

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

South Coast District Office  
301 E Ocean Blvd., Suite 300  
Long Beach, CA 90802-4302  
(562) 590-5071



**W13a**

**A-5-LGB-20-0001 (City of Laguna Beach)**

**JULY 8, 2020**

**CORRESPONDENCE**



California Coastal Commission  
45 Fremont St. #2000  
San Francisco, CA 94105

July 3, 2020

To: Steve Padilla, Chair  
CC: Jack Ainsworth, Executive Director  
Vince Lee, Coastal Program Analyst

RE: Item W13a, Appeal No. A-5-LGB-20-0001, Laguna Beach Citywide Parking Program

Dear Chair Padilla,

The Surfrider Foundation is an environmental nonprofit dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves and beaches, for all people, through a powerful activist network. Surfrider's South Orange County Chapter has worked for decades to protect equal access and coastal preservation throughout South Orange County. **Surfrider agrees that substantial issue exists with the City of Laguna Beach's proposed Citywide Parking Fee Program; however, we do not believe the staff recommendation goes far enough to address the concerns and urge the Commission to postpone or deny the Program.**

The Program will increase the metered parking rates throughout Laguna Beach, and greatly increase the parking rates in downtown Laguna Beach. The Coastal Commission conditioned its approval of the City of Laguna Beach's proposal upon three requirements.<sup>1</sup>

The de novo staff recommendation, while an improvement from the City's proposal, will nonetheless increase coastal access inequity by fortifying a financial barrier likely to severely diminish already underserved communities' access to the beach. Surfrider contends that the staff modifications to the City of Laguna Beach's proposal are minimal, and that the rate hike, even as modified by the Coastal Commission, is still exorbitantly high. Although the staff recommendation removes the indefinite increase of the metered parking by up to 50% over three-year increments, it does allow the bulk of the originally proposed increase over the first three-year period to remain in effect. Thus, over the next three years, the City of Laguna beach will still be able to raise its summer month parking fees by up to 45%, as opposed to its originally proposed 50%. Furthermore, the city will also be allowed to increase non-summer parking rates by a dollar over the next three-year period. The rate increase conflicts with the Commission's own environmental justice policy.

In its report, the Coastal Commission acknowledges that its revised fee structure will still "discourage some people from driving their vehicles and parking in the most expensive areas subject to the parking rate increases." The report also acknowledges that people who are

---

<sup>1</sup> Those conditions being: 1) a revised rate structure with lower metered parking rates than the original proposal, 2) the implementation of an additional language program for the Laguna Beach Trolley, and 3) the consideration of reduction of the rate for metered parking spots next to electric vehicle charging stations.  
(<https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2020/7/W13a/W13a-7-2020-report.pdf>)



disproportionately impacted by this parking rate increase are individuals and families from low income communities.

As a solution, the report notes that people who cannot access the beach by paying for parking in prime meter parking spots can park on the outskirts of the city and use City of Laguna Beach's Trolley Program to reach "the downtown area, Main Beach, and most of the City's other popular beaches." Additionally, the staff report calls for the implementation of an additional language accessibility program to increase public awareness of the Trolley Program. Surfrider supports the language accessibility program, as it may allow more diverse individuals beach access. However, the Coastal Commission report fails to note a critical problem with the proposed trolley solution: the Laguna Beach Trolley Service is indefinitely shut down due to Covid-19 concerns. As a result, when the metered parking rates spike under the revised fee structure, those individuals and families who can not afford to pay high metered fees have no viable alternative parking options in Laguna Beach. Approval of any parking rate increase should be made once it becomes clearer when the Trolley Program will be able to reopen. Otherwise, the proposed rate increase will disproportionately impact beach access without mitigation.

