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J. Ben Lomond

Traffic light slated for Ben Lomond

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BEN LOMOND — Highway 9 through Santa Cruz County will get its third traffic light next spring as part of a long-awaited town beautification and safety project.

The traffic light will be installed at the Mill Street-Glen Arbor Road intersection on Highway 9 in downtown Ben Lomond. The project also calls for sidewalks, a flashing beacon, curbs, gutters and improved drainage in the area.

"We had hoped that it could be done sooner," said Murray Fontes, the county's civil engineer on the project. "I know the residents have been waiting a long time for this, so I'm sure they're sorry to hear about the delay."

The delay stems from the fact that the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. has decided to break off its work burying utility wires around downtown Ben Lomond and resume after the rainy winter months.

Fontes said the utility-line project must be completed before the county can begin its work.

"It's really not a surprise," said Fontes. "It's difficult to do this kind of work in the winter months."

The signal-light project will cost \$318,000, and the bill will be split among county, Caltrans and federal grant funds.

PG&E's undergrounding of the utilities is expected to cost between \$1.5 million and \$1.75 million. Utility lines on Highway 9 from the bridge on the south end of Ben Lomond through downtown to Fillmore Avenue will be buried. In ad-

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dition, utility lines on Main and Mill streets will be re-installed underground.

That's a more extensive project than was proposed by PG&E in July at a town meeting, but a petition from residents was successful in getting the company to extend the undergrounding project past Mill Street Park.

"We put a lot of work into getting those boundaries so the wires and poles would be removed and provide a more aesthetic look," said Main Street's Program Director Judy Stoddard, a resident of Ben Lomond.

Dan Edwards, service planning supervisor for PG&E in Santa Cruz County, said the petition played a part in the decision, but a more important reason was the ability of county parks officials to get funding for the promenade project in front of Mill Street Park.

Edwards said PG&E didn't want to put the utility wires underground in front of the park, only to have them dug up in the next five years when the promenade was ready to be built.