

Notice of Exemption

TO: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation PO Box 3044 Sacramento, CA 95812-3044 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plumas County Clerk-Recorder 520 Main Street #102 Quincy, CA 95971	FROM: City of Portola 35 Third Avenue Portola, CA 96122
Project Title: City of Portola Water Distribution System and Wastewater Collection System Improvements Projects	
Project Location: As shown in Figure 1 , the proposed project is located within the City of Portola in Sections 1 and 2, Township 22 North, Range 13 East, and Sections 35 and 36, Township 23 North, Range 13 East of the U.S. Geological Survey’s (USGS) Portola 7.5-minute quadrangle. Improvements would occur throughout the City’s water and wastewater service area primarily within public road rights-of-way (ROWs) of several streets north and south of the Middle Fork of the Feather River (Figure 2).	
City: Portola	County: Plumas
<p>Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:</p> <p>The proposed project includes improvements to the City’s water and wastewater infrastructure. The study area for both water and sewer improvements is shown in Figure 2. Due to the age and condition of the City’s wastewater collection system, the City is experiencing excessive amounts of inflow and infiltration (I&I) entering the wastewater system during wet-weather periods. The I&I is causing manholes to surcharge, wastewater spills, and the need for emergency pumping. In turn, the City has received multiple discharge violations from the State Water Resources Control Board.</p> <p>The City’s water distribution system is also old and undersized, causing the City to incur losses due to leaks and frequent breakages. The small size of existing waterlines limits maximum fire flows within parts of the City. In addition, the waterlines are located in close proximity to existing wastewater collection pipelines, potentially creating serious health risks to residents due to potential contamination. Any construction and/or rehabilitation to the City’s sewer infrastructure would most likely damage existing water distribution pipelines. The proposed project would replace aging infrastructure, reduce leaks, and provide improved fire flows for the water system, and replace aging sewer infrastructure to reduce I&I for the wastewater system.</p> <p>Water Distribution System Improvements:</p> <p>Water system improvements include replacing undersized, leak-prone steel and asbestos cement water mains that are in conflict with sewer main replacements (see Figure 3). The existing water mains would be abandoned in place. Improvements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installing ~4,780 linear feet of new 8-inch polyvinyl chloride (PVC) water mains. • Installing ~5,050 linear feet of new 6-inch PVC water mains. • Installing ~12 new fire hydrants. • Installing ~107 mainline gate valves. • Replacing ~160 water meters and meter boxes, and reconnecting ~160 water services to the new water mains. <p>Wastewater Collection System Improvements:</p> <p>Wastewater system improvements include replacing aging sewer collection system infrastructure. As shown in Figure 4, improvements are proposed to be completed in two phases as funding becomes available. Improvements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing ~1,930 feet of 15-inch piping. • Replacing ~480 feet of 12-inch piping. • Replacing ~150 feet of 10-inch piping. 	

- Replacing ~21,370 feet of 8-inch piping.
- Replacing ~22,950 feet of 4-inch laterals, including two-way cleanouts at property lines.
- Replacing ~36 manholes and rehabilitating ~110 manholes.

Improvements would occur in existing public road ROWs and public utility easements. Sewer and water laterals would generally be extended to private property lines. Minimal vegetation and tree removal may be required to accommodate some of the improvements.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: City of Portola

Name of Agency Carrying out the Project: City of Portola

Local Agency Contact Person: **Ryan Bonk, City Manager**
530.832.6800
CityManager@cityofportola.com

Exempt Status: Categorical Exemption:

California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3 (CEQA Guidelines):

Class 1, §15301 (Existing Facilities)

Class 2, §15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction)

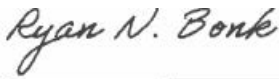

Class 3, §15303 (New Construction or Conversation of Small Structures)

Reason Why Project Is Exempt:

Class 1 covers the repair, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing publicly owned utilities used to provide public utility services involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. Class 2 covers the replacement or reconstruction of existing utility systems and/or facilities involving negligible or no expansion of capacity. Class 3 covers the installation of new piping and the installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures.

