



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF WATER

Categorical Exclusion

**For the City of Tacoma Central Treatment Plant Electrical Distribution System
Replacement Project**

Pursuant to 40 CFR § 6.204

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is planning to award a loan under the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) to the City of Tacoma, Washington. The EPA intends for this loan to fund the Central Treatment Plant Electrical Distribution System Replacement Project.

The EPA's authorization of funding for the proposed project is a federal action requiring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 USC §§ 4321-4370(f). According to the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations, 40 CFR § 1508.4, a federal agency may categorically exclude an action from detailed environmental review as long as the action does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. An action undertaken by the EPA can qualify as a categorical exclusion if it falls under any category within 40 CFR § 6.204(a) and does not exhibit any of the extraordinary circumstances listed in § 6.204(b).

Project Description

The project will repair, replace, and rehabilitate the entire 15 kilovolt (kV) Medium Voltage (MV) electrical distribution system at the Central Treatment Plant in the City of Tacoma, Washington. It will build over 3,000 lineal feet of concrete encased reinforced duct bank, install over 20 miles of electrical cables, construct a 3,400 square foot building for protecting and operating the new electrical equipment, and install a new 15-kV switchgear comprised of 41 circuit breakers. Some of the existing reinforced concrete duct banks will be reused, but all the MV feeder cables will be replaced. This project will also modify the local electric utility's transmission overhead lines and support poles.

Eligibility for Categorical Exclusion

This project is eligible for a categorical exclusion under 40 CFR § 6.204(a)(1)(ii), which requires that projects be:

“Actions relating to existing infrastructure systems (such as sewer systems; drinking water supply systems; and stormwater systems, including combined sewer overflow

systems) that involve minor upgrading, or minor expansion of system capacity or rehabilitation (including functional replacement) of the existing system and system components (such as the sewer collection network and treatment system; the system to collect, treat, store and distribute drinking water; and stormwater systems, including combined sewer overflow systems) or construction of new minor ancillary facilities adjacent to or on the same property as existing facilities.”

The proposed project affects an existing system, and it constitutes a minor upgrade to the existing system. This minor rehabilitation of an existing system is expressly listed as a permissible categorical exclusion under 40 CFR § 6.204(a)(1)(ii).

Additionally, in order to qualify as a categorical exclusion, a project cannot fall within any of the exceptions listed under 40 CFR § 6.204(a)(1)(ii). Accordingly, projects cannot be designated categorical exclusions if they:

“involve new or relocated discharges to surface or ground water; will likely result in the substantial increase in the volume or the loading of pollutant to the receiving water; will provide capacity to serve a population 30% greater than the existing population; are not supported by the state, or other regional growth plan or strategy; or directly or indirectly involve or relate to upgrading or extending infrastructure systems primarily for the purposes of future development.”

The EPA has determined that these factors do not apply for this project. This project does not involve new or relocated discharge to surface or groundwater and will not result in the substantial increase in volume or loading of pollutant to the receiving water. This project will not be providing capacity to serve a population 30 percent greater than the existing population. The project’s purpose is not to upgrade infrastructure for future development; instead, its “primary objective” is to replace portions of the existing infrastructure to improve reliability and redundancy in the system in the event of a power outage.¹

Extraordinary Circumstances

The EPA has determined that none of the following extraordinary circumstances outlined in 40 CFR § 6.204(b) applies to the proposed project:

1. *The proposed action is not known or expected to have potentially significant environmental impacts on the quality of the human environment either individually or cumulatively over time.*

This project is being developed to replace aging infrastructure that has exceeded its useful life.

2. *The proposed action is not known or expected to have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on any community, including minority communities, low-income communities, or federally-recognized Indian tribal communities.*

¹ City of Tacoma Application, Section D, #1.

The low-income and minority populations for the project area falls under Census blockgroup 530530602001, with an approximate population of 1,944. The low-income and minority populations comprise 51% and 60% of the total population for the blockgroup compared to the State averages of 28% and 30% and County averages of 28% and 32%, respectively. The minority population is greater than 50%; therefore, environmental justice communities are present. The project is also located within a tribal area; therefore, tribal communities are present.

Public meetings have taken place during the state environmental review process to notify and solicit comments about project implementation and the City plans to continue reporting construction progress during City Council meetings, which are open to the public.

