

South Laguna Civic Association
Candidate Forum 2024
GOVERNANCE

October 7, 2024

1. Staff Responsiveness. Over the past several years the City has incurred substantial criticism over the functioning of several departments, including long delays in processing citizens' requests. Despite the hiring of a new City Manager and some internal reorganization, serious problems persist and include substantial delays in processing applications. How would you go about improving staff responsiveness and the effectiveness of various departments?

GW: I agree that problems within Community Development and Finance still need to be addressed. I would first ask who is to blame for these problems because unless we hold those responsible accountable it will be business as usual or worse. These problems go back a long way and have multiple causes.

We have been told that our Our codes and zoning are sometimes in conflict with each other and the general plan too. That is being addressed through a comprehensive revision of these documents, so they are much easier to understand and provide a guide for city planners as they guide a project through the process.

Bad Leadership: Community Development was devastated under the leadership of Shohreh Dupuis and Mark Weiner. Here is a quote for you from a resident who had some insight into the root cause of the problems we are experiencing today.

“Shohreh Dupuis behaved abhorrently and treated city staff with zero respect of their expertise or position. It was essential that she be removed from her role before more damage was done and we lost more talented people due to her abuse of power. After the fact, council members have described her work as unprofessional, but only you presented her with the details of her adverse impact on the values and dignity of our city and democratic process. I’m an HR consultant by profession and staff sought me out as a sounding board. I was made aware of lots of turnover due to her leadership.”

Loss of Experienced Staff: We lost an extraordinary number of experienced people including Scott Drapkin who spent 24 years as a planner and then manager. We have had a difficult time finding planners with the experience those that left had.

An Unlevel Playing Field: Finally, we must have a level playing field where everyone is treated equally. That has not been the standard practice and has resulted in many appeals and decisions that pit neighbor against neighbor. It also takes up a lot of staff time as these projects typically go through DRB three times and then are appealed. It's the applicant and their representatives who take advantage of personal relationships with staff that cause some of these issues.

We need to support the CM and Community Development Director's efforts in all these efforts. I would also be open to forming an advisory group of residents to provide input as well as scheduling workshops as we revise the zoning, codes and general plan. It's the general plan that should guide everything, but it's been largely ignored as a planning document.

2. Code Enforcement. A public policy is only good if it is enforced effectively. In Laguna, it could be argued that there is inadequate enforcement of important rules regarding many topics, including violations related to parking, speeding, noise, building codes, DUI's, short-term lodging, tidepool protection, etc. What would you do to improve the enforcement by Laguna's employees of important areas of the City's rules and regulations.

*GW: There are too many code officers (6). A few years ago, only two officers have code enforcement streamline code cases. Only valid cases should be opened, not minor cases such as trash cans or leaf blowers. Code enforcement officers should not be working from home. Code enforcement should not be proactively policing the city searching for violations. The city approved a part time contract code officer for only short-term rentals, what happened to that position, it turned into a full-time officer working nuisance abatement. Code enforcement should not be handling building code related violations, **they are not qualified to enforce the building code** and life safety could be at risk. The planning division needs to be consistent enforcing the general plan and coastal commission requirements. Planners need to make sure that DRB and Planning Commission requires get onto the approved working plans and are consistent to what was approved.*

There is a lot of bureaucratic red tape involved such as writing a violation for trash containers, or for leaf blowers. I suggested having residents hand out a one pager in English and Spanish to the landscapers who violate this rule. I found we do have such a form, but it takes four clicks of your mouse to get to it on the city's website. Code enforcement found a way to reduce the number of clicks to 3.

3. Voting Rights. All of South Laguna is within the service area of the South Coast Water District (SCWD), our water and sewer service provider. Until 1999 the residents of South Laguna could vote for SCWD's Board of Directors. Then the City Council and the SCWD agreed – without consultation with the voters – to shift the voting boundary, but not the service boundary, of the district southward to the edge of Dana Point, thus taking away South Laguna's right to vote for representation on the SCWD Board. Since we remain in the SCWD's service area and collectively shoulder expenses for its projects (i.e., the sewage tunnel project, the proposed Doheny desalinization plant), we believe that we should be able to vote for the members of the SCWD's Board. For this to happen only the Laguna Beach City Council can initiate the process. Over the past several elections' cycles, all the council candidates agreed to support the reinstatement of our right to vote, but no action has been taken. Would you have the City initiate action to restore our right to vote?

