

## **Village Entrance: Councilmember Whalen's Guiding Principles**

1. We have a responsibility as a City Council to listen to public input on the Village Entrance and arrive at a plan that has meaningful support in the community.
2. We have a responsibility as a City Council to provide factual information to the community upon which it can arrive at an informed decision regarding the Village Entrance.
3. We have a responsibility as a City Council to inform the community when incorrect or misleading information is being provided to the public concerning a proposal for the Village Entrance.
4. We have a responsibility as a City Council to arrive at a Village Entrance project that benefits both residents and businesses.
5. We have a responsibility as a City Council to arrive at a sound financial plan for the project that does not put other City programs and financial obligations at any significant risk.
6. We have a responsibility as a City Council to move ahead with a Village Entrance project. The easy out at this point would be to do what numerous past City Councils have done – put the Village Entrance on the “back burner,” ignore it, and move to the next issue. But in my view that would be a huge disservice to the community. What we have now at the Village Entrance is not acceptable. I have taken to referring to it as the “Village Armpit.” We talk loosely about Laguna Beach being a world class resort. Well, there is nothing world class about the Village Entrance. It is an unsightly mish mash of asphalt and decrepit buildings, devoid of landscaping and public art and unfriendly to pedestrians and bicycles. If we had a competition, it would be hard to design a less attractive entrance to our city.
7. It is important to see the Village Entrance in a larger context. As I said throughout last year's campaign, the Village Entrance really starts at El Toro Road and continues down to Laguna Canyon Road and Forest Avenue. Along with Councilmember Toni Iseman, I have been working hard on the (Laguna Canyon Road) Subcommittee addressing long-range improvements for Laguna Canyon Road to improve traffic flow, add pedestrian and bike lanes, underground utilities and create attractive landscaping. All of that is achievable in partnership with Caltrans, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), OC Parks and the utility companies. But to do all of that and then arrive at our existing Village Entrance would be incongruous to say the least. It is also important to see the Village Entrance project as a part of the land use planning for downtown. What is done at the Village Entrance in terms of parking will determine in part what sort of flexibility we have to loosen parking restrictions on individual buildings in the downtown and to eliminate on-street parking in certain areas such as the first block of Forest Ave to promote greater pedestrian uses in the downtown.

8. We have to remain optimistic. Despite all the rancor over the last several months regarding the City Council's decision to move ahead with a Village Entrance project, I am optimistic that as a community we will arrive at a general consensus regarding the elements to include in the Village Entrance project. This is primarily a beautification project. I believe that there is strong support for improved landscaping along Laguna Canyon Road that will shield surface parking and buildings from the road and the Festival of Arts. I believe that there is strong support for the Village Entrance to be the start of pedestrian and bike lanes that will allow members of the community to walk and bike safely all the way out to the open space in the Canyon. I believe that there is support for converting the sewer digester building or constructing a new building in its place to promote an active community use such as a cafe, bike rental center and/or visitor center. I believe that there would be broad support for making the improvements that I just described and replacing the parking spaces lost to the improvements in order to maintain the existing total of about 400 parking spots onsite at the Village Entrance.
9. But clearly, despite these many points of agreement, the contentious and difficult issue is whether to add parking at the Village Entrance in the form of a parking structure. What remains to be seen over the next number of months as we discuss the Village Entrance is how this issue will play out. This leads me to my final guiding principal, which is we have to be willing to listen and consider viewpoints other than our own. So as we enter the public input phase of this process I would encourage everyone to keep an open mind and be willing to listen to other viewpoints.