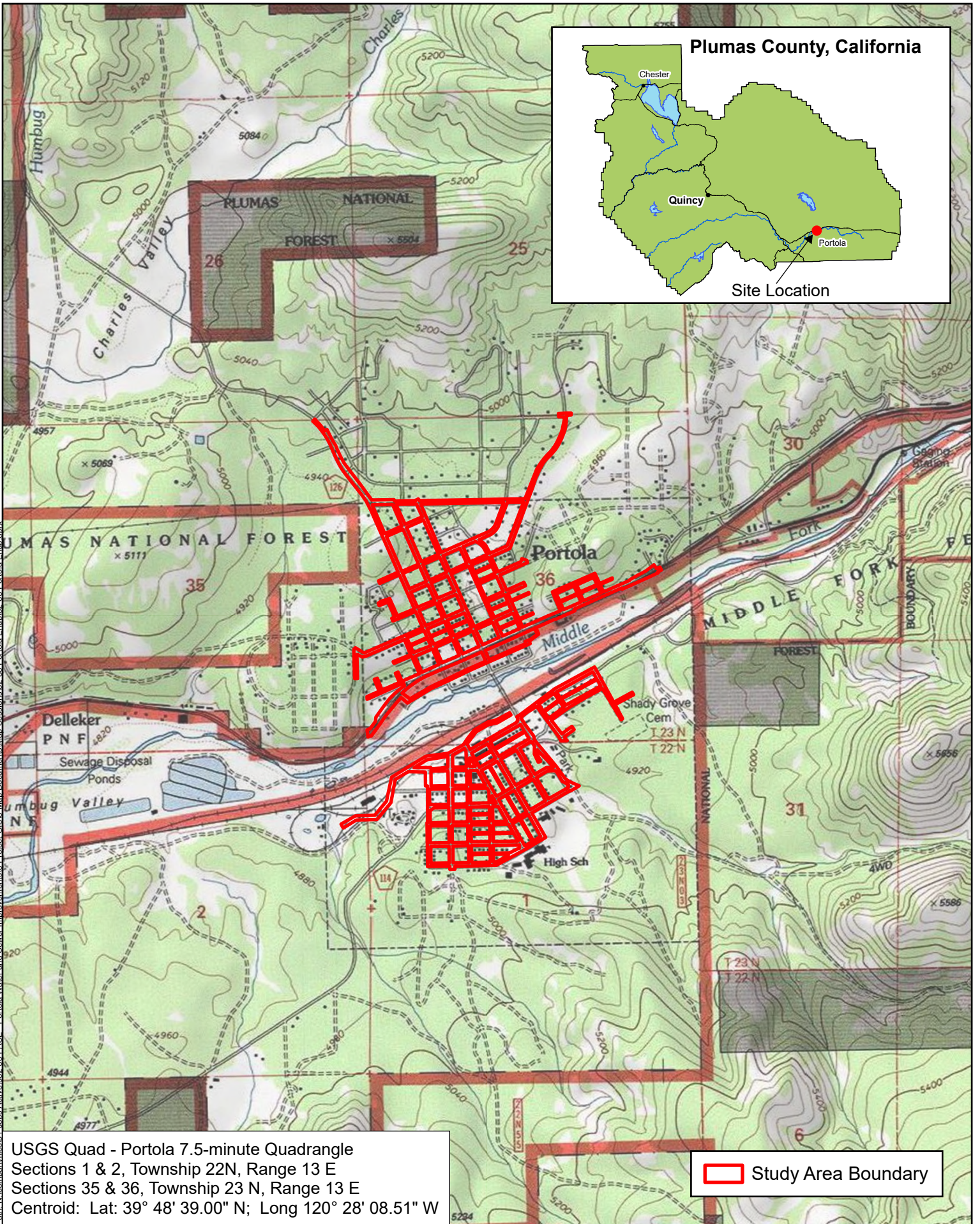
The project is consistent with the exemptions noted above because work would consist of replacement of existing water and sewer lines; installation of new water and sewer lines; installation of fire hydrants, water meters, meter boxes and gate valves; installation of new manholes and rehabilitation of existing manholes; and installation of cleanouts. No expansion of capacity would occur. The majority of the pipelines would be placed in previously disturbed areas within the public road ROWs and in public utility easements; and the ground surface would be restored following construction.

As documented in **Attachment A**, the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances; would not result in damage to scenic resources within a Scenic Highway; is not located on a hazardous waste site pursuant to §65962.5 of the Government Code; would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource; and would not result in cumulative impacts.

Signature:   **Date:** 09/17/2025
Ryan Bonk
City Manager

Attachments:

- Figure 1: Project Vicinity and Location Map
- Figure 2: Study Area Boundary
- Figure 3: Proposed Water System Improvements
- Figure 4: Proposed Wastewater Collection System Improvements
- Attachment A: Documentation in Support of a Categorical Exemption



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All depictions are approximate. Not a survey product.

08.29.25



Figure 1

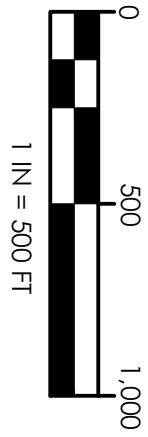
Project Location and Vicinity





CITY OF PORTOLA
 WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS
 PROPOSED FACILITIES

