



NOTICE OF CEQA EXEMPTION

**TO: X Office of Planning and Research
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814**

**FROM: City of Ukiah
300 Seminary Avenue
Ukiah, CA 95482**

**X County Clerk
500 Low Gap Road
Ukiah, CA, 95482**

PROJECT TITLE: Ukiah Electric Utility Hazard Mitigation Grant- Fuel Reduction and Undergrounding Project

PROJECT LOCATION: Various locations within western Ukiah (see attached figure)

PUBLIC AGENCY APPROVING PROJECT: City of Ukiah, City Council

DATE OF APPROVAL: August 2, 2023

NAME OF PROJECT APPLICANT: City of Ukiah Electric Utility Department

CEQA EXEMPTION STATUS:

- Ministerial**
- Declared Emergency**
- Categorical Exemption:** Section 15302(d), Replacement/Reconstruction; Section §15304 (i), Minor Alteration to Land
- Statutory Exemption Section**

PROEJCT SUMMARY AND REASONS WHY PROJECT IS EXEMPT:

With the use of funds received as a part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant, the City of Ukiah proposes to reduce the fuel load along critical electric utility line corridors on the west side of the city and underground more than 1.5 miles of existing overhead wires and equipment in the same area ("Project").

The fundamental goal of the Project is to reduce impacts of wildland fire on Ukiah's critical electric power infrastructure through the implementation of hazardous fuels reduction activities and undergrounding vulnerable overhead lines. Hazardous fuel reduction activities help to harden protection of critical electrical utility infrastructure. By conducting hazardous fuel reduction activities the utility lines, poles and transformers will be safer from wind-driven tree and limb falls that can both down lines and cause



transformer explosions or sparking that result in fire ignition. Additionally, undergrounding the existing lines is intended to protect infrastructure from threats of wind, lightning, fire and other natural disasters.

Hazard mitigation methods would include: 1) fuel reduction via brush removal and tree thinning around approximately 9,412 linear feet of existing electrical distribution lines; and 2) undergrounding of approximately 8,270 linear feet of overhead lines and related equipment. A project location map depicting the alignment of these activities is included in Figure 1. Brush removal activities would occur within a 24-foot-wide corridor around the electrical lines and poles (12 feet on each side), and tree trimming activities would create 12 feet of clearance below the power lines, as well as clearing all tree limbs that overhang power lines. If it is determined that fuel reduction activities are needed beyond 24-feet in areas with higher wildfire risk, the activities would not extend beyond 100 feet of the City's electric infrastructure, consistent with CEQA Section 15302. No trees would be removed and vegetation management activities would occur outside of the nesting bird season (typically March through August). Undergrounding activities would occur within the City's right-of-way or within existing disturbed areas developed with roads, sidewalks and areas residential uses. Trenches for undergrounding would be approximately 24 inches wide and approximately 48 to 60-inches deep and would be restored to the current condition upon completion.

The Project alignment crosses Gibson Creek in the following two areas: West Standley Street (south of Girono Avenue); and Park Boulevard (North Barnes Street area). According to the California Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW's) California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB), a historical occurrence of red-bellied newt (*Taricha rivularis*), a CDFW species of special concern, is documented by CDFW in the riparian corridor of Gibson Creek. The area identified with potential sensitive habitat encompasses lands west (and outside of) the Project alignment, with the exception of a small portion along West Standley Street (see Figure 1). However, existing poles adjacent to the creek in this area will not be replaced as a part of this project, as they are secondary (not primary) poles and were not included in the grant program. Overhead lines that currently span Gibson Creek in the area of Park Boulevard and North Barnes Street will remain overhead and will not be included in the underground portion of this Project. Instead, the undergrounding will continue up to the existing pole in the sidewalk, on either side of the creek (approximately eight ft from top of bank), leaving an overhead span crossing the creek. If existing poles need to be replaced or relocated, they will be replaced like for like and will not be located closer to the creek than the existing poles, and will be placed in the sidewalk. No modification will be made to the creekbed or bank, and undergrounding in this area will take place during the dry season.

The proposed Project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15302(d) and 15304(i). Section 15302(d), Replacement/Reconstruction consists of replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities, including electrical infrastructure, where the new structure will be located on the same area as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced. Section §15304, Minor Alteration to Land, subsection (i) includes fuel management activities within 30 feet of structures to reduce the volume of flammable vegetation, provided that the activities will not result in the taking of endangered, rare, or threatened plant or animal species or significant erosion and sedimentation of surface waters. This exemption shall apply to fuel management activities within 100 feet of a structure if the public agency having fire protection responsibility for the area has determined that 100 feet of fuel clearance is required due to extra hazardous fire conditions.



As noted above, the Project includes the removal of existing utility poles and infrastructure, trenching, placement of electrical conduit in the trenches, and the restoring of the trenched areas to their previous condition. The proposed Project would not have an adverse impact on environmental resources because it is located in an urban environment, vegetation activities would occur outside of the known nesting bird season, no trees would be removed, and all work would be performed in areas within the existing right-of-way or areas that are previously disturbed. Additionally, no work would occur within Gibson Creek and the area containing potentially sensitive habitat would be avoided. As such, the Project qualifies for the aforementioned exemptions.

