**Comments received for April 23, 2024**

**Resident Comments:**

***David Schroeder*** *“Forest Avenue, as it existed before the Covid pandemic was a historical treasure, unique in Southern California, which should not be abandoned. Regardless of other considerations which have been discussed at length, the street has a heritage worth preserving as it was. It is the very worst kind of hypocrisy for the city to maintain any type of control over residences or business properties for historical reasons and then to gut the historical center of the city itself.” Received by email in January, 2024*

**In Person Council Comments:**

**Gene Felder** said the project needs more creative ideas and advocates for a design competition to get more imaginative plans.

**Michele Monda** wants a hybrid solution more like Europe where the street is used as it was before covid and at night or on weekends becomes a Pomenade. She recommended getting local residents like Bob Borthwick, who has experience designing projects like this, involved.

**Les Miklosy** said we should figure out what the requirements are? Define what a successful promenade would be.

**Anne Caen** said residents were concerned about the lack of a hybrid design, and about the loss of parking.

**Johanna Felder** said we should start by going back to how the street was before covid and then compare it with a hybrid or permanent plaza. SWA may be a respected firm but they proposed removal of 118 trees in the Downtown Action Plan. Do they really care about Laguna’s character?

**Mark Christie** is a supporter of a Promenade but not in its current form. If done right it should look like it was there forever.

**Charmagne** (owner of the Shoe Cellar says older visitors and local customers need to be able to access the store. They need parking nearby.

**John Thomas** said there was not meaningful involvement by residents in the focus groups. Residents should have the biggest voice over special interest groups, such as tourist, business owners, etc. Many see Forest Avenue as the heart of Laguna and the subcommittee is trying to do heart surgery on it. The plan needs to include all the costs.

**Gregg MacGillavary** support the Promenade but thinks it can be far better.

**Carrie Reynolds** supports the focus groups as stated in the staff report.

**Bill Hoffman** said the Promenade is the only car free spot in Laguna. It’s too important to put cars back in. He claimed there was sufficient public input in previous meetings and workshops.

**Alice** (The Shoe Cellar) says there is no energy on the Promenade. People on one side of the street can’t see the stores on the other side very well. Don’t take away the trees. Aging people don’t have a place to park.

**Judy Mancuso** suggested using it on weekends for a Farmer’s Market. Make it a hybrid so 5 days a week it has parking (a normal street), and on weekends make it a plaza by closing the street.

**Toni Iseman** mentioned the cities of Boulder, Carmel, and San Louis Obispo as places that have plazas we could learn from. She asked how many business could survive a year long shut down during construction if it became a permanent plaza.

**Mike Ray** said that a survey showed that 90-95% of people love it.

**Ann Krisman** said the Promenade has hurt her business, Fresh Produce. 99% of the people she talks to don’t go to it. It’s $250,000 just for maintenance plus the lost parking revenue. *GW: The cost of lost parking revenue is $206,00 per year and increasing as meter rates go to $5.50 an hour this summer.*

**Jacob Cherub** said 2,700 households received the 2021 survey and 553 replied. 2,307 businesses got the survey and only 187 answered. The project needs a taskforce to bring people together. Steve Kellenberg (Planning Commission member), said the two previous designs were for Tourists.

**Mike Hoag** loves the concept of a Promenadeand seeing parents take their toddlers to take their first steps there. We need a document of what we want the Promenade to do.

**Violet** (owner of Violet’s Botique) thanked Sue for contacting her. Business has fallen off. Elderly no longer come downtown. Maybe the idea of a hybrid would work better.

**Ann Christoph** asked who made this project a priority over all the other areas and neighborhoods in Laguna Beach. It needs a flexible plan for heavy use in summer. Bring it back to what it was before covid.

**Yu Tan** worked a the Forest Gallery and closing off the Promenade was useful for visitors to go to restaurant and then to the gallery.

**Jerome Pudwill** said the group (subcommittee) is tilted towards the business owners and who picked the subcommittee members? Public has not had a chance to vote on whether they want a permanent pedestrian promenade.

**David Rubel** of Rubel’s Jewelers said his business has been fine. Beautify the area and make it nice, but the Promenade works. *(GW Note: Rubel’s Jewelers is located outside of the Promenade*

**Comments received by EMAIL**.

Hello City Council,

I am writing in support of creating a permanent design for our downtown promenade. It has become a local gathering place for many alike. We have heard beautiful live music, art installations and even memorials for locals held there. It is truly a special place and deserves a permanent updated design.

Personally, we spend much more time on Forest than we ever did before, frequenting restaurants and other shops because it is so welcoming to pedestrians and cyclists. Riding our bikes down from North Laguna and having dinner at 230 outside is our favorite date night.

We hope you will keep moving forward in the process to create an even more beautiful permanent promenade.

Sincerely,

Nia Evans & AJ Allen

North Laguna

Hello Mayor Kemp, Mayor Pro Tem Rounaghi, and Council Members Whalen, Orgill, and Weiss,  
  
I wanted to share my support for investing and beautifying the Forest Avenue Promenade. I believe it has been an incredibly positive change to our downtown. I frequent it often as do all my Laguna neighbors and friends. It has created an open pedestrian friendly public square in Laguna Beach. Our town deserves to have a space designated for people to walk about, dine, and enjoy.  
  
I support investing in and creating a beautiful permanent design that is accessible and welcoming. Investing our city dollars into better experiences for our local citizens and our visitors is worth it. Infrastructure and community spaces are what make a place welcoming and livable. A prime example is always the Susi Q, a once argued about investment that is used by so many in the community. The Susi Q is an amazing asset. We deserve more investments in community spaces in our town. These spaces are what make people come downtown, shop downtown, dine downtown, attend events downtown and feel connected to their community. It is time to make Forest Avenue Promenade permanent and beautiful.  
  
I support the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee, Focus Groups, Public workshops and a Community Survey. I also support the work of experts including architects and city planners to know what works best in this type of space. Community input is important, but we must always integrate experts to help with final decision making. It is always important to get community input, but that does not mean they are the decision makers - it is input for the leaders to make final decisions.  
  
Thank you for your service to the City of Laguna Beach. I am grateful you all work to improve and invest in our city. The Wolff family is in full support of the Forest Avenue Promenade permanent design and implementation.  
  
Sincerely,  
Josh and Peggy Wolff

**Barbara McMurray <mcmurray@me.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

Cc:​Bill Hoffman <bhoffman421@gmail.com>​

Tue 4/23/2024 10:39 AM

Dear City Council members,

I’m writing in support of moving ahead with creating a beautiful, permanent design on Forest Avenue.

We can argue about it for 25 years, as we did with the Village Entrance, and, as with that meek, watered-down project, end up with something vanilla and quite unremarkable that will need to be revised to accommodate our city's actual needs.

Of course, citizens should be involved - but how much participation is practical? The Agenda item calls for the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee, Focus Groups, Public Workshops and a Community Survey.  This sounds like plenty of community participation to me. Your elected duty is to move this project forward, despite a loud minority of self-appointed experts. We know them well, we hear from them often, and I can assure you they do not hold the majority opinion of residents in Laguna Beach. People I talk to support the Promenade’s concept and want to see it grow out of its current rather awkward adolescent phase into something more sophisticated.

Please move ahead with creating a lovely, peaceful spot in the heart of our town where families, locals, and visitors can gather as friendly fellow pedestrians. The Promenade is a calming influence on our sometimes frenetic downtown. I am eager to see it blossom.

Sincerely,

Barbara McMurray

**MJ Abraham <mjabraham0812@gmail.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

LB City Council,  
  
This staff report directed by the Ad Hoc Committee (Kempf/Orgill) leaves many questions on the controversial permanency promotion of Forest Ave as a Promenade.  
  
From what I read, our Mayor continues to direct a priority via outlined focus groups to the constituents that have been given higher considerations (Businesses/RE/Tourism marketers Chamber/Visit Laguna) over resident/taxpayers since the temporary closure was introduced.  It is no longer necessary as originally proposed IMO and any further substantial investment should be made by the City majority taxpayers.  
  
Sadly, after years of experiencing council non-transparency including conducting leading question surveys supported by the Council majority (Whalen/Kempf/Blake) and their hand-picked City Manager Shohreh Dupuis a percentage of the public has lost faith and trust in our City processes and decision-making.  
  
At this point, if residents are not made a priority input group involved in all workshops with the other designated groups this project proposal will be perceived as just another strong-arming self-interest agenda which will not be the accepted.  
  
Thank you for your time and consideration.  
  
MJ Abraham  
Resident/Founder lagunabeachchat.com  
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**William Fantini <wfantini@me.com>**

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To:​**City Council;**​McKay, Ann Marie CC​

Cc:​Catherine Casale <kcasalef@me.com>​

Tue 4/23/2024 8:18 AM

My wife, Catherine and I have been residents and homeowners in Laguna Beach for 31 years and we write you at this time to express our concerns regarding the aforementioned.

Having reviewed Agenda Item 9 – Promenade Ad Hoc Committee Work Plan, we find it woefully incomplete at this time as it contains misrepresentations which may mislead the public and largely eliminate resident input regarding the planning of the promenade. Which is not what residents were promised.   
   
The Staff Report  says that the promenade has “received positive feedback.” The fact is, it has also received significant negative feedback and was never properly reviewed  by the public – the previous survey purposefully did not include residents from across the city who responded online. Plus when asking residents if they wanted the promenade, the survey never revealed how much it would cost to build and the ongoing maintenance costs.   
  
The public has never been allowed to vote on whether it even wants the promenade. That’s something which should be allowed if there is to be true community involvement.   
  
The Staff Report’s work plan talks about forming early lead focus groups in May. But virtually everyone cited are members of groups who have a monetary interest in a permanent promenade. The groups include business owners, architects, the Chamber of Commerce and Visit Laguna. Yet there’s absolutely no mention of members representing residents. The bias is obvious and inappropriate.   
   
In June, an economic retail analysis is supposed to be presented by a consultant which reviews various trends both on the promenade and in other cities. This consultant should be identified prior to its hiring. We need to know the benefits to the public and retail stores that have not embraced the Promenade. Residents – not just business and tourism interests – need to be represented to provide comments to the consultants.    
   
Since a consultant is being brought in to explain business aspects of the promenade, why is there no outside consultant being brought in to review the impact the promenade will have on residents and the community?  If residents are supposed to pay for this promenade, they deserve a say in it upfront, from the get-go. This plan treats the promenade like it’s only for businesses.  
  
In July, the committee and the focus groups are supposed to meet with the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. Why? If the intent is to pursue converting the promenade into an open carry liquor zone, as Mayor Kempf has recently stated, then the public deserves to know about it NOW. Members representing the residential community should be attending those meetings to ensure residents’ concerns  are addressed and accurately reported to the public.  
  
In August, the committee along with input from the business/tourism focus groups, staff, consultants and “the community” will establish design goals. So who’s “the community”? There’s absolutely no identification who these “community” members will be, how they’ll be selected and how their input will be reported to the public and implemented.  
  
Interestingly, all of above items have scheduled dates.  But the staff report’s promised Public Workshops and Community Survey are not scheduled. So when are they supposed to originate?  What good are they if the committee has already determined for us what its goals are?    
  
No mention is made regarding who will lead the workshops, who can attend, who will report the findings, and how they will be provided to the public.   
  
Similarly, the last community satisfaction survey ignored online city-wide resident responses and failed to address the promenade's costs, thus rendering a highly inaccurate reporting of the promenade’s popularity. Without safeguards, what assurances does the public have that this won’t be replicated?

The workshops and survey need to be scheduled before any design decisions are made or this whole effort will be just theater for the public with the City Council already doing what it wants to do.  
  
We all saw what happened the last time residents were excluded early on in the promenade’s planning - $250,000 wasted on plans torn apart by about 20 community leaders speaking at the City Council.  
  
Let’s not repeat this.  
   
We recommend this Agenda Item be tabled  to address the issues cited above.   
   
Respectfully,  
   
William Fantini & Catherine Casale-Fantini  
527 Mountain Road  
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

[wfantini@me.com](mailto:wfantini@me.com)

kcasalef@me.com

**Lorna Shaw <lornabshaw@netscape.net>**

To:​**City Council;**​McKay, Ann Marie CC​

Cc:​Lorna Shaw <lornabshaw@netscape.net>;​+1 other​

Mon 4/22/2024 10:41 PM

Attn:  all members of the Laguna Beach City Council and the Laguna Beach City Clerk

I am writing in regard to Agenda Item 9 concerning the Promenade ad hoc Committee Work Plan.  I have lived in Laguna Beach since 1965 when my husband and I bought our first home.  The beauty and ambiance of Laguna drew us to this place and we valued its setting, its small town appearance and size and the convenience of its services available for residents.  Over the years, Laguna has grown in size, and, alas, in traffic.  Still, it retained many of its conveniences for residents, though several useful stores left town.  Forest Avenue was our Main Street.  Ocean Avenue had given us access to Sprouse-Reitz.  JCPenney was reasonably priced and carried practical goods.  Now, it seems, many of the stores are more geared towards selling to tourists. It is a frustration.

