

Dear Recap Readers,

The acquisition of Laguna Canyon Road was the subject of a recent City sponsored workshop. I was unable to attend because of the possibility that if three City Council showed up it could be a Brown Act Violation as the meeting was not properly noticed. Fortunately, an insightful resident wrote a summary of the meeting. Please read this and also my comments that follow.

Sincerely, George Weiss

### **One Resident's Thoughts on the Workshop:**

*The gummy bears and colored pens on the tabletops set the tone for the meeting on May 7<sup>th</sup> about Laguna Canyon Road – the residents were being treated as kindergarteners and they had nothing of value to share. The agenda was set in a way to disallow residents' voices and instead we were supposed to color in our ideas for curb styles.*

*Even though they said the meeting was to hear our voices, we were not allowed to ask questions and speak. Mr. Perez and the main presenter, Susan (last name not disclosed), used deceptive terms, such as “relinquishment” to brush over what they were really talking about was the **purchase** of LCR. Mr. Perez and Susan alluded to previous Cost Benefit Analysis and PSR reports to back-up decisions made about negotiating with Cal Trans for LCR and said we could look up the 600-page reports if we were interested in more information. Why would they not start the meeting with a review of salient points from these previous reports? Perhaps because they did not want discussion of the elephant in the room.*

*We were supposed to be distracted by giving our input on types of bike lanes and curbs without having an opportunity to address the real items that needed discussion:*

- Why would Laguna Beach need or want to purchase LCR?
- What is the cost of such a purchase?
- What are the priorities for changes to LCR?

*I do not very often get involved in city issues, but this meeting was an eye opener. I felt the real issues were being obscured and there were obvious efforts to avoid hearing from the concerned residents who had real expertise and valuable ideas and questions.*

*I think the City Council is **out of touch** with how residents feel and their common concerns. Many residents feel that the City Council does not have the residents' wellbeing as their primary focus and instead prioritize attracting more businesses and tourists to town.*

*As a City Council member, every decision you make should first and foremost be for the residents – ask yourself, “How does this decision help make life better for the residents?” We don't need to spend time and money on making it easier for tourists to travel and park in Laguna – they are already here, and they will always continue to come!*

*How about “**Residents First**” as your mantra – updating infrastructure items such as fixing roads and sewer lines, adding sidewalks and parks, doing fire and evacuation drills and undergrounding utilities? While these items may not attract more tourists, they would improve the lives of residents.*

*We are a small town and our expenditures on purchasing land and properties in the recent past seems out of line with our budget.*

GW: In the second paragraph the author says: "*Mr. Perez and the main presenter, Susan (last name not disclosed), used deceptive terms, such as "relinquishment" to brush over what they were really talking about was the **purchase** of LCR.*"

GW: Relinquishment is the right term and Caltrans may very well provide some funds to ease the transition, if approved. **But where will the \$150 million come from?** When the County relinquished the beaches in S. Laguna, we received \$22 million which we would use to pay for maintenance and lifeguard costs amounting to \$2 million a year.

GW: Caltrans tells us that the annual cost to maintain LCR is \$250,000 a year. However, the liability costs have not yet been adequately documented. At a previous City Council meeting, former CM Shohreh Dupuis said the liability costs could be **\$11 million** but that number was never documented or explained as a one-year cost or covering multiple years.

GW: At a more recent City Council meeting, Mr. Tom Perez, Asst. Public Works Director said Caltrans won't provide the liability costs overtime. That statement has to be false as Caltrans is a state public agency and would be required to release that information if a California Public Records Request was made.

GW: I would like to have utilities undergrounded along Laguna Canyon Road. However, the costs quoted at the workshop were \$150 million for the project. This number is at odds with previous estimates as you will see by reading the excerpts below.

### **City Council Meeting Recap November 15, 2022 (Excerpt)**

#### **Item 19 – Laguna Canyon Road (LCR) Improvement Project Update: Passed 5-0**

**GW:** Council approved spending \$810 thousand dollars to Southern California Edison for design of utility undergrounding for LCR between El Toro and the SCE substation ¼ mile west of Canyon Acres Road. City Staff will also be submitting a federal grant application for \$32 million. The City would also have to provide \$14 million in matching monies. This amount may be reduced by as much as \$3 plus million with SCE providing those funds. Grant funding is never certain so the amounts above could change.

**GW:** City Staff said that \$47 million would be enough to underground LCR. The designs SCE completes should help us get more precise estimates. Other plans include taking over Laguna Canyon Road from Caltrans which would allow the City to make improvements that make this

**GW:** Another option being considered is creating a reversable 3<sup>rd</sup>. lane to increase the flow of traffic in and out of town. Consider that one effect would be an increase in speed that two incoming or outgoing lanes would foster. This would decrease public safety and limit access to businesses in the Canyon. Please see the Staff Report for more details.

**City Council Meeting Recap, May 16, 2023, (excerpt)#Regular Item13: – Award for Professional Service Contracts for Laguna Canyon Road engineering, environmental, outreach and project management services Passed 5-0**

**Summary:** The City Council directed staff to pursue the project association with the above-described services. The project is large, complex and expensive with the initial cost for the above services at \$4.4 Million for services listed above.