

Item #10: Promenade on Forest Concept Design Review and Approval, (Council did not approve either design and voted to Continue this Item)

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 Avenue historic qualities. The workshop process didn't allow for resident input. Laguna has a "Main St," Forest Avenue.

Kirsten: I want a 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 Laguna's 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 Laguna's cool, whimsical, unique "brand."

Best,

Josephine Torbensen

Tel: 949-241-3091

Realtor®

Historic and architectural Laguna homes

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.

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 I do.

Yours truly, David Schroeder

Save our downtown Laguna Beach Trees



Started
March 2, 2020
Petition to
[City of Laguna Beach](#)

Report

5,218
Signatures

john albritton <johnalbritton@yahoo.com>



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.

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) 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)

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>) , 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

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 contracts 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.

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

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 was 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 Brea.

- 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

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'm 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.

Vicki Borthwick <vickiborthwick@yahoo.com>

Mayor Kempf and Councilmembers:

I talked to Alice Brown [owner of The Shoe Cellar] 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>
open attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]

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>



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

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
PR • writing • marketing • grant writing
949-233-9548
www.mcmurraymarketing.com

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

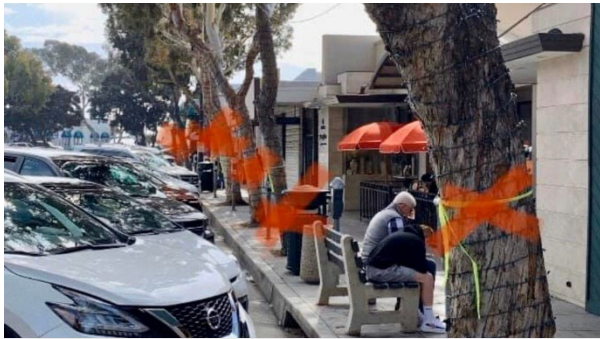
Carly Sciacca <carlydayart@gmail.com>

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.



[Join the Cause to Protect Laguna Beach's Natural Beauty and Fight the \\$14 Million Deforestation Plan!](#)

chnng.it

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

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.



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.



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

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

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 shouldn’t feel like we are copying other places.” “Not ready for prime time.” “Keep all the trees that are healthy.”

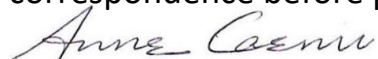
An issue that has not been raised to date is consideration of the downtown area and particularly lower Forest as a historic resource. Commissioners referred to this obliquely when they referred to Laguna’s art colony heritage and suggested we think about how the early Laguna artists would have looked 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 recognize 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.

Please 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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Caenn".

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.

2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **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.”
5. **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:

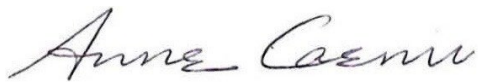
Flooding is the greatest concern of the environmental hazards potentially affecting the downtown. Downtown Laguna Beach is subject to periodic flooding due to overflowing of the Laguna Canyon flood control channel during a major flood event. According to the report from the Flood Mitigation Task Force 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.

6. **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.

7. **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



Anne Caenn
President

July 3, 2023

RE: Agenda Item No. 6.1 Promenade Concept Designs

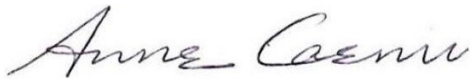
Planning Commission:

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:
 - a. Existing sidewalks comply with ADA and would not have to be removed.
 - b. Digging trenches for utilities is a common operation and does not dictate that the option of keeping existing curbs is infeasible.
 - c. 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.
 - d. Additional storm drain inlets can be accomplished along with the utility trenches described in b. above.
 - e. Maintaining existing decks is not a required part of the design.
 - f. 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.



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’s 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 work

Watch the Planning Commission meeting at.

https://lagunabeachcity.granicus.com/player/clip/2090?view_id=3&redirect=true&h=854f433a54a1ab4fc801151d20bb6134 starting at 1 hour 42 minutes.

Please urge 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 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's time for us all to step up to assure this project represents Laguna's goals.

