

October 17, 2016

To: Members of the Planning Commission

From: Becky Jones

RE: Item # 10 Overview of Review Framework for Downtown Specific Plan

#### PROCESS OBSERVATIONS

1. I hope whatever format you chose for your review of the MIG draft for Laguna's Downtown Specific Plan will allow the public to be an integral part of the process, welcoming public input as each section or policy grouping is discussed. A workshop atmosphere where a genuine dialog can develop would be appreciated. Please don't use the press of time as a reason for limiting the public to three minutes at the beginning of the meeting with no further opportunities for input. This subject is too important for such limitations.
2. Also please make sure the public has access to all the materials made available to Commissioners—even if such availability requires a fee, as long as free copies are available for public study at the library and at City Hall.
3. Please explain the relationship between the existing Downtown Specific Plan Update Subcommittee and its influence on the Planning Commission review, public hearings and work product.
4. We have not reached consensus on very many, if any, of the policies previously presented by MIG, and, in fact, some specific suggestions such as creating street parklets removing street and surface parking, increasing night-time "entertainment" activity, and the cosmetics of making Ocean Avenue a "green" street have encountered significant opposition. Will MIG simply be repeating their previous suggestions or will their future input reflect public, City Council, and Planning Commission comments?
5. I hope that the "Review Framework of MIG's Proposed Changes" is simply an organizational device to examine the various proposals and that inclusion in the framework does not by itself carry any presumptions of consensus agreement for the proposals being presented.

## SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS ON SUGGESTED REVIEW FRAMEWORK

6. The term “small scale in-fill development” is inappropriate. MIG notes the phrase is chosen “to better reflect current ideas about development.” There are no vacant lots in the CBD. Rather, the previous terms “re-use” and “intensification” more accurately reflect the process being described. Similarly, we should not reference “underutilized sites” since such reference incorrectly suggests intensification as a goal of the update (page 11). As established at our first meeting with the City Council, encouraging intensification is not a goal of the update; rather we are seeking to work with what we have and to determine how best to respond to pressures for intensification. This distinction should underlie any proposals for intensifying activity, heights, or number of buildings. “Underutilized sites” such as our one-story buildings offer a mixture of heights that creates a pedestrian feel and preserves views while our “underutilized” surface parking lots may need to be beautified, they serve an essential purpose as well as providing welcome open space and valuable links between streets for pedestrian access. Citing opportunities for intensification without a site-specific analysis of the impacts of such is not helpful.
7. The role of Municipal Services cannot be reduced to maintenance only; for example areas such as traffic control, sidewalk cleansing, and trash pickup should be included under this heading.
8. All discussion of residential uses in the CDB, including second-story housing, should be included under “Housing”(Chapter 3, #9). The term “in-fill housing” should be eliminated.
9. The Central Bluffs and the Civic Arts District need to remain separate districts since they each require different policies, development standards, design guidelines, planning, and hazard prevention than do the other land use districts in the CBD. Also, the land characteristics as well as the development potential are significantly different than for those properties in the CBD proper.
10. The term “commercial plazas” does not seem appropriate; it is too urban and does not effectively describe the areas to which it is being applied. We need a new term: the previously used term “interaccessibility” is equally lacking.
11. “Open Space” as a heading is not an adequate description of the topics included under this heading in the urban design section: landscaping, streetscape, street lighting, and “wayfinding” and street signage simply do not fit here.
12. If the Resident Serving District is to be eliminated, so should The Visitor Commercial District since the Downtown Commercial Core District should serve both these populations. If the Coastal Commission still requires Visitor Commercial zoning along the Visitor-Serving Corridor of Coast Highway, the zone should remain restricted to this corridor.

LAGUNA BEACH  
Chamber of Commerce

2016 Board of  
Directors

October 18, 2016

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President  
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PLANNING COMMISSION – CITY OF LAGUNA BEACH

Debbie MacDonald  
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Dear Madame Chair and Members of the Planning Commission:

Aaron Talarico  
Secretary  
Talarico & Associates

The Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce has been involved with the Downtown Specific Plan (“DSP”) update from the beginning of the process. We would like to make some observations about MIG’s presentation related to the Table of Contents scheduled for discussion during tomorrow night’s Planning Commission meeting.

Dave Rubel  
Treasurer  
Frederic H. Rubel  
Fine Jewelers

A downtown that people want to patronize is good for residents, merchants and visitors. But our Downtown has lost some of its vitality. As a result, many residents are not using the Downtown as much as they used to, and many merchants are having trouble staying in business.

