

7.5 GAS, ELECTRICITY, AND COMMUNICATIONS

This section evaluates the gas, electricity, and communications impacts of the proposed City of Fortuna General Plan 2030 (proposed plan), including whether the proposed plan will require or result in the development of major new natural gas, electricity and communication facilities, construction of which would lead to significant environmental effects.

This section is based, in part, on the 2007 City of Fortuna Background Report, Section 7.6, Gas and Electric Service and Section 7.7, Communication Systems (Mintier & Associates et. al., 2007). The Background Report is included as Appendix G of this PEIR.

Environmental Setting

Electricity

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) provides electric service within Humboldt County, including in the Planning Area. PG&E is a public utility regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) that establishes rules for operation, customer rates, and PG&E's rate of return on investment.

Electricity is supplied through both local generation (73 percent) and transmission imports (27 percent). The PG&E transmission system for Humboldt County consists of four transmission lines that supply less than half of the county's current peak electricity demand. Therefore, local generators (i.e., PG&E Humboldt Bay, PALCO, Fairhaven) fill the majority of local electricity needs.

According to the Humboldt County Energy Element Technical Appendices document, there is currently enough local generation capacity to meet all of Humboldt County electrical energy needs (Schatz Energy Research Center, 2005). In 2001 during the California electricity crisis Humboldt County exported 178,000 megawatt hours (MWh) of electricity (Ibid). In 2003, total electricity consumption for Humboldt County was 940,000 MWh (RCEA, 2005). Combining the existing County wide electricity consumption and surplus numbers, it is estimated that total electricity supply in Humboldt County is currently 1,118,000 MWh.

The Planning Area falls within a PG&E service area serving approximately 7,408 customers. PG&E maintains the Fortuna Service Center office at 2755 Rohnerville Road. PG&E operates one main substation near Newburg Park to serve the City of Fortuna. Other parts of the Planning Area are served by substations in Carlotta, Rio Dell, and the Fernbridge area. PG&E has indicated that electric load serving future development within the Planning Area will likely be shared between these substations in order to ensure redundancy (PG&E, 2005a).

The PG&E electric distribution system serving Fortuna is largely in place and PG&E is obligated under CPUC regulations to provide service to new customers within the City. New service requests, or requests for additional service, are generally governed by CPUC approved Rule 15 (Distribution Line Extensions) and Rule 16 (Service Extensions).

Natural Gas

PG&E also supplies natural gas within Humboldt County, including in the Planning Area. PG&E operates and maintains a natural gas transmission pipeline that generally follows Highway 36 from Orland in the Sacramento Valley to a metering facility located in Alton. PG&E also operates and maintains smaller natural gas transmission facilities that extend north and south from Alton to serve the urbanized areas of Humboldt County, including the Planning Area (PG&E, 2005b).

Natural gas is conveyed to the Planning Area in pipes that are up to 12 inches in diameter (City of Fortuna, 1995). A 12-inch high pressure main and regulator station located on Fortuna Boulevard provides natural gas within the City. There are also natural gas lines running under Newburg Road (SHN, 2004).

PG&E's Fortuna Service Center office serves approximately 4,400 customers within the PG&E service area including the Planning Area. These customers consume approximately 2.9 million therms of natural gas per year (Ivan Marruffo, 2005, values from 2004). Most households in the Planning Area are served by natural gas. Households and businesses located in areas without natural gas service use propane, which is available from a variety of local providers.

Natural gas is generally available throughout Fortuna, and PG&E is obligated to provide service to new and existing customers. New service requests or requests for additional service are generally governed by Rule 15 (Gas Main Extensions) and Rule 16 (Gas Service Extensions).

Communications

Land line telephone service in the Planning Area is provided by AT&T. Cellular phone service is provided by a number of companies. One cell towers serve the Planning Area. One is located within the City's corporation yard at 200 Dinsmore Drive. The second is on Drake Hill Road. Planning Area residents receive television through conventional broadcast, cable or satellite transmissions. Suddenlink provides both cable and internet service. Internet service is available as dial-up, high-speed (Suddenlink) and DSL (for internet users within 15,000 cable feet from the AT&T equipment office at 832 L Street).