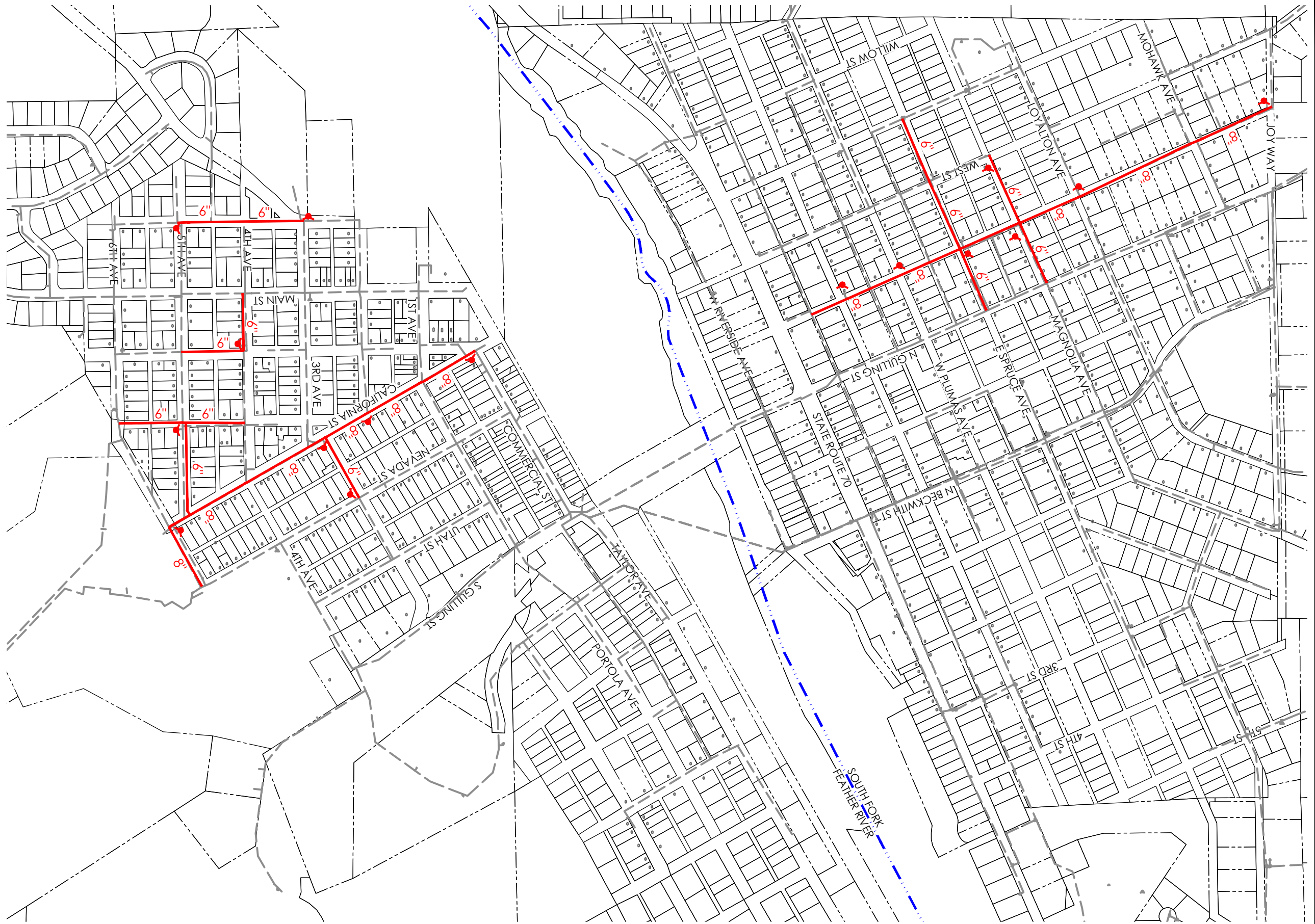
FIGURE 3
 DATE: 9/24
 JOB # 2630.21



GRAPHIC SCALE

LEGEND

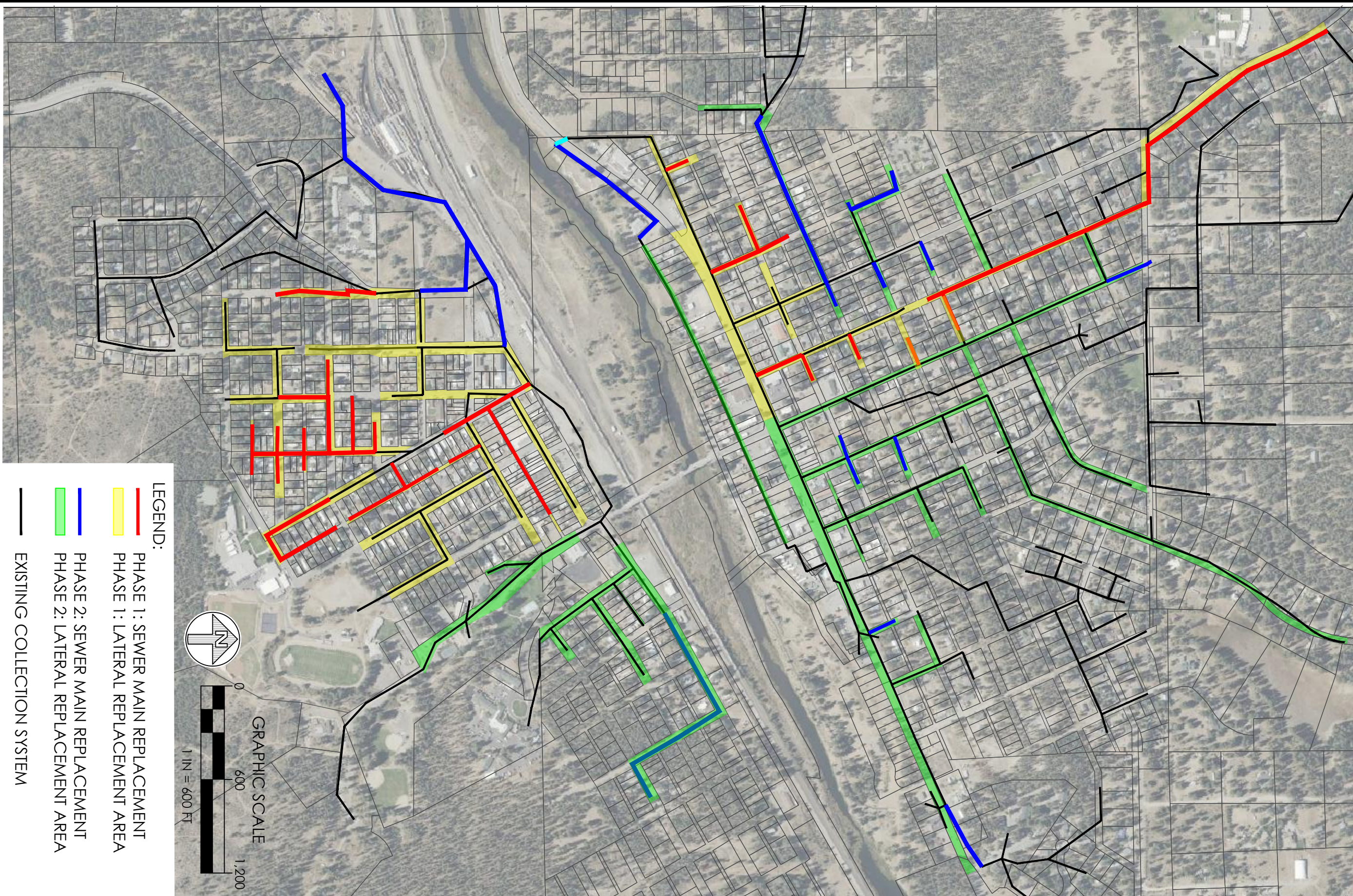
- EXISTING SYSTEM
- PROPOSED FACILITIES





CITY OF PORTOLA
WASTEWATER COLLECTION SYSTEM
IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT
SELECTED PROJECT - PHASES 1 & 2

FIGURE 4
DATE: 5/25
JOB # 2630.20



ATTACHMENT A

Documentation in Support of a Categorical Exemption

City of Portola Water Distribution System and Wastewater Collection System Improvements Projects

As described in the Notice of Exemption (NOE), the proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to §15301 (Class 1-Existing Facilities), §15302 (Class 2-Replacement or Reconstruction), and §15303 (Class 3-New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) of the CEQA Guidelines. CEQA Guidelines §15300.2 identifies exceptions that override a lead agency's ability to use a categorical exemption. These exceptions are listed below, followed by documentation of why each exception does not apply to the proposed project.

1. Location. *Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply in all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.*

The proposed project is supported by a Class 3 exemption. As documented below, no evidence has been found to suggest that the project location is particularly sensitive. Likewise, the project is not expected to affect an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern. Therefore, the Class 3 exemption is applicable to the proposed project.

2. Cumulative Impact. *All exemptions are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time, is significant.*

The proposed project involves improvements to the City of Portola's existing water and wastewater systems that are necessary in order to repair aging infrastructure, reduce inflow and infiltration, and provide improved fire flows. No successive improvements to these systems in the same location are proposed. Impacts during construction are temporary and would cease at completion of the project. Therefore, the project's impacts would not be cumulatively considerable.

3. 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.*

An "unusual circumstance" exists if the project's circumstances differ from the general circumstances of projects covered by the applicable exemption, and, if so, whether there is a reasonable possibility of a significant effect on the environment *due to* the unusual circumstances. As documented below, there are no unusual circumstances that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Aesthetics:

The majority of the proposed improvements would be subsurface and would have no impact. Fire hydrants would be installed in developed areas with similar public structures (e.g., utility poles, street signs, directional signs, cluster mailboxes, etc.) and would be compatible with the existing visual character of the area.

