

PG&E After-the-Fact Coastal Development Permit
Record Number: PLN-14376-CDP
Assessor's Parcel Number: 517-041-016

Recommended Planning Commission Action

1. Describe the application as a public hearing;
2. Request staff to present the project;
3. Open the public hearing and receive testimony; and
4. Close the hearing and take the following action:

Adopt the resolution to 1) find the project exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15303 of the CEQA Guidelines, 2) make all of the required findings for approval of the Coastal Development Permit, and 3) approve the PG&E Coastal Development Permit project subject to the recommended conditions.

Executive Summary:

A Coastal Development Permit to modify an existing electric distribution facility previously constructed without permits. Proposed modifications to the facility consist of the following: removal of one 45-foot-tall utility pole, replacement of two 45-foot-tall utility poles with 55-foot-tall poles, installation of a new 55-foot-tall pole and 3 platform mounted voltage regulators. The poles were installed within the County right-of-way and near the driveway that serves parcel 517-041-016. An existing utility pole is located 8-feet south of the existing driveway and will remain in place. The design standards for allowable pole sizes for platform mounted voltage regulators has changed to a 55-foot-tall pole, while the previous standards allowed for a 45-foot-tall pole. All poles must be the same height to allow the electric distribution line to be at the same height. PG&E is proposing to install three (3) 55-foot-tall poles in accordance with these standards. These new poles would be 10-feet taller than the existing 45-foot-tall poles. Additionally, the height of the conductor and distribution line would change from 39-feet to 47-feet. The voltage regulators and other equipment will remain at approximately the same height. The development does not qualify for the repair and maintenance exclusion under Coastal Act Section 30610(d) because the new poles are an expansion of the existing pole layout that supports the existing electric distribution line. No major vegetation removal occurred as part of the installation of the existing poles.

The utility pole proposed for removal is located 2.8-feet north of the driveway edge, after removal, the pole proposed to be replaced will increase the setback distance on the north side of the driveway edge to 18 feet. The removal of the existing northern pole will improve ingress/egress to the driveway. The property is zoned TPZ and is developed with a single-family residence. The development does not qualify for the repair and maintenance exclusion under Coastal Act Section 30610(d) because the new poles are an expansion of the existing pole layout that supports the existing electric distribution line. No major vegetation removal occurred as part of the installation of the existing poles. A biological/botanical assessment is not required for the proposed development.

A total of three new 55-foot-tall utility poles and removal of three 45-foot-tall poles are proposed at this time, no net increase in the total number of utility poles is proposed, only one location approximately 46-feet north of the driveway, includes a new pole installation. This proposed project location is not within the Trinidad Coastal Scenic Area.

According to the applicant, It was necessary to install the voltage regulator along Patricks Point Drive to be effective in serving customers along the circuit. A project description was submitted by the applicant stating: "To improve service reliability, the regulators needed to be installed within a specific geographic area, which included the length of Patrick's Point Drive. Because the distribution line runs along Patrick's Point Drive, a mapped scenic corridor, there were few opportunities to avoid placing the equipment within a scenic corridor. After field trips and consideration of various proposed locations, the project site was found to be the most suitable due to availability of existing right-of-way, accessibility, and environmental constraints. Additionally, installing the regulator bank at the project site avoided the need for additional aboveground PG&E facilities to improve service reliability, which could further impact the scenic character of the road. For these reasons, the project location was determined to be the least impactful to land and environmental resources."

The figure below shows the existing and proposed relocated facility.



Figure 1: Visual mockup showing the existing and proposed facility looking North.



Figure 2: Street view looking south at the existing facility.

The proposed project is consistent with the General Plan's policies. The project is in conformance with Chapter 12 Standard 12.5: E-S5.A (Electrical Transmission Lines) of the Energy Element because it proposes to increase the setbacks of existing utility poles to an adjacent private driveway, will consolidate utility pole infrastructure to minimize impacts on the viewshed, and increase the height of the existing infrastructure (45-feet to 55-feet), which will lessen the visual impacts of the project. Proposed development will meet Chapter 10.7.4 Standards (SR-S1) Development in Mapped Scenic Areas) because it proposes to consolidate utility pole infrastructure and increase the height of the existing infrastructure, which will lessen visual impacts of the project.

