

HILLSDALE HIGH SCHOOL SWITCHGEAR REPLACEMENT PROJECT
NOTICE OF EXEMPTION DISCUSSION

Project Description

Existing Facilities

The Hillsdale High School, located at 3115 Del Monte Street in San Mateo, is a grades 9-12 school owned and operated by the San Mateo Union High School District. The school site is approximately 35 acres and has a current enrollment of approximately 1385 students.

The school is immediately adjacent to single-family houses to the south, and across the street from single-family houses to the north, east, and west (across 31st Street, Alameda de las Pulgas, and Del Monte Street, respectively). West Hillsdale Blvd. runs to the south of the adjacent homes.

Proposed Project

The project includes demolition of existing transformer and associated electrical equipment for the installation of a new switchgear, switchboard, transformer and 12kv switchgear. A new retaining wall and concrete pad for the transformer would be installed, and existing utilities would be re-routed to service this equipment. One landscape tree would be removed. The new pad would be about eight feet by 16 feet. The retaining wall would extend about 25 feet east to west and about 20 feet north to south, in an "L" shape. The work would be located near the parking lot on the 31st Street side of the campus and within Building 500 at the school. No new or expanded uses of any school facilities are proposed as part of this project.

The project would be constructed over a 9-week period, in the summer of 2025.

Categorical Exemption Analysis

Class 1 Exemption

The CEQA Class 1 Exemption (Class 1-Existing Facilities [CEQA Guidelines, Section 15301]) applies to repairs and maintenance of existing facilities including interior or exterior alterations involving no or negligible expansion of the facilities, and restoration and rehabilitation of deteriorated structures and facilities, as well as health and safety improvements. The project would include exterior and interior electrical service improvements for the existing school to improve reliability and allow for increased electrical equipment use at the school. Therefore, this exemption would apply.

Analysis of Possible Exceptions to Class 1 Exemption

The exemptions are subject to the following exceptions:

- **Cumulative Impact.** This exception would apply if the project were to contribute to

significant impacts to a resource in combination with other proposed new development nearby. The proposed project would involve minor construction work at the existing school that would not have the potential to result in any cumulatively considerable impacts. Rooftop chiller replacement project may be constructed atop Building 5 at the school simultaneously, however both projects are so small that there would not be the potential of a cumulatively significant impact.

- **Scenic Highways.** This exception would apply if the project were to result in damage to scenic resources within a scenic highway corridor. There are no highways or roadways in the project area or from which the project area can be seen that are designated as Scenic or are eligible for scenic designation. Highway 280, which runs north-south approximately three miles to the west of the project area, is the nearest designated scenic roadway. The roadway nearest to the project area that is eligible for scenic designation is the segment of State Route 92 west of Highway 280. The City of San Mateo General Plan does not designate any roadways in the project vicinity as locally scenic. Hillsdale Boulevard is indicated in the Urban Design Element of the General Plan as a major corridor in the City, but is not given any formal scenic designation.

The new 10 x 15-foot transformer structure would not substantively change the school's exterior appearance, and there would be no changes to building massing, heights, or layout. Therefore, the project would not affect views from Scenic Highways.

- **Hazardous Waste Sites.** This exception would apply if the project were to be located on a hazardous waste site listed pursuant to California Government Code Section 65962.5. A search of the State Envirostor database conducted on January 20, 2025, found no listed hazardous wastes sites on or near the school site. A School Investigation was conducted but no action was required¹. In addition, no past uses that caused contamination, or actual potential contamination, are known for the school.
- **Historical Resources.** This exception would apply if the project were to potentially significantly adversely affect an historical resource. When it opened in 1955, Hillsdale High School was awarded the School Design Award from the American Institute of Architects for its "Neo-Brutalist" style. It served as the prototype for Bay Area high schools, with indoor/outdoor passages, landscaped courtyards, and skylights in classrooms. Therefore, the school may be of historical architectural significance. The project's minor electrical improvements, including addition of the transformer pad and retaining walls, would not alter the exterior of the school buildings or the overall layout of the buildings, passages, skylights, or courtyards. No buildings would be expanded or demolished. Therefore it would not significantly alter the school's historical architectural characteristics.
- **Significant Effect.** The exception would apply if the project would have the potential for a significant effect to the environment due to unusual circumstances.

¹ https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/map/?global_id=21880002

Unusual circumstances may include historic structures, hazardous materials contamination, protected species or habitats, and other similar conditions. There are no unusual circumstances on the site and there is no potential for significant effect, therefore this exception would not apply.

Conclusions

As discussed above, the project is within the parameters of the Class 1 Exemption and none of the exceptions to the exemption would apply. Therefore, this exemption would apply to the proposed project.