GW: I would and will make a commitment tonight that upon re-election I will make every effort to make that happen. South Coast was desperate to get Laguna to sign on to the project and allowing residents of S. Laguna to vote could have been used as a bargaining chip for Laguna Beach to fund the Doheny Desal project. A missed opportunity.

4. Zoom. During the Covid epidemic the City switched to a hybrid protocol for public meetings, which permitted citizens to attend and participate via Zoom link. Many people found this to be an inducement to increased participation, and for health reasons some people continue to be reluctant to attend public meetings in person. Last year the City Council suspended Zoom access because of an interruption. Some cities have found ways to resume Zoom access, and we believe it would be a good thing. Do you support having the City return to allowing Zoom access to public meetings?

GW: Unqualifiedly yes. Certain members of the City Council find the testimony of residents annoying or waste of time. I do not. I recently met a couple who moved here from Coto de Casa, and they said that they love watching public comments as it helps them understand the issues residents are concerned about. Zoom would increase that kind of participation and its prohibition diminishes public participation and the democratic process itself.

5. Zoning Code. The Community Development Department has long suffered from extreme delays, staff turnover, and apparent dysfunction. Some people have proposed that the root of the problem lies in the zoning code and have suggested

that it be subject to a comprehensive revision. While this may appear to offer a simple solution, in reality such a process would likely take years – and lots of additional staff time. In our opinion the current code is appropriately complex in response to Laguna’s diverse neighborhoods, exceptionally varied site conditions and unique character, developed over time to respond to the challenges of fairly adjudicating the entitlement process. within Laguna Beach. The code is a means of both providing and protecting property rights for all while ensuring that our City retains its architectural distinction and special community character. **Do you believe that the zoning code should be overhauled? If so, what would you do to preserve the protections that the current code provides?**

GW: We have been told that the zoning code has many contradictions and conflicting clauses. I honestly don't know if that true or if the code is just complex and reflects the complexity of the geography or our town. I take on face value that the Community Development Department has an enormous backlog. One resident contacted me saying that her project application was submitted 130 days ago and that she was never contacted about its progress. So, is it a process problem, lack of staff training, code and zoning conflicts. Certainly, is a staff training and experience issue but it's unclear to me about the rest as city leadership has not provided any data on this. I have asked for it, but it was not forthcoming.

FINANCE

6. Debt Financing. We understand that the City spent more than \$10 million in cash and about \$11 million in borrowed money to purchase the property of Saint Catherine’s School. We think this acquisition was a good idea, but when we request City funds to purchase other properties in South Laguna, such as the two lots at Catalina and Monterey Streets for a park or to acquire the Community Garden, we are told that we must raise our own funds for most of the cost. If the City can borrow for the purchase of Saint Catherine’s, the same mechanism can be used to purchase other properties to meet the needs of the community. Are you in favor of the use of debt financing for the purchase properties to be used as parks and open space?

GW: In hindsight I see the purchase of St. Cathrines as problem. Council was told that we could put a pool there, that the chapel could be make money by being used for civil weddings and music events, that the gym and it's built in theater could be rented out, that the school library could be used, that the School district wanted to have a pre-school there too. So, the main use now is for the Fire and Marine Safety command staff and as an emergency site for the city. Once staff is ensconced as

they are on this site it will not be easy to move them out. I think the council majority is relying on the Master Facilities Plan to help them make a decision and evade responsibility for the purchase of the site. Meanwhile the Fire Department would like to have the entire site for training. I don't rule it out debt funding either as it's important to provide the amenities like a dog park that S. Laguna residents want.

7. Day-Tripper Subsidies. Day-visitors cost the City and its residents between \$20 million and \$30 million more every year than they generate in revenue for the City. These costs involve public safety, marine safety, trash removal, traffic control, environmental protection, wear and tear on infrastructure, and more. What specific policies will you promote to reduce this huge subsidy by the City and its residents to day-visitors?

GW: *The City accepted the cost of visitor report authored by John Thomas, James Danzinger and Greg Vail, but has never acted on it. As have said before the day trippers come here to enjoy the beaches and coastline, the open space and our built environment too. The majority of those resources are owned by the state like the beaches and the county owns or manages much of the open space.*

These are regional resources entrusted to Laguna Beach to manage and maintain and fund. We need to get the state, County and Coastal Commission to step up and help us fund the shortfall we residents pay for now to protect and maintain these state and regional resources. It must be a regional solution. In the meantime, there are stop-gap measures we can take like increasing the business licensing fees, put parking meters along all of PCH and lobby the Coastal Commission to allow for some form of metered parking in S. Laguna neighborhoods.