I am writing to protest what feels to be a plan to permanently change what remains of the Forest Avenue we all loved.  It was a beautiful street with lovely, tall trees, side parking that made for shopping convenience, and a wonderful view down its length to the Pacific beyond.  Now its character has completely changed.

I have received a copy of comments by Ann Christoph regarding her thoughts about the City Council Session tonight, on April 23, Item 9  Promenade ad hoc Committee Work Plan.  I wish to state that I absolutely support everything contained in her comments.  Please consider mine as another voice of protest about these issues.  I feel we are being railroaded towards decisions that are not being made with proper and sufficient resident input and I want this stopped and the decision making process changed accordingly.

Below is a copy of Ann Christoph's comments.  I want to register "ditto" to her words.

Thank you for your attention.

- Lorna Shaw

1918 Temple Hills Drive

Laguna Beach, CA  92651

(949) 244-1586

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**Below are comments from Ann Christoph representing Village Laguna**

The report of the Subcommittee is disappointing since it does not address the concerns that were raised at the last hearing.  There were many speakers who had serious reservations about proceeding with a design for a completely closed lower Forest Avenue.  Yet this report addresses those concerns by asking that the Council  
         “Reaffirm the Promenade on Forest project description as a pedestrian plaza.”  
Those speakers wanted a fair assessment of alternative approaches including

* returning the street to its former condition with through traffic and parking while projecting schemes for beautifying and landscaping.
* Hybrid schemes with some outdoor seating and some parking and through access
* Allowing for public use of the space for special events and evening hours, while keeping parking and through access at other times.
* The promised alternative that keeps the curbs, gutters and existing trees in place—a reversible scheme.

In order to have a fair process and address valid concerns the council should not “reaffirm support for a pedestrian plaza” completely closed to vehicles and parking.  A fair evaluation and analysis must precede any such affirmation.   
   
The closing of the street was done under Covid provisions with no CEQA compliance required.  Now that the council is proceeding to permanent design, it is time to do the environmental studies analyzing the impacts and alternatives.   
   
The wording of the staff report seems to say we are starting with the existing promenade and are just looking for how to improve it and make it permanent.   We should be starting with the street the way it was as a baseline and evaluate whether to return it to a street again as well as other options.  The report doesn’t say what we will do with the economic analysis and comparison with other cities.  Who is that consultant?  How much and from what funds are they being paid? Is it intended to assure the concerned public that the economics of retail there are just fine with the closed street?  There are similar questions raised regarding the tree evaluation consultant.    
   
How are the focus groups formed?  How do members of the public participate if they are not chosen for a focus group?  We support a Task Force model with all meetings open to the public instead of the Ad Hoc Committee approach which allows council members to meet privately and limit public participation.  
   
SWA is a well-respected National firm.  However they are the ones who prepared the downtown action plan that proposed to remove almost all the trees in the downtown.  To us they have not demonstrated their commitment to preserving and protecting the features that make up Laguna’s village character.  Village Laguna is committed to preserving the Laguna village character, and this is a serious concern.  
   
Ann Christoph

**Promenade**

**Paul Puma <paul.r.puma@icloud.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

Mon 4/22/2024 8:01 PM

[NOTICE:  This message originated outside of City of Laguna Beach -- DO NOT CLICK on links or open attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]  
  
Please do not let MRI. Pudwill influence your decision. The promenade absolutely needs to be moved forward as a permanent part of downtown Laguna. As a 40 year resident I have been waiting for this to be in place for years. Surveys show an overwhelming number of residents and tourists support it. Let’s stop a few people who seem to have a different agenda from delaying something that needs to be done now.  
  
Paul Puma  
Sent from my iPad

Laguna Beach City Council

April 23, 2024

Item 9 Promenade ad hoc Committee Work Plan.

The report of the Subcommittee is disappointing since it does not address the concerns that were raised at the last hearing. There were many speakers who had serious reservations about proceeding with a design for a completely closed lower Forest Avenue. Yet this report addresses those concerns by asking that the Council

“Reaffirm the Promenade on Forest project description as a pedestrian plaza.”

Those speakers wanted a fair assessment of alternative approaches including

o returning the street to its former condition with through traffic and parking while projecting schemes for beautifying and landscaping.

o Hybrid schemes with some outdoor seating and some parking and through access

o Allowing for public pedestrian use of the space for special events and evening hours, while keeping parking and through access at other times.

o The promised alternative that keeps the curbs, gutters and existing trees in place—a reversible scheme.

In order to have a fair process and address valid concerns the council should not “reaffirm support for a pedestrian plaza” completely closed to vehicles and parking. A fair evaluation and analysis must precede any such affirmation.

The closing of the street was done under Covid provisions with no CEQA compliance required. Now that the council is proceeding to permanent design, it is time to do the environmental studies analyzing the impacts and alternatives.

The wording of the staff report seems to say we are starting with the existing promenade and are just looking for how to improve it and make it permanent. We should be starting with the street the way it was as a baseline and evaluate whether to return it to a street again as well as other options. The report doesn’t say what we will do with the economic analysis and comparison with other cities. Who is that consultant? How much and from what funds are they being paid? Is the report from the economic consultant intended to assure the concerned public that retail economics there are just fine even though the street is closed? There are similar questions regarding the tree evaluation consultant. Who chooses the tree evaluator? How are they paid? Will there be a peer review?

How are the focus groups formed? How do members of the public participate if they are not chosen for a focus group? We support a Task Force model with all meetings open to the public instead of the Ad Hoc Committee approach which allows council members to meet privately and limit public participation.

SWA is a well-respected national firm. However they are the ones who prepared the downtown action plan that proposed to remove almost all the trees in lower Forest--and in the whole downtown! To us they have not demonstrated their commitment to preserving and protecting the features that make up Laguna’s village character. Village Laguna is committed to preserving the Laguna village character, and this is a serious concern. Please rethink the approach to resolving the Promenade’s future in light of these comments.

**Jahn Levitt <jahnml@yahoo.com>**

To:​**City Council;**​McKay, Ann Marie CC​

Mon 4/22/2024 6:47 PM

Dear Council Members and Mayor Kempf,  
  
Regarding the decision to go forward with Park Plaza as presently conceived,  I am opposed.  
  
Fortunately, parking is a non-issue for me personally. I can walk to any local store from my home.  
  
Why was it agreed at the last council meeting to address those issues concerning residents, of which you are all aware, and then ignore your promise?  
  
I recall that during the last campaign, candidates expressed concerns with “transparency,” and promised to “ unify the various opposing view points” dividing residents through communication and  “listening to the facts.”  
  
The facts are, the majority of you did not listen. There have been no plans made to include residents in this decision which affects us all.  
  
Park  Plaza is a tourist attraction.  
  
Tourists do not help make Laguna “ vibrant.” They are a drain on our resources… police, firefighters, lifeguards, sanitation department, waste management. They increase the purchases of alcohol, attracting more licensed restaurants and “ tasting rooms.”  
  
If tourists don’t make a profit for Laguna Beach and residents have concerns… why not keep your commitment to plan an ad hoc committee with residents and delve further into the future of Park Plaza?  
Unless you have already decided how best to use my tax dollars. Which gives me pause.  
  
Respectfully,  
Jahn Levitt  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Catherine Jurca <cathjurca@gmail.com>**

To:​Kempf, Sue;​Orgill, Mark;​Rounaghi, Alex;​+2 others​​

Cc:​McKay, Ann Marie CC;​Megan Garibaldi​

Tue 4/23/2024 9:15 AM

[NOTICE:  This message originated outside of City of Laguna Beach -- DO NOT CLICK on links or open attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]  
  
Dear Mayor Kempf and Members of the Laguna Beach City Council:  
  
I write to urge you not to delist the property from the Laguna Beach Historic Register. It has been designated since 2008 by a previous owner. Whether that owner received requested parking reductions is moot.  
  
The basis for delisting is a memo from fired Director of Community Development Marc Wiener. It does not contain any information from the previous owner stating that he withheld his signature from the paperwork. The only thing we know for sure is that the City apparently cannot find the paperwork. That is no basis on which to delist a historic property.  
  
The Staff Report states that the previous "Property owner did not pursue the aforementioned historic register agreement with the City, which it was not obligated to do as a result of not receiving the parking incentive.” This sentence appears to mean that staff believe the City was not required to get the previous owner’s signature because he did not receive the parking incentive he had sought. Nowhere does the historic preservation ordinance in place at that time say that. The City cannot use the rules of the old ordinance when it serves its purposes and ignore them when it doesn’t.  
  
The property owner raised the paperwork issue in previous failed attempts to delist the property. What has changed? Clearly nothing.  
  
Thank you for your consideration.  
  
Best wishes,  
Cathy Jurca, President  
Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Coalition

Amy Jackson <sixactionjackson@gmail.com>

To:​**City Council**​

Cc:​McKay, Ann Marie CC​

Mon 4/22/2024 6:28 PM

[NOTICE:  This message originated outside of City of Laguna Beach -- DO NOT CLICK on links or open attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]  
  
Dear City Council Members-and City Clerk,  
Please postpone a vote tomorrow on agenda number 9- The Promenade Ad  
Hoc Committee Work Plan.  
It seems that very little meaningful resident participation is included in this plan. We request that public meetings and information gathering and consensus building be the FIRST action of the plan.  This was promised to us at the city Council meeting when the prior administrations $250,000 plan was scrapped because it was completely out of touch with the residents and businesses. Not to mention very lacking in the creative spirit that defines our city! We have a lot of stakeholders to consider, but we also have the opportunity to create a gift to the generations to come. Let’s do this together! Please do not repeat the past failed process and allow consultants to turn our community’s beating heart into a hollow strip mall. Make residents and businesses number one and let’s schedule those community meetings  tomorrow instead.  
Respectfully ,  
Amy Jackson

**Alison King <aking@csusm.edu>**

Mon 4/22/2024 4:12 PM

﻿

Having reviewed Agenda Item 9 – Promenade Ad Hoc Committee Work Plan, I find it woefully incomplete at this time as it contains misrepresentations which may mislead the public and largely eliminate resident input regarding the planning of the promenade. Which is not what residents were promised.

The Staff Report  says that the promenade has “received positive feedback.” The fact is, it has also received significant negative feedback and was never properly reviewed  by the public – the previous survey purposefully did not include residents from across the city who responded online. Plus when asking residents if they wanted the promenade, the survey never revealed how much it would cost to build and the ongoing maintenance costs.   
  
The public has never been allowed to vote on whether it even wants the promenade. That’s something which should be allowed if there is to be true community involvement.   
  
The Staff Report’s work plan talks about forming early lead focus groups in May. But virtually everyone cited are members of groups who have a monetary interest in a permanent promenade. The groups include business owners, architects, the Chamber of Commerce and Visit Laguna. Yet there’s absolutely no mention of members representing residents.  How biased can this get?    
   
In June, an economic retail analysis is supposed to be presented by a consultant which reviews various trends both on the promenade and in other cities. This consultant should be identified prior to its hiring. We need to know the benefits to the public and retail stores that have not embraced the Promenade. Residents – not just business and tourism interests – need to be represented to provide comments to the consultants.    
   
Since a consultant is being brought in to explain business aspects of the promenade, why is there no outside consultant being brought in to review the impact the promenade will have on residents and the community?  If residents are supposed to pay for this promenade, they deserve a say in it upfront, from the get-go. This plan treats the promenade like it’s only for businesses.  
  
In July, the committee and the focus groups are supposed to meet with the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. Why? If the intent is to pursue converting the promenade into an open carry liquor zone, as Mayor Kempf has recently stated, then the public deserves to know about it NOW. Members representing the residential community should be attending those meetings to ensure residents’ concerns  are addressed and accurately reported to the public.  
  
In August, the committee along with input from the business/tourism focus groups, staff, consultants and “the community” will establish design goals. So who’s “the community”? There’s absolutely no identification who these “community” members will be, how they’ll be selected and how their input will be reported to the public and implemented.  
  
Interestingly, all of above items have scheduled dates.  But the staff report’s promised Public Workshops and Community Survey are not scheduled. So when are they supposed to originate?  What good are they if the committee has already determined for us what its goals are?    
  
