





MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

THROUGH: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager

FROM: Bob Kahn, General Manager, Austin Energy 
James Snow, Director, Capital Delivery Services 

DATE: October 25, 2023

SUBJECT: **Resolution 20230323-058** – Utility and CIP Coordination in the Right-of-Way (ROW) and Review of Placing Power Lines Underground

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on the City of Austin’s progress regarding [Resolution No. 20230323-058](#), which sought a review of current practices for City department coordination related to the placement of underground electric distribution lines in the development of capital projects as well as the identification of improvement opportunities.

Below are the areas under review and our progress to-date:

- **Review the City’s current practice regarding coordination between City departments regarding the placement of electric distribution lines underground in the development of capital projects and identify opportunities for improvement to ensure that the potential for underground placement is thoroughly considered.**
 - The Capital Delivery Services (CDS) department recently completed a review of the current practice of coordination between City departments in the development of capital projects. Although there is an existing coordination process to support the City’s “dig-once” concept, one improvement opportunity is an additional review during the project development phase, with an explicit call for inputs from all City departments. The additional call is to confirm that the City has identified all potential utility or infrastructure improvements to be considered within the project scope before a project baseline is finalized. There will be no negative impacts to schedules with this additional step.
- **Coordinate planning across departments and pursue, where feasible, the transition of overhead electric distribution lines to underground facilities for all future publicly funded capital projects in or along the public right-of-way (ROW) including, but not limited to the Corridor Mobility Project, Project Connect lines, and other similar Transportation and Public Works projects that are in the early stages of project design.**
 - CDS has launched a Capital Projects Development process improvement initiative to ensure a clearly defined scope, schedule and budget baseline are developed for all capital

improvement projects prior to approval for design and construction. Through this new initiative, as described above, each capital project must be reviewed with all City departments for “dig-once” opportunities. As part of the review and in coordination with Austin Energy, Capital Delivery Services will include explicit language to consider opportunities for undergrounding overhead electric distribution lines as part of the scope for every new capital improvement project. However, current capital improvement projects in the later stages of design may not offer opportunities for undergrounding without extensive delays and unplanned additional costs affecting project delivery.

- The Project Connect Office (as part of CDS) will work with Austin Transit Partnership and Austin Energy to identify potential opportunities with the Project Connect Light Rail project to underground overhead electric distribution based on criteria determined by Austin Energy. Potential opportunities, if any, will be identified by Austin Energy during the project development phase. A scope, cost estimate and schedule will be approved before integrating undergrounding opportunities into the project. While these opportunities should be considered, Project Connect Light Rail is not seen as an ideal candidate for a pilot project due to the added complexity of the addition of light rail to the existing ROW space. That is, the “utility free” areas needed to accommodate the light rail infrastructure result in a net loss of ROW space available for underground utilities.
- **Identify, as a pilot, areas and priority locations where capital projects have already been identified to focus on as an initial phase of implementation of this resolution.**
 - CDS, in coordination with other applicable departments, will review existing CIP projects and identify potential opportunities for undergrounding overhead electric distribution lines by the end of 2023. CDS will then send identified projects to Austin Energy to determine if there are opportunities to leverage projects as a pilot for undergrounding distribution utilities, considering criteria outlined in the Resolution. To be candidates for a pilot, projects for consideration would need to be in the early stages before scope or design have been finalized.
- **Coordinate efforts with private utilities that co-locate overhead services lines on City-owned utility poles and non-City-owned telecommunications or utility poles within the same right-of-way as prescribed in the Utilities Criteria Manual.**
 - Austin Energy has coordinated and will continue to coordinate efforts with private utilities through industry meetings to provide updates on the City’s approach to considering the placement of electric distribution lines.
 - Austin Energy will work with the Transportation and Public Works department to identify opportunities to leverage the existing Austin Utility Location Coordination Committee (AULCC) process for coordination with private utilities and telecommunication companies.
 - Austin Energy will benchmark with other utilities who have transitioned to prioritizing the placement of electric distribution lines underground to identify the impact this process has on private utilities that co-locate overhead services on City-owned utility poles.

CDS and Austin Energy continue to coordinate efforts across City departments that relate to potential opportunities to redesign and relocate electric distribution lines underground in conjunction with capital projects in the public rights-of-way.

Please contact Elaine Veselka, Austin Energy's Interim Vice President, Electric System Engineering and Technical Services, at (512) 322-6667 or elaine.veselka@austinenergy.com if you have any questions.

cc: Electric Utility Commission