Applicable Plans, Policies, Codes and Regulations

Federal

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) regulates and oversees energy industries in the economic, environmental, and safety interests of the American public. FERC is an independent agency that regulates the interstate transmission of natural gas, oil, and electricity. FERC also regulates natural gas and hydropower projects.

Federal Communications Commission. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is an independent United States government agency, directly responsible to Congress. The FCC

was established by the Communications Act of 1934 and is charged with regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable. Suddenlink and AT&T are regulated by the FCC.

State

California Public Utilities Commission. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) regulates privately-owned telecommunications, electric, natural gas, water, railroad, rail transit, and passenger transportation companies, pursuant to the Public Utilities Act (Public Utilities Code §§ 201 through 2119). The regulatory functions of the CPUC are wide ranging and include the establishment of service standards and safety rules; utility rate changes; energy efficiency and conservation programs; and programs for the low-income and disabled.

Local

Underground Utility Districts. Pursuant to Government Code §38793, and Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) Rule 20A, the City of Fortuna adopted regulations establishing underground utility districts (Fortuna Municipal Code Title 13 Utilities, Chapter 13.68). Upon making a finding during a public hearing that the public necessity, health, safety, or welfare requires the removal of overhead utilities, the City Council may adopt an ordinance establishing underground utility districts. Companies operating overhead utilities within the district shall remove existing overhead facilities and install new facilities underground. Undergrounding projects are limited by the PG&E budget allocated to the City of Fortuna, which is based on the number of overhead meters in the city in comparison to the entire PG&E system.

Methodology

Policy Background

The following policy background is used to assess the gas, electricity and communication impacts of the proposed plan:

- The transmission system is sufficient to supply the Humboldt Transmission Area with electricity for the next 10 years, but may not be sufficient for the full term of the proposed plan.
- Natural gas distribution to the City is sufficient, and the proximity of natural gas transmission lines to the Planning Area could allow for the expansion of natural gas service.
- Natural gas and delivered propane will continue to be available throughout the Planning Area.
- Communication services will continue to be provided by Suddenlink and AT&T (and other companies) through the full term of the General Plan.

Thresholds of Significance

Proposed General Plan implementation will have significant gas, electricity, or communication impacts if it:

- Requires or results in the development of major new electrical transmission or generation facilities, natural gas transmission lines, or communication facilities, the construction of which would lead to significant environmental effects.

Implications of the Draft Land Use Diagram

At buildout of the proposed plan, the population within the Planning Area will increase from 11,351 (DOF, 2009) to 24,904 persons. Based on the countywide annual per capita electricity demand estimate of 7.3 MWh (RCEA, 2004), the estimated existing annual electricity demand in the Planning Area is 82,862 MWh and the estimated annual electricity demand at buildout under the proposed plan will increase to 181,799 MWh.

Natural gas consumption in Humboldt County in 2003 is estimated at 93.9 million therms (RCEA, 2005). Based on this number and the existing County population of 132,755 persons (DOF, 2009), the existing annual per capita natural gas consumption (demand) in the County is 707.3 therms. Based on this per capita estimate, the estimated existing annual natural gas demand in the Planning Area is 8.0 million therms, and the annual natural gas demand under the proposed plan will increase to 17.6 million therms.

General Plan Policy Response

The proposed General Plan includes the following policies and programs relevant to gas, electricity and communications.

Gas & Electric Service

Policy PFS-7.1 Energy Conservation. The City shall require energy conservation in new construction.

Policy PFS-7.2 Renewable Energy. The City shall support the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar, in residential, commercial, and industrial developments and municipal facilities.

Policy PFS-7.3 Utility Companies. The City shall communicate its major development plans to utility companies and coordinate planning for the extension of those utilities.

Policy PFS-7.4 Technological Improvements. The City shall promote technological improvements and utility service upgrades to serve existing and future needs, while minimizing noise, electromagnetic, and visual impacts on current and future residents.

Policy PFS-7.5 Underground Utilities. The City shall require underground installation of electrical distribution utility lines in new developments and areas that are redeveloped, except where infeasible for operational reasons.

Policy PFS-7.6 Environmental Impacts. The City shall coordinate with electricity service providers to locate and design gas and electric systems to minimize impacts to current and future residents.

Policy PFS-7.7 Alternative Energy Sources. The City shall encourage the use of alternative energy technologies as they become commercially available and demonstrate reduced operating costs throughout the life cycle of the technology.

Program PFS-23 The City shall inform City residents and businesses owners of various discounts, incentives, and credits available for energy conservation programs and alternative energy systems and other energy efficient installations.

Program PFS-24. The City shall require that new construction be oriented and designed to take advantage of solar heating.

Program PFS-25. The City shall power City Hall and most other occupiable City buildings with renewable energy sources by 2030.

Communication Systems

Policy PFS-8.1 City Website. The City shall continue to maintain a website that will contain information about the City government, City services, and City-produced documents in a downloadable format.

Policy PFS-8.2 Civic Activism. The City shall strive to expand opportunities for all citizens to participate in City governance through use of communication technologies, including its website and the video broadcast of City Council and Planning Commission meetings on the public channels of the regional wideband cable system.

Policy PFS-8.3 Broadband Services. The City shall work with telecommunication companies to provide broadband services to all interested residents and businesses in Fortuna.

Policy PFS-8.4 Regional Telecommunication Infrastructure. The City shall work with the County and other pertinent agencies to coordinate telecommunication infrastructure planning on a regional basis for both telephone and data.

Policy PFS-8.5 Wireless Communication Facilities. To minimize the visual impact of wireless communication facilities (e.g., cell towers), the City shall require that they meet the following conditions:

- Are located away from residential and open space areas;
- Are not visibly intrusive to residential neighborhoods or public rights-of-way;

- When possible, are co-located with other wireless facilities on existing buildings, towers, poles, or other existing support structures; and
- Are painted, camouflaged, or textured in a manner as to reduce their visual impacts.

Impacts and Mitigation

Impact 7.5-1: Gas, Electric and Communications Facilities

Proposed General Plan implementation will require the construction of gas, electricity, and communication facilities, the construction of which could have significant environmental effects.

Discussion

The proposed plan will permit development in underdeveloped and/or underutilized areas, particularly within the proposed Focus Areas and Annexation Areas. As described previously, the proposed plan will also increase the annual electricity demand from 82,826 to an estimated 181,799 MWh and will increase the annual natural gas demand from 8.0 to an estimated 17.6 million therms. This proposed new development could require either (1) the extension of natural gas, electricity and communication infrastructure to serve it and/or (2) system wide improvements to the local natural gas, electricity and communication systems to serve new plus existing development in the Planning Area. Any improvements will be provided by the utility companies consistent with CPUC regulations which obligate the utility providers to serve the City of Fortuna.

The construction of new natural gas, electricity and communication infrastructure required to serve new development under the proposed plan has the potential to cause significant environmental effects. However, the proposed plan includes the following policies and programs to reduce such impacts:

- Policy PFS-7.1 requires energy conservation in new construction;
- Policy PFS-7.1 2 requires the City to support the use of renewable energy sources in new development and redevelopment;
- Policy PFS-7.2 3 requires the City to coordinate the extension of utility services associated with proposed large developments with utility companies;
- Policy PFS-7.6 requires the City to encourage the use of alternative energy technologies; and
- Policy PFS-8.4 requires the City to work with the County and other pertinent agencies to coordinate telecommunication infrastructure planning on a regional basis.

No specific development projects or gas, electric, or communication facility improvements are proposed under the proposed plan and specific environmental effects associated with constructing any new or expanded facilities cannot be identified at this time. Not speculating with respect to potential environmental effects is encouraged under the State CEQA guidelines. Section 15145 states that, if after evaluation a lead agency finds that a particular impact is too

speculative for evaluation, the agency should note its conclusion and terminate discussion of the impact. Section 15146(b) states that an EIR for a plan should focus on the secondary effects that can be expected to follow from its adoption, but that the EIR need not be as detailed as an EIR for a specific construction project that might reasonably follow. At the time that specific natural gas, electricity, and communication improvements are proposed, the environmental effects of construction will be evaluated by the City in accordance with CEQA.

Determination of Level of Significance

Less-Than-Significant

Mitigation

No mitigation necessary

References Cited

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