The solution is limiting the number of cars coming into our town. It is the method many cities are using to preserve residents' quality of life, prevent even more gridlock and improve public safety. Does anyone believe that if there is a major disaster while we have a town full of tourists and cars, we could evacuate our town in four hours?

One thing we can do is provide the thousands of workers who work at our hotels, restaurants, bars and retail stores who commute from out of town with parking in the Act 5 lot and provide bus service in partnership with these businesses and the city.

We also need to find revenue sources that tax day tourists. The council had an opportunity to let the voters decide if a restaurant and bar bill tax would be feasible, and also an increase in business license fees which have not been increased in 28 years. The council declined to allow residents to vote by dismissing both possible ballot Initiatives from a vote.

8. Empty Homes. Census data indicate that in our City the difference between the number of households and the number of housing units is more than 2400, which is nearly 20% of our housing stock. Many of these 2400 units are second homes whose owners' primary residence is elsewhere. The absence of so much of our housing stock presumably increases the price of the remaining units, thus adding to our housing affordability problem. To address this problem some cities, impose a tax on vacant homes. Do you think that Laguna should consider such a tax?

GW: I want to thank John Thomas for his research into this issue and for his thoughts on how this problem could be used as a revenue source for affordable housing. I would love to work with Council members on this funding mechanism for affordable housing and the purchase of open space. So far, the Council has not shown an interest. Please lobby council members to work with me to at least consider this option.

9. Portfolio Loss. Among the most important responsibilities of the City Council is stewardship of the City Treasurer's management of our public funds. The cost basis of the city's investment portfolio is over \$168 million, but its fair market value is \$5 million less. That means that the City has a real but unrealized loss of over \$5 million in its portfolio. Yet we have not heard this discussed at Council meetings. What should the Council be doing to prevent losses like this in the future?

GW: This is not an issue as the differential between 2022 and 2023 is only \$500,000.

10. City Debt. The most recent audited financial statement for the City, dated 30 June 2023, reports total outstanding liabilities of \$130,000,000, which was equal to 100% of the City's total budget for that year. Does this amount of debt concern you? What would you do about this?

GW: This is an issue as the pension liability is now at \$83 million and if we continue to hire more staff will increase despite the new state laws.

11. Staff Increase. Since the year 2000 the population of Laguna has declined by more than 1,000 residents, but the number of city employees has increased 50% (from 230 to 345 full-time equivalent employees). As the number of employees grows, the payroll grows- and the City's net unfunded pension obligation also grows. As of June 30, 2022, that obligation was over \$83,500,000, which is the largest component of the City's \$130 million of total liability. Do you think this is a problem? And if so, what would you do about it?

GW: I want to seek ways of reducing staff through attrition while improving the levels of service now provided to residents. I would support a moratorium on new positions being created. We need to use technology and software much more than we do today and the new CM has recognized this and want to work toward that goal.

HOUSING / ZONING

12. Housing at Hospital. Two years ago, in a revision to the Housing Element of the General Plan, the City designated a steep, undeveloped parcel uphill from the hospital as a site for future high-density housing for low- and moderate-income residents. The site is in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone on the edge of the Greenbelt; most of it contains high-value native habitat; and it is accessible only over extremely narrow streets. We believe that this parcel should not be developed at all and should be acquired as permanent open space. What is your opinion of the designation of this parcel for high-density housing? And would you support having the City? prioritize acquiring the site for open space?

GW: Yes, as I mentioned previously, I oppose building in high severity fire zones. It's a recipe for disaster. I applaud Alex's efforts to create both a Housing Trust Fund and a Housing Fund. We need to create a more robust source of funding for affordable housing. Private/public partnerships are the best approach. Unknown to most, 32% of Laguna's population are renters. The city needs to contribute the land or half the funding while the private sector contributes the other half.

We also need to preserve existing affordable housing by buying them to keep them affordable. The private/public partnership model should apply here as well. Funding for affordable housing is now provided through a tax on short-term lodging but is not the most robust funding mechanism. We need to work on funding options for affordable housing for Laguna Beach.