Even if the Trolley was not indefinitely out of operation, the proposal is fundamentally inequitable. While the trolley is an excellent service for an individual wanting to explore Laguna Beach at a leisurely pace, it is not an equivalent replacement for metered parking. In the summer months, the trolley's schedule can be unpredictable, and the trollies can be overcrowded; during the non-summer months, trolley operating hours are reduced.<sup>2</sup> The proposal creates more parking spot turnover for wealthy individuals, who can afford the best spots, by shunting those people unable to pay the high cost of convenient parking to the outskirts of the city so that they can be periodically bussed to beaches. The proposal raises serious equity concerns, since it prioritizes beach access to the wealthy at the expense of beach access to the less privileged.

In its decision to approve or deny a permit request, under the Coastal Act Sections 30013 and 30604, the Coastal Commission is allowed to consider whether the project will result in an inequitable distribution of environmental benefits, and whether individuals have been unlawfully discriminated against based on race.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Coastal Commission's Environmental Justice Policy states that "even nominal costs can be barriers to access [...] this includes [...] parking areas. [...] The conversion of lower-cost visitor-serving facilities to higher-cost facilities is also a barrier to access for those with limited income and contributes to increased coastal inequality."<sup>4</sup> Adoption of this proposal would decrease coastal access for the communities already facing barriers to equitable access – including lack of public transit, lack of affordable overnight

---

<sup>2</sup> "Fall, Winter and Spring Weekend Coastal Trolley hours of operation: Friday: 4:00pm-11:00pm Saturday: 11:00am-11:00pm Sunday: 11:00am-8:00pm" <https://www.visitlagunabeach.com/plan/transportation/trolley/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/coactact.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/assets/env-justice/CCC\\_EJ\\_Policy\\_FINAL.pdf](https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/assets/env-justice/CCC_EJ_Policy_FINAL.pdf)



accommodations<sup>5</sup> – thereby contravening Coastal Act Sections 30013 and 30604 and the Coastal Commission’s Environmental Justice Policy.

To justify its rate increase, the City of Laguna Beach compared its proposed rates to several large cities, arguing that these cities had a comparable number of visitors (more than 2 million) and that the other cities had high parking fees.<sup>6</sup> However, the City failed to include among its list, the City of Del Mar, which also has over two million visitors on an annual basis.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, the City of Del Mar wanted to raise its rates to \$3 an hour for the same reason that the City of Laguna Beach has fronted for its own proposed rate hike: “to encourage turnover.” The Coastal Commission rightly rejected this price hike and instead proposed a variable fee program, capped at \$3 an hour, which ensured that the maximum \$3 fee was not in effect year-round.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, as the Coastal Commission determines whether or not the City of Laguna Beach's parking program proposes a reasonable rate increase, it should consider the City of Dana Point's parking program. Although this neighboring city also has over two million visitors on an annual basis, the City of Laguna Beach failed to compare Dana Point's parking to its own. The vast majority of the parking lots in Dana Point's coastal areas are free; of the few lots that do charge for hourly parking, most only charge a dollar an hour.<sup>9</sup> **Surfrider encourages the Coastal Commission to deny the City's parking program as proposed and as modified by staff and instead seek a more equitable solution to high parking demand that does not involve substantial rate increases.**

This proposal would bar non-wealthy individuals and families from enjoying the unique bounties of Laguna Beach through recreational activities such as snorkeling, swimming, diving, surfing, sun bathing, tide pooling, and running. Surfrider believes – and the Coastal Act ensures – that an individual's beach access should not be dictated by socioeconomic status.

Sincerely,

Jack Anderson  
Legal Intern  
Surfrider Foundation

Denise Erkeneff  
South Orange County Chapter Coordinator  
Surfrider Foundation

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ioes.ucla.edu/article/new-generation-barriers-californias-public-coast/>

<sup>6</sup> Exhibit 5: Newport Beach, Huntington Beach, Santa Monica, Manhattan Beach, and downtowns of cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego (<https://bit.ly/38odwWU>)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.delmar.ca.us/764/About-Del-Mar>

<sup>8</sup> <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2016/11/f20a-11-2016.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Salt Creek: <https://www.ocparks.com/beaches/salt/> North Doheny Lot: <https://bit.ly/2C7Aa9S>