Agenda Item No. 15.



#### **Staff Report**

Date:	June 16, 2022	Δ
To:	Mayor Robbins and Council Members	
From:	Richard Simonitch, Public Works Director	
Subject:	The condition of various PG&E utility poles on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard	

#### **Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the Town Council receive a presentation on the condition of various PG&E utility poles on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and authorize the Mayor to send a letter to PG&E requesting a safety evaluation of the utility poles in conformance with California Public Utilities Commission guidelines.

## **Background and Discussion:**

This item was placed on the agenda at the request of Councilmember Kircher with support from other Town Council members. In the Fall of 2021, a request was made for staff to make an inquiry to PG&E about the status of some overhead utility poles along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. The reason for the request was that it appeared that certain poles located between Lagunitas Road and the Kentfield Hospital were leaning toward the roadway in an adverse manner. The concern is, as evidenced by the adverse lean, that the poles have shifted and rotated over time and in the event of an earthquake, particularly during a time when the ground is saturated, one or more of these poles could come down as a result of liquefaction of the ground.

The Town Engineer confirmed the high liquefaction potential of the Ross Valley floor and acknowledged the fact that Sir Francis Drake Boulevard is a primary evacuation route for Ross Valley residents. He performed a site visit on November 10, 2021 and identified at least three poles of concern. These three poles carry electric distribution lines and communications cable and are located on the west side of Sir Francis Drake, in front of 3, 15, and 19 Sir Francis Drake. The Town Engineer provided this location to Mark Van Gorder, PG&E's Government Affairs liaison for the North Bay Area with an inquiry about inspection protocol for these poles. Mr. Van Gorder responded that these particular poles along Sir Francis Drake were inspected in 2019 and passed with "no issues of concern." Staff followed up again with the local PG&E Government Liaison in early May to provide an updated assessment of the poles in question. The response received on

June 3, 2022 was "PG&E had a Qualified Electrical Worker go out to the three locations yesterday and completed an assessment for the three poles. We are pleased to report that all three poles passed assessment and they are in a good healthy state."

In addition, the Town Engineer is aware that PG&E is actively inspecting poles in the Town of Ross because they have applied for several encroachment permits over the past few years to repair or replace poles in Town that do not meet the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) standard for structural integrity. In accordance with CPUC regulations, PG&E performs annual patrols for its poles in urban environments and every two years for poles located in rural environments. These patrols are performed to visually identify safety and reliability issues such as structural hazards or problems. In addition, CPUC General Order 165 requires that each pole is intrusively tested at a minimum of every 20 years; however, according to PG&E, for the vast majority of the poles in Ross this test is performed about every 10 years. To perform this test, PG&E digs down about 20 inches to expose part of the pole to conduct a detailed visual inspection of the pole. Holes are bored and wood probed to evaluate the integrity of the wood. A preservative is also applied to extend the life of the pole. There was, however, no inspection protocol for geotechnical related subsurface conditions (i.e., liquefaction potential.)

## **Conclusion:**

Staff found no indication that the impact from earthquakes and subsequent liquefaction of the utility pole foundation is addressed in either CPUC General Order 95 (pole construction standards) or CPUC General Order 165 (pole inspection standards). At the request of Town Council, staff prepared a letter (Attachment 1) addressed to the PG&E's North Bay Government Liaison to garner an official response and receipt of a possible action plan to address the safety concerns of the Town related to earthquake safety. Staff recommends that the Town Council authorize the Mayor to sign the letter, with any amendments, and send it to PG&E. Based on PG&E's response to this letter, there may be additional follow up on this issue and staff will advise the Town Council accordingly.

#### Fiscal, resource and timeline impacts:

There are no fiscal impacts with the exception of staff time investigating this issue and preparing this agenda report

#### Attachments

- 1. Draft Letter to PG&E from Mayor Robbins
- 2. Leaning poles photos

# ATTACHMENT 1

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June 17, 2022

Pacific Gas and Electric Company c/o Mark van Gorder, Government Affairs, North Bay Sent via email: <u>mark.vangorder@pge.com</u>

RE: Seismic vulnerability of joint utility poles in the Town of Ross, CA

Dear Mr. Van Gorder:

I am writing you today on behalf of the Ross Town Council to bring to your attention a matter of concern regarding the safety of the residents of Ross and possibly the entire Ross Valley in Marin County.

The potential for a significant earthquake in the San Francisco Bay area is a well-established fact. As PG&E may be aware, the Sir Francis Drake Corridor through Ross is a major evacuation route for Ross and, potentially, most of the Ross Valley including San Anselmo and Fairfax during a natural disaster.

According to the United States Geological Survey, this corridor, which roughly follows the Corte Madera Creek, is identified as having a "High" liquefaction potential during an earthquake. Liquefaction is generally defined as the conversion of soil into a fluidlike mass during an earthquake or other seismic event. The Town Council and staff are very concerned that a number of poles that are noticeably leaning over Sir Francis Drake Boulevard may have rotated over time due to a shifting of the buried portion of the pole. Further, Town staff are concerned that there appears to be no provisions in the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) General Orders for the inspection of poles for structural integrity during seismic events in high liquefaction zones.

Should one or more of these poles fall into Sir Francis Drake Boulevard for any reason, this primary evacuation route for the Ross Valley communities of Fairfax, San Anselmo, and Ross, as well as the rural communities of West Marin County, would be rendered unusable for an extended period of time.

The Town of Ross Town Council hereby requests that PG&E perform a full subsurface geological evaluation of the structural integrity of the utility poles along Sir Francis Drake in the Town of Ross, with consideration taken for a probable seismic event in a high-liquefaction soil environment.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter, and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Robbins Mayor

cc: Town Council

Town Manager

Dr. Naveed Paydar, California Public Utilities Commission, Executive Division (sent via email: <u>Naveed.Paydar@cpuc.ca.gov</u>)

# ATTACHMENT 2



Leaning Pole at 3 Sir Francis Drake



Leaning Communications Pole at MAGC showing rotation