13. Affordable Housing. The Housing Element of the City's General Plan currently foresees several large-scale, dense developments of affordable housing. It explicitly lists four sites within the City, where all of this housing would be concentrated. How do you think the City should go about attempting to accommodate affordable housing and where do you think it should be sited?

GW: I think the NCC site is fine as long as it's neighborhood compatible. I think the Church of Christ Scientist site in N. Laguna could work, and the empty parking lot near Canyon Acres that was being considered some time ago. We should also pursue additional affordable housing at the National Homes site as they have expressed interest in partnering on adding units.

14. ADU's. The State of California has over-riden local zoning authority with the stated intent of increasing the supply of housing, particularly of affordable housing. However, we have no data about the effects of this change. Accessory dwelling units (ADU's) are not subject to the normal design review process, and applications for ADU's have soared. There are many complaints that not all ADU's are being rented, that the neighborhoods where these additional units are being built do not have adequate parking and infrastructure to accommodate them, and that the recent change in the law to a by-right maximum 25' height has led to increased blockage of views, which exacerbates the problem. Should the City be collecting data about the actual rental use of its ADU's? What actions would you take to address the problems with ADU's?

GW: While our intentions were good in adopting a resolution so we could be in conformance with state law, overall, the ADUs have been nothing but a way for property owners to increase the mass of their homes and thereby their value without increasing the supply of affordable housing. Malibu, for example requires an occupancy permit for an ADU. We need to protect neighbors from ADUs that have taken away their views without public noticing or a hearing. The City should be collecting data and supposedly the Housing and Human Service Committee did

so, but that effort is a survey and those who respond don't necessarily need to tell the truth.

ROAD SAFETY

15. Sidewalks and Crosswalks. The data show that Coast Highway is unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists. While the City's contribution of \$10 million towards a Caltrans project to provide a sidewalk along one side of the Coast Highway from Ruby Street to the hospital will mitigate part of the problem, it is far from solving it. For decades we have lobbied for adequate sidewalks along both sides of this heavily trafficked and dangerous road and for more and safer pedestrian crosswalks. What would you do to bring about the installation of safe and adequately wide sidewalks? and safer crossings for the entire length of the Coast Highway?

GW: I have not looked at how much funding we would need to accomplish this goal. Coast Highway has had its share of pedestrian fatalities, one at Mountain, one near Hinkle, one at Pearl, one near the Montage and there are probably others I don't know about. I think there should be much more collaboration with Caltrans on this as an overall plan should be developed that looks at speeding and how to stop it, DUI and drug related fatalities and what can be done to reduce the speeds on Coast Highway. Speed kills, so if we can make an effort to reduce the speeds it would improve pedestrian safety.

16. Parking on Coast Highway. We understand that the City is proceeding with plans to charge for parking along the Coast Highway in South Laguna. We are concerned that this measure will worsen the already difficult parking situation in our residential neighborhood by encouraging visitors to shift to adjacent residential streets where there is no charge to park. We have requested that the City evaluate methods of extending pay parking – for non-residents only – to these neighborhoods. Do you support actions to extend pay parking – for non-residents only – into these neighborhoods?

GW: We should lobby Coastal to allow pay parking in neighborhoods as well as allowing locals parking stickers as was done to mitigate the impacts from Mozambique. S. Laguna is as least as important as that large restaurant/nightclub and concert venue.

I do and I believe our history of violating the Coastal Act and thus compromising our relationship with Coastal must be addressed. We have to show Coastal that we take the Coastal Act seriously. The recent attempt by Community Development and some Council members who supported allowing for coastal development closer than the 25 foot from the Coastal Bluff face is misguided and wrong. That legislation, still active, would also have allowed the Community Development Director the power to guide commercial development for 26 or more parcels where the coastal bluff is difficult to discern. The city hired Amber Dobson as a city planner to help us develop a better working relationship with Coastal, but she recently jumped ship and went back to working for the Coastal Commission.

17. Control of Arterial Streets. The City is considering options for taking over Coast Highway and Laguna Canyon Road and is spending several million dollars for preliminary design of LCR, even though there has been no official decision to take control of the roadway. Both of these highways are subject to severe congestion and taken together are, according to an on- going study of street safety, the location of about 85% of accidents that cause serious injuries and fatalities. Assuming ownership of these street would provide greater control over their design and operation. However, it would also involve very significant initial and on-going costs and much greater financial. liability for the City. What do you think are the important costs and benefits of assuming control of these streets, and do you support doing so?