Minimal vegetation and tree removal may be necessary to accommodate the proposed improvements; however, this would not result in a significant visual change in the area. Paved roads that are disturbed during construction would be re-paved at completion of the improvements, and other temporarily disturbed areas would be restored as necessary.

Additionally, the project site is not in an area of unique scenic vistas, and temporary visual impacts during construction due to excavation and staging activities would cease upon the completion of the

improvements; no unusual circumstances apply and no significant impacts would occur.

Agriculture and Forest Resources:

Improvements would occur in urban areas within public road ROWs and in public utility easements. Based on final project design, there is a possibility that a small number of trees may need to be removed. This would be considered a minimal impact, and the City would be eligible for a Utility Right-of-Way Exemption from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) without the need for a full Timber Harvest Plan. The Exemption would need to be approved by CAL FIRE prior to removal of the trees. There are no properties in agricultural use in the project area. Therefore, project implementation would not result in the loss of agricultural lands or a significant impact on forest resources.

Air Quality/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions:

The City of Portola is located within the Mountain Counties Air Basin and is subject to rules and regulations established by the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District (NSAQMD).

The City of Portola and surrounding areas are designated nonattainment for the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) and California Ambient Air Quality Standard (CAAQS) for PM_{2.5} (California Air Resources Board [CARB], 2024a). Specifically, the City of Portola and surrounding areas (the Portola Nonattainment Area) are designated nonattainment for the annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS of 12 µg/m³ (CARB, 2024b)¹.

PM_{2.5} is made up of many constituent particles that are directly emitted, such as soot, smoke, and dust, or formed through complex reactions of gases in the atmosphere. Precursors to PM_{2.5} include NO_x, sulfur dioxide (SO₂), VOCs, and ammonia (NH₃) (NSAQMD, 2024a). According to CARB, the main source causing the Portola Nonattainment Area to violate the PM_{2.5} standard is wood smoke from residential home heating, which contributes ~76 percent of the annual mass and ~86 percent on an average exceedance day (CARB, 2024c).

