the morning came home to find that house-moving equipment had been used to elevate a downhill house and their ocean views had vanished.

They found that the City had issued permits for raising the house to allow eight feet of clearance on one side of the house for vehicular passage to a garage in the rear. Staff did not require design review or noticing for this increase in height. After neighborhood protests, the project was sent to the Design Review Board, which found that eight feet of clearance was not required, since the garage door heights are six feet eight inches, and approved raising the house a maximum of eight inches.

The owner has appealed this decision to the City Council, and the City has waived the usual \$610 appeal fee. Problems related to construction at this address have gone on since the early 1990s, when the owner was allowed to construct a three-car garage in the rear yard without respecting the required rear- and side-yard setbacks. Staff did not require a variance for this or send the proposal for design review, being under the impression that the applicant was only repairing an existing garage. Access to the garages then became an issue when it was found that the driveway was too narrow. Since the garages are not required for parking for the existing residence (there is a one-car garage under it), it seems clear that the concerns of the neighbors should be paramount and they should not have to suffer because of staff mistakes. ≈

ACT V Relocation: Point of No Return

The awarding of a construction contract for the relocation of the Corporate Yard to ACT V ends more than ten years of efforts by Village Laguna to persuade the City Council not to introduce industrial



uses to the greenbelt side of Laguna Canyon Road and to annex the property (which is still in the County) so that its own environmental regulations would apply to any construction. The last time the project reached the bidding stage, in 1998, a cost overrun of \$1,600,000 caused the Council to reject all bids and reevaluate the project. (At that point the low bid was \$3,892,000.) This time, bound by the "compromise" that allows the retention of at least some of the existing parking at the site and continuation of the summer shuttle service), the Council unanimously approved a contract amounting to more than \$8,500,000 — the funding depending on an anticipated grant from the Orange County Transportation Authority, the presumably greatly increased value of the City's Olive Street lots, and previously allocated capital improvement funds of some \$3,000,000. In a city that recently paid \$9,000,000 for what was touted as a \$2,000,000 park, the virtual absence of Council or public (Gary Alstott's and ours excepted) consideration of the wisdom of spending this much money on this particular project is disheartening. ≈

Time to Renew Your Membership!

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 1/1/06 or earlier, please clip the payment coupon below and mail it with your check today to Village Laguna, P.O. Box 1309, Laguna Beach, CA 92652. You can also donate to Village Laguna beyond the nominal cost of membership renewal, and we hope that you will consider doing so. ≈

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, 1/1/2005 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).

I have included an additional amount of \$ _____ to help Village Laguna with its mission.

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



P. O. Box 1309
Laguna Beach, CA 92652

FIRST CLASS MAIL

**MONDAY, APRIL 24
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP
MEETING
Wells Fargo Bank**

Scoping for Village Entrance EIR: Deadline for Comments Extended

Concerns raised by community members about the Planning Commission's narrow conception of the scoping process for the Village Entrance EIR (that is, determination of the instructions to the consultant about what should be covered) were reflected in Jane Egly's placing the issue on the Council's agenda on April 4. The Council, having heard these concerns, decided to extend the public comment period for a month. One speaker pointed out that the commission had not clearly identified the objective of the project and that possibly environmentally superior alternatives for meeting that objective should be considered. Certainly it seems that the traffic and circulation impacts of the proposal and the appropriate number of parking spaces in the garage in the context of other proposed development in the area ought to be among the consultants' concerns.

The Civic-Arts District Committee, through its consultant Paul Freeman, also argued for the extension, which will give it time to put the finishing touches on a proposal to intensify the use of the site by adding a transplanted and expanded Laguna Art Museum ("wrapped around" the parking struc-

ture), an amphitheater, and 34 townhouses. The proposal would apparently require a substantial reconfiguration of the prize-winning approved plan and an ordinance change

that would allow increased height for privately owned as well as public buildings. Such a change is in the works, but it stipulates that the building, though private, must be arts-related, and the anticipated \$2-million residences would seem not to meet this criterion. In any case, the Council has sent the proposed ordinance back to the Planning Commission for further attention, asking, among other things, how, once a privately owned building had been built above the height limit, they could enforce its arts-related use forever.

It's hard to see how a project that depends on an ordinance change, adds residential units climbing the hillside behind City Hall, contributes

to traffic in the area, and subtracts parking spaces from the approved structure (for the residential uses) would be considered environmentally superior. A project envisioning houses there was floated some years ago (remember the "Hanging Gardens"?) but received no local support. ≈