No mention is made regarding who will lead the workshops, who can attend, who will report the findings, and how they will be provided to the public.   
  
Similarly, the last community satisfaction survey ignored online city-wide resident responses and failed to address the promenade's costs, thus rendering a highly inaccurate reporting of the promenade’s popularity. Without safeguards, what assurances does the public have that this won’t be replicated?  
The workshops and survey need to be scheduled before any design decisions are made or this whole effort will be a charade - just smoke and mirrors to fool the public and do what the City Council already wants to do.  
  
We all saw what happened the last time residents were excluded early on in the promenade’s planning - $250,000 wasted on plans torn apart by about 20 community leaders speaking at the City Council.  
  
Let’s not repeat this.  
   
I recommend this Agenda Item be tabled  to address the issues cited above.

**Michele Monda <michelemonda3@gmail.com>**

To:​McKay, Ann Marie CC;​Orgill, Mark;​Rounaghi, Alex;​+3 others​​​

Mon 4/22/2024 2:43 PM

Hi Ann Marie-

Please include this in public comment for Agenda item 9 and circulate to all CC members.

Thank you.

Michèle

Dear City Councilmembers:

Despite saying that input into the Promenade plans would be with public participation (even Mayor Kempf said she was going to do this) I find the staff report on this item once again excluding residents.

Oh, you will say, they can attend the Public workshops held by the different focus groups/Committee.  They can take the online Community survey.  Where are the qualified residents on any committee or focus group where the real input/decisions will be made?  You've certainly got the focus groups covered with self interested parties like the Chamber of Commerce, Visit Laguna Beach, architects etc.  What about the residents who will be paying for this?  Who's looking out for OUR interest?  This town is teeming with experts qualified to make reasoned decisions like Ann Christophe, Ruben Flores, Bob Borthwick, Roger Butow and many more.  They have expertise yet you refuse to utilize them to make decisions.  This is OUR town - how many from your "focus groups" live here and care the way residents do?

And furthermore on the agenda you state one goal is to "Reaffirm the Promenade on Forest project as a pedestrian plaza".  Again, I ask: Where is your proof that a permanent closure of Forest Avenue is what the majority of residents want?  Where are the empirical studies?  The survey you say you are basing this on was flawed and you never used the responses from the online survey which was many many more than the paltry few from the downtown region.  You are moving ahead to create this closed plaza with unknown costs - don't you think residents should have the right to know what this will cost and vote to have it before you just do it???

Please include residents on your committee and focus groups.  It is vital that the community buy into this project for any success and not just after the fact input in workshops.  That's just disrespectful to the people who will be paying for this.

Thank you-

Michèle Monda

**GAYLE WAITE <justwaite@cox.net>**

To:​McKay, Ann Marie CC;​**City Council**​

Mon 4/22/2024 2:42 PM

Dear City Council members,

**Regarding tomorrow’s Agenda Item 9 on the Promenade Ad Hoc Committee Work Plan, it is my opinion that this significantly important project has not had enough input from residents as was promised to us in several meetings.**  Those with economic interests should not be the primary focus and major input givers, they are not necessarily invested long term in the promenade.  It is residents who long term will be saddled with the consequences of wrong decisions.

The project has received so much negative input, it is obvious much more work is necessary before committing to a permanent solution.  The facts are that the total costs have not been fully explained yet much money has been spent on design plans that were not acceptable to many residents who had time to study them. The promenade’s wood platform in front of the restaurants was rebuilt last year at what seemed an inflated cost, yet it was not that old in number of years. Another consequence of rushed planning.

Proposals should be encouraged from more experienced local design firms accompanied by estimates for implementation and for on-going maintenance. Our beautiful downtown trees must be preserved and incorporated into the design features. If a permanently closed street is decided upon, allowances must be made for deliveries and public transport spaces. I also have a concern about having even more additional alcohol consumption out in the open. The promenade area must not just be for restaurant patrons.

Please proceed with **more public communication and input**, perhaps with a new city manager coming, he may have some good guidance and innovative ideas to share. Let’s wait and see.

Thank you for your consideration of my requests and investing more time in this. I am a downtown resident and neighbor of the promenade.

Best regards,

Gayle Waite

55 Through Street  
949-887-3247

The Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce supports agenda item 9. The Chamber of Commerce supports Mayor Sue Kempf and Councilmember Mark Orgill as the City Council AD HOC Committee. The work plan they have organized is sound. Bringing back the local business SWA to help with the design of the promenade is an excellent idea. The Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce looks forward to participating with SWA to help communicate with the business community to receive public comments and ideas they can hopefully integrate into their plan going forward. We applaud the use of our local businesses to help move the Promenade on Forest project forward in a timely manner. I think it is noteworthy, and thank Mayor Kempf and Councilmember Orgil for receiving resident input into the process.

Respectfully, Paula Hornbuckle-Arnold Paula Hornbuckle-Arnold Chairman of the Board Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce

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**Becky Visconti <rebeccavisconti1@gmail.com>**

Tue 4/23/2024 4:08 PM

Dear Mayor Kempf, Mayor Pro Tem Rounaghi, Council Members Whalen, Orgill and Weiss,  
  
We wish to send our support for the continued investment and development of the Forest Promenade. Isolation is a major health crisis in today’s society. The resulting medical issues are too numerous to justify not persevering with every possible solution. The Promenade is a wonderful way for individuals, families and friends to come together to share a coffee, cocktail and or a bite to eat, in the beautiful out of doors, engaged in conversation and laughs.  
  
The music nights and other activities are wonderful for the community and visitors.  
  
We love to walk to town and on to the pedestrian safe promenade to shop, eat and socialize. I believe it has already contributed significantly to the health of residents; getting them outside and on foot or on a bike. We also love that we are not breathing in toxic gasoline emissions and dodging cars backing out of parking spaces.  
  
Let’s make it permanent and more accessible. How about safe bike or walkable lanes leading from north and south to the center of town. How about more flowers and greenery, and perhaps sculptures and seating areas designed by area artists.  
  
To make this work we need professional city planners, architects and designers with the expertise to make this an incredible open social space. Resident comments can be helpful but it is our hope that this will include architects like Morris Skenderian and others who understand this town and how to make a special space, just like what happened at the Montage / TI beach park. What a wonderful place that is for residents and visitors to enjoy.  
  
Thank you for your work to continue to push forward to make Laguna a great place and healthy environment in which to live and enjoy.  
  
Becky and Frank Visconti  
Woods Cove  
702-338-3137

**Roger Kempler <roger.kempler@gmail.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

Cc:​Ellen Kempler <ellen.g.kempler@gmail.com>​

Mon 4/22/2024 7:18 AM

Dear Mayor and Council,

We are unable to attend tomorrow evening's Council Meeting, but want to urge you to continue taking the above step to complete the Promenade, including securing input from the community, including such key long-term residents and committed pedestrian plaza supporters as Bill Hoffman (Ph.D in urban planning from UCLA), Cary Redfearn (Lumberyard's owner on Forest outside the Promenade), Dave Rubel (Rubel's Jewelry owner on Forest inside the Promenade), and Billy Fried, to help get the permanent design work done really well.

Despite a few naysayers' loud and persistent criticism (whom I am not sure even visit the Promenade very much), whenever we go there, we see happy, relaxed people (including families) who enjoy being there and when we asked their thoughts about this pedestrian plaza, typically say it is "much better than before" and that they "do not wish the City return to the dark, empty parking days."

In sum, we believe the Promenade is wildly popular and once completed in a great, inspiring way, it will be a lasting, wonderful, economically beneficial

and terrific legacy of your council.

Thank you.

Roger and Ellen Kempler

27 Year Residents

**Susan Velasquez <susanvelasquez3@gmail.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

﻿The closure of Forest Avenue creates a negative reception for both visitors and residents for different reasons. Driver's unfamiliar with the layout of Laguna are greeted instead of a welcoming, open and receptive downtown, to a sign that says STREET CLOSED. The closure of Forest Ave. sends visitors (through their phone directions )  predominately to Glenneyre St.as an easier route into Laguna. Glenneyre USED to be more exclusively used by residents as an alternative to PCH and due to the blockage of ways to enter downtown, Glenneyre (especially at night)  is a dangerous nightmare.  Locals are avoiding downtown. Tourists don’t come here to shop. Our city is targeted by every condo developer who makes sure to put Laguna in their projects name and then uses photos of Main Beach as an assumptive close that the beach connected to their project IS Main Beach.  
The Promenade is a multifaceted and a core development project. Local Resident home owners have a  significant demand that our voices be heard and our concerns are addressed through the eyes of the people who have homesteaded here. If your vision is myopic, tidy and leans towards ‘quick fix’  the mistakes made under your watch will impact our city in ways that we all will regret.  
Please expand your thinking to consider that the residents input is PRIMARY to the success of this project.  
Respectfully,  
Susan McNeal Velasquez  
(949) 322-0847

**Comments received after City Council Meeting of January 23, 2023**

February 26, 2024

**The Promenade**

Mayor Kempf and Councilmembers:

After the disruption at the last council meeting, and the amount of time that has passed, it was disappointing to see that no change has been made to item 15.2. Many residents requested to be included in the process for the Promenade.

It would have been reassuring to see the word residents added into the sentence that says the ad hoc committee will “work with staff and consultants” to will “work with staff, consultants and residents.” Not including residents makes a very clear statement that inclusion is intended to be limited.

Kiku Terasaki <kiku.terasaki@cox.net>

>​

Fri 2/9/2024 5:05 PM

Dear Rosemary,

**Thank you so much for doing the RESEARCH that should have been done before any planning about the future of Forest Avenue took place.**

Quite apart from the [Bloomberg study’s finding that only 1/3 of pedestrian malls lasted beyond 20 years](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bloomberg.com%2Fnews%2Ffeatures%2F2021-09-09%2Fwhy-america-fell-out-of-love-with-the-pedestrian-mall&data=05%7C02%7Cgweiss%40lagunabeachcity.net%7C77c67cfef0a14a1d71bd08dc29d46b08%7C6887626ee5da488baf502fb8a2338bfe%7C0%7C0%7C638431239549197080%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=LdYty8dgH6pFiV%2Fjdhgubc3rkm%2FRDrF68%2BEA7jkH6DE%3D&reserved=0), it pointed to two factors that militate against making Forest Avenue into a permanent mall:

1. Pedestrian malls need high-density cities with good public transportation to keep them open

2. The younger the median age, the better: an increase in the median age of a city increases the risk of closing a pedestrian mall by 8%

(LB median age: 51.2.  USA median age: 38.1)

Your research clearly demonstrates that as appealing as it might appear to be, it is a bad idea all around to turn Forest Avenue into a pedestrian mall and to remove the trees.

We should restore Forest Ave. to its pre-Covid arrangement and, at most, close it off for special events and holidays.

Thanks for your valuable contribution to this issue!

Cheers,

Kiku

Kiku Terasaki  
Resident  
[Kiku.Terasaki@cox.net](mailto:Kiku.Terasaki@cox.net)

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**Marjorie Hall <sadiesnana07@gmail.com>**

Please allow me to have a voice in this vital matter.

Marjorie Hall

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**Laguna Streets <lagunastreets@gmail.com>**

To:​Whalen, Bob;​Kempf, Sue;​Weiss, George;​Laguna Beach City Clerk;​+2 others​​

Cc:​McKay, Ann Marie CC​

Dear LB City Council and Clerk,  
  
What are the written project requirements for the Forest Promenade project?    
What are the success criteria  and metrics to establish what a successful Promenade is?    
If the requirements are unknown, the criteria not specified and metrics not collected, it matters little who directs the  project and who participants are; city staff designates, residents or retailers.    
   
With no requirements Our "Promenade Committee " does not understand why we built the Promenade in the first place; this is the third Promenade floundering in execution because the baseline requirements are not specified much less understood. In May 2023 I wrote an open letter to Promenade Project Director Tom Perez expressing these concerns giving promenade goals, design elements and metrics, to date no reply has been received.    
   
Successful projects demand requirements, criteria and metrics, the Promenade can be saved but not by Executive Order from a select "Promenade Committee" and city staffers.  
   