For areas of the State that have not attained air quality standards, air districts must develop and implement attainment plans to demonstrate that they will meet the standard(s) by a specified date. In November 2024, the NSAQMD adopted the *Portola Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}) Serious State Implementation Plan (SIP)* (NSAQMD, 2024a). According to CARB, based on air quality modeling, the Portola SIP demonstrates that the Portola Nonattainment Area will attain the 12 µg/m³ annual PM_{2.5} standard by the December 31, 2025, attainment deadline by implementing control measures intended to reduce emissions from residential wood burning (CARB, 2024c). This strategy relies on an incentive program that provides financial assistance for replacing uncertified, inefficient wood stoves with less polluting home heaters.

The project does not include any components or activities that would result in a long-term increase in emissions above existing levels. The project would result in the temporary generation of ROG, NO_x, PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, and other regulated pollutants and GHGs during construction. ROG, NO_x, and GHG emissions are associated with employee vehicle trips, delivery of materials, and construction equipment exhaust. PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} are generated during site preparation, excavation, road paving, and from exhaust associated with construction equipment.

As stated in the NSAQMD Guidelines for Assessing and Mitigating Air Quality Impacts of Land Use Projects (NSAQMD, 2024b), the project is subject to NSAQMD rules that were enacted to minimize emissions from various land use activities. For example, District Rule 226 (Dust Control) requires a dust control plan to be prepared before topsoil is disturbed on any project where more than one acre of natural surface area is to be altered or where the natural ground cover is removed.

Although the majority of improvements would not occur in areas with natural surface area, even smaller projects are required to take reasonable precautions to prevent dust emissions (NSAQMD, 1994 and

¹ On February 7, 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency established a new national annual primary PM_{2.5} standard of 9 µg/m³; however, area designations for this revised standard will not be finalized until February 2026.

2024b). This could include periodically watering active construction sites; limiting vehicle speeds to 15 miles per hour on unpaved roads; suspending clearing, grading, earth moving, or excavation when winds are causing excessive dust; sweeping/cleaning paved streets in and adjacent to active construction sites to remove accumulations of silt and/or mud; and reseeding or compacting areas disturbed during construction as necessary.

In addition, the project must comply with the State's In-Use Off-Road Diesel-Fueled Fleets Regulation, which were enacted to reduce NO_x and PM emissions. The Regulation applies to various off-road mobile sources, including construction equipment. Public agencies must obtain Certificates of Reported Compliance from fleets prior to awarding public works contracts (CARB, 2023).

Because the project does not include any components that would result in a permanent increase in emissions, and the project will comply with applicable State and NSAQMD rules and regulations, the project would not result in a significant net increase in emissions from criteria pollutants, including PM_{2.5}, or GHGs. Therefore, the project would not conflict with the Portola SIP.

There are no unusual circumstances associated with air quality and GHG emissions that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Biological Resources:

Based on the information presented below, there are no unusual circumstances associated with biological resources that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Special-Status Species

The evaluation of potential impacts to special-status species and sensitive habitats was based on a records search and field observations.

Records reviewed for the evaluation consisted of California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) records for special-status plants, wildlife, and natural communities; California Native Plant Society (CNPS) records for special-status plants in the USGS Portola 7.5-minute quadrangle; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) records for federally listed, proposed, and candidate plant and wildlife species under jurisdiction of the USFWS; and USFWS records for Birds of Conservation Concern.

Field evaluations were completed by an ENPLAN biologist on November 19 and 20, 2023, August 6 and 7, 2024, and July 14, 2025. Some of the special-status wildlife species potentially occurring in the project area would not have been evident at the time the fieldwork was conducted; however, determination of their potential presence could readily be made based on observed habitat characteristics.

Special-Status Plants

Review of the USFWS species list did not identify any federally listed plant species as potentially occurring in the project area. The project area does not contain designated critical habitat for federally listed plant species (USFWS, 2025).

A review of CNDDDB records showed that three special-status plant species have been reported in or immediately adjacent to the study area: lens-pod milk-vetch (California Rare Plant Rank [CRPR] 1B.2), sticky pyrrocoma (CRPR 1B.2), and Plumas ivesia (CRPR 1B.2). Lens-pod milk-vetch has been observed near the corner of Rio Grande Street and Sixth Street in the City of Portola in 1962, 1985, and 1988; this area burned in a fire in 1988, and lens-pond milk-vetch has not been observed at this location since the fire. The occurrence of Plumas ivesia is broadly mapped throughout the City of Portola based on collections from 1912 and 1939; the exact location of the species is not known (California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW], 2025). Neither lens-pod milk-vetch nor Plumas ivesia were observed during the botanical surveys.

Sticky pyrrocoma was reported in 2002 southwest of the intersection of Lake Davis Road and Joy Way in Portola. Sticky pyrrocoma was observed during the August 2024 botanical survey ~50 feet from the study area; therefore, the species would not be impacted by project construction activities.

The following special-status plants have been reported within an approximate five-mile radius of the project site: Nevada daisy (CRPR 2B.3), Santa Lucia dwarf rush (CRPR 1B.2), Sheldon's sedge (CRPR 2B.2), and Sierra Valley ivesia (CRPR 1B.2). One non-status plant species, Mingan moonwort (CRPR 4.2), was reported within an approximate five-mile radius of the project area (CDFW, 2025).

