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SWA Group

SWA Group design a pandemic-age pedestrian plaza in Laguna Beach

Georgina Johnston

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The Californian city of Laguna Beach, has collaborated with SWA Group to transform its famous Forest Avenue in the heart of the city's downtown into 'The Promenade On Forest'



designed as a new, pedestrian-only experience that helps support local businesses, as well as strengthen public wellbeing and social bonds.

The Promenade on Forest is a step above simple street closures to improve social distancing. In the current climate of the political divide between “stay-at-home” and “open-up” proponents, the project serves as a model of a new kind of public space, one that takes into consideration both health and economy. Public health and safety measures are made visible through directional sidewalk and street arrows for one-way pedestrian traffic, introduction of hand washing stations, additional retail signage in the street, and visible cleaning staff.

SWA’s kit of design elements include wooden decks fashioned for different uses. Dining decks feature high railings, made of wooden pallets, and accommodate movable tables and chairs for expanded restaurant dining space that conforms to liquor licensing as well as social distancing requirements. SWA’s plan included utilising rentable furniture, a key component for affordability.

The firm also introduced merchandise decks that provide protected, open-air space for retail stands on the sidewalks. Performance decks provide space for soft programming and live entertainment. A projector screen is included to showcase local musicians and other cultural arts performers, and will eventually transition to hosting a solo live performer. String-lights are introduced along the street to foster a spatial definition and a feeling of festivity. The promenade includes multiple opportunities for the engagement of local artists, including temporary art installations. All of these elements can be easily modified and replicated in other locations nationwide.

SWA conducted an in-depth assessment of all existing trees within the area, which include 594 trees and 51 species, and an ensuing street tree replacement strategy based on individual tree health. Retrofitting existing tree wells, with a focus on providing generous soil volume and proper aeration to prevent soil compaction and tree damage, was also a key consideration.

SWA’s efforts also included new water systems to capture stormwater, increasing permeable pavement areas and new bioswales, pedestrian crosswalk improvements and new bicycle infrastructure, and new gathering spaces.



Brand:

Architecture

Practice:

SWA Group

Project Category:

Performing Spaces

Transport Hubs

Transport

Civic Buildings

Healthcare

Location:

United States

California

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