The Forest Promenade has several origins briefly:    
- 2001 Goal in the LB Vision Strategic Plan: "A Gathering Place"  
- 2008 Climate Protection Action Plan: "alternative to car transportation."  
- 2010 Parking Day Demonstration: "Develop Community Space"  [https://lagunastreets.blogspot.com/2017/09/today-is-parking-day.html](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flagunastreets.blogspot.com%2F2017%2F09%2Ftoday-is-parking-day.html&data=05%7C02%7Cgweiss%40lagunabeachcity.net%7C1906690dd1804a4b8c8b08dc2ab4917f%7C6887626ee5da488baf502fb8a2338bfe%7C0%7C0%7C638432202230275855%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=LSpLuImd8emW6Fjmo%2BRxbyHBR53s3z6VUGTE0w0lVnY%3D&reserved=0)  
- 2020 The Promenade Committee: "Permanent outdoor seating as response to Covid-19 pandemic."  
- 2023 Planning Workshop: "The Serpentine, The Broadway"  by the RRM Design Group   
   
Paris Barcelona and Boulder remove cars to benefit residents visitors and retailers, will Laguna be so bold?  [https://lagunastreets.blogspot.com/2022/11/postcard-or-post-car-laguna-beach.html](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flagunastreets.blogspot.com%2F2022%2F11%2Fpostcard-or-post-car-laguna-beach.html&data=05%7C02%7Cgweiss%40lagunabeachcity.net%7C1906690dd1804a4b8c8b08dc2ab4917f%7C6887626ee5da488baf502fb8a2338bfe%7C0%7C0%7C638432202230284205%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=qUaINORN9Ce7AtCIgksO39z96ctpXQBrCgZ%2FGpqfihU%3D&reserved=0)

[**Laguna Streets**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Flagunastreets.blogspot.com%2F&data=05%7C02%7Cgweiss%40lagunabeachcity.net%7C1906690dd1804a4b8c8b08dc2ab4917f%7C6887626ee5da488baf502fb8a2338bfe%7C0%7C0%7C638432202230290992%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=mwXbsQdBofAXQlfjJy%2B0YnOSUFVuFgjeRPALGSgRZU4%3D&reserved=0)

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**Michele Monda <michelemonda3@gmail.com>**

Dear Ann Marie-

Could you please add this to the Public Comments for Agenda Item 2 and also forward to the City Council to ensure that they see it before the meeting?

Dear City Council:

In January 2020 I stood before you and asked that you consider closing lower Forest Avenue down on weekends and some nights during the week for special events and outdoor activities.

Somehow this has morphed into a permanent closure of Forest Avenue, loss of income from parking meters, loss of income for merchants whose stores are now obscured by the parklets and the removal of all the grand historic trees.  Where is the empirical evidence that this is what residents and merchants on Forest (obviously the restaurants are all in) want?  Where is the evidence that this permanent closure benefits residents who are expected to pay for this redo?  Where are the cost estimates?

Why does it have to be permanent?  Why can't we consider opening the street during the day for commerce and closing it at night and on weekends for dining, concerts, art shows and special events?  Why is a compromise situation not being considered?  In Europe that is how they do it - restaurants are responsible for putting the tables and chairs out in the evenings - they are NOT permanent.

I ask that you include residents on this committee to explore options.  That you include the idea of temporary closures.  That you leave the trees as they are.  That you provide hard evidence of any survey, not just hearsay, that is conducted.  That the survey be conducted by professionals not a City Council member and City Manager walking around.  Give us proof that this permanent closure is what residents and Forest Avenue MERCHANTS want.  We know the restaurants do - what an amazing benefit we are gifting them.  If you do this, and it overwhelmingly comes back to permanently close Forest, the detractors will have to agree.  If you do not, you will be forever castigated for doing what YOU want and not what residents and merchants want.

Michèle Monda

**Roger Butow (article published in Patch and sent to Council, 2.12.2024**

**Laguna Beach Promenade: A Tragic Tale Of 4 Dumb Monkeys**

Suicide is often referred to as a long-term, permanent solution to a short-term problem.

The Promenade, as championed by **OUR**4 monkeys (**Kempf, Whalen, Orgill & Rounaghi**) has become that long term, lasting solution, way beyond its original temporary fix, band-aid intent several years ago.

There **WAS** a short-term problem, i.e., getting people out of crowded rooms that were ***“spreader*** ***events”*** regarding Covid. Open air, widely distanced dining with a prevailing onshore wind which accelerated through the constricted air spaces between buildings, contagions effectively dispersed hence threat reduced.

Yes, **HELP** the few businesses for a year or 2, but not **ENABLE** them to basically become permanent occupants, squatters in **OUR** version of **Main Street USA**(Forest Avenue).

Bottom of Form

Shouldn’t all of the businesses now being allowed to encroach have to individually amend their **Conditional Use Permits**, the entitlements and restrictions that travel with the property?

If not, why not, on what legal basis can the City take public right of ways in a blanket, umbrella fashion?

The City has in essence illegally transferred, expropriated **OUR** ownership rights without a valid beneficial public purpose or by voter acquiescence. Who in their right natural mind believes those 4 have **OUR** best interests at heart?

As an enviro-analyst, I always ask: ***“Where’s the mitigation?”*** This enormous swath, this swarm of multiple takings and significant adverse impacts had no independent CEQA study, did it?

Suing and screwing one’s own city might seem over-reach, but isn’t that what the City has done to us? The Promenade is an***"unmitigated disaster****,"* emphasis on the **unmitigated**.

As in no mitigations offered for the various permanent environmental impacts. Mitigations under CEQA should be apprised as compensation---where is that in the City planning or dispositive process?

Shouldn’t it have been a foregone conclusion, at minimum go through a **CEQA Initial Study** **Checklist** review?

Today, it’s more like a ***“Promo-nada,”*** a way to promote a select few businesses with ***“nada”***(nothing) for 95% of year-round residents like me.

**WE** were not rewarded, **WE** have been and apparently will be punished indefinitely for not aborting the idea at launch. A fraudulent, duplicitous canard heist pulled in plain sight; an illegal, unlawful temporary-turned-permanent taking of public space without a vote by residents.

What about the non-food or alcohol serving businesses, they are not receiving compensation for their travails, are they? Their customer base must park further away, and has no choice other than to leave town, shop elsewhere.

Where once upon a time (2019) drivers could let out or pick up their passengers on Forest who wanted to shop or browse, where is that accommodation, that compensation or mitigation taking place?

It does not ***“add”*** to the way I have experienced Laguna since passing through as a child back in the early 50’s, nor add to my subsequent encounters, my previous 52 years here since 1972. This is massive disruption and dislocation achieved by aristocratic elitists.

The ***“Promo-nada”*** detracts and it is an example of what happens when governance turns dictatorial and ceases to listen to the will of the people...

Every time I go downtown at random hours, there are few if any people in those cattle corrals. Obviously (**DUH**) during inclement weather, from say midnight to 6 am 7/365 it is 100% barren of bodies. It is and will always be a self-limiting fiasco.

It therefore serves no round the clock or year-round purpose or function, eliminates a historical cut-through passage street to avoid the backup at PCH & Broadway.

The **Forest Promo-nada** usage is not even maximized, it is about ***"PRO-moting,"*** about **ponce** (pretentious and affectatious) people who think themselves kool, wannabes yearning to be ***“seen on the scene.”***

Celebritards all: As if their mere presence in **OUR** midst equals some kind of hip-happening blessing. Royalty slumming. Hollywood poseurs and pretenders.

**WE**, the people (residents in general) did not acquire any benefit. Formerly, **WE** went downtown from the am into early afternoon, **WE** were able to visit local businesses as they opened or casually socialize.

**WE** got the hell out before surrendering the late pm featuring tourists rolling in, taking over. **WE** grumbled but vacated.

Mind you, that was for only 3 months/year, some increase from Thanksgiving to New Year’s holidays, maybe Easter Week, but the rest of the year **WE** had **OUR** town, local businesses adjusted quite well or folded, just like any natural environs.

An ebb and flow, feast or famine economy. It is called capitalism, it is competitive, that is how it works folks. Nothing was really broken that needed this type of peacock-strutting, self-righteous fixing.

The City illegally, illegitimately by fiat or decree took **OUR** parking spaces, did not replace them, stole **OUR** sense of community but found **THEIR** workaround.

The City purloined **OUR Main Street USA** feel with the quaint banners across Forest for local events, that long block of Laguna’s essence, its***“time and place”*** character away from us. Identity theft.

Why didn’t a group like **Village Laguna** file against the City for an ***“unlawful taking?"*** What’s to stop them or a coalition of NGOs to do so now? Nothing, just the will.

It was and remains grand theft by its very definition, Forest Avenue **OUR** public domain, **OUR** public easement, **OUR** property held in trust, in common. Artifice does not equal intimacy, just the opposite is true.

Those most in support of it are the phoniest, most out-of-touch in **OUR** community. **Billy Fried Brain** and his ilk, monetizing carpetbaggers believing **US** a commodity not an existent viable, self-respecting community.

Why didn’t VL or an ad hoc of community organizations file post haste in OC Superior Court and name the Coastal Commission as a party?

It is not too late, watch how soon the CCC rescinds, what is wrong with at least trying to **“Save Forest Avenue”** or **“Free Our Forest”** from a booze-friendly, resident-hostile Council?

**Grand theft of Property (Cal Penal Code §487) involves violations over $950 in value. Not just downtown but along PCH encroachments into public right-of-way turf abound.**

Sidewalks, once sacrosanct for easy pedestrian circulation, are not **OURS** anymore. By the same methodology, enabled by **OUR** imbecilic City Council, sidewalks now belong to the businesses controlling them, impeded passageways that once were declared public easements. All are in rampant, flagrant violation.

Any journeyman real estate or enviro-attorney in one of the **Resident’s First** extended family could file and plead that case, it is neither expensive or rocket science.

Start a PAC, create a war chest of funds for legal representation and hold rallies. For the long slog put City Council under siege: Meeting after meeting after meeting, akin to **Chinese Water Torture**, bombard public comments which are mass broadcast with **OUR** bodies in open, raucous and outraged rebellion.

Include lots of hoopla including media saturation for maximizing the public pillory crater, issue a series of press releases with updates, file as a CEQA challenge that should include the following checklist items: **Land Use/Planning; Noise; Air Quality; Transportation/Traffic; Aesthetics; Mandatory Findings Of Significance (Cumulative Impacts).**

Then an OC Superior Court judge can decide, not **OUR** traitorous City Council.

For a few hundred $$$ to file, hasn’t **THAT** dynamic been on the table since inception years ago?

Nearly 100 parking spaces in proximity to **OUR** preferred destinations unavailable, without offered compensation for damages to **OUR** quality of life and **OUR** property rights.

That is a legally viable type of tort, damage has occurred, it is a taking lacking any form of mitigation. ***Qui bono?*** (who profited and continues to profit?), certainly not the majority of the residents?

What is there now is ersatz, a manufactured sense of community like Disneyland. That there are stubborn holdouts is typical: These are people who are not in touch with **OUR** reality, **OUR** history.

Forest is no longer genuine or authentically **US**….unless of course a person feels that herding the gullible and glamorous into a compressed environs for a few hours late afternoon or early evening, basically an **URBAN** habitat, is one’s idea of bliss.

Conquerors always try to eradicate the vestiges of a former culture—which is what has happened. With **Krazy Klown Kween Kempf**or **Mumbling Bob The Clueless**, their main purpose as propped up and funded by commerce is to continue the entropy, full speed ahead.

Unaddressed, they will secure entitlements formally disbarred or enjoined. This Council as composed is stealing the streets and sidewalks, common land that should entitle **the US** to the right of free, unrestricted mobility.

They are swiftly making **OUR** past obsolete, their vision has no such nostalgia or historical, heritage sentiment.

Newer is not axiomatically better, only to those consumer society types, inclined towards disposing of culture as one does of conduct containers tossed into the trash.

They allege that **WE** fear change? Sophistry personified, and yes, we are horrified! No, **WE** do not need your changes, but that is not fear. It is knowing what **WE** want, definitely not shiny new toys or gimmicks...

The **Promo-nada** is not only a form of visual blight. It’s an insult to the majority of residents plus the overwhelming majority of non-alcohol or food serving businesses on Forest and Ocean. Public testimony and petitions sustain that claim.

And who believes that those indulging in alcohol will not have other substances in their bodies? With marijuana and now even psychotropics available, ever heard of the synergistic, amplified effects? Ask our **LBPD**, **LBFD**, **EMT personnel** or **Mothers Against Drunk Driving** (MADD).

Where are the cost or risk benefit analyses as they get in their vehicles and drive **OUR** local streets or major arteries? If **WE** do purchase Laguna Canyon Road, how much indemnification will **WE** need to carry for related accidents?

Can PCH or Laguna Canyon Road get any more hazardous, more dangerous? LCAD has expanded tremendously there, and a clear, designated bike path is being considered if **WE** control the 133. Bikes & pedestrians as bowling pins, how quaint is that?

Or what about revelers who stumble into the **OTHER**, non-alcohol sales merchant’s stores? Why should they be sacrifices to the hubris and greed of the ***"booze and grub"*** commerce constituents?

