

The Week That Was^{TW2}

March 18 –March 21, 2024



1. SCE work underway to replace five utility poles in the open space north of Park Avenue between Canyon Acres Drive and Bern Court

On Monday, March 18, SCE resumed work to replace five utility poles in the open space north of Park Avenue between Canyon Acres Drive and Bern Court. The work is expected to take up to two weeks and is being monitored by SCE biologists for construction impacts. In January, unpermitted grading work was stopped to allow SCE to apply for an emergency Coastal Development Permit (CDP) from the City. After the work is complete, SCE has agreed to obtain a full Coastal Development Permit complete with restoration plans subject to public review and input. The City issued an emergency CDP in February and SCE has since been waiting for the ground to dry sufficiently to conduct their work.

According to SCE, using a helicopter to replace the poles was not viable due to the tall dense brush surrounding the poles which prohibited the safe landing of rappelling workers. As part of the work, SCE plans to clear a small buffer area around each pole that will allow future pole maintenance to occur via helicopter rather than relying on the graded trails.

As for, “what’s next”? Staff has prepared a summary of steps in the entitlement process for SCE trail grading in the open space.

- The project requires Design Review and Coastal Development Permit approvals from the City
- SCE shall submit a development review application by April 22, including the following:
 - Construction and grading plans
 - Habitat assessment
 - Habitat restoration plans
 - Rare plant and bird nesting surveys
 - Cultural report
 - CEQA documentation
- City staff will review the application documents and prepare a report
- Planning Commission will consider approving the Design Review and Coastal Development Permit at a noticed public hearing, likely in the summer of 2024
- SCE must submit and process plans for a grading permit if needed
- Upon issuance of permits, SCE shall proceed with any restoration activities required.

2. Community Pool Decisions Made by City Council and School District, Respectively

Following their March meetings, City Council and School Board have each determined how to best meet the interests of their respective pool patrons that have since 1993 relied upon a 25-meter pool located at Laguna Beach High School. An outcome of the District's comprehensive facilities master plan and community outreach led the District to conclude that a larger (50-meter) pool and replacement ancillary buildings would better meet the needs of student-athletes participating in a storied aquatics program. For its part, the City Council has taken the position that a 25-meter pool prominently featuring shallow water would best accommodate the needs of the broader community including: parents' desire to ensure that we can teach their children to swim, parents' desire to have youth water polo practices in the daytime hours, seniors' desire to participate in water aerobics, and lap swimmers' desire to have more hours for their use.

Since the meetings of the [School Board](#) and [City Council](#) letters have been exchanged among and between representatives of the respective elected bodies. Meanwhile, the City Council has added as the highest priority of the City's Facilities Master Plan identification of the most ideal site for a new 25-meter community pool and feasibility study for construction and operation of the same.

3. Tree Removal next to 387 El Camino Del Mar

A large lemon-scented gum tree was removed from the parkway adjacent to 387 El Camino Del Mar this week. In the upcoming weeks, City staff will continue to evaluate opportunities to plant three new trees in the area.

4. Tree Planting next to Hotel Laguna

Four new trees are planned to be planted in front of Hotel Laguna. Following the City of Laguna Beach Tree Removal and Planting Policy for Public Trees, the Public Works & Utilities Department accepted public comments regarding the proposed tree species for 21 calendar days. The public comments, staff responses, and final recommendations for planting New Zealand Christmas trees have been forwarded to the City Council and an interested parties list. The trees will be planted in approximately one month unless a Councilmember asks, within the next two business days, for the matter to be placed on an upcoming City Council meeting.

5. March 20 Administrative Design Review Meeting Recap

The Administrative Design Review held its regular meeting on March 20, 2024. Staff from the Community Development Department presenting items at the meeting included Associate Planner Daniel Latham and Associate Planner Garrett Wank; Principal Planner Martina Caron served as the Hearing Officer. Below is a summary of public hearing items:

- 1355 Coral Drive – New elevated decks and a new in-ground spa were approved.
- 219 La Brea Street – New window was referred to the Design Review Board for future consideration.

6. Planning Commission March 20 Meeting Recap

The Planning Commission held its regular meeting on March 20, 2024. Below is a summary of the two public hearing items considered:

City Capital Improvement Project – West Street Underground Utility Assessment District

- The Planning Commission considered a Design Review application for removal of overhead lines and poles and installation of new aboveground structures including riser and antenna poles, guy anchors, utility cabinets, pedestals, bollards, and retaining walls. The Commission reviewed the project and the CEQA Notice of Exemption and after deliberation voted to conditionally approve the project. Senior Project Manager Pierre Sawaya presented the item.

