



## Utility Undergrounding Frequently Asked Questions 03/04/20

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

#### 1. What is the Del Mar Undergrounding Project (UP)?

The Del Mar Undergrounding Project (UP) will remove utility poles and replace overhead cables for electricity and telecommunications with underground lines. Wires for these utilities are run through underground conduits usually located in streets, allowing the utility poles to be removed. Service wires to homes and businesses must also be placed underground.

This project was identified as a priority by Del Mar voters with the approval of Measure Q in 2016. This one-cent sales tax measure is generating the funds used to implement the public side of the project.

The City Council has designated and prioritized the City into several districts based on service density and fire safety criteria. See City Council staff reports dated [April 15, 2019](#) and [August 5, 2019](#) for more information.

#### 2. What are the advantages to utility undergrounding?

Removing overhead utilities will result in several benefits:

- It eliminates the visual blight of utility poles with crossarms, wires, overhead transformers, and associated hardware. This will significantly improve the unique beauty of the Del Mar community.
- Burying lines underground also eliminates fire hazards, accidents, and safety risks from power outages due to downed lines.
- Utility cables located underground are more reliable and less prone to outages. Overhead lines can be damaged by high winds, falling tree limbs, and other accidents that can cause utility disruptions. Burying lines eliminates weather-related power outages and provides more reliable service to subscribers.

#### 3. How is this project being funded?

Measure Q, the one-cent sales tax measure approved by voters in 2016, is providing funds for the Del Mar Undergrounding Project. These funds will be used for design and construction of undergrounding utilities in the public right-of-way. Property owners will be responsible for undergrounding the service lateral connection between the property and the property line on the street.

#### 4. So, what will it cost?

Costs are expected to vary based on site conditions and technical requirements of each project. Timing will also play a role as construction costs change over time. The current preliminary estimated total cost, as determined by the Undergrounding Project Advisory Committee ([UPAC](#)), is \$32M to \$42M. More specific estimates are currently being developed.



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### 5. Why doesn't the City just pay to have all of Del Mar undergrounded?

Del Mar, like all California communities, simply can't afford to pay for undergrounding the entire City at once. The City Council has divided and prioritized the City in several districts and will approach the undergrounding process in a phased approach.

### 6. Why doesn't SDG&E pay for undergrounding?

There is no legal requirement for SDG&E to pay for undergrounding.

### 7. What is [UPAC](#)?

[UPAC](#) is a group of City residents selected by the City Council to advise the City Council on matters related to the Del Mar Undergrounding Project. These volunteers work with the City staff to ensure the UP moves forward in a timely manner and that team goals and tasks are achieved. The [UPAC](#) will evaluate ongoing success and make recommendations for adjustments as necessary.

### 8. If District 1A and X1A are formed by the Council, what would the implementation schedule be?

If the City Council forms these districts in March 2020, the design process would begin. Construction has not yet been approved. Here is an estimated timeline:

- *March 2020*: City Council forms District 1A and X1A
- *Q2 2020 - Q3 2021*: Design and engineering process
- *Q2 - Q4 2021*: Private service lateral construction (property owner responsibility)
- *Q4 2021 - Q4 2022*: Undergrounding construction (funds for this phase not approved yet)

## UNDERGROUNDING DISTRICTS

### 9. What is an "undergrounding district?"

An undergrounding district is a portion of the City identified by the City Council for future undergrounding. The City Council will establish boundaries and authorize design and construction for the undergrounding within each district.

### 10. How is a district created?

Undergrounding districts can be created by the City or by property owners in Del Mar. There are three types of underground districts per [California Public Utilities Commission](#):

- Rule 20A – These are initiated by a City or county. Costs are paid from funds provided by SDG&E. Del Mar receives only about \$68,000 per year, which is insufficient for a stand-alone district. Rule 20A money may be used in very limited setting such as log major arterials.



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- Rule 20B – This is the most common way to effect undergrounding mostly paid by the City.
- Rule 20C – One or more property owners can create a ‘private’ district with costs being shared on a mutually agreed basis.

For the Del Mar Undergrounding Project, the City Council will create the districts based on recommendations from [UPAC](#), staff, and SDG&E. Undergrounding districts created through private efforts are not eligible for Measure Q funding.

### **11. Why would anyone choose to do a private (Rule 20C) district?**

Private districts have no minimum size requirements and can often be done in less time than public districts. Although they take 100% participation of all properties within their boundaries, they have been a convenient way for a single owner or a small group of neighbors here in the City to remove utilities in their area. It is important to note, however, that these projects are not eligible for Measure Q funding.