Great models for the young too, indulging those who cannot remain sober while in **OUR** public commons, huh? ***“Mommy, what happened to the old Laguna, you know, where kids felt safer?”***

Parking and traffic circulation are critical elements of any CEQA review. By eliminating Forest as a vehicular venue, the ***“queuing”*** (backing up Glenneyre) has increased.

More cars are also ***“bulging”*** into adjacent streets like the 3rd Street hill. This cascading effect ends up putting more of a burden on the **OUR** streets that feed into Park Avenue too. Including LB High School, Thurston and TOW mornings and afternoons.

More smog in the central business district bowl from idling vehicles, more honking by irate, frustrated drivers in a hurry, historical traffic circulation patterns eradicated, and to benefit a handful of business owners who don’t even live here, now do they? Ever see a survey about **THAT** ownership?

This is antithetical, a disincentive to encouraging locals to venture downtown and shop locally…what was once upon a time ephemeral, grid lock is now systemic.

Looked at ecologically, what was once foraging habitat for indigenous species (year-round residents) is gone. Extirpated, all in the name of a minority.

If the civic groups which allege that they represent **OUR** core values will not stand up to these 4 monkeys, openly defy and resist their crypto-fascism, then the fight to ***“Save Planet Laguna”*** was over before it ever even started.

Thank

Share

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**Paul Puma <paul.r.puma@icloud.com>**

attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]  
  
Dear Council Members, I will not be able to attend the meeting in person, but I want to give my full support to consume alcohol within the promenade area. Signs can be posted that alcohol is strictly prohibited from leaving the promenade area. The promenade has been an overwhelming success so let us keep building on that success. It can only help increase pedestrian traffic to the non-restaurant businesses. I really can see no downside. As always restaurants can refuse to sell alcohol to anyone they deem has had enough.  
  
Regards, Paul Puma  
530 High Drive  
40-year resident  
Sent from my iPad

**Bill Robertson <bill@wsrobertson.net>**

To:​**City Council**​

Sat 2/10/2024 3:14 PM

Dear Council Members. I am a lifelong Laguna Beach resident. Forest Ave was a great classic small town Main Street. I came across this attached picture taken not too long ago. It could be a Ken Auster painting. Take the modern cars away and it could be from the 60’s. I have never been a fan of the parklets and assumed they would go away after Covid. Unfortunately, they have not. I believe Forest should go back to what it was before Covid. The restaurants should operate within their space. The restaurants and their kitchens were designed to serve the tables that were approved within their lease space. We do not frequent these restaurants anymore because you pay the same price whether you sit in a nicely designed restaurant or sit out on the street. I am adamantly opposed to having the whole street available for liquor consumption. We don’t need an open air bar downtown. Thank you. Bill Robertson

Sent from my iPhone

Bill Robertson

WS Robertson Co

**Colleen McCallion <colleenmccallion@gmail.com>**

Dear City Council,  
  
What a scary idea! Please keep the restaurants in charge of alcohol consumption within designated areas.  
Thank you,  
  
Colleen McCallion

**Gea Meijering <gea.meijering@gmail.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

Sun 2/11/2024 1:19 PM

As a long time resident I have no objections. City council please go ahead and make the entire promenade designated for liquor sales.

Do not listen to all these ‘senior’ citizens that want to rule from their armchair and never get out to use it anyway. Please do not make our town into a Leisure World.

Kind regards,

Gea Meijering

[949.235.3114](tel:949.235.3114)

**Heykathathome <heykathathome@aol.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

Sat 2/10/2024 1:

I do not want to see liquor available for sale in the Promenade. There are already too many DUI’s in our town.

Kathleen Johnson

788 Balboa Ave

Laguna beach

**jheri st. <jheristjames@yahoo.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

Sat 2/10/2024 9:29 AM

Good Day, Council Members,

Regarding the above, my two cents is:

Why not put the outdoor eating areas behind the restaurants in the already very attractively cobblestone-paved alley?  A few trash containers and plants, and it would be a lovely alternative to the present corrals and future destruction of our historic downtown street.

I remember a study done some years ago that touted the design of our downtown main street as particularly resident-friendly.  Certainly more so than Dana Point with what three main highways down the center of town?

The restaurants are all on that side of the street already, and this would help the non-restaurant businesses to enjoy better parking.  Seems like the traffic flow might also improve with the return of this thoroughfare.

Please DO NOT CUT DOWN the trees on Forest Avenue!!

Appreciate all you do.  Thanks for listening.

Sincerely, Jheri St. James

**Karen Hedges <khedgestudio@cox.net>**

To:​**City Council**​

Fri 2/9/2024 3:48 PM

[NOTICE:  This message originated outside of City of Laguna Beach -- DO NOT CLICK on links or open attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]  
  
Laguna Beach City Council,  
  
I am a Laguna Beach resident and I oppose lessening restrictions on any part of Forest Avenue for alcoholic beverage consumption.  
  
I am also opposed to a design that would remove our mature trees that line our Forest Avenue.  
  
Respectfully,  
Karen Hedges  
  
Sent from my iPhone

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**CHRISTOPH VANLEY <vanley@cox.net>**

To:​**City Council**​

Fri 2/9/2024 4:33 PM

[NOTICE:  This message originated outside of City of Laguna Beach -- DO NOT CLICK on links or open attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]  
  
Please return Forest Avenue to its pre-Covid state.

**Summary of Verbal Comments at the Meeting:** (I have excluded comments of residents who submitted written comments)

**Brandon Crigler:** Does not match unique CA History. In an age when malls are failing why do this? We can close the street when we want. Are going to get little trees at the price of existing trees?

**Amy Jackson:** Simplify the plan. We need better designs including of the dining areas, The designs look like it is a Mall. Please listen to residents and retailers.

**Gayle Waite:** I live near the Promenade. I support some version of it but not these two designs. Why is there not a design that utilizes the existing trees?

**Ann Krisman:** I have a business on Forest, Fresh Produce, The designs showed no fencing for restaurants. No tents shown in either design or restaurant seating. How much was spent on these designs?

**Rhonda G.**: The existing trees make the street. These are iconic to our community.

**Ruben Flores:** Need a hybrid design where we can park during the day and then close the street for the restaurants at night. Both designs look too managed and linear.

**John Thomas:** Look for better options. The plan was to have a minimal design or a maximum design. We did not get that. Both designs suggested are permanent.

The two designs are lackluster, modern designs. Popular European cities have

mastered hybrid plazas and promenades with vehicles.

**Jacob Cherub:** Loved “Main St” with diagonal parking. Workshops held were only presentation and were not collaborative with residents. Use the European hybrid model.

**Gene Felder:** Looks like very expensive designs. Hubris! What makes the sponsor think that cutting down trees will improve downtown? Retain Downtown trees. Use a design with the existing trees.

**Billy Fried:** Workshops were not working input sessions. Put in seating for restaurants down the middle of the Promenade which would make it better for retailers.

**Mike Phillips:** Save Forest Avene historic qualities. The workshop process didn’t allow for resident input. Laguna has a “Main St,” Forest Avenue.

**Kirsten:** I want an permanent Promenade and want the existing trees incorporated into the design.

**Erin Slattery:** Like the Forest Stroll design. Dislike the play area, Need Uber pick up spot.

**Carly Saica:** In 1976 we shut down Forest and had booths for local artists. Put

parking on one side of the street. 4,800 people signed a petition to support keeping the trees on Change.org.

**Email comments sent to City Council**

Josephine Torbensen

Dear city council,

I hope you are able to see that the two designs that were proposed for the permanent Promenade do not fit in with lagunas character. The fact that someone would even suggest taking down our mature trees is crazy enough, but the aesthetic of both designs are simply off. I hope you will consider a local designer for the job. Someone who understands lagunas cool, whimsical, unique “brand.”

Best,

Josephine Torbensen

Tel: 949-241-3091

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**Anna Laidler <alaidler11@hotmail.com>**

Laguna Beach trees on lower Forest Avenue are in jeopardy again.  City consultants have prepared two alternative plans to make permanent the “Promenade,” the street closure done during the pandemic to accommodate restaurants.  Both plans propose to remove almost all of the eucalyptus trees that line the sidewalks of this iconic and historic downtown area.

If you value, the beauty and feeling that mature trees contribute to the streetscape and character of our Downtown preserving existing trees should be a goal of any plans for the Forest Avenue area.

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David Schroeder 1150 Temple Terrace Laguna Beach

January 22, 2024, Re: Forest Avenue

Mayor Sue Kempf and Laguna Beach City Council Members:

Forest Avenue, as it existed before the Covid Pandemic, was a historical treasure, unique in Southern California, which should not be abandoned. Regardless of other considerations which have been discussed at length, the street has a heritage worth preserving as it was.

It is the very worst kind of hypocrisy for the city to maintain any type of control over residences or business properties for historical reasons and then to gut the historical center of the city itself.

It might be nice to "modern-up" Forest Avenue, but every historical property in the city could also be replaced by something more fun and up to date than what is here now. Getting rid of the old Forest Avenue is a far more egregious mistake than it would be to get rid of the "gate hanging well" or the Main Beach Lifeguard Tower or The Hotel Laguna or the Pottery Place, at least in the opinion of many who remember Laguna Beach from the 1940s-as Ido.

Yours truly, David Schroeder

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john albritton <johnalbritton@yahoo.com>

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**Agenda item 10 Forest Ave**

In Europe, many City’s plazas convert to pedestrian only access late in the day and into the evening after being open to vehicles by day. Every evening the businesses bring out tables and chairs and then put them away before the area reopens to vehicles the next morning. In a partnership of private business and government workers it’s a seamless transition. Sometimes they are also closed to traffic on weekend days as well as farmers markets and food stands. A scenario like this would allow for parking and convenient commerce on weekdays and more social activities on evenings and weekends. It would be a solution for both sides. These European cities make it look easy. So could Laguna. In lieu of this I’m in favor of reopening Forest to parking and one way traffic.

John Albritton

949-494-7030

20351 Sun Valley Dr.

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**Rosemary Boyd <rosemaryboyd190@gmail.com>**

Dear City Council Members,

I am from Kalamazoo, Michigan, where the first mall in the US was built in 1959. That mall went through many changes over time--eventually, in 1998, half the originally closed-off main street was reopened. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalamazoo\_Mall](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FKalamazoo_Mall&data=05%7C02%7Cgweiss%40lagunabeachcity.net%7C26f6f6beac684be01fd908dc1be301b3%7C6887626ee5da488baf502fb8a2338bfe%7C0%7C0%7C638415909041771993%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=mKoEg2KVfuhp%2FSmv4OrBxjF4rfdOmoismTRWV%2F86x8A%3D&reserved=0)) According to this Wikipedia article, "The bloom eventually faded. Critics said the mall had too little parking nearby, exposed shoppers to bad weather, attracted crime, and held too few shops."

According to another Wikipedia article, "Almost all of this generation of pedestrian malls built from 1959 through to the 1970s, have disappeared, or were shrunk down in the 1990s at the request of the retailers. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedestrian\_malls\_in\_the\_United\_States](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FPedestrian_malls_in_the_United_States&data=05%7C02%7Cgweiss%40lagunabeachcity.net%7C26f6f6beac684be01fd908dc1be301b3%7C6887626ee5da488baf502fb8a2338bfe%7C0%7C0%7C638415909041780845%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=SgTDLYY0Lc5ZU9%2Fz0jvQrel1Yl9OnyLnIWQA%2BZ1dvag%3D&reserved=0))

According to an article in Bloomberg news ([https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-09-09/why-america-fell-out-of-love-with-the-pedestrian-mall](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bloomberg.com%2Fnews%2Ffeatures%2F2021-09-09%2Fwhy-america-fell-out-of-love-with-the-pedestrian-mall&data=05%7C02%7Cgweiss%40lagunabeachcity.net%7C26f6f6beac684be01fd908dc1be301b3%7C6887626ee5da488baf502fb8a2338bfe%7C0%7C0%7C638415909041787838%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=INuu2BEd7Cvvu9CnEG3ReF%2BEY2fLo05wTfr%2FnYvpj6g%3D&reserved=0)) , only about 1/3 of pedestrian malls lasted long-term.

Is this a case of repeating a bad idea over and over? If we are going to keep the pedestrian mall, let us make very sure we do it right. Let us make sure it retains our quintessential Laguna charm so that it does not fall into the failed category of the above-cited malls.  Key should be notifying, educating, and getting input from Laguna residents who will have to pay for and live with your decisions. I personally am particularly concerned with excessive cost, having adequate parking for downtown businesses, and the threatened loss of our iconic Eucalyptus trees. Please tread with great care, considering all aspects and options, and heeding the feedback from those who elected you.