CNPS records do not identify any additional special-status plants within the project area. CNPS records identified the following additional non-status plant species within the USGS Portola 7.5-minute quadrangle: Anderson's clover (CRPR 4.3), Bailey's woolly buckwheat (CRPR 4.3), Center Basin rush (CRPR 4.3), and Lemmon's clover (CRPR 4.2) (CNPS, 2025).

As documented in the Biological Study Report prepared for the project (ENPLAN, 2025), no special-status plant species were observed in the project footprint during the botanical field survey, nor are any expected to be present.

Special-Status Wildlife

Review of the USFWS species list for the project area identified the following federally listed animal species as potentially being present in the project area: California condor (Experimental Population, Non Essential [EPNE], State Endangered [SE], State Fully Protected [SFP]), California spotted owl (Federally Proposed Threatened [FPT], State Species of Special Concern [SSSC]), gray wolf (Federally Endangered [FE], SE), monarch butterfly (FPT), northwestern pond turtle (FPT, SSSC), Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (FE, State Threatened [ST]), and yellow-billed cuckoo (Federally Threatened [FT], SE). The project area does not contain designated critical habitat for federally listed wildlife species (USFWS, 2025).

A review of CNDDDB records showed two special-status wildlife species have been broadly mapped throughout the City of Portola: Sierra Nevada red fox – southern Cascades DPS (ST) and western bumble bee (State Candidate Endangered [SCE]). CNDDDB records indicate that the Sierra Nevada red fox, which was reported in 1953, is possibly extirpated from this location. The reported occurrence of western bumble bee was in 1954; the exact location is unknown (CDFW, 2025).

The following additional special-status wildlife species have been reported within an approximate five-mile radius of the project area: American badger (SSSC), American goshawk (SSSC), great gray owl (SE), greater sandhill crane (SFP, ST), Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (FE, ST), southern long-toed salamander (SSSC), and willow flycatcher (SE). The following non-status wildlife species also have been mapped within the search radius: long-legged myotis, North American porcupine, prairie falcon (State Watch List), silver-haired bat, western ridged mussel, and Yuma myotis (CDFW, 2025).

As documented in the Biological Study Report prepared for the project (ENPLAN, 2025a), no special-status wildlife species or suitable habitat for special-status wildlife species were observed during the field survey. Therefore, no special-status wildlife species would be affected by project implementation.

Natural Communities

CNDDDB records do not identify any sensitive natural communities in the project area (CDFW, 2025). Field review found that the principal natural communities in the study area are urban and Jeffrey pine forest. The onsite Jeffrey pine forest is highly fragmented due to urban development, limiting its value as wildlife habitat. However, less disturbed Jeffrey pine forest abuts the study area near the outskirts of Portola. Neither urban nor Jeffrey pine communities are considered sensitive by CDFW.

A number of constructed ditches are located in the study area within both the urban and Jeffrey pine forest areas. These ditches do not have a relatively permanent flow and lack a continuous surface connection with waters of the U.S. (i.e., Middle Fork of the Feather River); therefore, it is not anticipated that the ditches are subject to federal jurisdiction. However, the constructed ditches fall under State jurisdiction as Waters of the State. Based on current project plans, the project would temporarily impact ~0.1 acres of constructed ditches. Prior to trenching through the ditches, a waste discharge permit (or waiver) would need to be obtained from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) unless the RWQCB declines to exercise permit authority over the ditches. No permanent impacts to the ditches would occur, and impacts would be less than significant.

Nesting Birds

The USFWS identified the following Birds of Conservation Concern as potentially being present in the project area: American dipper, black-throated gray warbler, California gull, Calliope hummingbird, Cassin's finch, Clark's grebe, evening grosbeak, flammulated owl, hermit warbler, Lewis's woodpecker, long-eared owl, olive-sided flycatcher, and western grebe. The bald eagle and golden eagle are not listed as Birds of Conservation Concern, but the USFWS noted that they are birds that warrant attention because they are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (USFWS, 2025).

As documented in the Biological Study Report (ENPLAN, 2025a), several of these species could potentially nest in the vicinity of project improvements, as could individuals of other more common species.

Indirect effects such as nest abandonment by adults in response to loud noise levels are not expected given the urban character of the work area. Any birds that may nest adjacent to the work area would be accustomed to periodic loud noises and other human-induced disturbances. However, construction activities that involve the removal of trees and other vegetation have the potential to directly impact nesting birds, if present. The potential for adversely affecting nesting birds will be minimized by conducting construction activities between September 1 and January 31 when birds are not nesting, or conducting pre-construction nesting surveys in accordance with existing standard construction measures if work is conducted during the nesting season.

There are no unusual circumstances associated with special-status species, natural communities, nesting birds, or other biological resources that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Energy:

The proposed project does not include any components that would result in environmental impacts due to the wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources in the long-term. There are no unusual circumstances related to energy use during construction of the proposed project that would result in more significant impacts than other similar construction projects.

Geology and Soils:

According to the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone Map, the nearest Alquist-Priolo Special Study Zone to the project area is the Honey Lake Fault Zone; faults affiliated with this Zone are located over ~22 miles northeast of the project area (California Department of Conservation [DOC], n.d.a). The California Geological Survey (CGS) also identifies the potentially active Mohawk Valley Fault, a north-south trending fault, about six miles southwest of the project area (DOC, 2022). The project does not include any components that would increase the likelihood of a seismic event or increase the exposure of people or structures to risks associated with a seismic event. Improvement plans for the project would be prepared by a licensed engineer to ensure any necessary seismic design measures are implemented to reduce or eliminate potential impacts. According to the 2019 Portola Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, land subsidence, expansive soils, and landslides are not considered to be hazards in the City (City of Portola, 2019).

