

# Chapter III

## Challenges for the Future

**D**uring the visioning process, community members identified what they believed to be the major challenges facing the community. These challenges as identified below are a product of both internal and external forces. Some threaten to erode many of the community's assets and strengths which were identified in the prior chapter. Some are a result of past choices which we have made on our own volition in an effort to achieve and preserve a high quality of life. Some are beyond our control, and some present new opportunities and hope. Regardless, in varying degree, **each of these challenges is real and must be addressed if the community is to achieve its desired vision.** A more thorough discussion of facts and trends relevant to decisions for Laguna Beach's future is presented in a companion document entitled *Laguna Beach: At a Glance*.

As with any community of people, Laguna Beach represents a dynamic and complex composite of demographic, economic, political, and spiritual forces. Nothing stands still. We as a community will continue to change just as the world around us will continue to change. In addition to the challenges identified below, the final challenge will be for us to summon our collective skill and insight to identify and anticipate change, from whatever corner, and do so in sufficient time to make the appropriate response.

### Loss of Small Town Character and Texture

Lagunans are fearful that the small town atmosphere, scale, and texture, so important to residents and visitors alike, will begin to disappear. Unique homes and commercial buildings have been replaced by larger less distinctive structures in parts of town. Significant infill development and renovations and expansion of existing residential properties are taking place. Also, new and renovated homes challenge the character of our unique neighborhoods. This "mansionization" of



homes increases residential neighborhood density, displaces distinctive older homes, and alters view corridors. Adhering to neighborhood and community design strategies that preserve the character of Laguna Beach neighborhoods and Downtown will be important to this issue and central to maintaining the historic heritage, neighborhood character, and diverse nature of the community.

### Preserving Demographic Diversity

Preserving the demographic diversity that has traditionally characterized Laguna Beach is an important issue to the community. There is a general feeling that Laguna Beach is in danger of losing its diversity in large part because of the loss of affordable housing. As regional population has continued to grow and beach real estate has become more desirable, Laguna Beach has become more and more in demand as a place to live. This, coupled with the strong regional housing market, has pushed home prices in Laguna Beach way past the reach of typical low and middle income families. Since the 1970's, the median price of homes grew from about \$40,000 to almost \$600,000. The impact has reduced the supply of housing that is affordable to middle and lower income residents. Many people—artists, seniors, teachers, city workers, and service industry



employees in particular—can no longer afford to live in Laguna Beach. In addition, the adult children of local families are having to leave the community for the same reason. A secondary impact of the increase in the value of real estate has been the trend toward “mansionization” that is discussed earlier.

### Responding to Regional Growth

Many community members cite regional growth as both the most significant issue and the one Laguna Beach is least able to control or influence. Over the last thirty years, dramatic growth in surrounding Orange County communities has significantly impacted Laguna Beach. The City responded with innovative strategies such as creating the Laguna Greenbelt, preventing the widening of Laguna Canyon Road and Pacific Coast Highway, reducing zoning densities, and adopting building height and other development limitations. Never the less, external commercial and residential development still encroaches upon the community, more and more people come to visit, and environmental degradation increases. Over the next two decades, while Laguna Beach's population will continue to plateau, the County and many nearby cities—Dana Point, Laguna Niguel, Irvine, Aliso Viejo and Newport Coast in particular—will continue to grow. Future development plans for airports, roads and industry will also intensify the pressures of regional growth. Additionally, the lack of intergovernmental coopera-

#### LAGUNA BEACH AND ORANGE COUNTY COMPARISON

	Laguna Beach	Orange County
<b>1999 Population:</b>	24,325	2,775,619
<b>Population growth 1990-1999:</b>	5%	13.5%
<b>Population Projection 2000-2020:</b>	1.7%	13.2%
<b>1999 Median Age:</b>	45.4 years	34.5 years
<b>Median Household Income:</b>	\$65,382	\$56,352
<b>Per Capita Income:</b>	\$52,128	\$25,746
<b>Demographics:</b>		
White:	85.7%	55.6%
Hispanic:	11.0%	29.7%
Asian & Pacific Islander:	2.4%	12.5%
Black:	0.7%	1.5%
Other:	0.3%	0.4%

Source: *Marketview Comparison Report for Laguna Beach and Orange County*. Claritas, Inc. 2000.