GW: I would consider taking over Coast Highway and Laguna Canyon Road if it would allow us to charge a toll for day tourists visiting Laguna. The liability costs would have to be recovered from tolls on cars. We don't want to keep out tourists, but our town faced gridlock during the 4th of July week and the most effective solution is keeping cars out and tolling those who come into our town. Cars have environmental and quality of life impacts on residents. Again, this is regional issue as the City is a caretaker of state and regional natural resources that that day trippers are here to enjoy. Is a great effort but we need to address it now or it will only get worse. A two-person subcommittee is not adequate to the challenge at hand.

INFRASTRUCTURE

18. Recycled Water. The South Coast Water District is already producing recycled water from its plant in Aliso Canyon. That water is being used for irrigation in selected parts of the South Laguna. Over time we may expect further reductions in the availability of potable water and thus further restrictions on its use for

irrigation. Furthermore, recycled water significantly reduces the amount of wastewater going into the ocean. Thus, we believe that expanding the capacity of the recycled water distribution system has important and valuable benefits for the City and for the environment. Would you support the expansion of the recycled water facility's capacity and the extension of the network of recycled water into additional areas of the City?

GW: I support all efforts to recycle water. In S. OCY we send 20 of the water we import into the ocean. We need to recycle that into useable drinking water. I do not see a positive cost benefit to extend pipes to deliver recycled water to the city's parks, landscapes or open space. This would require massive disruption of sensitive coastal sage scrub habitat and there is no place to store the water either. I've thought long and hard about this being lobbied by Mr. Beanan but have come to the conclusion that would be too disruptive to the open space.

19. Ocean Pollution. All of Laguna's wastewater, along with wastewater from other cities, is processed in the Coastal Treatment Plant in Aliso Canyon. Every day nearly 10 million gallons of partially treated but still contaminated water is discharged into the ocean 1.5 miles off Aliso Beach. The plant is old and in serious need of upgrading or replacement. Frankly, we do not think that any wastewater should be going into the ocean. There are technologies available to make that possible, and other cities in our region have reduced their effluent discharge to zero. What would you do to reduce the amount of effluent entering the ocean? Do you think our City should lead such? an effort?
Let's recycle the water now going into the ocean and turn it into potable water.

FIRE SAFETY

20. Undergrounding. While much of SDG&E's high voltage service to South Laguna is already underground, one high-voltage line comes down a steep hillside from Laguna Sur to Eagle Rock Way through heavy, highly flammable vegetation. The line presents a clear fire danger to South Laguna. Would you support the undergrounding of this line?

GW: I support undergrounding every utility pole if we can find a funding mechanism that doesn't place the burden directly on residents. Massive undergrounding projects like LCR should have had a commonsense funding plan submitted at the beginning of the project. We have spent 10 million thus far for undergrounding LCR. I do not know how much risk a down high voltage line

poses. I would want to know the number of incidents we have had with that type of electrical infrastructure before making this a project.

21. Fire Danger. While there are many potential sources of disaster for our community, wildfire is widely considered to be the most serious single threat. What specific steps would you support to reduce the severe threats to life and property from a wildfire in Laguna?

GW: During the high tourist season we are at the greatest risk of loss of life as we would not be able to evacuate the town. Imagine trying to do that with the gridlock we experienced during the 4th of July week.

22. Emergency Evacuation. Laguna's experience with wildfires has shown that fires can move very quickly. A study done for the City after the tragic fire in Paradise, California, stated that: "The entire City takes 4 hours and 20 minutes, on average under normal roadway conditions (no roadway hazards like stalled vehicles, trees/debris and/or power lines blocking the road, thick smoke limiting sight distance, etc.) to evacuate with no roadway closures." The study goes on to estimate much longer evacuation times if one or more of the three exit routes are unavailable. What do you think we should do to create additional emergency escape routes?

GW: Well, if you haven't learned how to swim, I would definitely take lessons now and maybe get a paddle board or inflatable kayak. Seriously I think we need to hold some evacuation drills, maybe of those areas that are most at risk like Bluebird Canyon.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

23. Restrooms. The beaches of South Laguna are under ever-increasing pressure from visitors. One of the worst problems for visitors and residents alike is the lack of public restrooms in key areas of South Laguna from West Street to south of the hospital. This is a public health issue for visitors and residents who use our beaches and parks, and it is an annoyance and public health issue for owners of properties near the beaches. While we understand that two public restrooms will be part of the new Fire Station #4, we do not believe they will be nearly sufficient to address the problem. Would you support City action to provide additional public restrooms in South Laguna, and if so, where do you think they should be located?

