SAN MATEO
RESOURCE
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT

PHONE: 650.712.7765

80 STONE PINE ROAD, SUITE 100
HALF MOON BAY, CA 94019

SANMATEORCD.ORG

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Filed to:	Office of Planning and Research P.O. Box 3044, Room 113 Sacramento, CA 95812-3044 County Clerk of: San Mateo
Project Title:	Vallemar Sewer and Water Relocation Project
Project Location:	Vallemar St, Moss Beach, CA 94038 Latitude: 37.531976, Longitude: -122.517490
City and County:	Moss Beach, San Mateo County

Description of Nature and Purpose of Project:

The Vallemar Sewer and Water Relocation Project will protect water quality in the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve while safeguarding essential utility services in the Montara and Moss Beach communities. The Project will relocate, replace, and upgrade critical sewer and water infrastructure, including 1) relocating sewer service from a rapidly eroding cliff above the ocean to Vallemar St above, 2) replacing the degraded sewer pipe above Dean Creek, 3) upgrading fragile and undersized water pipes to prevent chlorinated water from entering the ocean, and 4) relocating water pipes that are currently below sewer pipes, increasing the risk of contamination of drinking water. In addition to protecting water qualify by preventing a catastrophic sewer spill into the ocean or creek, these upgrades will improve community wildfire resilience by pressurizing the water system for better emergency response capacity. The total combined amount of sewer and water pipes that will be replaced, relocated, or installed is approximately 9,225 linear ft. The project size is less than three acres including all areas of disturbance and staging areas.

Name of Person, Board, Commission or Department Proposing to Carry Out Project:

San Mateo Resource Conservation District
80 Stone Pine Road, Suite 100
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

Lead Agency ☒
Responsible Agency ☐

Contact Person: Colleen McNally-Murphy

Telephone: 650-712-7765 ext. 131

EXEMPT STATUS:

Categorical Exemption Class 33, Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction

Remarks: See next page.

Date of Determination: May 1, 2026

I do hereby certify that the above determination has been made pursuant to State and Local requirements.

Colleen McNally-Murphy, Conservation Project Manager

REMARKS:

As described below, the Project meets the CEQA criteria for exemption from environmental review under Class 33, Section 15301 and 15302. These sections of the guidelines describe operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, licensing, or minor alteration of Existing Facilities (Section 15301) and the Replacement or Reconstruction of existing structures and facilities, specifically including utility systems (Section 15302).

The Vallemar Sewer and Water Relocation Project will protect water quality in the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve while safeguarding essential utility services in the Montara and Moss Beach communities by relocating, replacing, and upgrading critical sewer and water infrastructure.

Project Description

The Project will protect water quality in the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve while safeguarding essential utility services in the Montara and Moss Beach communities. The Project will relocate, replace, and upgrade critical sewer and water infrastructure, including 1) relocating sewer service from a rapidly eroding cliff above the ocean to Vallemar St above, 2) replacing the degraded sewer pipe above Dean Creek, 3) upgrading fragile and undersized water pipes to prevent chlorinated water from entering the ocean, and 4) relocating water pipes that are located below sewer pipes, increasing the risk of contamination of drinking water. In addition to protecting water qualify by preventing a catastrophic sewer spill into the ocean or creek, these upgrades will improve community resilience to wildfire by pressuring the water system for better emergency response capacity. The total combined amount of sewer and water pipes that will be replaced, relocated, or installed is approximately 9,225 linear ft. The project size is less than three acres including all areas of disturbance and staging areas.

The existing sewer line for the homes on Vallemar St is part of a gravity system that flows downhill towards a pipe set into the cliffside. Over time, the cliff has eroded exposing the sewer pipe; in some places the cliff edge is less than 3 ft from the pipe and in other places the pipe has already had to be repaired in multiple places. If the existing clay pipe is exposed, it would be vulnerable to breakage and would cause an uncontrolled sewer spill into the ocean. The pipe primarily serves 25 homes, but it is also the backup line for an additional 2,200 homes and is employed several times for that purpose; if the pipe were to break on one of the high-usage days it could result in a spill of more than 500,000 gallons per day of raw sewage. To prevent this, a new sewerline will be installed in Vallemar St above the homes. An individual sewer pump will be installed at each home to pump the water uphill into the new pipe. The existing sewer pipe will be abandoned in place by filling it with grout, which will help strengthen the cliff; no trenching or digging will be required to address the old pipe since it will not be removed. Homes on nearby Ellendale St also flow into a sewer pipe in the cliff along S. Laguna St. This pipe will also be abandoned, with new sewer pumps installed at these homes. The existing Niagara pump station for the current sewer line will be abandoned, with electronics and other equipment being removed.

