

Notice of Exemption

To: ☒ Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, 1400 Tenth Street, Room 212
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: County of San Benito
2301 Technology Pkwy
Hollister, CA 95023

☒ County of San Benito Clerk-Recorder
1601 Lana Way
Hollister, CA 95023

Project Title: San Benito County Free Library Expansion

Project Applicant: County of San Benito

Project Location – Specific: 470 5th Street, Hollister, CA 95023

Project Location – City: Hollister

Project Location – County: San Benito

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of the Project:

The San Benito County Free Library Expansion Project is located at 470 5th Street in Hollister, California. The project includes renovation and modernization of the existing approximately 15,772-square-foot library building and construction of an approximately 1,622-square-foot addition, representing an approximately 10.3 percent increase in building area. Improvements include interior renovations, new and expanded library program areas, accessibility and building system upgrades, structural improvements, and associated site, civil, and utility improvements. The project also includes demolition of two small buildings located at the rear of 498 5th Street, as well as selective demolition to a portion of the existing library to accommodate the proposed improvements. The project would modernize and expand the County's primary library facility to improve public spaces, meeting areas, and community services.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: County of San Benito

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: County of San Benito

Exempt Status:

☒ Categorical Exemption. Existing Facilities: (California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15301)

Reasons why project is exempt:

See attachment: San Benito County Library Expansion Categorical Exemption Findings.

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Abraham Prado

Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (831) 902-2273

e-mail: aprado@sanbenitocountyca.gov

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signature: *m. a. p.*

Date: 9/24/2026

Title: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND BUILDING

☒ Signed by Lead Agency

Date received for filing at OPR: _____

☐ Signed by Applicant

SAN BENITO COUNTY CLERK - RECORDER
RECEIVED: 09/24/2026
REMOVE: 10/24/2026 SCAN: 9/24/26

Filed in San Benito County
FRANCISCO DIAZ: County Clerk

35-20260924-042

09/24/2026
Pages: 1
Fee: \$ 50.00

By *acarrillo*, Deputy



San Benito County Free Library Expansion NOE Attachment

Findings and Evidence

The proposed project qualifies for the CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Class 1, Existing Facilities, exemption because it consists of the renovation and modernization of the existing San Benito County Free Library and would involve negligible expansion of the existing use.

The project includes interior and exterior alterations to the existing library, including reconfiguration of interior spaces; removal and replacement of partitions, casework, ceilings, finishes, plumbing fixtures, storefront systems, doors, ramps, stairs, railings, and portions of paving; and upgrades to mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire sprinkler, alarm, accessibility, structural, and other building systems. The project also includes selective demolition necessary to accommodate the proposed renovation, expansion, and site improvements. These improvements are consistent with the types of minor alterations listed under CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301(a).

The project also includes an approximately 1,622 square-foot addition to the existing approximately 15,772 square-foot library building, representing an approximately 10.3 percent increase in floor area. CEQA Guidelines Section 15301(e)(1) applies to additions to existing structures that do not exceed 50 percent of the existing floor area or 2,500 square feet, whichever is less. Fifty percent of the existing library floor area is approximately 7,886 square feet; therefore, the applicable limitation is 2,500 square feet. The proposed 1,622 square-foot addition is below this threshold.

Further, the project involves demolition of two ancillary structures located at the rear of 498 5th Street. These structures consist of a small storage shed and a longer building with a garage; both of which are currently used for library storage. Accordingly, demolition of these accessory structures is consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301(l)(4), which includes demolition and removal of accessory (appurtenant) structures.

Overall, the project would renovate and modestly expand an existing public library facility while maintaining the same land use and function. The proposed alterations, rehabilitation, building addition, demolition, and associated site improvements are, therefore, consistent with the types of activities contemplated by CEQA Guidelines Section 15301.



Exceptions to Categorical Exemptions

Section 15300.2 of the CEQA Guidelines lists exceptions that would prohibit a project from qualifying for a Categorical Exemption, even if the project satisfies the requirements for one or more of the exemption classes. EMC Planning Group conducted a review and evaluation of the proposed project and concluded that none of the exceptions listed in CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2 (a-f) apply to the proposed project (discussed below). Therefore, the categorical exemption is appropriate pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301.

- a) 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 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.

Evidence. The location exception identified in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(a) applies only to projects relying on categorical exemptions under Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11. The proposed project is being evaluated under the Class 1 categorical exemption. Accordingly, this exception does not apply.

- b) 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.

Evidence. The project is not identified as part of a series of successive projects of the same type at the same location. Therefore, there is no cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place and this exception does not apply.

- c) 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.

Evidence. Case law makes clear that application of this exception must proceed in two steps. The first is to determine whether a proposed project involves “unusual circumstances.” If the answer to that question is in the affirmative, the second step is to consider whether those unusual circumstances will give rise to potentially significant environmental effects. (*Berkeley Hillside Preservation v. City of Berkeley* (2015) 60 Cal.4th 1086, 1097-1105 (*Berkeley Hillside*.) As explained previously and below, the proposed project does not involve any unusual circumstances with respect to its location, size, environmental setting, physical attributes, surrounding land uses, or planning context – factors considered relevant under case law. (See *Berkeley Hillside*, *supra*, 60 Cal.4th at pp. 1118–1119; *San Lorenzo Valley Community Advocates for Responsible Education v. San Lorenzo Valley Unified School Dist.* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 1356, 1381; *McQueen v. Bd. of Directors* (1988) 202 Cal.App.3d 1136, 1149; *Lewis v. Seventeenth Dist. Agricultural Assn.* (1985) 165 Cal.App.3d 823, 828–829; *City of Pasadena v. State of California* (1993) 14 Cal.App.4th 810, 826–827; *Bloom v. McGurk* (1994)

26 Cal.App.4th 1307, 1315–1316; and *Voices for Rural Living v. El Dorado Irrigation Dist.* (2012) 209 Cal.App.4th 1096, 1109.)