### **12. Who decides which districts get undergrounding?**

Public districts will be prioritized by City Council based on recommendations from City staff and the [UPAC](#). The first two districts to move forward with project design are Districts 1A (Stratford Ct South) and X1A (Crest Canyon). You can view district maps on the project web page under [Districts Maps & Tools](#).

### **13. What is the timeline, once a district has been formed, for the poles to come down?**

In general, once a district is created, it is anticipated that all undergrounding work in the right-of-way will be completed and the poles removed in about three to five years, subject to City Council approval to proceed with construction and Measure Q fund availability.

### **14. How will I find out when poles in my district will be removed?**

The City Council will determine the schedule for undergrounding in each district. The first districts to move forward into the design phase are District 1A (Stratford Ct South) and X1A (Crest Canyon). You can view district maps on the project web page under [Districts Maps & Tools](#). While a specific schedule has not yet been developed, it will be posted on this website when the information is available. Timing to proceed with other areas has not yet been determined.

### **15. If the timetable for my area is too far out for me, can I underground the utilities myself?**

Yes, however, you will not be reimbursed for the cost of the work.

### **16. I have just recently undergrounded my poles. Can I get reimbursed?**

No. The City will not reimburse those properties that have previously undergrounded at their own expense or are in the process of undergrounding. This decision was made



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because private undergrounding projects have been underway for more than ten years and it would be very difficult to determine accurate costs for these projects and what was spent on public vs. private property. Furthermore, projects spending public funds are subject to public contracting laws which those past private projects did not comply with. See City Council staff reports dated [April 15, 2019](#) and [August 5, 2019](#) for more information.

### **17. Why not form one big district to underground the remaining overhead areas of the City?**

Del Mar cannot afford to pay for undergrounding the entire City at once. The City Council, in coordination with SDG&E and based on [UPAC](#)'s recommendations, has divided the City into several districts and will approach the undergrounding process in a phased manner. In addition, public safety and convenience must be weighed against the amount of construction impact involved. SDG&E's experience has shown that smaller districts can be best managed and completed during a normal construction period. Larger districts, with the necessary road closures and construction activities, could strain traffic circulation and the patience of residents.

### **18. What is going on in and near the San Dieguito River? Who is working on the poles in the lagoon?**

SDG&E is installing a new one-mile section of underground transmission line within Via de la Valle. Upon completion, they will remove the existing transmission lines within and near the City at the lagoon and convert about one mile of existing overhead distribution circuits to underground service. All project components are within SDG&E's existing right-of-way, property, or franchise within San Diego and Del Mar. For more information, see SDG&E's Fact Sheet posted under [Districts Maps & Tools](#).

## PROPERTY OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

### **19. Will Measure Q cover the costs of running the power from the undergrounded utilities to my home?**

Measure Q money may generally be used only for undergrounding within the City right-of-way limits (public side) and cannot be used for homeowner services (laterals). Homeowners will be responsible for paying the cost of converting their overhead services to underground from the City street right-of-way to the owner's meter location and all required panel upgrades.

### **20. How much will these 'laterals' cost me?**

The cost will vary depending on several factors including required panel upgrades (if any), lateral length, meter location, and presence of obstacles or surface improvements.



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### **21. What if I refuse to convert my service laterals?**

Once an undergrounding district is established, it will become unlawful for property owners within the district to keep their overhead facilities. See [City's Municipal Code Section 23.54.110](#) for the responsibility of property owners and enforcement.

### **22. If I cannot afford to pay for these laterals, how can I get assistance?**

The City and [UPAC](#) are working with the community to identify possible resources that could be available to residents in need of assistance. More information will be provided when it is available.

### **23. Does SDG&E connect cable to a resident's panel or is that the responsibility of the homeowner?**

The homeowner's licensed electrician makes the connections and SDG&E inspects the work.

### **24. Do service laterals have to be completed before right-of-way work begins?**

It is preferable that service laterals are complete prior to the start of right-of-way work. The City will advise district residents as to when lateral completion is required.

### **25. How will handhole (i.e., connection box) locations be determined for individual properties? Can property owners request that a handhole be moved to a different location?**

A handhole is an underground concrete box which allows for wires to be pulled through the underground conduits (the picture here shows what a typical handhole looks like.). The only visible part of the handhole is the lid. SDG&E will determine the locations of handholes based on the requirements of their system. Homeowners will be notified during the design process for their district when SDG&E handholes or other equipment are planned for placement on their property.



### **26. When residents trench from their homes to the street, what do they need to know?**

Trenching will need to be in accordance with SDG&E standards, which are available online at <https://www.sdge.com/construction-toolbox>. Your contractor will also need to coordinate with the City and the UP team to ensure that the conduit connects to the right location. The City strongly advises residents to hire licensed electrical contractors to supervise trenching and the installation of conduit on their property. A licensed and bonded electrical contractor should be familiar with codes and standards required to complete this work. Refer to question 25 for additional information on selecting a contractor.



