

The Story of the Library

This is the story of the recent events concerning our Library. The good news is that City Council, by a vote of 4-1, directed City Staff to purchase the site where our library has served the community for 50 years,* and lease it back to the County for a term of 25 years. City Council also allocated up to the entire purchase price of \$4.2 million to refurbish the building and upgrade the Library for the 22nd Century. We anticipate that the County will provide funding, too.

The outpouring of resident support for the Library made all the difference. Without your letters and heartfelt testimony this would not have been the outcome. In addition to your letters and testimony from Laguna's youth, adults, and seniors, there was even a touching story told privately by one of the librarians: A boy of 6-8 years of age was accustomed to stopping behind the yellow barriers to have a librarian deliver his books when pandemic precautions restricted entry. The librarian noticed this same boy standing in his usual position after the barriers were removed. He told the lad that he could now enter, and the boy said, "Really?!" And, when assured that he could enter, he ran to the new children's bookshelf of books and hugged it declaring that "I've missed you so much." The library is cherished by even the young in our community.

My deepest thanks to everyone who wrote letters, spoke at the meeting, posted comments on Nextdoor, and signed the online petition which garnered nearly 1,496 signatures. Council listened and voted to do the right thing.

Now to the back story. In early 2020 on a 5-0 vote with Toni Iseman, Bob Whalen, Steve Dicterow, Peter Blake, Sue Kempf serving as Council members voted to do the following:

- 1. Authorize the City Manager (CM) to send a letter to the County Chief Executive Officer exercising the City's option to purchase the Laguna Beach library branch property from the County of Orange.*
- 2. Direct the CM to continue with pre-acquisition due diligence activities such as obtaining a property appraisal, an environmental assessment, and property inspection report;*
- 3. Appropriate \$20,000 using available Library Impact Fees to cover the costs of preacquisition diligence activities;*

4. *Authorize the CM to execute a month-to month lease Agreement #20-001 with the County of Orange, effective January 2, 2020, in the amount of \$1,484 per month, to continue providing office space for the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce in the Laguna Beach County Library branch building; and*
5. *Authorize the CM to execute a month-to-month sublease Agreement #20-002 with the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce for office space in the Laguna beach Library branch building per the terms of a 1937 agreement between the City and the Chamber of Commerce.*

At the City Council meeting on Tuesday, April 15, Agenda Item #8 was on the Consent Calendar which means that if the item was not pulled for discussion, it would be automatically approved. What disturbed me is what was omitted in the Staff Report recap/description:

1. *The fact that the library's lease would be for only 3 years, and that a lease renewal clause was purposely omitted.*
2. *Clause Item #9 which states: "The parties understand and agree that the City is investigating the possibility of relocating the free County library and related services to a new location within the City" ("Alternative Location")*
3. *Clause Item #14: "In the event that an alternative library location has not been identified within twelve (12) months of the effective date of this lease, the County and the City shall meet and confer and develop a capital improvement plan for the Premises to be funded from the Library Purchase Price Principal ("**Capital Improvement Plan**")*

From my reading these clauses meant that the City had 12 to 36 months in which to find another site for the library and if successful the current site would be sold to a third party, or kept by the City for other uses like offices or a parking structure.

The notion of building a parking structure has been referenced by discussions related to the Downtown Action Plan developed by the City to improve the Downtown streets, lighting and more. This use was also publicly suggested by a well-known downtown landlord with much to gain if additional parking was built nearby. Our former City Manager said that Libraries are passé. The site was also

included in a feasibility study which looked at parking structure sites in the Downtown and beyond.

You can read the City's Staff report on this item here:

https://lagunabeachcity.granicus.com/GeneratedAgendaViewer.php?view_id=3&event_id=2011

This story makes our success more satisfying. The people spoke, and the Council listened. People who cared about the Library and acted on that care made the difference.

Thanks to all of you,
George Weiss

City Councilperson

*The library has new cards commemorating its 50-year anniversary.