Carmelit Green  
Director  
Troy Lee Designs

This phenomenon is happening all over the country and is not isolated to Laguna Beach. There has been a paradigm shift in what consumers, including our residents, want: Americans spend more money doing things, like eating out and traveling, rather than buying things. When they do buy goods, they increasingly do it online. This shift has upended the brick-and-mortar retail environment everywhere. We believe that just as the retail paradigm has changed in the past 25 years, we can expect a changing environment in the future. Rather than locking our merchants into a specific model, the Chamber would like to see flexibility that encourages success, while maintaining those features that ensure our Downtown remains special.

Dawn Knepper  
Director  
Ogletree Deakins

We would like to flag two changes to the Table of Contents presentation that we think are antithetical to the discussion of Downtown revitalization:

Kavita Reddy  
Director  
Buy Hand

- Topic 4 should **not** be renamed to *Small-Scale Infill Development*. Retaining the *Re-Use and Intensification* title enables us to examine the policies that we believe have hindered the Downtown’s ability to meet residents’ needs.
- Topic 11 should **not** be removed. The Central Bluffs is a critical component in the Downtown revitalization because it represents the only large area owned by a single entity that is capable of an integrated planning effort, which would establish a significant presence with the capability of influencing revitalization of portions of South Coast Highway. As stated in the existing Topic 11: “(T)his area presents a unique opportunity to create a land use pattern that combines and balances sensitive environmental features, public amenities and new development.” As such, the Central Bluffs deserves a separate topic discussion.

Cary Redfearn  
Director  
Lumberyard

Scott Sanchez  
Director  
Firebrand Media

Mauricio Souza  
Director  
Montage Resorts

Laura Henkels  
Executive Director

For the past year, the Chamber has been methodically analyzing the current DSP to identify policies that hinder the revitalization of the Downtown in the face of the new retail reality.

We look forward to providing our input throughout this process because a revitalized Downtown is essential for the satisfaction of residents and merchants alike.

Very truly yours,

LAGUNA BEACH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Nokes", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Larry Nokes  
President

cc: LBCC Board  
Greg Pfost  
Scott Drapkin

**From:** Norm Grossman <ngrossman67@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 18, 2016 5:37 PM  
**To:** Planning Commission  
**Subject:** Downtown Specific Plan Update

#10

Planning Commissioners:

I appreciate the opportunity to address the agenda item on the Downtown Specific Plan Update. Although I have several comments on the proposed updates to the Table of Contents, I would like to focus on a couple of concerns I have over the format for future meetings:

1. Reaching consensus – The goal of this process is to, hopefully, reach agreement on a final document. This is not an unreasonable expectation; the Land Use Element, Downtown Parking Management Plan, and Housing Element were all adopted with no significant opposition. My concern is how to accomplish this in the framework of a standard meeting format with inputs limited to 3 minutes per person and minimal dialog between Commissioners and speakers. I hope we can develop a format that allows more freeform discussion to fully address each of the issues.
2. Understanding diverse views – In the course of the effort so far, several submissions have been made by community groups and individuals. The problem is that these submissions are generally not available to the public, only to the Commission and staff. This can be addressed by creating a link on the City website to all of the communications received on this issue. Doing this will allow groups and individual to understand each other's views and, hopefully, work together to find common ground.

Thank you for your consideration,

Norm Grossman

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**From:** John Thomas <johnthomas@cox.net>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 19, 2016 12:20 PM  
**To:** Planning Commission  
**Cc:** Drapkin, Scott CD  
**Subject:** Item #10 on Planning Commission Agenda for Oct. 19 2016 "Overview of Review framework of MIG's Proposed changes"

Three questions regarding the item on tonight's Planning Commission agenda regarding changes to the MIG table of contents:

1. Topic 4: Currently: "Re-use and Intensification:" By renaming "Re-Use and Intensification" as "Small-Scale Infill Development" does that mean that not calling intensification "intensification" means that intensification then is not intensification?
2. Since about a half mile of beach is in the Downtown Specific Plan area, and since the "Destination Analysis" being prepared for Visit Laguna Beach suggests about 90% of people visiting Laguna visit a beach, should the Downtown Specific Plan mention the beaches in the Table of Contents?
3. And since only 8% of respondents to the survey indicated that museums, theatre, or the arts were important to their decision to visit Laguna, should "Identity as an Arts Community" really be Topic #2 in the Table of Contents Section III?

The original Downtown Specific Plan was written in-house. There were 25 of us, in addition to the Planning Commission, and as we discussed the issues from our various perspectives the staff took notes and produced something everybody was proud of.

I realize that times have changed, but I hope that you'll consider setting up something nearly as open and productive for this revision. Having attended all the workshops and read the proposals for changes, I think that there are a lot of things that will need to be discussed before you can adopt them.

Greg Pfost has told us, for example, that MJB "does not recommend a regulated tenant mix but recommends allowing the retail trends and market to dictate uses." This seems to me to turn the Downtown Specific Plan upside down. If we were to accept that point of view, it would hardly be worth the trouble to go ahead with the exercise.