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### **27. How do I select a contractor to do the undergrounding of my home service?**

To be certain that your money is well spent, the City recommends asking friends for personal recommendations of contractors, getting written bids from contractors, checking contractor references, obtaining a written contract for the terms and work agreed to, and monitoring the project and contractor as the work progresses.

It is strongly recommended that you obtain at least three bids from contractors and ask for references in order to get a reputable contractor that will provide the highest quality of work at the lowest possible price.

Remember that you must retain an appropriate contractor. A great source of thorough information and free publications about selecting a contractor in our area is the Contractors' State License Board, Northern Region. Visit their website at <http://www.cslb.ca.gov> or their office at (916) 255-4027 in Sacramento. Complaints can also be registered through this oversight board.

The contractor you retain must:

- Possess at least one of the following contractor's licenses to perform the private underground conversion work:
  - ✓ C-10: Electrical Contractor (Specialty)
  - ✓ A: Engineering Contractor
  - ✓ B: General Building Contractor
- Be bonded
- Have the appropriate kind and coverage of insurance:
  - ✓ Workman Compensation
  - ✓ General Liability
  - ✓ Automobile

For your convenience only, you may refer to the [City of San Diego's list of prequalified contractors](#). Please note that the City of Del Mar has not vetted this list. Therefore:

THE CITY MAKES NO WARRANTY, GUARANTEE, REPRESENTATION OR PROMISE ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE OF ANY CONTRACTOR ON THIS LIST. The City is not responsible for nor shall it have liability for any performance or failure to perform by any contractor, whether in contract, tort, or otherwise, including any construction defects. Any construction contract shall be solely between the property owner and the contractor and the City shall not be a party to the contract or subject to any rights, duties, obligations or liabilities under such a contract. The property owner is solely responsible for making payments to and obtaining required performance from the contractor.





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### **28. What is the method of connection for private service laterals?**

You and your contractor will need to work with the City and the UP team, SDG&E, and the other utility companies to determine the method of connection. They will require exhibits and other information before approving the lateral.

### **29. What City permits do I need?**

You will need, at a minimum, an electrical and possibly an encroachment permit. The City plans to review its current permitting process and streamline it for the purpose of undergrounding. More information will be shared as it becomes available. This process will include an estimate of permit fees that can be expected.

### **30. I have a project going and want to run a conduit from the house to the edge of the property. It would be very easy for my landscaper to place a conduit now. What's required by SDG&E?**

The City recommends that all conduit and wiring be installed by a licensed electrical contractor. Your contractor will need to coordinate with the City and the UP team to ensure that the conduit is run to the correct location. Refer to questions 25 and 26 for related information.

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND OVERSIGHT

### **31. Is the City financially responsible for undergrounding of cable and telecom lines?**

The City's position is that telecom and cable franchisees are responsible for the costs to underground their lines.

### **32. Will telecom and cable companies locate their "transformer equivalent" boxes next to the actual transformer pads?**

Telecom and cable boxes, pedestals, and equipment will be located on a case-by-case basis based on site conditions and technical requirements.

### **33. Do transformers need to be placed at street-ends or can they be placed elsewhere along the right-of-way?**

Transformers are not required to be placed at street ends. SDG&E will locate them based on technical requirements.

### **34. How much construction oversight is provided by City staff?**

The City staff and the City's consultants will oversee design and construction of the undergrounding project. The amount of oversight will vary based on size and complexity of each project and the nature of task.



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**35. Will SDG&E provide specifications to the City contractor for cabling or installing transformers?**

It is anticipated that SDG&E will install its own cable and transformers. The City contractor will install trenching and conduit in the public right-of-way in accordance with SDG&E standards.

**36. How would SDG&E bill for its services, as described above?**

SDG&E would bill the City for labor and materials.

**37. Is it easy to feed cable through an underground pipe?**

Yes, electrical contractors use special tools to pull the cable through conduit.

**38. Who will own the lines, pipes and transformers once they are undergrounded?**

SDG&E and telecom companies will own this infrastructure. The electricity delivery system will be the property of SDG&E. Cable, phone, and data systems will be the property of the various telecom companies serving the community.

**39. What happens to the streetlights that are now on the utility poles?**

They will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. They may be removed unless the City Council determines they should stay in service due to public safety concerns.

**OTHER**

**40. If I have further questions, whom should I contact?**

Additional questions may be emailed to [up@delmar.ca.us](mailto:up@delmar.ca.us).