

Yes on Measure CC — The Laguna Beach Open Space Initiative

by Paul Freeman

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Measure CC will equip our city to finish a job begun more than twenty years ago: preserving the remaining natural open space. While the city has been in the business of acquiring open space, it has been able to do that thanks largely to Laguna's share of statewide park bond dollars. Those funds now are nearly depleted.

The Measure CC program will continue what's been the city's prevailing practice, with just one notable exception. Under Measure CC, our tax dollars won't go first to Sacramento, where the system takes its cut before sending them back to the locals. We will literally see our tax dollars at work.

The idea is to set aside funds for the city to act when opportunities present themselves. That's how the state park bonds program worked, successfully, for decades. Measure CC provides a temporary backfill, given the lack of state funds, to complete our "inner greenbelt."

There are understandable questions concerning Measure CC. The best bet for anyone is to visit the campaign website: www.lagunaopenspace.com

The website has the text of the initiative; you can read it for yourself. The website also has a map, frequently asked questions, video testimonials, and other information that might prove helpful.

Three questions seem to recur.

(1) Isn't it true that most of the city's undeveloped open space is simply unbuildable? Why should we pay for it?
What may seem unbuildable today will be more easily developable tomorrow, a function of improved engineering, higher values, changes in local politics, and new case law. If you doubt that take a drive up Diamond Crestview. The city thought that was unbuildable and found out otherwise thanks to a successful class action suit in which the city was found guilty of inverse condemnation. Even though this area is now built out, I defy anyone to go up to the top, turn around... and not get a little scared.

(2) Who's going to decide what to buy, and how much to pay for it? What kind of accountability will there be?
The City Council alone will have the authority to decide which parcels to acquire and for how much. There will be a citizens' advisory "watchdog" committee, such as there is for the Laguna school bonds. The initiative specifically states that the citizen's advisory committee members will not be paid, and it puts a limit of 0.5% of annual income into the open space fund to be spent for advisory committee functions.

(3) Is it really in our interest to take all these parcels off the tax rolls? Is that really fiscally prudent?

While it's true that lands acquired for preservation then go off the tax rolls, it's also true that most parcel owners on unimproved property pay only modest property taxes. If this land is not really buildable, as opponents claim, then the property will be taxed as unbuildable and the tax loss is minimal.

Again, please visit the website for more information: www.lagunaopenspace.com

This is an historic opportunity. It's an opportunity, with a modest and temporary investment now, to leave an open space legacy for Laguna Beach. The benefits will be forever.