GW: I think the new Fire Station 4 was mentioned as planned site and if we could acquire the Catalina lots there too. Residents need to tell us where to place new toilet facilities. We should do that to protect the quality of life for S. Laguna residents.

24. Estuary. A window of opportunity for a singular legacy project may soon close if the City does not act soon. The estuary at Aliso Creek is currently a poster child for an abused ecosystem. The restoration of the estuary would create a healthier and more diverse coastal wetlands habitat; it would link the Greenbelt and Bluebelt; it would assist in improving the water quality of the discharge of the Creek into the ocean; and it could be a showcase for Laguna's southern gateway. Four years ago, the City Council expressed strong support of the project and committed to co-fund development of the project's site plan and environmental review.

The Council also expressed the desire to see the restoration proceed "as soon as possible". But the City has not yet fulfilled its commitment with the funding and staff time to assume the role of Lead Agency. What specific steps would you take to ensure the public and the co-founders that the City is making good on its commitment to restore the estuary?

GW: I would like to see restoration of as much riparian habitat as possible. The questions in this case relate to both the science involved and the costs the city must assume. I also don't want it to be another tourist attraction that requires we provide more parking.

25. Roundup. Last year over 500 South Laguna residents signed a petition asking the City Council to ban the use of Roundup in light of the abundant science showing its harmfulness to people and the environment. The Council responded with a vote earlier this year to provisionally stop its use in fuel modification activities in all of Laguna Beach. The Laguna Canyon Foundation has also heard our concerns and is developing an Herbicide Transition Plan. The California Wildlife Conservation Board recently stated that it would not consider permitting any project that used Roundup unless it has thoroughly considered alternatives and that those alternatives are substantially cost. prohibitive. Nonetheless, the City is still proposing to use Roundup for habitat restoration. What is your position on using Roundup in Laguna Beach?

GW: I oppose the use of Roundup or any other synthetic herbicide. It's what S. Laguna residents wanted, and I sponsored banning it. There are very rare exceptions to this as when there is a new invasive species found in the open space, but that exception requires that its use be far from where people hike and live.

26. Catalina Lots. South of Aliso Creek we have only one very small, intensely used City-owned park, called the Village Green. Repairs are needed to the play equipment, and the park's condition has been compromised by overuse. There are conflicts and public health issues between children and their families and dogs and their owners. We have an opportunity to expand the Village Green by acquiring the two empty, relatively flat lots diagonally across the street (at Monterey and Catalina), which would make it possible to provide sufficient room and facilities for both children and dogs. Do you support the purchase of those lots as additional park space before it is too late?

GW: Working on it.

27. Community Garden. The South Laguna Civic Association has long maintained that the Community Garden Park is an asset not just to South Laguna but also to the entire city. We are committed to making the Garden a permanent part of our community. Do you support having the City fund the acquisition of the Garden? If so, what steps would you take to make the acquisition happen?

GW: Have one or more people fly to Saudi Arabia and get an audience with the owner.

28. Beach Patrol. The officers of the Beach Patrol were originally intended to provide information and assistance to beach goers, as well as additional surveillance, supervision, and enforcement of ordinances pertaining to beaches. However, in 2021 the Beach Patrol officers were replaced by Park Rangers whose scope of responsibility has gradually widened, with a consequent reduction in the amount of time they are actually patrolling on the sand, particularly on the more remote beaches in South Laguna. This has significant consequences for behavior on South Laguna's crowded beaches. Would you support restoring, and perhaps increasing, the time and attention the Park Rangers actually spend on the sand patrolling South Laguna's remote beaches and coves?

GW: I would but that becomes a cost issue that needs to be discussed. According to what I have heard lately our maintenance costs for S. Laguna beaches will be 3 million this year so our 22 million may be gone within 7 years not 10 or more than

the city staff projected. Perhaps parking revenue from S. Laguna can be allocated to provide more park rangers during certain times of the year. How we do that needs to be explored.

29. Aliso Creek Berm. The sand berm at the mouth of Aliso Creek is often breached by skim boarders and others, not to mention by grading under an emergency permit originally intended only for protection of homes but now routinely invoked to open the estuary to the sea. Every breach dumps millions of gallons of untreated urban run-off directly into our Marine Protected Area (MPA). In the past the City has supported actions to improve education about, and monitoring of, the berm, but this has not solved the problem. Now that the City has taken over complete responsibility for the beaches in South Laguna, we think that the City should direct the police to cite people for the breaching of the berm. Do you support stronger City enforcement at the berm?

