

TO: SAN FRANCISCO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS – GOVERNMENT AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

RE: HEARING OF JANUARY 14, 2016
ITEM 4: Gas Line Ruptures and Sinkholes Related to City Work in the Haight Ashbury
Neighborhood

STATEMENT OF SYNERGY PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Synergy Project Management provides this statement to the Committee as a presentation of its opinions as to the general issues and background relating to the matters being examined by the Committee. As certain parties may seek to litigate the issues related to this Project, Synergy can only provide general information to avoid its statements from being used against it.

SUMMARY:

- The issues with this project were site specific.
 - The original design for the water lines was not constructible.
 - The site presented problems with an old railroad yoke obstruction and PG&E's utilities placed in unpredictable locations.
- Synergy has worked safely on hundreds of blocks in the City doing this sort of work, and these problems arose on one block.
- The City did not attempt to solve these problems through the use of the contractually-required partnering and escalation ladder, but instead resorted to an inappropriate hearing process.
- City and residents are not served by scapegoating Synergy, instead of rationally addressing the dangers presented by Haight Street's decaying infrastructure and contorted gas lines with a comprehensive and engineered approach.

1. The Original Design for Placement of Water Lines Was Not Feasible:

The original DPW-designed route for the two water lines to be installed on this project was along the sides of the street, near the curb. Post-award investigation by the contractors, however, disclosed that this route was not feasible due to a large amount of obstructions in this path. A greater level of pre-award investigation and analysis by DPW could have avoided this mid-project change in the design for the route of the water lines.

2. Relocation of Water Lines to Alignment in Center of Haight Street – Old Railway Yoke.

With the as-bid design determined to be not feasible, DPW directed the contractors to change the route for the water lines. The two water lines were to be routed together in a trench that was to run down the center of the street, instead of along the sides.

Haight Street used to have a cable-car style trolley running down its center. Although the trolley service was discontinued many decades ago, the underground structures that supported the tracks and the cable remained buried in place, under the asphalt roadway topping. Two old concrete structures, each referred to as a "yoke," run side-by-side down the center of Haight Street.

In order to place the water lines down the center of the street, the yoke structures had to be at least partially demolished and removed. The old and partially decayed yoke structure was in places still solid and at other places fractured and disintegrated.

3. PG&E Gas Lines Placed Unpredictably Over and Through the Yoke Structure.

The existence of the yoke structure in the middle of Haight Street for more than a century had resulted in PG&E's gas lines, over the years, being placed in varying and unpredictable ways to run gas lines from the main gas pipe and across the street to individual customers. Sometimes the gas lines would be run over the top of the yoke structure, possibly they could be run underneath the yoke structure, and sometimes the gas lines would be routed through a hole bored through the yoke structure.

4. Limited or Inaccurate Information as to Placement of Gas Lines.

When the utilities are contacted to locate their facilities before excavation, the information provided is limited. The utility paints a line on the pavement with a very brief indication of what type of facility is there. For example, no information as to the depth of the utility is provided, or whether the utility is within a concrete structure, such as the yoke.

Additionally, there is no information given about the potential existence of other facilities underground, such as abandoned, or unused but not abandoned facilities, creating confusion and uncertainty, where there should be none.

In the contracting community, the problem of potentially inaccurate and incomplete information as to underground utility facilities is widely recognized, and requires a statewide solution.

5. Results-Oriented Investigations.

After an incident, investigations are performed by the utilities and public entities, all with interests to protect and the desire to avoid liability or criticism. There is no neutral, uninterested entity that performs an investigation or provides an unbiased point of view. For example, the CPUC issued an investigation report relating to one of the incidents, without contacting Synergy, and to Synergy's knowledge, without contacting Ghillotti Brothers, or examining the site.

Synergy has been unfairly blamed for all of the problems arising on this difficult project and exploited as a political and public scapegoat.