Thank you,

Rosemary Boyd

Laguna Resident for 57 years

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**Jahn Levitt <jahnml@yahoo.com>**

To:​**City Council**​

Dear Mayor Kempf and city council members,  
  
So many residents feel a strong connection to the trees on Forest Avenue. I am merely one who is reaching out to you.  
  
Over the past years I have spoken to you in person and written you letters whenever this subject is brought up. And the subject of tree removal is brought up frequently. I have given you facts, but the “facts” you seem to relish are alternatives to mine.  
  
The removal of  trees is frequently eluded to as another “plan.” A plan to accomplish what? To make sure there is no shade on a hot summer’s day. To ensure birds have no place to build their  nests?  
To share the pleasure I get when I hear the breezes ruffle the leaves on those eucalyptus trees? To say it is comforting to know that trees bear witness to the horrors of AIDS, and I am grateful to place ribbons on their trunks in memory of the people I have loved and lost?  
To share with you that as our climate changes, trees provide us with oxygen? To chide you with the irony that Laguna is a “tree city?” To remind you the day you make your decision is Arbor Day?  
  
 I realize my sentiments have no place in your decision-making process. But my vote still counts, as I align myself with residents who also believe you should stipulate in your contacts with these “consultants”  
to present plans which leave those trees on Forest Avenue intact. Why would you NOT. How could you NOT.  
  
Please consider the impact your decision will make on the emotional health of residents, who believe trees and nature are sacred. There are many of us.  
  
Respectfully,  
Jahn Levitt  
Resident.

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**Lisa Vanderbeek <lisav@cox.net>**

To:​**City Council**​

Mon 1/22/2024 5:36 PM

Hello City Council Members,  
  
Thank you for serving.  
  
Please retain the eucalyptus trees on lower Forest.  
  
Removing them will look stark, barren and be very hot in the summer.  
  
Trees lend ambience to our downtown area.  
  
Thank you for your time.  
  
-- Best Regards,  
Lisa Vanderbeek

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**David Raber <david@raber.us>**

I am not in favor of the current promenade plans.  As you know, the public workshops were very tightly managed. If the objective were to create a dialogue to find out what residents really wanted, the execution of those workshops failed to accomplish that purpose.

Here are some specifics that need to be included to make the promenade successful:

* Keep the mature trees.  Yes, trees require maintenance, but a significant part of the charm of Forest Ave is due to the trees.  Keeping the trees is the most cost-effective way of keeping unique charm.   
    
  Removing the trees disenfranchises the city from the possibility of a unique experience. It puts us on the path of emulating the empty, cold, malls in other cities, such as Downtown Bera.
* Discretionary business category zoning must be integral to the plan.  We need to diversify the visitors' experience. Too many food outlets will dilute the profitability of those already there and make the experience of walking downtown much less attractive.  Please, Plan for a balance.
* One season the City Council gives away downtown parking because you found a consultant to tell you that we have too much parking.  The next season you find that you need to use tax revenue to subsidize growth in downtown parking.  The bottom line is that most out-of-town visitors need parking.  The simple solution is to ask residents to subsidize that, rather than resident-facing amenities that neighboring cities can provide their residents.  Why not do the right thing here?

David Raber

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**Lani K <espressorebel@gmail.com>**

Hello,

I am writing as a concerned local who cares about the nature and preservation of the flora of Laguna Beach, its history, and its beauty.

I am sure I am not alone in urging you all to make the right decision NOT to move forward with either Forest Ave development plan involving the removal of mature trees. They provide shade in the summer, bird habitat, beauty, and enjoyment, and they sequester carbon (which should be of grave concern given the environmental impacts of cars in the area).

It is against the entire ethos of this community to continue to allow outside development and companies moving in and producing negative impacts. It is each of your jobs to align with what the community wants and what is best for that community and the environment we all share.

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**Vicki Borthwick <vickiborthwick@yahoo.com>**

Mayor Kempf and Councilmembers:

I talked to Alice Brown [owner of The Shoe Celler] yesterday at the request of Violet Sarhad, the owner of Violet's Boutique.  Both stores are on lower Forest Ave.  Letter is below.

Violet has expressed serious concerns about being able to continue her business, which was thriving before COVID and the street closure.

I recognize that the City has spent a lot of effort on this so far, and I did not seek to be the advocate for Violet, The Shoe Cellar, or their other retail friends downtown.  But I feel a responsibility to respond to their concerns, which for various reasons have not been effectively communicated.

Respectfully,

Bob Borthwick

----- Forwarded Message -----

**From:** The Shoe Cellar <shoes@shoecellar.com>

**To:** vickiborthwick@yahoo.com <vickiborthwick@yahoo.com>

**Sent:** Monday, January 22, 2024, at 08:26:02 AM PST

**Subject:** Promenade

The following is the statement that should be read at the meeting:

"The Shoe Cellar, at 245 Forest Avenue, wishes to register our strong objection to the parking spaces on Forest Avenue being taken away. This lack of parking has affected our business greatly. We do not believe that taking away the parking to put in seating that only benefits the restaurants and hurts the merchants is in the city's best interests. Restaurants take up more than half the street and put-up tent-like structures which totally block the visibility of the stores on the opposite side of the street. We carry high quality merchandise and cater a good part of the business to mature customers.

Our older customers have a hard time walking long distances. There is nowhere to drop them off, and there is nowhere for them to pick up shoes.  With rents as high as they are in Laguna Beach, the present configuration of Forest Avenue has hurt our business and the business of adjoining stores tremendously, especially in the winter months and when it rains. There are many ways to beautify the street with planters, and without doing away with parking. Since the changes to the promenade, we have received ongoing complaints from customers telling us they can no longer shop in downtown Laguna Beach because it is too difficult to get to the stores. We hope you will rectify the situation."

Thank you,

The Shoe Cellar

**Vicki Borthwick <vickiborthwick@yahoo.com>**

Mayor Kempf and Councilmembers:

In 1974 I moved to Laguna Beach because it had an authentic downtown. Forest Avenue was resident-serving, yet tourists loved it because it was an example of small-town America prior to shopping centers.

As a landscape architect I have designed downtown redevelopment projects, some of which have included permanent street closures. When the Request for Proposal [RFP] was issued in early 2021 for the Promenade, I declined to submit a proposal because the Scope of Services was too narrow. I felt that preparing only two options, both of which required permanent street closure, was premature and too narrow a scope when so many other options could be considered.  One concept could leave Forest Ave intact during the day and close it down once-a-week after 5 pm for street dining and entertainment, like San Luis Obispo. Other hybrid concepts could add some outdoor dining while also preserving some curbside parking for retail customers.

Permanently closing off downtown's primary street is consequential for many reasons.  Amazingly, open dialog to present and discuss creative alternatives was not allowed in the RFP, nor was it allowed at the two city "workshops" that were supposedly held to elicit community and business feedback.  Even the Promenade proponents were shocked that meaningful dialog about ideas beyond choices "Plan A or Plan B" was not allowed.

Months ago I stopped into Violet's Boutique on lower Forest to ask if the street closure was helping or hurting her business.  Violet is a Laguna resident and has owned several businesses downtown over a span of 28 years.  I got a resounding "no, the street closure is definitely hurting my business... customers were used to parking in front of my shop and now are gone."  And she mentioned that her situation is not due to internet shopping since she had her biggest year ever prior to COVID and the street closure.  And she mentioned a list of other women's fashion stores on lower Forest who were all in the same boat, including the shoe store next door to her that was here when I moved to Laguna 50 years ago.  I talked to the shoe store owner Alice Brown a few days ago and she confirmed Violet's descriptions of declining business.  I just received a letter from Alice today and will forward it separately.

We need to recognize the path we are on --- spending millions tearing out lower Forest Avenue --- will foster a food-oriented plaza at the expense of our existing retail shops and the diverse downtown atmosphere essential to the "Main Street" qualities of our downtown.

If the town prefers to reclaim the previous Forest Avenue before the street closure, with a healthy balance of restaurants, retail, fashion, and services...then I hope that a pause can be taken to evaluate our priorities and options.  This may take a bit more time and expense in the short-term, but many of the hybrid alternatives are much less expensive than the complete demolition and rebuilding of lower Forest from the ground-up. For this public project to be successful it needs to be a "win-win"  for all business and public sectors.  We need to get this right, the sooner the better.

Thank you,

Bob Borthwick, ASLA

**Ginger Osborne <gtosborne@gmail.com>**  
  
Dear Councilmembers,  
  
Please provide a public input workshop on the Promenade Plan that allows people to speak before the group. The previous workshops only allowed comments to be left. As a result, people did not feel heard.  
  
Regarding the two plans for the Promenade that are proposed, mature trees are slated to be removed. The consultants should be instructed to produce plans that incorporate the existing trees that provide shade and a beautiful ambiance to the area.  
  
Thank you for hearing my concerns,  
Ginger Osborne

**Margaret Brown <margaretbee@cox.net>**

To:​**City Council**​

Mon 1/22/2024 12:43 PM

Over 90% of closed streets are returned to traffic use, which I feel will ultimately happen here.  Meanwhile we have a high-priced food court which is not resident serving.  Now, to compound the insult, you are considering removing the existing trees.  Over 5,000 people have signed a petition to stop this – please pay attention to that!  Margaret Brown

gareth butler <garethgbutler@gmail.com>

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Brilliant Roger and Ellen! It is time to get the proverbial finger out and MAKE IT HAPPEN. It is excruciating the pace things move. Time to move the snails out of City Hall! Laguna needs dynamic visionaries. No problem. This city is full of them.

On a related note. Whatever happened to that wonderful multi-storey parking structure? So tastefully designed. In harmony with its surroundings. And SO, walking convenient to everywhere downtown,  eliminating the endless “looking for parking space cruisers.” I thought that would be a slam dunk, a no brainer.

Maybe that was the problem. The “no brains” prevailed!

Respectfully, Gareth Butler.

RK

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**Barbara McMurray <mcmurray@me.com>**

Dear esteemed City Councilor,

I am writing to express my support for a permanent design for the Promenade. I would personally like a design that offers a bit more imagination that includes attractive new paving, creative landscaping (including shade trees and structures) and ample, comfortable seating/gathering places and lighting as sketched out in the “Forest Stroll” design.

It would be lovely to make it a venue where it’s possible to hold art and community/cultural events for kids and adults - think mini-parades and carnivals, Halloween trick-or-treating, portraitists, chalk artists and other art-focused events, games (Laguna Olympics? artist quick draws, poetry on-demand, hat-making out of upcycled materials…) Let us make this a fun and colorful place to go, with a design that is inviting and cohesive - and beautiful and sophisticated to the eye.

Thank you for giving us a pleasant central place to expand on our VILLAGE atmosphere! Your efforts are appreciated.

In community,

Barbara McMurray

McMurray Marketing Communications

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Mark Curry <MCurry@westcoastrc.net>

Council,

We just wanted to say that we often use and appreciate the Forest Promenade and hope that it can be made permanent.

While the temporary structures for dining did serve the mid-term needs and bridged the gap on covid dining we hope that a long-term plan can be effected for this area.

We would be happy to chat about this if that would further the discussion/probability of making this plan go forward.

Thank you for your consideration!

Mark & Mary Curry

Laguna Beach Residents

Scott Thomas <scottthomaslaguna@gmail.com>

Attention City Council

I would like to go on record as stating that I am very much in favor of the permanent, promenade for forest Avenue. It has really revitalized the downtown experience. Thanks in advance for making it permanent!

Scott Thomas

28852 Alta Laguna Blvd.

Dawn Moon <dawnallisonmoon@gmail.com>

Dear Councilperson, Rounaghi,

I strongly support the permanent design for the Promenade.  The temporary parklets, bollards and landscaping served a great purpose, but I would love to see a beautiful design consistent with our wonderful town and its traditions.  New paving, landscaping, gathering places and lighting - as described in the “Forest Stroll” design - will be a source of pride for our town.

Thank you for all you have done to make our downtown a true gathering place.

We appreciate you!

Sincerely,

Dawn Moon

567 Bluebird Canyon Drive

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **Catherine Jurca** | | Mon, Jan 22, 3:04 PM (18 hours ago) |  |  |
| |  | | --- | | to skempf, Mark, Alex, me, Bob, Ann | | | |

Dear Council Members,

The Staff Report does not accurately reflect the Planning Commission hearing, which I watched and spoke at via zoom. The Planning Commission generally favored “Forest Stroll” as more “natural," but commissioners were rightly critical of both proposals. They did not find either adequate for substantive review. And neither proposal is compatible with the desire of a majority of the Planning Commission to preserve more if not all existing trees.