GW: I think that the Berm ordinance will be discussed soon. I prefer to have the forces of nature take care of berm breaching but there will be times that we need to use mechanical means.

30. Lang Park. In recent years various groups have proposed that Lang Park be the site for various new or relocated recreational facilities. In fact, the park is already heavily used, has almost no unused space, and is not easily capable of accommodating additional facilities. Do you favor changing the mix of recreational uses at Lang Park, and if so, what would you change?

GW: I see moving the Pickleball courts as needed to the corner of Wesley Drive and S. Coast Highway. I see it as a possible site for a community pool too with mitigations needed to accommodate kid soccer and other activities. I have not seen the park overused.

31. Bluebelt Enlargement. Among our city's proudest achievements is the Laguna Bluebelt, which was established 10 years ago by a joint effort of many local groups led by the Laguna Bluebelt Coalition, with support by the then City Council. The result was the creation of a No-Take Marine Reserve from Abalone Point to Table Rock Beach in South Laguna. The purpose of the Reserve was to restore a wide range of ocean life and to serve as a nursery to replenish depleted fishing stocks. Commercial and recreational fishing was prohibited north of Table Rock. The State is now reviewing the status of these protected areas, and the Laguna Bluebelt Coalition has filed a petition with the State to extend the no-fishing designation to the southern border of the City.

While the City has agreed to “collaborate and assist” in this process, it has yet formally to endorse the petition. An endorsement is critical to the success of the effort. Would you act to have the City endorse the petition and the proposed revision to the boundary of the Reserve to protect sea life along all of Laguna’s coast?

PUBLIC FACILITIES

GW: I support extending the no-fishing zone to the S. Laguna border.

32. Existing Fire Station #4. The City is now in the process of designing a new Fire Station #4 in South Laguna. Eventually the City will need to decide the fate of the current Fire Station building and of the land on which it sits. Do you support the City’s retaining the existing property and converting it to another community-serving use?

GW: I would support that effort but with the following conditions. A non-profit be created by S. Laguna residents that would own and run the facility or manage it on behalf of the city. The city would provide the land and buildings under a long term 1 dollar a year lease and non-profit would have to raise funds to remodel the building. If you want the city to foot the whole bill for renovations, maintenance and management then we would need to have discussions about its use via Town Hall and other methods that the community uses to define the use and justify it.

33. Hospital. The Providence Mission Hospital occupies a large and central site in South Laguna, but much of the facility is underutilized, and its future is uncertain, particularly in view of the State’s requirement that all hospitals be brought into conformance with stringent new earthquake code requirements. It is an urgent public safety concern to keep, at the least, a fully staffed and equipped emergency facility here to always serve our community. What do you think the City can do to ensure that this happens?

GW: I agree but we have had dialogue with the hospital about what they are planning and it’s possible that it could be shut down or parts sold off for other uses. I am told that 80% of the patients of the hospital itself and that would include emergency room visits are from nonresidents of Laguna Beach.

34. Hospital. The neighborhoods adjacent to the Providence Mission Hospital continue to experience disquieting encounters with persons with serious mental health problems who have been brought from outside of Laguna for treatment here and who have then been simply released from the hospital with apparently, no place to go. We believe that these individuals should be released back into the communities where they originated. Do you support asking the Hospital to do this?

GW: I honestly did not know that was still a problem but would support that.

35. LBCRC. The Laguna Beach Community and Recreation Center (formerly St. Catherine's School) is approximately four times the size of the Suzi Q Center, yet it is not easy for the community to use the LBCRC for community events. We have attempted to hold community meetings (including this one) at the facility, and we have been rebuffed – on the basis of insufficient available parking. What would you do to enable more community utilization of this facility?

GW: I have sponsored meetings between Laguna Terrace and the City. Those started over 6 months ago. Laguna Terrace has requested a proposal from the City so they can discuss this with their residents.

MISCELLANEOUS

36. Gelson's. Since its closure last year, the former Gelson's market, the site of which includes parking for approximately 180 cars, has remained empty. Do you see an opportunity for the City either to acquire this property for some public use or to intervene in some way to ensure that it does not continue to remain vacant?