We're also told that the section "Re-Use and Intensification" is going to be renamed "Small-scale Infill Development" in order to "better reflect current thinking about development." Policies are being added to "reflect the desire to transform underutilized sites and parking lots into active uses." Whose thinking is this, and whose desire? Is really consensus that intensification of our downtown is a good idea?

The Resident-Serving zone is being abandoned simply because "there is little distinction between CBD-1 and CBD-2 from a land use standpoint." This may be true, but the idea was not to prohibit resident-serving uses on Forest Avenue but to reserve a safe haven for those needed housekeeping uses on Ocean, where rents are lower and they might have a better chance of survival.

The so-called workshops that we've had so far have provided very little opportunity for you to talk about these things and listen to the public in more than a formal way. I hope that you'll hold a number of real workshops in which dialogue is possible.

Whatever the format of your meetings, the public is going to be attending them, and it will be important for us to have all the information the Commission has. Some of us have saved the Power Point presentations, but I gather that there will be additional information that we haven't seen. I hope you'll make sure all the memos are posted on the web site for our information.

*Barbara Metzger*

Received at  
10/19/16 PC meeting

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10/19/16 PLANNING COMMISSION TESTIMONY  
DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

Words Matter. The way the question is phrased influences the answers you receive just as the way in which the wording of the policy and the heading under which it is appears determine the way it will be interpreted.

The euphemism “small scale in-fill development” suggests the presence of small, weed-covered vacant lots located between buildings and gives no indication that what we are really discussing is adding second stories to one-story buildings, allowing these buildings to be torn down to be replaced with multiple story buildings, or seeing surface parking lots become building sites.

Similarly, “under-utilized sites” in the downtown village are under-utilized only in the sense of the potential financial profit that could be made through developing them to the max and does not reflex the public purposes they serve.

Our one-story buildings offer a mixture of heights that creates a pedestrian feel, preserves a diversity of views, and helps keep the height of our buildings in balance with the width of our streets—alleviating any tunnel effect. While our surface parking lots need to be beautified, they provide parking for locals on a daily basis as well as welcome open space and valuable links between streets for pedestrian access.

City Council comments at the first public meeting with them established that encouraging intensification is not a goal of this revision; rather we are seeking to update and beautify what we have and to encourage appropriate reuse. Knowing how best to respond to intensification pressure is not the same as encouraging it. The document should reflect this philosophy.

The terms “small-scale, in-fill development” and “under-utilized sites” should not appear in this document. The previously used terms “re-use and intensification” more accurately reflect what we are discussing.

If we are including introducing more active uses onto the borders of specific parking lots, then let’s consider that use under “Commercial Uses,” “Parking,” or “Open Space” since parking lots should included in that section.

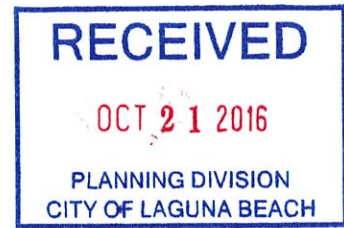
Likewise, “commercial plazas” is inappropriate since it suggests urban areas and large commercial complexes and is not descriptive of the areas that it seeks to define.

In closing, I hope you will design future hearings on this Downtown Specific Plan update to facilitate maximum public involvement so the resulting document will genuinely reflect local consensus.

*Becky Jones*



**DSP PROPOSED TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
(suggested by McErlane 10/20/16)



**CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

**CHAPTER 2. PROFILE OF DOWNTOWN CHARACTERISTICS**

**CHAPTER 3. GOALS, ISSUE STATEMENTS AND POLICIES**

1. Village Character and Identity
2. Downtown Core
3. Re-use and infill
4. Housing
5. Circulation, Transit and Parking
6. Maintenance and upkeep
7. Hazard Planning

**CHAPTER 4. URBAN DESIGN PROGRAM**

**1. Urban Design Framework and Guidelines**

Framework and Structure  
Vistas, Views and Significant Icons  
Open Space  
Key Streets  
Streetscape/Landscape  
Street Lighting  
Graphics, Signing and Way-finding  
Maintenance

**2. Design Guidelines**

Scale and Compatibility  
Building height  
Site Design  
Architectural form  
Materials and Color  
Windows  
Roofs  
Balconies  
Awnings and Marquees  
Lighting  
Pedestrian Connections  
Alleyways  
Surface Parking Lots  
Parking Structures  
Trash, Storage and Equipment Areas

**CHAPTER 5. LAND USE DISTRICTS**

**CBD Downtown Central Core**

Commercial  
Visitor Commercial  
Office  
Multi- Family Residential  
Civic District  
Arts District  
Central Bluffs District

**DSP Conditional Use Permit, Required Findings**

**Definitions**

**CHAPTER 6. IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.