The council directed preparation of a minimally impactful proposal that maintained existing sidewalks. That did not happen. Public works staff did not even mention it at the Planning Commission hearing until the public objected to its omission. Then, after the close of the public hearing, a staff member showed one slide of a promenade design that kept the sidewalks but added cars back and said it would not work. Of course, not—Council did not ask for a design that included cars, and no one wants it.

I will be more polite in my comments at the Council meeting, but where do we find these consultants with their twee designs? Is the idea really to turn Forest Ave. into a Rainforest Cafe?

Simple, simple, simple. Forest Ave. is a charming, appropriately scaled urban space. It has been demonstrated that lots of people want to eat there. **I**like to eat there!Does anyone really think that adding boulders and “sedimentary planting walls,” or that sad children’s play area, are going to make residents or visitors really want to just hang out, with the park and ocean just across the way? That it will become an “iconic destination”? It is going to remain a place to enjoy eating outside, just with a lot more kinds of paving.

These designs are trying way too hard. The best option is really to work with what is there. It should look like a street! Staff emphasize that residents do not like the “corrals," and that became a reason for getting rid of sidewalks and raised platforms. But they did not mention that there must be barriers if alcohol is served. So, redesign them! Keep it simple. One reason to do so is Steve Kellenberg’s observation (omitted from PC comments), that urban planning research shows 90 percent of downtown streets that are closed to traffic end up being reopened to cars. But another reason is that it would look so much better, less precious, less fussy, than either of these designs, which seem to want to celebrate Laguna as an Arts Colony.

The need for infrastructure was mentioned as a constraint. Why? To justify the City charging more money from restaurants, I think. Can’t we charge them less? The Promenade offers outdoor seating, and if the weather is inclement, it will not get used. In southern California that is precious few days. Please get rid of the tents that have gone up. Those are eyesores that should not be allowed. Is there really a need for a stage, let alone two on this one block of Forest Ave? Speaking of “iconic,” Main Street Beach is a great place for public gatherings.

These designs cannot be fixed with tweaks and should be discarded. Regardless, please make sure the public gets  the option you promised, the minimally impactful proposal. And do keep the trees; they should have been the constraint that guided everything else.

Thanks!

Best, Cathy

**Violet Boutique <violetinlaguna@gmail.com>**

Mayer Kempf & city council members ,  
Thank you for trying to make the project to work in favor of every one of us, not just the food court, contractors or architects who are looking for name recognition. I came to this beautiful town in 1993. I have engineering back round but decided to go to business.

I have lived in Germany, Netherlands, and England in my teenage times.

This project was very exciting and amazingly European for me. That is the culture with which I am familiar. I could not wait to see the same European warm ambience here in  our cozy downtown.

I was also interviewed by channel 7, in  Covid time, regarding closure of the Forest.I was in favor of giving try to have the forest being closed to see the impact on businesses and residents of Laguna.

Unfortunately, soon I realized that the fantastic idea of Forest promenade, is not realistic for Laguna beach downtown.

1)I have completely lost my mature clients who used to park their cars on Forest, shop, put their bags in their cars and then dine.

2)Another negative impact, tourist season, people used to shop from us, then drive by the boutique on Forest and pick up their bags.

Now that option has completely been taken away. They cannot drive by the boutique later in the evening to pick up their clothes, cause Forest is close.

3) The little ally behind  my store, Eiler Larsen had taken traffic from Forest Ave. In summertime traffic is crazy there. And the safety of adults and kids who are going to the library is questionable.

4) How many locals shop after 6:00 or 7:00 o’clock?

Here culture is to eat around 6 or 7 o’clock then relax and go home.

How many of people here go shopping after dinner ? Barley anyone.

5)Did you know I do not have a back door. That means there is no way for me to get the product in and out. I have tried my best to compromise with the wish for Forest being closed but it has been destructive for my business, my clients, and our comfort.

My shop is like my home, imagine you have bought groceries, and you cannot take them in from the front door. And you do not have a back door. How would that feel if each time you have to ask your neighbor to ask his or her permission to use their back door to take your merchandise in:(?

Nevertheless, the impact on following businesses that they just closed and gone was negative as well.

1) Fears on 360 PCH gone

2) 254 Beech St. just left a few weeks ago

3) unique boutique on 664 South Coast Highway also gone.

Thank you for your care.

Violet Sarhad

**Carly Sciacca**[**carlydayart@gmail.com**](mailto:carlydayart@gmail.com)

﻿﻿Dear Laguna Beach City Council Members,

In March of 2020, 4800 people signed a petition to ask the council to reconsider the removal of nearly 150 historic trees, as proposed by the DAP. Thankfully, our voices were heard, and the trees were spared. That night the council chambers were full of concerned citizens and even some former residents, some of which traveled as far as from Oregon to appear.  
  
The people who signed the original petition have been contacted regarding the proposal to remove many of the established trees on Forest Avenue if the Promenade is made permanent. I and many others would like a third option that allows for the iconic trees to remain.  
  
In fewer than 48 hours, the updated petition has gained approximately five hundred signatures and is being circulated widely throughout the community. Please click on the link below to see the live petition. As you can see by the many comments, Laguna Citizens are extremely concerned.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Ironically, item 3 on the agenda tonight proposes the planning of Arbor Day. Laguna Beach has also been dubbed “Tree City USA” for multiple years. I am sure you see the irony in this. Please do the right thing and preserve our historic trees.

Carly Andrews

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**Jan Kent <jankentyoga@gmail.com>**

Leave your beautiful trees alone and appreciate them. You have plenty of business. Leave Laguna beautiful and natural. Do you want to be a concrete jungle like LA?  You have what everyone else wants Do not do stupid stuff to destroy your natural wealth🩷

**Josephine Torbensen <j.g.torbensen@gmail.com>**

Dear city council,

I hope you are able to see that the two designs that were proposed for the permanent promenade do not fit in with lagunas character. The fact that someone would even suggest taking down our mature trees is crazy enough, but the aesthetic of both designs are simply off. I hope you will consider a local designer for the job. Someone who understands lagunas cool, whimsical, unique “brand.”

Best,

Josephine Torbensen

Tel: 949-241-3091

**Ameae M Walker <ameae.walker@ucr.edu>**

Tue 1/23/2024 4:37 PM

Dear City Council,

I am a Laguna Beach resident, and I am writing to strongly oppose removal of the Forest Ave trees. There is no reason to remove the trees in order to create a permanent pedestrian environment. Not only do mature trees add to the ambiance but in the summer months, the trees provide important shade for pedestrians. Furthermore, to remove trees from an avenue named for a forest is ludicrous. I hated the removal of the mature trees from the median on Laguna canyon, not to mention the cost. The replanting was unnecessary and has a vastly inferior appearance. Even if the mature trees are replaced by younger ones, it will be many years before the ambiance is regained.

Please listen to the opinions of the residents.

Sincerely,

Ameae Walker

21720 Wesley Dr,

Laguna Beach,

**Vicki <vicki.mc@cox.net>**

Dear City Council,  
I am so very saddened to think there is a plan to remove the trees on Forest Ave. They are beautiful. They provide shade and oxygen to our town. They are what I think of when I envision our downtown area. They look beautifully decorated with their white lights. So many memories of our community Xmas. Please preserve our trees. They are a part of our town’s history and beauty.  
Vicki Crowe  
Sent from my iPhone.

**Lori Steiner <july.09@live.com>**

If you remove all the trees on Forest Avenue, not only will you take away the intermittent spots of shade (that people always enjoy when picking out a spot on the promenade), but you will also extinguish a place for dogs to pee. They will start peeing on the corners of buildings or walls if there are no trees. WHO thinks that removing part of nature is an improvement? I vote for the city to ADD hundreds of trees throughout the city, not remove the ones that are established!! Disappointed Resident, Lori Steiner  
Sent from my iPhone.

**Billy Fried <billy@lavidalaguna.com>**

**36 KB**

Thank you for postponing a decision and hearing me out on a center placement of dining. This can accomplish so much, and I saw them all over Spain last summer.

A street with tables and chairs in a city

Description automatically generated

Check out how pedestrian traffic has to pass by stores. This would go so far in mollifying our shopkeepers, and not obscuring them. And by arranging seating vertically down the middle (instead of rows deep fronting the restaurant), we will actually gain real estate for other things - like food and coffee carts - things that.

will truly serve locals who want to hang but not necessarily dine. It is also better for pedestrians - more to look at - people on one side, stores on the other. Finally, it is a better dining experience with more open view corridors.

Tree plants on the periphery of the seating makes shade for both pedestrians and diners (see above). And we will not have to remove any, except the sick ones.

And thank you for not buying into the tired tactics from the usual suspects to delay and/or neuter the plaza. This has already been adjudicated. Of course, curb and drain makes no sense. It is the major element of a plaza. And if it ever gets reversed for any reason for cars, it can still function as a road - and an effective traffic calming element at that!

Yes, to bollards. Vehicles need access for special events and emergencies.

As for winterizing seating that is in the middle of the plaza, there were dozens of innovations during the pandemic that were beautiful and fun  - like igloos, bubbles, and clear sheds.

A group of people sitting at tables outside of a building

Description automatically generated

Let us make this plaza amazingly beautiful, and amazingly useful to all stakeholders!

Cheers,

Billy Fried  
**La Vida Laguna**

949-922-7729

Carly Sciacca <carlydayart@gmail.com>

Dear Council Members,

I wanted to thank you for your work and diligence last night in respect to reevaluating the plan for a more permanent promenade. I think there will be a way to preserve our greatest assets and also move ahead for the future. Here are the photos I was talking about pictures Douglas Miller took on May 5, 1976. This was the “Forest Avenue Street Show.” We have been utilizing the main street in creative ways for over 50 years. Also note the size of the eucalyptus in 1976. If we were to plant mostly new trees, they would not mature to the point that they are now in any of our lifetimes. Well, Alex Rounaghi would have a chance to see them perhaps 😉, however is my understanding that many are over one hundred years old.  
  
Looking forward to seeing what Mayor Kempf and Mark Orgill produce!  
  
All Best,  
Carly Andrews

Josephine Torbensen [j.g.torbensen@gmail.com](mailto:j.g.torbensen@gmail.com)

Dear city council,

I hope you are able to see that the two designs that were proposed for the permanent promenade do not fit in with lagunas character. The fact that someone would even suggest taking down our mature trees is crazy enough, but the aesthetic of both designs are simply off. I hope you will consider a local designer for the job. Someone who understands lagunas cool, whimsical, unique “brand.”

Best,

Josephine Torbensen

Tel: 949-241-3091

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Paula Hornbuckle-Arnold   
Chairman of the Board   
Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce

It is with enthusiasm that we are writing today to express our full support for Agenda Item #10, The Promenade on Forest. A permanent pedestrian plaza on Forest Avenue is a long overdue great addition to Laguna Beach. It has shown itself to be wildly popular amongst our locals and businesses alike.

While both designs are beautiful, we particularly like Forest Stroll as it incorporates visual artistic features and the ambiance created by a less linear approach. We are also in favor of removing the curbs and parking meters permanently.

It is important that residents do not conflate the Downtown Action Plan with the Forest Street Promenade and that the council understands that some people are trying to make that connection in their decision not to support the permanent promenade. As has been shown time and time again, upwards of over 80% of Laguna Beach residents love the promenade. Those people generally do not attend council meetings as they trust their council members to vote on their behalf.

The Chamber of Commerce respectfully asks that you vote in favor and   
support a thriving city center designed with thoughtful comments from   
thousands of residents and business owners.

Sincerely,

Gareth butler <garethgbutler@gmail.com>

Brilliant Roger and Ellen! It is time to get the proverbial finger out and MAKE IT HAPPEN. It is excruciating the pace things move. Time to move the snails out of City Hall! Laguna needs dynamic visionaries. No problem. This city is full of them.

On a related note. Whatever happened to that wonderful multi story parking structure? So tastefully designed. In harmony with its surroundings. And SO, walking convenient to everywhere downtown,  eliminating the endless “looking for parking space cruisers.” I thought that would be a slam dunk, a no brainer.

Maybe that was the problem. The “no brains” prevailed!

Respectfully, Gareth Butler.

Carey Strombotne [carestrom1@gmail.com](mailto:carestrom1@gmail.com)

Dear Mayor Kempf and City Council Members,

I urge you to protect all the healthy, mature trees on Forest Avenue while choosing a design for the promenade. As we adopt March 7th as a special day for Arbor Day in reverence to trees at this very same city council meeting, it seems quite ludicrous to then cut down existing mature trees to fit a concept design. Why not include the existing trees INTO the design?

