

Director's Message

As we near the end of the year and the holiday season, we want to express our sincere appreciation for the collaboration and partnership we share with the design professionals, contractors and architects who serve the Laguna Beach community. Navigating the development review process, whether through Design Review, the Coastal Zone, or our unique topography, can be challenging, and we value the cooperative spirit you bring to this work. We view our relationship with our customers as a true partnership grounded in communication, shared commitment, and continuous improvement. Your engagement and feedback are essential to helping us provide the best service possible. Thank you for your hard work, dedication, and support throughout the year. We wish you a joyful, restful, and inspiring holiday season.

Thank you,
Matt Schneider
Community Development Director

Community Development Updates

New Extended Counter Hours

In response to several requests to extend our permit counter hours, we are pleased to announce that beginning January 5th, we will offer extended counter hours every Monday.

New Weekly Schedule

- Monday: Full Planning and Building permit services available 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
 - Last check-in for permitting: 3:30 p.m.
- Tuesday–Thursday: Permit counter closes at 1:00 p.m.
 - Applicants must check in no later than 12:00 p.m.

We hope the extended Monday hours provide a more convenient option for applicants who are unable to visit earlier in the day.

Virtual & Digital Services

Please remember:

- Digital permit submittals are accepted 24/7.
- Virtual Planning Counter appointments are available Tuesday–Thursday from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

These in-person, virtual, and digital options are designed to accommodate a wide range of applicant needs.

Why a 1:00 p.m. Closure on Tuesday–Thursday?

Closing the counters at 1:00 p.m. ensures that staff have the dedicated time needed to:

- Thoroughly process applications submitted earlier in the day
- Support the review and intake of applications submitted online

BUILDING & PLANNING PERMIT COUNTER HOURS

Monday 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday – Thursday 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

[Community Development Website](#)

[Public Permit Portal Link](#)

[Board and Commission Agenda/Minutes](#)

Your cooperation in respecting the 1:00 p.m. closure time is greatly appreciated, as uninterrupted desk time is essential for accurate and timely permit processing.

Building & Fire Code Update

The City of Laguna Beach has prepared for the mandatory transition to the 2025 California Building Codes and Fire Codes, which will take effect statewide in January 2026. As part of the State's triennial code update cycle, the City will require all building permit applications submitted on or after the effective date to comply with the 2025 codes. The Laguna Beach City Council completed the formal adoption process, adopting the ordinance on second reading on December 18, 2025. As part of this process, the City incorporated the updated 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps into the Municipal Code, an important measure to strengthen local wildfire safety and resilience.

Applications submitted on or after January 1, 2026, will be reviewed for compliance with the 2025 codes.

Design Review Efficiency Ordinance

In response to recent State law changes and our own commitment to improving customer service and efficiency, staff have been developing a proposed Design Review Efficiency Ordinance, which would clarify zoning procedures, reduce the level of design review for certain projects, and streamline review findings and criteria. These changes will help us in our efforts to implement a more efficient business operation without compromising on the special character of Laguna Beach.

A revised draft was presented to the City Council on November 18, 2025, following prior community and joint study sessions. The ordinance is anticipated to complete the local adoption process in the first half of 2026. We welcome your feedback on this effort.

New Public Hearing Limits

State law limits certain development projects to a maximum of five public hearings. In some cases, the City's review process could exceed this limit due to multiple hearings and appeals.

To ensure compliance with State law and streamline the entitlement process, the City Council recently adopted a resolution directing the

Planning Commission and Design Review Board to hold no more than two hearings per project. This change helps preserve the full appeals process within the required limits, reduces delays, and encourages applicants to maintain good communication with neighbors and take their concerns into consideration, supporting a more efficient and timely entitlement review process.

Welcome to the Team!



Gabriel Linares PE, CBO

Gabriel, a seasoned professional with over 25 years of experience in local government, has been appointed as the new Deputy Director of Community Development for Laguna Beach. In this role, he will oversee the Building & Safety and Code Enforcement divisions. Gabriel previously served as the Community Development Director for the City of Lynwood for three years, where he successfully entitled and permitted new projects that revitalized the city's economy and provided residents with new shopping and entertainment venues.

Prior to his time in Lynwood, Gabriel spent 15 years with the City of Brea as the Deputy Director and Building & Safety Manager. There, he oversaw the significant La Floresta development, a large mixed-use master-planned community featuring diverse housing, a vibrant retail center, walking trails, resort-style amenities, and community public art. He also ensured permits and inspections to a busy Brea Mall and vibrant downtown entertainment district. His extensive expertise in the management of Building, Code Enforcement, Economic development, Housing, and Entitlements is expected to be a significant asset to the City of Laguna Beach.



Brenda Wisneski, AICP

Brenda brings over 30 years of professional planning practice and extensive experience in all phases of municipal planning. Twenty-five years have been spent within coastal cities, serving the cities of San Clemente, Newport Beach, Encinitas, and most recently as the Community Development Director for the City of Dana Point. Her career includes both hands-on project management and leading teams to improve efficiencies in the development review and permitting process. Highlights of her career include obtaining certification of Encinitas’s Housing Element, management of three General Plan updates, revitalization efforts in the City of Newport Beach and development of Dana Point’s Town Center Plan. She also has extensive experience in coastal issues and compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act. Brenda’s interest is to dispel the “mystery” of local government by making the local government more accessible and transparent through the use of technology, as well as basic quality customer service.



Alyssa Suárez, MSc

Alyssa started with the Planning Division as an Associate Planner in October of 2025. In this role she will be processing planning entitlements and supporting staff with data collection for the Comprehensive Zoning Code update. Alyssa previously worked as a planner for two jurisdictions, including the City of Indio and the County of Humboldt. She has worked on a range of diverse projects, including residential, commercial, and

industrial waterfront projects subject to CEQA, the Coastal Act, and the Subdivision Map Act. More recently, Alyssa earned her Master of Science in Natural Resources Policy and Planning where she partnered with the Yurok Tribe's Planning Department to assess renewable energy proposals offshore. She brings community engagement, technical analysis, policy, and environmental planning expertise to her new role.



Soleil Berkson

Soleil is a recent college graduate beginning her career in city planning. After spending four months as an intern with the City of Laguna Beach, Soleil joined the team full-time as a Planning Technician in early November. Since beginning her career at the City, Soleil has had the opportunity to work on a range of projects including zoning and building plan checks, a housing inventory study, and real property reports. Soleil looks forward to gaining more experience and knowledge in the new year and is proud to be a part of the Laguna Beach team.

Happy Holidays !!!



City Hall will be closed December 25, 2025 - January 1, 2026

Please note that the online permit submission portal and inspections will be closed during the Holiday closure dates.