

# George Weiss

(article ran slightly edited in the Laguna Beach Indy August 2024)



I ran in 2020 because I care about our community and didn't like what was happening to it. By community I mean both our stunning natural and built environment as well as the people who live here. Laguna residents are talented and generous. Where else do so many volunteers contribute their time to community organizations? Look at how many volunteers each year help with our renown Pageant of the Masters---often entire families.

Before I ran, residents reported being treated in a dismissive or antagonistic manner by our City Council and Executive staff. I worked to change that, and we now have a more professional Executive City Team and staff than before I ran.

I also pledged to listen to residents' issues and to work to solve them. One of the first agenda items I spearheaded in January 2021 was the establishment of a tax deductible COVID Relief Fund to provide direct financial assistance to individuals and employees living or working in Laguna that had been impacted by COVID-19.

To keep residents informed about Council agenda items and the rationale for my vote, I write and send out City Council recaps after each meeting. When residents complained that the upcoming agenda items were too cryptic and late, I got an agenda item passed in February 2022 to provide 12-day advance notice of future agenda items.

We also had issues with Closed Session titles not matching the actual items being discussed as well as reports on Agenda items not matching the actual language of the contract

# George Weiss

(article ran slightly edited in the Laguna Beach Indy August 2024)

or resolution. That happened with our library where clauses---#9 and #14---stipulated that the library could be moved. Concerned residents showed up to keep our library at its current location, and I made a motion that passed to acquire the library's property from the County and extend the County's lease for 25 years and with it the \$4.2 million we paid coming back to us for upgrades. Progress is now being made on closer matches between the titles and content of closed session items and the overview reports and contents of contracts and resolutions in agenda items.

Other accomplishments over the last 3 ½ years are the Climate Action Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through electrification of the City's fleet, solar microgrids, and vehicle charging stations. Speaking of electric cars, I helped broker meetings between the Rivian team and the Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Coalition to renovate our long-shuttered movie theatre for a showroom for Rivian and a community center for us. Rivian's restoration of the movie theatre is a model of how responsible development works. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places. I'm working with Battalion Chief Andrew Hill on another restoration project -- the restoration of Santa's ride to Hospitality Night and Laguna's first fire truck, the Seagrave.

Working with the Environmental and Sustainability Committee we got a ban on the sale and use of balloons in public places to protect our marine and avian life and our community from fires. On the fiscal accountability side, I got an agenda item passed that requires an outside appraisal of any property valued at over \$500,000 the City considers buying since there wasn't an outside appraisal of the Ti Amo project when Council voted to acquire it. (I voted against it).

The City Council has spent tens of millions on a number of large projects which have yet to be completed, such as the Promenade, (\$3-5M). I am in favor of a hybrid Promenade, one that preserves it as a unique main street during the week and as a Promenade on weekends. This will help retailers whose businesses have been hurt by the Promenade. Council also has other large financial projects on the horizon, such as the desalinization project (\$23M), the undergrounding of Laguna Canyon Rd (\$150M), the Downtown Action Plan (\$14M), the takeover of Pacific Coast Highway, and the quest to build more large parking structures. Since these projects could cost residents more in taxes, it's my fiduciary obligation—as it should be all City Councilmembers---to prioritize which projects to undertake and fund---such as those that

# George Weiss

(article ran slightly edited in the Laguna Beach Indy August 2024)

benefit residents the most. We must spend resident taxpayers' money more prudently than we have in the past.

We've experienced worse congestion of our streets, neighborhoods, beaches, and trails and more violent crime since the end of the pandemic. (We are now the 3<sup>rd</sup> in violent crimes for all OC cities). How has the spending on many of these large projects improved the lives of residents? We need to find funding from others, not local residents, to deal with congestion that threatens our quality of life and safety, such as in a disaster requiring an evacuation of the town. Shouldn't this be a priority over so many large purchase projects that do not benefit residents?

During my term in office, Council voted to build a community pool, upgrade the library, convert our public vehicles to electric with more recharging stations, and convert St Catherine's to a community recreation center for residents. Implementing these projects and finding a solution to congestion's negative impact on our environment are my goals for a second term. I operate from the principle that I was elected to serve residents. I realize others operate from a principle of serving the City and the organizations' needs over residents' needs. Don't residents deserve someone on Council who will not only listen to their issues, but will actually act on them?

## **What I enjoy in Laguna**

I do yoga, and swim laps in the City pool or the ocean where I also do beach cleanup while down there. I like to dance, which I get to do at our great music events down at Bluebird Park, Fête de la Musique, and the Sawdust Festival. I also enjoy Opera Laguna and keeping a native plant and vegetable garden.

## **Service and Background Information**

- Past president of the Laguna Beach Beautification Council
- Past Chair of Laguna's Housing and Human Services Committee
- Past Chair of the Laguna Beach Film Society
- Retired telecom executive and small business owner
- Former U.S. Marine with psychology degree from Loyola University, Chicago