Trees take decades to reach maturity. Planting large shade trees will take years to provide beauty and shade to the promenade. As a tree city, we should be doing everything we can to preserve and protect our existing trees. I urge you to change the concept to include the existing healthy, mature trees, and not to cut these trees just to fit a design.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Carey Strombotne

January 21, 2024

Submittal to City Council RE: Item 10 Promenade Options

Attached are three documents that Village Laguna has submitted previously that outline many of our concerns:

**June 5, 2023** letter to City Council

**July 3, 2023** letter to the Planning Commission

**July, 2023** memo to the Council which outlines issues in response to the Planning Commission meeting. The issues raised in this correspondence are still very important and unaddressed.

The Planning Commissioners made comments such as, “We have a long way to go with this project.” “These are not designs. They are diagrams.” “Struggling with the whole concept.” ”Should be designed to respond to changes.” “Should be more ‘Laguna-ish’.” They expressed a need to simplify. “I know what designers do—they get paid a lot of money and they feel they have to show their stuff.” The design should not be “like a planned community. It should not feel like we are copying other places.” “Not ready for prime time.” “Keep all the trees that are healthy.”

An issue that has not been raised to date is consideration of the downtown area and particularly lower Forest as a historic resource. Commissioners referred to this obliquely when they referred to Laguna’s art colony heritage and suggested we think about how the early Laguna artists would have looked at this space. Of course, the way it is now largely reflects their vision—small shops, walkways on each side, eucalyptus street trees, parking and vehicular traffic.

In reviewing the tape of the July 5 Planning Commission hearing we found several important segments of commentary with no sound--two sections by Commissioner Kellenberg and one by project manager Tom Perez. One of the comments by Kellenberg was referred to in the Commission’s motion, but now there is no record of what he said. Council and the public need the benefit of that information. Do we need to hire a lip reader? If we are to rely on the videos of the meetings as the public record, we need to have more reliable methods of recording.

Reviewing all these comments and the concerns in the attached letters should indicate to the Council that this project is not ready to proceed to be further studied for Design Review and other project entitlements and CEQA analysis. The full range of approvable alternatives needs to be available to reviewing bodies, environmental analysts and the public. An obvious omission is the alternative that the Council directed to be prepared—the option that retains the existing curbs and gutters.

This process is dragging on and meantime lower Forest is experiencing a lack of pedestrian activity, as is apparent now. It is time for the Council to recognized that this Promenade experiment has been imposed on the retail merchants and their customers without an objective process due to the pandemic. In good conscience the city should consider an interim hybrid situation that would allow parking and access to the south side of Forest, especially during cold weather periods.

A close up of a drawing

Description automatically generated with medium confidencePlease direct staff to implement an interim hybrid plan and prepare other options that reflect concerns of the Planning Commission and those raised in the attached correspondence before proceeding with next steps.

Anne Caenn, President

June 5, 2023

RE: Future of Lower Forest Avenue City Council:

Village Laguna has refrained from taking a position on the Promenade, reserving comment in consideration of the businesses that were struggling during COVID and later while the consultants prepared detailed plans. With the two public workshop sessions now complete, it is time to raise important unaddressed concerns.

1. **The process--**The closing of lower Forest was an emergency measure meant to support local restaurants that were unable to serve customers indoors. The design of the Promenade was done quickly without normal review. Retail businesses sacrificed parking and convenience for their customers in consideration of the restaurants’ needs to use the street area for outdoor dining. The changes to lower Forest were meant to be temporary, and a full evaluation considering all options was to be done later. Now is that time, and it appears to us that all options are not being considered.

In June 2022 the council approved the “Program Plan” to guide the development of two concept plans. The first option was a complete conversion of the street into a pedestrian space. The second option was “a simpler version that maintains curbs, gutters and sidewalks similar to what exists today.” This second option would allow flexibility in managing lower Forest—possibilities include restoration of parking and through traffic along with temporary closures for special events. It would also keep the existing sidewalks and trees intact, thus preserving the traditional Main Street character of lower Forest.

At the first workshop in September 2022 questions were raised about the two options the Council had approved for the consultant’s work. Some wanted them to consider whether we should have a Promenade at all—because they felt that the community as a whole had never approved this idea except for the needs related to the COVID emergency. “No,” the public was told, “We are not here to talk about that. We are only to work on the two options the Council has approved.” And now only one of these options—complete conversion— is being presented.

Note: The community survey that is often cited as support for converting lower Forest to a pedestrian plaza did not present the complete picture to respondents---important factors such as cost, loss of parking and its revenues, removal of existing trees, implications of the closure for traffic congestion, for flooding, long-term maintenance of the outdoor facilities (which have already deteriorated and now require replacement at considerable cost), the needs of existing businesses that are not restaurants, and alternatives

In the most recent workshop, May 17, the second option did not appear at all. Only two versions of the complete conversion were presented. This gives the impression that the process is being manipulated to ensure complete conversion, since no other option will be on the table. This is not acceptable. Drawings for the second option should be presented and considered as the Council directed.

In addition, the decision making should include information on costs, parking replacement requirements, and an evaluation of the total need for closure, its pros and cons.

1. **History**—Laguna Beach is one of the few cities in Orange County that still has its traditional Main Street. Historical photographs of lower Forest show access by horses and then automobiles. Parking on the sides has always been provided. Creating a modern plaza out of a linear streetscape does not serve to enhance Laguna Beach’s historical uniqueness.
2. **Design—**While it is tempting to mimic urban designs that work in dense European cities or to those that are incorporated in modern shopping complexes or that reflect the latest design trends, we should consider what works best for Laguna Beach, what enhances our unique character and build on what everyone loves about coming here— the feeling of being in a place that is different, where its people have respected its character for over a century.
3. **Trees**—Forest Avenue is named for the Eucalyptus trees that early homesteaders planted. The existing trees in lower Forest are essential to the appearance and feel of that space. Yet both of the options presented show nearly all of the Eucalyptus trees to be removed. This is a definite deal breaker. It changes the unique Laguna Beach character to “Anytown, USA.”
4. **Flooding** is a significant concern that has not been addressed in the two options presented. When the curbs and gutters are removed and the street area is raised to meet the elevation of the sidewalks, the ability of the street to serve as a holding area for flood waters is eliminated. Even with new drains in place, the potential for more severe flooding of the shops is increased. See page 74 of the Downtown Specific Plan:

Flooding is the greatest concern of the environmental hazards potentially affecting the downtown. Downtown Laguna Beach is subject to periodic flooding due to overflowing of the Laguna Canyon flood control channel during a major flood event. According to the report from the Flood Mitigation Task Force in 2011, in the near future, this situation can be improved, but not completely resolved…. storms have produced flood heights of approximately one to two feet at Forest Avenue.

1. **Management of restaurant dining areas—**Now that the constraints of COVID have subsided, the takeover of public areas in the streets by some businesses at the expense of others needs to be rectified. Other restaurants not fronting on Lower Forest are not benefitting from city largess in expanding their seating permanently and investing in hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars of constructed improvements outside their doors. The consultants’ options did not address how the seating areas they presented would be allocated for the restaurants, or in how alcohol could be served without the installation of the required ABC barriers. The renderings, which omit any such barriers, give a misleading impression of spaciousness.

To preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach

1. **Parking**—Recent Coastal Commission decisions in San Diego required that parking taken over for outdoor seating be replaced. In their adopting of the Downtown Specific Plan the Commission considered the Promenade to be temporary and said that it could only be made permanent if there were replacement parking spaces provided. This is a significant impediment to implementation of any “complete conversion” plan and is another reason for exploration of other options now--at this stage in the planning process.

Please redirect this planning effort in light of the above comments

A close up of a bird

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Anne Caenn President

July 3, 2023

RE: Agenda Item No. 6.1 Promenade Concept Designs Planning Commission:

Village Laguna has submitted comments to the Council following the last public workshop on the Promenade. These are attached and should be considered in this review. Following are our comments on the staff report.

* 1. The Planning Commission should be involved in planning this project in a detailed way. The Commission should not just be asked to choose between two faulty alternatives. This project is not ready to proceed to any further steps until concerns are addressed and all options have been considered including returning the street to its former condition with parking and through traffic.
  2. Comments from the public are not honestly presented in the staff report. A glaring example of this is the statement : “Community members seemed understanding of the need to remove existing trees in the interior of the promenade to make space for newer trees with better soil volume.” The removal of most of the Eucalyptus trees on both sides of Forest was glossed over by the consultant and existing trees to be removed were not shown on the plans. Most of the members of the public were not aware of the planned removal of most of the trees. This is would be a huge impact and a key part of decision making for many people. This alone points at the need to explore other alternatives.
  3. Staff’s explanation of why they have not followed the City Council’s direction and have not included the option of keeping the existing curbs, gutters and existing trees in place contains many arbitrary assumptions. Following are comments on staff’s list of reasons for not including the option of keeping existing curbs, noted on p. 3:
     1. Existing sidewalks comply with ADA and would not have to be removed.
     2. Digging trenches for utilities is a common operation and does not dictate that the option of keeping existing curbs is infeasible.
     3. The “need” for large walkways next to the stores is assumed criteria by staff and needs to be balanced with the priority to save the existing trees that is dictated in adopted city documents.
     4. Additional storm drain inlets can be accomplished along with the utility trenches described in b. above.
     5. Maintaining existing decks is not a required part of the design.
     6. Construction costs have not been presented for any of the options. In any case public review of costs and benefits of all options should take place.
  4. It is not the prerogative of staff to void the instructions approved by the Council. All decision makers and the public should have the opportunity to review all options that have been produced and further options should be developed and presented as a result of the public process.

A close up of a drawing

Description automatically generated

Anne Caenn President

Memo sent to Council July, 2023

On Wednesday July 5 the Planning Commission discussed two options for a permanent Promenade along Forest Avenue. Despite superficial differences in design, both options involve “storefront to storefront” transformation along the width and breadth of Forest Avenue from Coast Highway to Glenneyre, including removal of most of the existing trees, demolition of existing sidewalks and curbs, and lots of new paving.

Option 1 is the Straight Shot; Option 2 is the Winding Path. Overall the Commission preferred Winding Path as more “natural.” They proposed lots of modifications, including an effort to preserve more trees.

But the big news: at last we caught a brief glimpse of what staff say is the option mandated by Council for a minimally impactful design. This was not previously shared in public, because staff had rejected it out of hand. After the public hearing was closed, staff presented a single slide for this option (below). It features both a promenade AND parking, as though the idea is to have both a through street and a closed-to-traffic public space.

A promenade for people and cars:

This hybrid is NOT what Council asked for. The idea behind a minimally impactful alternative that would maintain sidewalks and curbs (and trees) in place is that Forest Ave. could be more easily returned to its previous function if desired in future. At the hearing, staff stated that they could not retain the existing curbs and sidewalks, because platforms and railings would be required, and the public did not want “corrals.” Moreover, the platforms impact drainage. But why did staff assume that dining must be elevated? And any alcohol service requires railings under state law, which is missing from both Options 1 and 2. Staff also said a raised, mid-block crossing would be required for ADA accessibility, but it is not clear why, or why that is a reason to reject this option.

Steve Kellenberg was the only commissioner to advocate for further study of the minimally impactful alternative. He stated, from urban planning research, that nation- wide **90 percent of downtown streets that are closed to traffic end up being reopened to cars.**

We believe it is a mistake for staff to worry over the details of Winding Path without taking seriously the alternative that actually does what Council asked. Staff argued that no matter what, sidewalks, curbs, and trees must go, but this is an arbitrary conclusion based on criteria not stated by council or set in public workshops.

The Commission was dismayed that there wasn’t more public comment, considering how much community interest there has been in the closing of Forest and the Promenade. (Only four people attended and a few more phoned with comments.) Where were all those people who had crowded the SusiQ workshops? Well, guess what? They were not noticed about this hearing, which took place the day after the 4th of July holiday—not a time when most people are checking Planning Commission agendas. This is just another example of the City “managing” public involvement. The consultants who designed the plans were not even present, which shows how limiting this review was in terms of meaningful Planning Commission

Watch the Planning Commission meeting at. https://lagunabeachcity.granicus.com/player/clip/2090?view\_id=3&redirect=true&h=854f 433a54a1ab4fc801151d20bb6134 starting at 1 hour 42 minutes.

Please urge the Council to have the Planning Commission hold another meeting that is widely noticed, and which especially notices all the previous participants in the planning process. Let them know that you want to see a detailed version of the minimally impactful proposal that the Council requested and have staff and consultants immediately address the important concerns the Planning Commission raised.

Thank you for your concern about this important project. It is time for us all to step up to assure this project represents Laguna’s goals.

To preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach