



NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

Submitted to:

San Francisco Office of the County Clerk
City Hall, Room 160
One Dr Carlton B Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Office of Planning and Research
Submitted electronically via CEQASubmit

From: San Francisco Unified School District
135 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

PROJECT TITLE: 2026 West Portal Elementary School Modernization Project

Project Address:
West Portal Elementary School
5 Lenox Way
San Francisco, CA 94127

Assessor's Parcel Number:
Assessor's block/lot 2979/014
County of:
San Francisco

Project Description: The 2.8-acre project site consists of one parcel: Assessor's block/lot 2979/014 at 5 Lenox Way in the West Portal Neighborhood of San Francisco, California. The project site is bound by Taraval Street to the north, Claremont Boulevard to the east, Verdun Way (a public pedestrian walkway) to the south, and Lenox Way to the west (Figure 1). The project site is surrounded by residential uses to the north, east, and west; a public park, the West Portal Recreation Center, and residential uses are located south of the project site.

West Portal Elementary School, a transitional kindergarten through 5th-grade school with an estimated 600 student enrollment (SFUSD 2025), is located at the project site. The West Portal Elementary School was initially constructed between 1926 and 1927, with later additions from 1931 to 1932 and the mid- to late 20th century.

The demolition of eight temporary portable classroom units (existing Buildings C through H) and the construction of two new buildings (Buildings C and D) at the project site is currently underway pursuant to a separate project approval (DSA Project #01-118517) issued by SFUSD in November 2023. Once construction of the separate project is complete, the project site will consist of approximately 48,200 square feet of building space within four permanent buildings (Building A, which includes a multipurpose wing and a main wing, and Buildings B, C, and D, which are used for classroom and administration spaces), as well as paved surface lots and outdoor recreational spaces. The project site includes the following permanent buildings:

- Building A: Three-story, approximately 32,260-square-foot building that includes 13 classrooms, a multi-purpose room, library, and warming kitchen.

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION - ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



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- Building B: Single-story, approximately 4,120-square-foot building that includes four classrooms.
- Building C: Two-story (with a cantilevered deck), approximately 9,100-square-foot building that includes six classrooms.
- Building D: Single-story (with a breezeway connecting two portions of the building), approximately 5,900-square-foot building that includes four classrooms.

Various play areas and landscaping are located throughout the project site. The project site consists of four flat terraces, referred to as yards, that step down in elevation from a high point at yard 1 in the northern portion of the site (closest to Taraval Street) to a low point at yard 4 in the southern portion of the site.

In addition, the Twin Peaks Tunnel runs beneath the central portion of the project site, approximately 41 feet below ground surface at yard 4. The Twin Peaks Tunnel is an underground light rail tunnel under the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority (SFMTA) that was completed in 1917 and is 2.3 miles long. The K Ingleside, M Ocean View, and T Taraval lines of the San Francisco Municipal Railway (SF Muni) system use the Twin Peaks Tunnel.

The project includes modernization improvements to existing Building A, minor improvements to existing Building B, as well as some paving/patching and striping in yard 4. Figure 2 depicts the conceptual site plan for the project. The project includes the following components:

- Building A: The project includes modernizations to the classrooms, administrative spaces, library, multipurpose room, restrooms, and corridors in Building A. In addition, the project replaces the existing windows with new windows and replaces the existing boiler with a fully electric HVAC system. The project also includes exterior painting of Building A.
- Building B: The project includes minor improvements to Building B (e.g., minor exterior improvements).
- Additional on-site improvements: The project includes selective replacement of the existing sewer lines along Lenox Way. In addition, the project includes landscaping, stormwater improvements (e.g., bioretention, infiltration gallery), a new play structure, and asphalt paving/patching and striping in yard 4. Furthermore, the project includes electrical upgrades, as well as the construction of a mechanical area in yard 2 south of Building A near Lenox Way.

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION - ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



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To accommodate the proposed on-site improvements described above, the project may require excavation within the project site up to five feet in selected areas below existing ground surface elevations. The selected areas of excavation would not impose an additional structural load to the Twin Peaks Tunnel.

This project has been **approved by** and **will be carried out by** the San Francisco Unified School District.

Lead Agency Contact Person: LeeAnn Bailey, SFUSD Grants and Compliance Manager,
bailey1@sfusd.edu 415-241-6000

Signature: LeeAnn Bailey **Date:** 4/11/25

EXEMPT STATUS

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|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ministerial Project (Section 21080(b)(1); 15268) | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Categorically Exempt | Classes: Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools; see CEQA Implementation Manual Table 5.2-1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Declared Emergency (Section 21080(b)(3); 15269(a)) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Emergency Project (Section 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c)) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Statutory Exemption (Code/Section_____) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The project clearly will not have a significant effect on the environment (15061(b)(3)) | |

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Reason Project is Exempt: This project consists of modernizations and minor improvements to Building A and B, as well as additional on-site improvements. The project would not result in a net increase of building area, classrooms, student enrollment, or staffing at the project site. The project is exempt under CEQA Guidelines Section 15314 – Minor Additions to Schools.

The project meets the conditions for these exemptions as explained below.

Minor Additions to Schools (Class 14). This categorical exemption consists of minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or ten classrooms, whichever is less. The addition of portable classrooms is included in this exemption.

The project results in no net increase in building space or classrooms. In addition, the project does not increase the original student capacity or staffing at the project site.

Exceptions to Use of a Categorical Exemption: The project does not have the potential to trigger any of the exceptions identified in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 prohibiting the use of a categorical exemption.

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- a. Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.