The City's Electric Utility Department plans to conduct fuel management and maintenance activities along the Project alignment for the foreseeable future. This Notice of Exemption is intended to be utilized for such future activities, so long as there is not a significant change in the environment or Project description that would necessitate additional environmental review, in accordance with CEQA guidelines.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Craig Schlatter, Community Development Director
Phone Number: (707) 463-6219
Email: cschlatter@cityofukiah.com

This is to certify that the record of project approval is available to the General Public at:

Community Development Department, Ukiah Civic Center, 300 Seminary Avenue, Ukiah, CA 95482


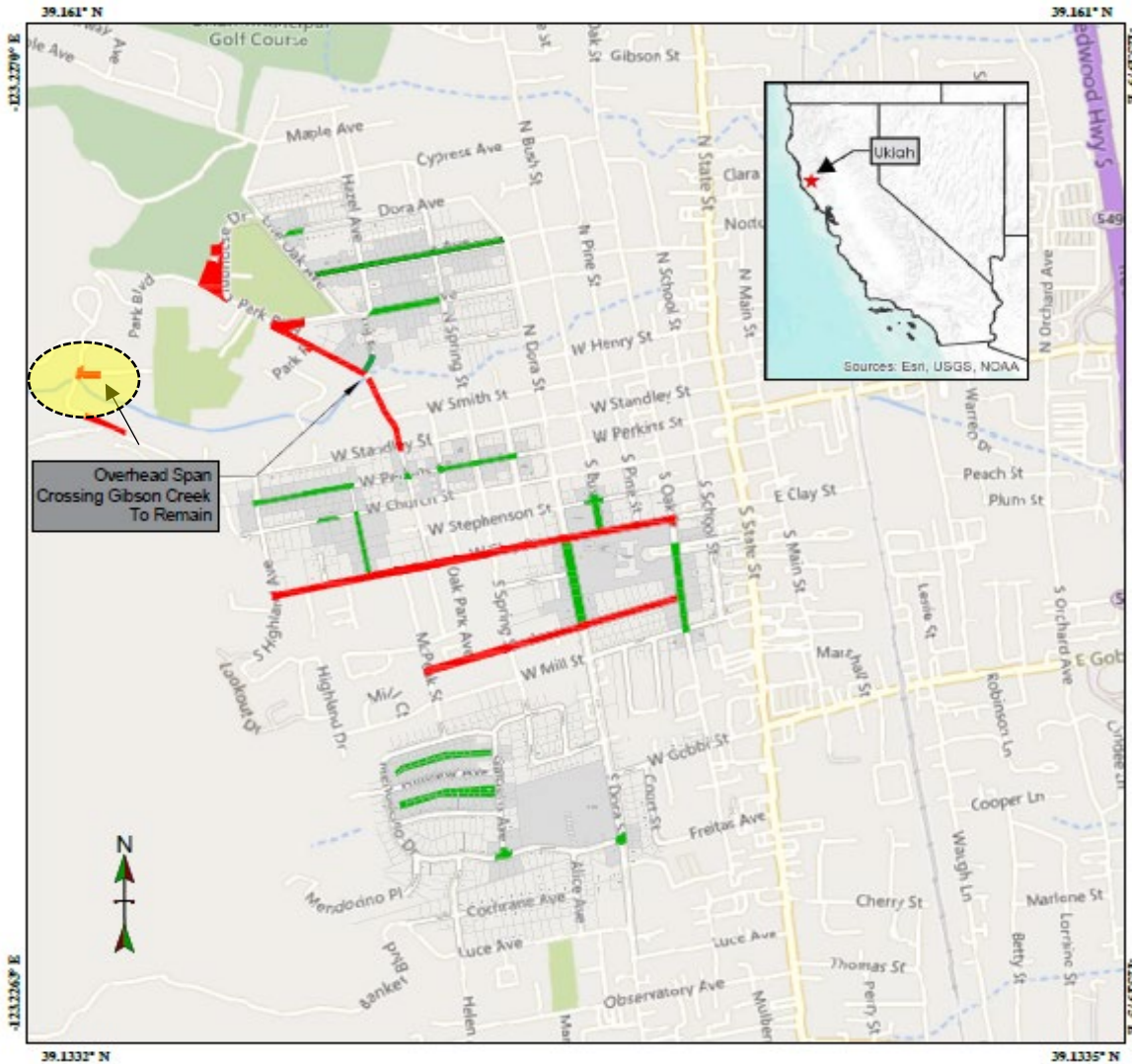
	08/03/2023	Community Development Director
Signature (Public Agency)	(Date)	(Title)

Figure 1, Project Location Map



City of Ukiah



LEGEND:

Underground Area- Extremely congested with large tree encroachment on lines/poles where tree trimming would not be sufficient.



Tree Trimming- Areas where additional tree trimming is sufficient



Parcels Protected By Project



Approximate Staging Area



Identified potential sensitive habitat area

SCALE 1/64" = 1'-0"