In order to accommodate the new sewer line in Vallemar St, the outdated WW II-era water infrastructure will be upgraded with some drinking water pipes being relocated. The street currently has sewer and water pipes closer together than the modern standards of 10 ft separation; this poses a risk to drinking water in the event of a sewer pipe failure. The water pipes in Vallemar St will be relocated in the street to allow for safe installation of new sewer pipes necessary for abandonment of the existing pipe along the cliff and to meet modern standards that avoid potential drinking water contamination.

The water main pipe crossing Highway 1 between Carlos St and Niagara St will be relocated between Etheldore St and Vallemar St. The existing water main is not pressurized, putting the community at risk in the event of a fire where pressurized hydrants may be critical. Moving the water main to a new highway

crossing location will address the need for pressurization and is the most effective and cost-effective way to upgrade the water main and facilitate the sewer work in the crowded street subsurface. The water main improvements will also address a second water quality issue; the existing water pipe is very old and has broken several times over the years. This may cause up to 300,000 gallons of chlorinated water to flow straight downhill into the marine reserve, causing issues for marine animals. The new upgraded water main crossing will address this potential water quality issue and significantly reduce the possibility of another pipe failure in the future.

The project also includes replacing an exposed degraded sewer pipe that crosses Dean Creek approximately 500 ft upstream of the mouth of the creek into the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. The existing pipe is badly rusted in places and is at risk of breaking if a tree falls on it or if it degrades further. The exposed section of the pipe is approximately 14 ft long and spans creek; it has been lined to prevent breakage, which reduced its flow capacity. This sewer pipe will be replaced with a stronger and thicker pipe that restores the original capacity; the total length of pipe to be replaced is approximately 40 ft and including sections of pipe set into each creekbank. The new pipe will be installed with a steel I-beam set on top of it to prevent breakage in the event of a tree fall. Areas of the banks that are cleared of vegetation during construction will be revegetated with native plants.

Work will be done to replace and upgrade existing sewer and water pipes on the surrounding streets to repair leaks, improve water pressurization, and improve system connectivity.

Class 1 (CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15301) Existing Facilities

Class 1 consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The types of "existing facilities" itemized below are not intended to be all-inclusive of the types of projects which might fall within Class 1. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of use.

Examples include but are not limited to:

(b) Existing facilities of both investor and publicly-owned utilities used to provide electric power, natural gas, sewerage, or other public utility services;

The project involves routine repair, maintenance, and minor alteration of existing sewer and water utility facilities in coordination with the Montara Water and Sanitary District. These activities are necessary to maintain continued operation of existing infrastructure and do not result in an expansion of use or capacity. Any proposed pipe relocations would occur within areas with existing sewer and water infrastructure and would not extend service to new areas. The project therefore qualifies for a Class 1 categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301

Class 2 (CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15302) Replacement or Reconstruction

Class 2 consists of replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced, including but not limited to:

(c) Replacement or reconstruction of existing utility systems and/or facilities involving negligible or no expansion of capacity.

The proposed project involves the replacement of existing, degraded sewer and water pipes and outdated underground infrastructure with new, secure facilities designed to protect water quality and restore original flow capacity. The Dean Creek sewer line replacement and associated underground pipe upgrades would occur on the same alignment and site as the existing facilities being replaced and would serve the same purpose and capacity. The project does not involve an expansion of use or an increase in service capacity and therefore qualifies for a Class 2 categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15302.

The project would be exempt under the above-cited classifications as it involves protection of the marine ecosystem and the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. The goals of this project are to relocate, replace, or upgrade existing at-risk critical sewer and water infrastructure.

CEQA State Guidelines Section 15300.2 states that 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. As described above, there are no usual circumstances surrounding the proposed project that would suggest a reasonable possibility for a significant environmental effect.