The project is limited to just the existing school site, limiting the potential for cumulative impacts to the immediate area. The demolition of eight temporary portable classroom units (existing Buildings C through H) and the construction of two new buildings (Buildings C and D) at the project site is currently underway pursuant to a separate project approval (DSA Project #01-118517) issued by SFUSD in November 2023. The proposed project would occur after DSA Project #01-118517 is complete. The cumulative impact of DSA Project #01-118517 and the proposed project would not be significant. In addition, no other projects adjacent to the project site would be constructed at the same time as the proposed project (San Francisco Planning 2025). There would not be successive or concurrent projects in the same place over time that could result in similar impacts to the same kinds of resources as the proposed project. Thus, this exception does not apply to the project.

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- b. Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

There are no known unusual circumstances that would be applicable to the project or project site that would result in a significant effect on the environment. The project is a typical construction project to modernize school facilities, similar to other similar projects that are undertaken periodically as school facilities age and needs change. There is also nothing unusual about the environmental resources on the site. Thus, this exception does not apply to the project.

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- c. Scenic Highways. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources including, but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.

The nearest scenic highway is a segment of Interstate 280 near San Bruno, approximately 8 miles south of the project site (Caltrans 2025). The project site is not within a highway that has been officially designated as a state scenic highway and has no trees, historical buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar visual resources within a highway that has been officially designated as a state scenic highway. Thus, this exception does not apply to the project.

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- d. Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site that is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.

The provisions of Government Code Section 65962.5 are commonly referred to as the “Cortese List.” The provisions require the Department of Toxic Substance Control, the State Water Resources Control Board, the California Department of Public Health, and the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery to submit information pertaining to sites associated with solid waste disposal, hazardous waste disposal, leaking underground storage tanks, and/or hazardous material releases to the Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency. The project site is not on a currently maintained Cortese List site (DTSC 2025; SWRCB 2025). The project site is also not identified on any other lists compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code. Thus, this exception does not apply to the project.

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- e. Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

CEQA requires a lead agency to consider the effects of a project on historical resources. CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5 provides specific guidance for determining the significance of impacts on historical resources (CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5[b] and California Public Resources Code Section 21084.1). Under CEQA, these resources are called “historical resources,” whether they are of historic or pre-European contact age. ICF was retained to

evaluate the potential historical resources impacts of the proposed project. The following discussion summarizes the Built Resources Technical Report (2023a) and the Archaeological Resources Technical Memorandum (2023b) prepared by ICF for DSA Project #01-118517; the conclusions in those cultural resources analyses apply to the proposed project because the proposed project would occur at the same project site and consist of similar construction and operational activities as DSA Project #01-118517.

West Portal Elementary School. An architectural historian who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications for architectural history completed an intensive-level survey of the West Portal Elementary School campus on July 18, 2023 (ICF 2023a). The architectural historian completed archival and background research to establish a historic context and construction history for the evaluation of the campus and its individual buildings for California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) eligibility. Neither the campus as a whole nor any of its individual buildings appear eligible for listing in the CRHR due to a lack of significant historical associations, architectural merit, and compromised integrity (ICF 2023a). Therefore, the West Portal Elementary School is not considered a historical resource for the purposes of CEQA.

Twin Peaks Tunnel. The Twin Peaks Tunnel was completed in 1917 and is a historical resource for the purposes of CEQA; the tunnel was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 and is listed on the CRHR. The tunnel is located approximately 41 feet below yard 4 of the West Portal Elementary School campus. Based on the analysis in the Archaeological Resources Technical Memorandum (ICF 2023b), construction of the proposed project is anticipated to generate vibration at the Twin Peaks Tunnel that would be below any reasonable damage threshold. The Twin Peaks Tunnel would not be demolished, destroyed, altered, or relocated as a result of the project. Based on the analysis in the Archaeological Resources Technical Memorandum, there would be no substantial adverse change to the tunnel as a result of vibration during the construction of the project. In addition, there would be no substantial adverse change to the tunnel as a result of activities during operation of the project.

Undiscovered Archaeological Resources. Based on the analysis in the Archaeological Resources Technical Memorandum (ICF 2023b), the project site is considered to have low potential for containing intact historic-period archaeological deposits (e.g., artifact-filled features such as wells or privies) that could be considered a historical resource under CEQA. In addition, the project site is considered to have low sensitivity for containing buried pre-contact-period archeological resources that could be considered a historical resource under CEQA. Based on the analysis in the Archaeological Resources Technical Memorandum, the project would not result in a substantial adverse change to the integrity of previously undiscovered historical resources. It is not anticipated that ground disturbance associated with construction of the project would have impacts on historical archaeological resources. No mitigation measures are

required or recommended to reduce, minimize, or avoid potential environmental impacts on historical resources associated with the project.

Conclusion. Based on the above, the project would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource and no mitigation measures are required. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the project.

REFERENCES

- California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). 2025. Envirostor. <https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/>. Accessed February 21, 2025.
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2019. List of Eligible and Officially Designated State Scenic Highways. <https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>. Accessed February 21, 2025.
- ICF. 2023a. *West Portal Elementary School Modernization Project Built-Resources Technical Report*. September. (ICF 104740.0.001.) San Francisco, CA. Prepared for San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, CA.
- ICF. 2023b. *West Portal Elementary School Modernization Project Archeological Resources Technical Memorandum*. October. (ICF 104740.0.001.) San Francisco, CA. Prepared for San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, CA.
- San Francisco Planning. 2025. Development Pipeline Map. <https://data.sfgov.org/Housing-and-Buildings/San-Francisco-Development-Pipeline/k55i-dnjd>. Accessed February 21, 2025.
- San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). 2025. West Portal Elementary School. Available: <https://www.sfusd.edu/school/west-portal-elementary-school>. Accessed February 21, 2025.
- State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). 2025. GeoTracker. <https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/>. Accessed February 21, 2025.

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Figure 1
Project Location
2026 West Portal Elementary School Modernization Project