According to the CGS, generalized rock types in the project area date to the Pleistocene-Holocene and consist of marine and non-marine sedimentary rocks (DOC, 2010). Although there is a low potential for these deposits to contain paleontological resources, the majority of work would be conducted in previously disturbed areas, and there are no unique geologic features in the study area.

There are no unusual circumstances related to geology and soils that would result in more significant impacts than other similar construction projects in the area.

Hydrology and Water Quality:

Construction activities would result in the temporary disturbance of soil and would expose disturbed areas to potential storm events, which could generate accelerated runoff, localized erosion, and sedimentation. However, this is a temporary impact during construction, and no long-term impacts would occur. Best Management Practices (BMPs) for erosion/sediment control would be implemented in

accordance with standard construction practices, which would prevent damage to surface and groundwater quality.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Map (Panels 06063C1304E, 06063C1311E, 06063C1312E, and 06063C1325E effective March 2, 2005), the majority of the study area is not located within a designated flood hazard zone. Minimal portions of the sewer line improvements are located within the 100-year flood hazard zone of the Middle Fork of the Feather River (FEMA, n.d.); however, improvements in the floodplain would be subsurface, and no structures that could impede flood flows or otherwise adversely affect the natural value and functions of the floodplain are proposed. The project must comply with Section 17.47.050B (Provisions for Flood Hazard Reduction – Standards for Utilities), of the City of Portola Zoning Code, which requires that all new and replacement water supply and sanitary sewage systems must be designed to minimize infiltration of floodwaters into the systems and discharge from the systems into flood waters (City of Portola, 2007).

Land Use and Planning:

The project would not physically divide an established community or cause an environmental impact due to a conflict with a land use plan, policy, or regulation.

Mineral Resources:

The CGS does not identify any designated Mineral Resource Zones in the project area (DOC, n.d.b). Two active mines are identified near the project site: the P.T.L Trans. D.G. Pit is located north of State Route (SR) 70, ~0.6 miles east of the improvements on E. Magnolia Street; the Rocky Point Borrow Site is located south of SR 70, ~1.6 miles east of the study area (DOC, n.d.c). Due to the distance from the project site, the project would have no impact on existing mining operations. In addition, the project site is in an urbanized area that is not conducive to mining operations.

Noise:

Construction activities would generate noise and would temporarily increase noise levels in the area; however, this is a temporary impact that would cease at completion of the project. The project does not include any components that would result in a permanent increase in noise levels. There are no unusual circumstances associated with noise that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Population and Housing:

The purpose of the project is to replace aging infrastructure, reduce leaks, and provide improved fire flows for the water system, and replace aging sewer infrastructure to reduce I&I for the wastewater system. Although some of the distribution lines would be upsized for compliance with current State regulations for water and wastewater systems, this would not reflect an increase in capacity that could result in growth-inducing impacts. There are no unusual circumstances associated with population or housing that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Public Services/Recreation:

Because the project would not induce population growth, the project would not generate an increased demand for fire protection, police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, or other public services.

Transportation/Traffic:

Because the project would not induce population growth, the project would not directly or indirectly result in a permanent increase in traffic or vehicle miles traveled. There would be short-term increases in traffic in the area associated with construction workers and equipment; however, existing regulations require safety measures to be employed to safeguard travel by the general public during construction. Further, this is a temporary impact and would cease upon completion of the improvements. There are no unusual circumstances associated with transportation/traffic that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Utilities and Service Systems:

Because the project would not induce unplanned population growth in the area, the project would not generate unanticipated demand for power, natural gas, telecommunications facilities, stormwater drainage, wastewater treatment, or other utilities and services. There are no unusual circumstances associated with utilities or service systems that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Wildfire:

The proposed project does not include any development or improvements that would increase the long-term risk of wildland fires or expose people or structures to wildland fires. There are no unusual circumstances associated with wildfire hazards that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

4. 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.*

According to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways in the project area; therefore, there would be no impact (Caltrans, 2023).

5. Hazardous Waste Sites. *A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to §65962.5 of the Government Code.*

The following databases were reviewed to locate "Cortese List" sites.

- List of Hazardous Waste and Substances sites from the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) EnviroStor database.
- State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) GeoTracker Database.
- List of solid waste disposal sites identified by SWRCB with waste constituents above hazardous waste levels outside the waste management unit.

The records search identified one active clean-up site within the project area (CalEPA, 2025).

The Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) Portola Railyard (Case 2050367)

The UPRR Portola Railyard is located on privately owned property at the end of Western Pacific Way, generally west of Second Avenue and north of Ponderosa Circle (SWRCB, n.d.). The Railyard was constructed in 1906 and included several buildings and structures, four aboveground oil storage tanks, and five waste oil ponds. Locomotives were maintained and re-fueled at this site. In 1953, the Railyard replaced its oil-fueled locomotives with diesel-electric powered locomotives. In 1985, most of the former structures were removed from the property, and currently only switch track operations and staging uses remain. The Feather River Rail Society operates a museum on a portion of the property (Jacobs, 2025).