City Capital Improvement Project – Main Beach Park

- The Planning Commission considered a Design Review application and a Coastal Development Permit application for the renovation of Main Beach Park. The proposed project aims to maintain the character of the existing park while improving pedestrian circulation, reducing water usage, and updating old and outdated furnishings. The Commission reviewed the project and the CEQA Notice of Exemption and after deliberation voted unanimously to continue the project to the May 15, 2024, Planning Commission meeting to allow for staff to consider and implement the recommended revisions to the project design. Assistant Director of Public Works, Tom Perez, presented the item.

7. Summary of March Environmental Sustainability Committee Meeting

The Environmental Sustainability Committee convened for its monthly meeting on Monday, March 18, 2024. The following agenda items were considered and discussed:

- *Firework Alternatives:* A presentation on the evaluation of firework alternatives was given. The information will be utilized by staff to procure service quotes for the City Council's consideration when awarding the July 4 celebration program.
- *Proposed Glue Trap Ban:* The committee recommended that the City Council consider adopting a local ordinance to prohibit the sale and use of glue traps within Laguna Beach.
- *Environmental Legislative Review:* The committee identified pending state legislation for which the City should submit letters of support.
- *Microgrid Resiliency:* The committee reviewed the Microgrid Resiliency Report slated for the City Council's review on March 26, 2024. The committee recommended the City proceed with the program. Additionally, it suggested that any infrastructure procurement should prioritize American companies.

8. Status of Fire Station 4

We are all eager to, in concert with input from area residents, determine the proper design of planned Fire Station 4, which will be located at 31796 Coast Highway—the site presently occupied by Laguna Beach Dental Group.

The City's design consultant initially proceeded with design of Fire Station 4 based on the site plan in the approved Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND). In late

2023, to share the initial plan with residents of South Laguna and received their input. Several concerns were expressed at that time about the location and mass of the building. Additionally, Fire Department staff has expressed the desire to make changes to the vehicular site circulation to improve functionality and firefighter personnel safety.

Although the size of the building is generally consistent with the approved IS/MND and the proposed use does not change, an amendment to the IS/MND is required to note design changes aimed at improving functionality and safety for our personnel. The need for supporting studies may also be identified as the plans further develop. It is anticipated that the amendment will be presented to the Planning Commission for adoption when the project is presented for Planning Commission Design Review approval. Once the designer completes modifications to plans, staff will hold a public outreach meeting to share the design modifications and solicit input to guide the Fire Station's final design.

9. Laguna Beach High School Civics Panel

On Wednesday, Mayor Pro Tem Alex Rounaghi, Director of Transit and Community Services Michael Litschi and Laguna Beach Police Sgt. William Downing participated in a Civics Panel at Laguna Beach High School. During the meeting, 12th grade students presented a Civic Activism video project in which they advocate for real-world change on a topic of their choosing. The invited panel members provided feedback on the students' projects, which included an impressive range of topics from public safety and environmental issues to mental health and sustainable transportation.

10. New Parking Pay Stations at Dog Park

This week, Transit and Community Services staff will be replacing single-space parking meters on the outbound side of Laguna Canyon Road adjacent to the Dog Park with new multi-space pay stations. The new, more efficient pay stations will allow license plate-based enforcement, as well as payment via coin, credit card, Google Pay and Apple Pay.

11. Police Department Reports

Patrol Activity

On Thursday, March 7, at 12:32 a.m., officers conducted a traffic stop of a male subject claiming to be a sovereign citizen. The male subject was uncooperative and refused to identify himself. After approximately 45 minutes, officers were able to positively identify the male subject and issued him a citation for several violations.

On Friday, March 8, at 6:20 p.m., officers were dispatched to a hotel in the 1500 block of South Coast Highway for a bomb threat. Officers investigated and discovered a subject in Arizona sent a bomb threat to the hotel after the hotel mistakenly entered his phone number in their automated system. The system kept contacting him after he responded to stop. He was upset and said a bomb would detonate in five hours. The subject was contacted by enforcement officers in Arizona. There was no bomb. The investigation is ongoing.

At 11:29 p.m., officers contacted a subject walking on the highway near Camel Point. The subject was on probation and during a consensual search, officers located counterfeit \$100 bills, drug paraphernalia, and a credit card that did not belong to the subject. As a result, the subject was arrested.

On Saturday, March 9, at 4:55 a.m., police and fire personnel responded to La Costa Court for a structure fire. The minor fire was extinguished, and it was determined to not be intentionally set.

At 10:56 a.m., officers were dispatched to SR-133, north of the 73, for an overturned vehicle. Officers arrived and located a large box truck that hit a guard rail and rolled over. The truck completely blocked the roadway and traffic was rerouted for three hours. The collision occurred in the CHP area and LBPD assisted with traffic control at the 73.

