



Utility Undergrounding Frequently Asked Questions 11/25/25

PROJECT OVERVIEW

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

The Del Mar Undergrounding Program (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.

Undergrounding utility poles and overhead wires has been a community priority for many years. Measure Q, a one-cent sales tax measure approved by Del Mar voters in November 2016, is the planned funding source for the public aspects 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 of utility undergrounding?

Removing overhead utilities provides multiple benefits:

- **Visual improvement:** Eliminates poles, crossarms, wires, and transformers, enhancing Del Mar's unique beauty.
- **Safety:** Reduces fire hazards, accidents, and risks from power outages and downed lines.
- **Reliability:** Underground lines are more reliable and less prone to weather-related outages and damage from falling limbs or other accidents.

3. How is the UP funded?

Measure Q, the one-cent sales tax measure approved by voters in 2016, is providing funds for the UP. 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. What will it cost?

Costs vary by site conditions and technical requirements, and timing affects construction costs. The most recent UP estimate was \$91–\$93 million. The City is currently reevaluating costs based on recent bids for Stratford Court South (UUD 1A) and Crest Canyon (UUD X1A), with updated estimates expected to be presented to the City Council in April 2026.



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5. Why doesn't the City underground the entire City at once?

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.

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

SDG&E has no legal obligation to pay for all of undergrounding. Their contribution is defined by CPUC Rule 20B which has them cover overhead removals and provide an equivalent credit.

7. What is [UPAC](#)?

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

8. What is the status and schedule of UP projects?

For current status, visit the UP website under [Program Overview](#), [Project Updates](#), or [Construction Updates](#).

UTILITY UNDERGROUNDING DISTRICTS

9. What is a "utility undergrounding district" (UUD)?

A UUD is a portion of the City designated by the City Council for future undergrounding. The Council establishes boundaries and authorizes design and construction within each district.

10. How is a district created?

Districts can be created by the City or by property owners under [California Public Utilities Commission](#) rules:

- **Rule 20A:** Initiated by a City or county with costs covered by SDG&E funds. The program is ending, and Del Mar's remaining funds have been allocated to UUD 25th Street.



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- **Rule 20B:** Most common method for implementing undergrounding, with costs primarily paid by the City. The UP is largely designed for these types of projects.
- **Rule 20C:** Private districts created by property owners with costs shared among participants. Not eligible for Measure Q funding.

For the UP, the City Council will create the districts based on recommendations from [UPAC](#), staff, and SDG&E. 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 are undergrounded?

The City Council adopted a prioritization for the UP districts based on recommendations from City staff and the [UPAC](#). You can view the district maps and priority 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?

Typically, once a district is created, undergrounding and pole removal are expected within three to five years, subject to City Council approval and Measure Q fund availability.

14. How will I know when my district is ready?

The City Council will determine the schedule for undergrounding in each district. Residents will receive notice when their district is ready to proceed. District maps can be viewed on the project webpage under [Districts Maps & Tools](#). Schedule information will be posted on the website as it becomes available. City staff is currently evaluating timing for districts beyond Stratford Court North (UUD 1B).

15. Can I underground utilities myself if the timetable is too far out?

Yes, but costs will not be reimbursed.

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

The City will not reimburse properties that previously undergrounded at their own expense or are in the process of undergrounding. This decision was made 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



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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.

PROPERTY OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

17. If my property is already undergrounded, will I incur additional expenses?

Each situation is unique, depending on factors such as property location, the age of the electrical panel, and other conditions. More information will be provided to property owners as the design process progresses. Generally, however, SDG&E can connect to the existing underground without any additional work required from the homeowner.

18. Does Measure Q cover lateral connections to homes?

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.

19. 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.

20. What if I refuse to convert my service laterals?

Once a UUD 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.

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

A licensed electrician hired by the homeowner completes the connections. SDG&E inspects the work and performs the electrical cutover.

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

The private service lateral will need to be installed after the City's contractor completes their work and establishes the point of connection. The City will advise district residents as to when lateral completion is required, but homeowners typically have about two months to complete their work.



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23. 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.



24. What should residents know when trenching from their homes to the street?

Residents must obtain the SDG&E service order and City preliminary lateral exhibit. Trenching must follow SDG&E standards available at <https://www.sdge.com/project-resources>. 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. You can also reference the [Property Owner Service Lateral Reference Procedure](#).

25. 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, referencing the City's list 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:



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- ✓ 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.

26. 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. SDG&E will provide a service order and the City will provide a preliminary lateral exhibit.

27. What City permits are required?

A building permit is required even for telecom-only laterals. An encroachment permit may be needed if work is in public right-of-way. You can reference the [Building Permit Information for Utility Service Lateral](#).

28. 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 must obtain an SDG&E service order and a City electrical permit, and coordinate with the City and the UP team to ensure the conduit is installed in the correct location.



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PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND OVERSIGHT

29. Is the City financially responsible for undergrounding of cable and telecom lines?

California Public Utilities Commission regulations and Federal law stipulate financial responsibility depending on certain circumstances.

30. 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.

31. 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.

32. How much construction oversight is provided by City staff?

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

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

The City’s contractor will be responsible for the civil scope, including installing trenches, conduit, and substructures within the public right-of-way, following specifications provided by SDG&E. SDG&E will handle the electrical scope, including cabling and connections, electrical cutovers, cable poles, and the removal of overhead lines and poles.

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

SDG&E will bill the City on an actual cost basis, primarily determined by bids received by SDG&E for construction as well as the time spent on engineering and project management.

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

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

36. 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.



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37. 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

38. If I have further questions, whom should I contact?

Additional questions may be emailed to up@delmar.ca.us.

39. Can the City complete all of the construction work, or do we need to rely on SDG&E?

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) regulates the requirements for electric utilities with regards to their participation in utility undergrounding pursuant to tariff rules, specifically Rule 20. As such, completion of the UP necessitates coordination with utility companies, including SDG&E, AT&T, Charter Communications/Spectrum, and Crown Castle. Specifically, the City must rely on SDG&E to complete certain portions of undergrounding projects, such as installation of cables and connections, pole removals, service cutovers, and engineering design. SDG&E has informed the City that these portions of the undergrounding project must be performed by SDG&E, and cannot be done by the City. SDG&E has allowed the City to assume responsibility for trenching and installation of conduit and substructures, which is allowed for as part of Rule 20. SDG&E also emphasized the importance of ensuring that their portion of the construction is completed by SDG&E qualified contractors and installed in a safe and reliable manner. This is crucial as SDG&E is responsible for the future maintenance of the system and inherits the risks associated with maintaining it.