The study area is located in an industrial area in the City of Tacoma, with very few nearby residences; three people are reported to live within a 0.5-mile radius of the project site. Work on the project site is in an area zoned for heavy industrial activities with large trucks and noise-generating activities routinely occurring. The construction-related impacts outside of the project site are anticipated to be negligible; therefore, implementation of the project is not anticipated to have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority, low-income, or federally recognized Indian tribal communities.^{2,3}

3. *The proposed action is not known or expected to significantly affect federally listed threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat.*

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) led the review under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. The EPA is adopting the USACE determination of no effect on the identified species. There are no terrestrial-listed species in the vicinity and the proposed project will not affect the aquatic environment.⁴

4. *The proposed action is not known or expected to significantly affect national landmarks or any property with nationally significant historic, architectural, prehistoric, archaeological, or cultural value, including but not limited to, property listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.*

The USACE led the review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and received concurrence by the State Historic Preservation Office. The EPA is adopting the USACE determination of no historic properties affected by this project.

The project is located near Indian lands. Under the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the USACE notified the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, the Nisqually Tribe, the Squaxin Island Tribe, and the

² EPA EJScreen data and report (February 2020).

³ Tacoma State Environmental Review Documentation (December 2019).

⁴ USACE Categorical Exclusion Determination (February 2020).

Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation regarding the project. The Squaxin Island tribe deferred to the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. No additional comments were received within the 30-day comment period.⁵

5. *The proposed action is not known or expected to significantly affect environmentally important natural resource areas such as wetlands, floodplains, significant agricultural lands, aquifer recharge zones, coastal zones, barrier islands, wild and scenic rivers, and significant fish or wildlife habitat.*

The project area does not contain any wetlands, agricultural lands, barrier islands, or federally recognized wild and scenic rivers.⁶ The project is located near the Puyallup river which includes essential fish habitat; however, this project area is inside a levee which will eliminate the potential for physical, chemical, and biological effects to the river during construction activities.⁷

The USACE owns and operates a levee adjacent to the river and the Central Treatment Plant which provides protection from flood events. The top of the floodwall is 1 foot above the 500-foot floodplain elevation. If triggered, automated floodgates will close entrance/exit locations to the treatment plant, providing a continuous barrier against flooding. The project site is not considered to be within the 100-year floodplain adjacent to the Puyallup River because of the floodwall protection. The project is occurring within currently developed portions of the treatment plant site and will not result in additional development within the floodplain.^{6, 7}

6. *The proposed action is not known or expected to cause significant adverse air quality effects.*

The project site is in an area of maintenance for particulate matter. The county received approval for their 10-year maintenance plan for particulate matter (PM2.5) through 2025. Air quality would meet the standards as set forth by the Washington Department of Ecology and the EPA. Construction of the project would not permanently affect regional air quality. During construction, reduction in air quality may occur due to exhaust emissions from the internal combustion engines of the construction equipment. This would occur periodically for an approximate 24-month construction duration at the project site and managed through best management practices outlined in the construction contracts. Operation of the electrical system upgrades are not expected to exceed the de minimis levels defined in the Clean Air Act General Conformity Rule or result in any changes to air quality.^{6,7}

7. *The proposed action is not known or expected to have a significant effect on the pattern and type of land use (industrial, commercial, agricultural, recreational, residential) or growth and distribution of population including altering the character of existing*

⁵ USACE Categorical Exclusion Determination (February 2020).

⁶ NEPAassist (February 2020).

⁷ Tacoma State Environmental Review Documentation (December 2019).

residential areas and is not expected to be inconsistent with state or local government, or federally-recognized Indian tribe approved land use plans or federal land management plans.

The proposed project is within the existing footprint for the Central Treatment Plant, and no change in land use is expected as a result of this project. No change in growth or distribution of population is expected.⁸

8. *The proposed action is not known or expected to cause significant public controversy about a potential environmental impact of the proposed action.*

The project would result in beneficial outcomes and is not expected to cause significant public controversy.

9. *The proposed action is not known or expected to be associated with providing financial assistance to a federal agency through an interagency agreement for a project that is known or expected to have potentially significant environmental impacts.*

The proposed action is to provide financial assistance to a municipal entity to upgrade existing infrastructure.

10. *The proposed action is not known or expected to conflict with federal, state, local government, or federally-recognized Indian tribe environmental, resource-protection, or land-use laws or regulations.*

The project will comply with all applicable federal, state and local regulations.

Finding

The EPA finds that the proposed action is eligible for exclusion from detailed environmental review under 40 CFR § 6.204(a)(1)(ii) and will not involve any of the extraordinary circumstances delineated under 40 CFR § 6.204(b). Consequently, the EPA will not prepare an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment for the proposed project. The EPA may revoke this categorical exclusion if changes in the proposed action render it ineligible for exclusion or if new evidence emerges which indicates that serious local or environmental issues exist or federal, state, or local laws would be violated.

Andrew Sawyers
Director, Office of Wastewater Management

Date

⁸ City of Tacoma Application, Section D, #1.