On Sunday, March 10, at 5:17 p.m., officers responded code-3 to Main Beach about a physical altercation in progress. Officers arrived on the scene and separated two male subjects who were involved in an altercation. One male subject was at the Free Palestine Rally and another male objected to the demonstration. Both male subjects were non-desirous of prosecution and declined medical transportation. All parties were identified, and a battery report was taken.

On Monday, March 11, at 11:13 a.m., officers responded to Main Beach about an intoxicated male subject causing a disturbance at the playground. The male subject was contacted by officers and arrested for public intoxication.

At 5:37 pm, officers responded to Laguna Avenue and Glenneyre Street about a 12-year-old male who was struck while riding his non-electric scooter in the crosswalk. The juvenile sustained injuries and was transported to Mission Hospital Mission Viejo. The juvenile was not wearing a helmet at the time of the accident and was deemed not at fault for the collision. The driver was assessed at the scene, and it was determined drugs or alcohol did not factor into the collision.

At 11:56 p.m., officers contacted a male subject threatening to assault officers in front of Pacific Edge Hotel. The male subject was yelling and threatening officers before he stumbled into the roadway. The male subject was later detained and arrested for public intoxication.

On Thursday, March 14, at 2:00 a.m., officers conducted a traffic stop of a suspicious vehicle within the 500 block of Nyes Place. A search of the vehicle and record check of the occupants revealed methamphetamine and an outstanding warrant. All four subjects from the vehicle were arrested for various drug charges and an outstanding warrant.

On Friday, March 15, at 12:56 p.m., officers responded to the area of Cliff Drive and Acacia about a suicidal subject. Officers contacted the woman and were able to place her on a psychiatric hold for further evaluation. The female was transported to Mission Hospital Laguna Beach.

On Saturday, March 16, at 6:17 p.m., Officers and Rangers assisted with locating and reuniting a missing child with his mother.

At 7:21 p.m., officers responded to Calliope and Coast Highway about a male subject walking in the roadway. Officers attempted to contact the male subject, but he was unresponsive and did not comply with officers. The male walked to Mountain Road beach and entered the water for a brief period before he was detained by officers. The male was

placed on a psychiatric hold and transported to Mission Hospital Laguna Beach for further evaluation.

At 9:46 p.m., officers responded to the 1000 block of Balboa Avenue about a domestic violence incident. It was reported by a witness that the male subject was seen slapping the female. Officers contacted both involved parties and detained the male subject. Further investigation determined a domestic incident occurred and the male subject was placed under arrest.

At 10:28 p.m., officers responded to the Montage about a second separate domestic violence incident. The officer contacted a male subject in the lobby who had visible injuries to his neck and claimed his girlfriend choked him. Officers contacted the female in the couple hotel room and placed her under arrest for domestic violence.

At 2:40 p.m., officers responded to Broadway Street and Coast Highway for a traffic collision involving a bicyclist. The bicyclist complained of pain and was transported to Mission Hospital Mission Viejo.

On Monday, March 18, at 2:25 a.m., officers responded to the area of 1500 South Coast Highway about a physical altercation. It was determined a male subject was attempting to enter the residence's vehicle and he was encountered by the homeowner. A physical altercation ensued, and the male subject was placed under arrest.

On Tuesday, March 19, at 3:34 p.m., an officer conducted a vehicle enforcement stop near the 900 block of Glenneyre Street. The rider of the motorcyclist had an outstanding warrant and upon searching his motorcycle, a silver firearm was located. The male subject was arrested for his warrant and firearm charge.

Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET):

Homeless Liaison Officer (HLO) Section

- Scheduled to attend a certified Homeless Liaison Officer training course next week.

Traffic Section

- The Traffic Section ordered three new Black Cat LIDAR systems to monitor traffic speeds in complaint areas.
- The Traffic Section is working on the order for a new RADAR trailer.
- Training the new Parking Service Officers/Accident Investigators in basic traffic collision investigation.

Park Ranger Section

- The Park Rangers attended Wildland Fire training.
- Ranger Zenk was released from training this week.

Parking Services Section

- The new Parking Service Officer/ Accident Investigator (PSO/AI) started and has completed their initial parking and traffic collision training.
- All PSOs are cross-training each other on all duties and responsibilities related to their positions.

Community Services Officer (CSO) Section

- The CSO is planning the Road Safety Expo that is scheduled for Sunday, May 19.
- The CSO is coordinating small community events and working with businesses through crime prevention education.

Community Events:

On Thursday, March 7, officers provided security to the RIVIAN showroom for introduction of its new models. No issues were noted.

On Friday, March 15, officers and professional staff conducted a “Know Your Limit” detail at several of the downtown alcohol establishments. The details were well received and pertained to education regarding Driving Under the Influence and crime reduction.

Sean Joyce
Interim City Manager