The proposed project is consistent with the Trinidad Area Plan (TAP) policies. The Coastal Commercial Timberland (TC) designation (TAP) applies to the parcel adjacent to the project site. By increasing the setbacks between utility pole infrastructure to an existing driveway to allow for large logging trucks ingress/egress, the project will bring the site into conformance with the purpose of the TC designation by improving access to primary site uses. The Trinidad Area Plan Visual Resource Protection, Coastal Scenic Areas section requires that new public facility development shall be limited to above-ground power lines less than 30KV, the project proposes above-ground power lines with 12KV capacity and is therefore in compliance with the TAP.

Public comments were received by the adjacent (driveway) property owner that initiated the requirement of a Coastal development Permit for the utility poles at the project site location. The primary concerns of the property owner included impacts to ingress/egress access for logging trucks for the existing driveway and utility pole (pole setback 2.8 feet north of the driveway) and negative impacts towards visual/scenic resources. The current project proposed by PG&E has

addressed the concerns of ingress/egress for logging trucks by increasing the utility pole setback to 18 feet from the northern driveway edge and will improve the visibility for car traffic along Patricks Point Drive by increasing the pole height to 55 feet. The proposal to relocate the pole closest to the existing driveway would result in approximately 44.6 feet between the faces of the electric distribution poles located closest to the driveway.

This project was heard during the May 12th Planning Commission hearing where several concerns were raised about project design and siting. Without adequate information being available or a representative from PG&E present, it was decided to continue the project to the June 16th hearing date to provide PG&E with enough time to respond to the concerns expressed during the May hearing. At the June 16th Planning Commission hearing this was continued to the July 7th hearing to allow for the project engineer to be available at the hearing.

Additionally, subsequent to the May hearing PG&E provided additional clarification on the design decisions for the regulator. Per PG&E the electric distribution line regulator bank was installed at this location on the Trinidad 1102 circuit along Patrick's Point Drive to avoid extended outages and improve service reliability to PG&E customers served by the Trinidad 1102, Orick 1102, and Orick 1101 circuits when there is planned and unplanned work at Big Lagoon Substation. To have the desired effect on service reliability, the electric distribution line regulators needed to be installed within a specific geographic area, which included the length of Patrick's Point Drive. Because the Trinidad 1102 circuit runs along Patrick's Point Drive, there were few opportunities other than this location that would avoid placing the equipment within a designated coastal scenic corridor or vista. The engineering team performed several site visits to evaluate locations where the equipment could be installed, and subsequently evaluated several alternatives. After considering all the alternatives, the project site was found to be the most suitable due to availability of existing right-of-way, accessibility, and environmental constraints. For example, other feasible locations would have required right-of-way acquisition, were not accessible for line trucks and construction equipment, and/or had environmental constraints, such as waterways or substantial initial vegetation clearing for construction and routine vegetation management for operations and maintenance. Additionally, installing the line regulator bank at the project site avoided the need for additional aboveground PG&E facilities to improve service reliability, which could further impact the scenic character of the area. For these reasons, the project location was determined to be the least impactful to land and environmental resources. This project has provided improved service reliability to 1,226 electric meters in the coastal area.

Alternative: Several alternatives may be considered: 1) The Planning Commission could elect not to hear this item and put the decision making in front of the Planning Commission. Any decision to place this matter before the Planning Commission must be done before opening the public hearing on this project; 2) The Planning Commission could elect to add or delete conditions of approval; 3) The Planning Commission could deny approval of the requested permits if you are unable to make all of the required findings. Planning Division staff is confident that the required findings can be made based on the submitted evidence and subject to the recommended conditions of approval. Consequently, planning staff does not recommend further consideration of these alternatives.