The project site is located within the developed urban core of the City of Hollister and is surrounded by established public, institutional, residential, and commercial uses and existing urban infrastructure. The project site is already developed with the existing library and associated paved and landscaped areas. Therefore, the proposed improvements would occur within the context of an existing developed public facility and would not extend development into a substantially undeveloped or natural area.

There is nothing unusual about the project site as a typical infill parcel and nothing unusual about the proposed project as a typical infill project. The project features (interior improvements, accessibility upgrades, building system improvements, etc.) are typical project features that do not differ from other projects qualifying for the Class 1 categorical exemption. The residential uses to the south and west of the project site would not suffer significant noise impacts due to the proposed project. Further, as concluded by the historic evaluation prepared for the project in September 2026, implementation of the proposed project would not impact the historic integrity of the San Benito County Historical Society building that borders the site to the southwest and is listed on the California Register of Historical Resources and has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

There are no unusual circumstances regarding conditions of the project site or in the immediate vicinity and, therefore, this exception does not apply.

- d) 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. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.

Evidence. The project site is not located within or adjacent to an officially designated state scenic highway (California Department of Transportation 2026). Accordingly, the project would not result in damage to scenic resources, including trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a designated State Scenic Highway corridor. Therefore, this exception does not apply.

- e) 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 Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.

Evidence. The project site is not located on the California Environmental Protection Agency's Cortese List (Health and Safety Code Section 25187.5). The State Water Resources Control Board's GeoTracker (Health and Safety Code Section 25295 and Water Code Sections 13273 and 13301) does not indicate any active hazardous sites at the project site. The project site is not listed on the California Environmental Protection Agency's list of solid waste sites identified by the Water Board with waste constituents above hazardous waste levels outside the waste management unit (Health and Safety Code Section 116395).

Therefore, the project is not located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code; this exception does not apply.

- f) 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.

Evidence. A historic evaluation was prepared for the proposed project in September 2026. The evaluation determined that the existing library building is not listed on, and does not appear eligible for listing on, the California Register of Historical Resources or National Register of Historic Places.

The property bordering the site to the southwest at 498 5th Street, identified as the San Benito County Historical Society building/Wapple House Museum, is listed on the California Register of Historical Resources and has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. However, the two ancillary structures proposed for demolition just north of the San Benito County Historical Society building do not significantly contribute to the historical integrity of the property and have been heavily altered, if not entirely replaced. The historic evaluation concludes that their demolition would not significantly affect the historic integrity of the property nor the historic integrity of the San Benito County Historical Society building and its California Register of Historical Resources or National Register of Historic Places eligibility.

Accordingly, the historic evaluation concludes that the project would not have a significant impact on historic resources and this exception does not apply.

Sources

Anderson Brule Architects, Inc. November 2024. *San Benito County Free Library Renovation 50% Design Development*. PDF. San Jose, CA.

———. November 2024. *San Benito County Free Library Renovation Design Development Narrative*. PDF. San Jose, CA.

Archaeological Resource Management. September 2026. *Historic Evaluation of the San Benito County Library Expansion Project in Hollister*. PDF. San Jose, CA.

California Department of Transportation. “California State Scenic Highway System Map.” Accessed August 25, 2026.

https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/47e2009986264718a5a13a2c81382774#data_source=Id%3AdataSource_2-199bb53805c-layer-71%3A23

California Environmental Protection Agency. “Cortese List Data Resources.”

Accessed August 25, 2026. <https://calepa.ca.gov/sitecleanup/corteselist/>

**2026 ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FILING FEE CASH RECEIPT**

DFW 753.5a (REV. 01/01/26) Previously DFG 753.5a

RECEIPT NUMBER:

35-20260924-042

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE NUMBER (If applicable)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON REVERSE. TYPE OR PRINT CLEARLY.

LEAD AGENCY

COUNTY OF SAN BENITO

LEAD AGENCY EMAIL

aprado@sanbenitocountyca.gov

DATE

09/24/2026

COUNTY/STATE AGENCY OF FILING

SAN BENITO COUNTY

DOCUMENT NUMBER

PROJECT TITLE

SAN BENITO COUNTY FREE LIBRARY EXPANSION

PROJECT APPLICANT NAME

ABRAHAM PRADO

PROJECT APPLICANT EMAIL

aprado@sanbenitocountyca.gov

PHONE NUMBER

(831) 902-2273

PROJECT APPLICANT ADDRESS

2301 TECHNOLOGY PKWY

CITY

HOLLISTER

STATE

CA

ZIP CODE

95023

PROJECT APPLICANT (Check appropriate box)☒ Local Public Agency☐ School District☐ Other Special District☐ State Agency☐ Private Entity**CHECK APPLICABLE FEES:**☐ Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

\$4,227.50

\$

☐ Mitigated/Negative Declaration (MND)(ND)

\$3,043.75

\$

☐ Certified Regulatory Program (CRP) document - payment due directly to CDFW

\$1,437.25

\$

☒ Exempt from fee☒ Notice of Exemption (attach)☐ CDFW No Effect Determination (attach)☐ Fee previously paid (attach previously issued cash receipt copy)☐ Water Right Application or Petition Fee (State Water Resources Control Board only)

\$850.00

\$

☒ County documentary handling fee

\$50.00

\$

\$50.00

☐ Other

\$

PAYMENT METHOD:☐ Cash☒ Credit☐ Check☐ Other

TOTAL RECEIVED

\$

\$50.00

SIGNATURE

X

AGENCY OF FILING PRINTED NAME AND TITLE

Anna Carrillo, Deputy County Clerk-Recorder