In 1988, the five waste oil ponds were excavated and replaced with clean fill. In 1994, a 350-gallon gasoline underground storage tank (UST) was removed, and in 1998, a 1,000-gallon diesel UST was removed. Two additional areas of contaminated soil were excavated in 2006 and 2007, followed by installation of a cutoff wall and groundwater extraction and treatment system (GETS) to remove subsurface petroleum. In 2011, the SWRCB approved adding light nonaqueous phase liquid (LNAPL) to the cutoff wall and groundwater monitoring as the final remedy. The SWRCB approved discontinuing operation of the GETS in 2017 following five years of semiannual monitoring (Jacobs, 2025).

Although a release of red-dyed diesel fuel was reported in the northern area of the Railyard property on January 2, 2016, spill response actions effectively remediated the fuel spill, and on October 28, 2016, the CVRWQCB concurred that no further action regarding the 2016 fuel release was required (CVRWQCB, 2016).

Groundwater monitoring has occurred routinely since 1995, and monitoring wells have been installed

throughout the Railyard property. According to the 2024 Annual Groundwater Monitoring Report for the Railyard site, there are no active monitoring wells in proximity to proposed improvements (Jacobs, 2024).

Groundwater monitoring results measured through May 2024 indicate that contaminant levels are stable or decreasing. In March 2025, the UPRR requested approval for a Low-Threat Closure (LTC) and no further action under Site Cleanup Program Case 2050367; approval of the LTC would trigger all groundwater monitoring wells to be abandoned in place (Jacobs, 2025).

Minimal work is proposed in the clean-up site area, and it is not expected that contamination from this clean-up site will be encountered during installation of the proposed improvements. In the event that contaminated soil or groundwater are encountered, the City would be responsible for the proper handling and disposal of the contaminated material in accordance with State and local requirements.

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

A Cultural Resources Inventory Report (CRI) was completed for the proposed project by ENPLAN in August 2025 (ENPLAN, 2025b). The study included a records search, Native American consultation, and field evaluation. The records search was conducted by the Northeast Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System (NEIC/CHRIS) on June 5, 2023, and covered a one-mile radius around the project's Area of Potential Effects (APE). The APE includes all areas in which improvements would occur, and areas for staging and temporary construction access, as well as sufficient area for construction.

The records search revealed that 46 archaeological surveys have been conducted within a one-mile radius of the APE, six of which encompass portions of the APE. The records search revealed that 86 archaeological sites have been recorded within a one-mile radius of the APE, none of which are located within the APE.

On June 26, 2023, the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) conducted a search of the Sacred Lands File; the search did not reveal any known Native American sacred sites or cultural resources in the project area. The NAHC also provided contact information for several Native American representatives and organizations, who were contacted on July 19, 2023, with a request to provide comments on the proposed project. No responses were received.

Archaeological fieldwork took place on June 27, 2023, and June 29, 2025, during which the APE was intensively surveyed to identify cultural resources that could be potentially affected by the proposed project. Three historical-era resources were recorded within the APE: the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) Portola Railyard, the City's water system, and City's wastewater system.

As documented in the CRI, the UPRR Portola Railyard is assumed to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR). However, all improvements within the Railyard would be subsurface, and the surface would be restored to pre-construction conditions following installation of the improvements; therefore, because no permanent impacts would occur, the project would not impact the integrity of the UPRR Portola Railyard or its eligibility for listing on either register.

Although the two City utility systems are historic, they are generic systems of a common similar type constructed by the millions throughout California and the U.S. They are not associated with any events or persons significant in local, regional, State, or U.S. history, nor are they unique or great examples of their kind, and they have not, nor are likely to yield information important in history or prehistory. Therefore, the City's water and wastewater systems do not meet the NRHP or CRHR criteria for listing.

The CRI concluded that the project would have no effect on historical or prehistoric cultural resources. However, because there is always some potential for previously unknown cultural resources to be encountered during excavation activities, the following standard construction measures would be included in construction contract documents for the project to address the inadvertent discovery of cultural resources and human remains:

1. In the event of any inadvertent discovery of cultural resources (i.e., burnt animal bone, midden soils, projectile points or other humanly modified lithics, historic artifacts, etc.), all work within 50 feet of the find shall be halted until a professional archaeologist can evaluate the significance of the find in accordance with Public Resources Code (PRC) §21083.2(g) and §21084.1, and CEQA Guidelines §15064.5(a). If any find is determined to be significant by the archaeologist, the City of Portola (City) shall meet with the archaeologist to determine the appropriate course of action. If necessary, a Treatment Plan prepared by an archaeologist outlining recovery of the resource, analysis, and reporting of the find shall be prepared. The Treatment Plan shall be reviewed and approved by the City prior to resuming construction.
2. In the event that human remains are encountered during construction activities, the City shall comply with §15064.5(e)(1) of the CEQA Guidelines and PRC §7050.5. All project-related ground disturbance within 50 feet of the find shall be halted until the County coroner has been notified. If the coroner determines that the remains are Native American, the coroner will notify the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) to identify the most likely descendants of the deceased Native Americans. Project-related ground disturbance in the vicinity of the find shall not resume until the process detailed in §15064.5 (e) has been completed.
3. In the event that project plans change to include areas not surveyed, additional archaeological reconnaissance may be required. If cultural resources are encountered, the archaeologist shall recommend/implement additional mitigation measures as necessary, which may include subsequent monitoring by an archaeologist or Native American representative.

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