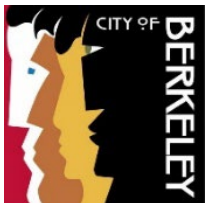


Electric Transformer Placement

Amendment to BMC 23.304.100 (Site Features)



Branka Tatarevic, Associate Planner

Transformer siting currently lacks a zoning rule

Current process

- No zoning standard
- Siting is negotiated project by project
- The final location often arrives after site and frontage design
- PG&E favors pad-mounted equipment absent a local requirement

Result

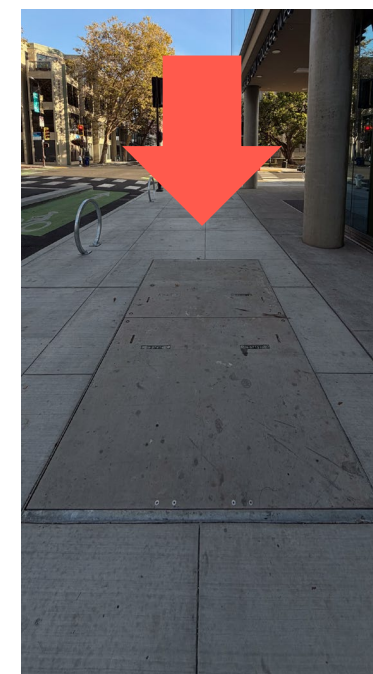
- Above-ground equipment can consume frontage and developable space
- Clearance requirements strain infill sites and sidewalks
- Applicants lack a predictable early design standard

Transformer affects more than its cabinet footprint

Clearances, equipment access, and trench routes require more space to constrained infill sites.



Berkeley examples



The ordinance fits within, not over, the existing decision structure

Step	Decision	Authority	Effect of ordinance
1	Need + service design	PG&E	Need, capacity, configuration, and technical requirements remain with PG&E
2	Project design	Applicant	Coordinates early and develops a compliant siting approach
3	Private property siting	Zoning / Land Use	New rule prohibits above-grade equipment on private parcels for residential, commercial and mixed-use projects
4	Right-of-way request	City Engineer / Public Works	Sole discretion; reviewed through the Engineering Permit
5	If a ROW site is not possible	City Engineer	Ordinance exception allows above-grade placement on private property
6	Installation + lifecycle	Applicant / owner	Pays for design, permits, installation, maintenance, relocation, and removal
7	Final approvals	PG&E + City	Utility approval and all applicable City permits are still required

Zoning rule change - not decision authority

What changes

- Defines applicable equipment
- Above-grade equipment on private parcels is prohibited for specified project categories

What does not change

- PG&E decides need and technical design
- The City Engineer retains sole right-of-way discretion
- Public Works need not find or accommodate a location
- The applicant bears costs and permits

ROW authority remains with the City Engineer

The ordinance creates no entitlement to use the public right of way

- Encroachments remain subject to an Engineering Permit and may be denied
- Review protects safety, ADA access, walking and biking, emergency response, and existing and future infrastructure
- The City Engineer also considers streetscape impacts, utility conflicts, operations, and maintenance
- Public Works is not required to identify, design, justify, or approve a location

The proposal reflects coordinated review

Input incorporated from:

- PG&E on service and equipment policies
- Public Works and Building & Safety on siting and right-of-way impacts
- Energy and Sustainable Development and Toxics Management on electrification, resilience, and water intrusion
- Local developers on feasibility and constrained infill sites
- June 4, 2025: Planning Commission unanimously recommended adoption (8–0)

Land-use benefits and utility tradeoffs

Land use benefits

- Protects active frontages and pedestrian circulation
- Preserves limited infill land for housing, retail, and common space
- Reduces above-ground visual impacts
- Gives applicants a predictable standard for early coordination

Operational tradeoffs

- Higher cost and constrained equipment supply
- More complex maintenance and confined-space work
- Water intrusion and flood-risk considerations
- Potential constraints on future capacity upgrades and outage recovery

Staff recommends adopting the ordinance

- **Conduct a public hearing and upon conclusion adopt the first reading of an ordinance amending Berkeley Municipal Code Section 23.304.100 (Site Features in Residential Districts) to prohibit the above-ground installation of electrical transformers serving new residential, commercial, and mixed-use projects on private property.**

Thank you!

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