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Ben Lomond traffic light delayed for aesthetic reasons

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Ben Lomond

Installation of Ben Lomond's first traffic light has been put on hold until next summer.

Originally set to be erected on Highway 9 at the treacherous Mill Street-Glen Arbor Road intersection this summer, placement of the traffic signal was moved back to allow PG&E to honor merchants' requests to combine two projects to bury utility wires in downtown Ben Lomond.

The decision was made after crews had begun digging a trench on the corner of Highway 9 and Mill Street in Ben Lomond last month for the first of two projects to bury power, phone and cable TV lines in the town's core.

Too many poles

Realizing the work would place several

new power poles in front of the recently renovated River Street Park on Mill Street, members of the business community asked that plans be changed. The request was spearheaded by Judy Stoddard, executive director of the San Lorenzo Valley Main Street Program, a non-profit civic group that works to enhance the region's historic districts.

"Our whole concern is aesthetics," Stoddard said.

Noting a second project to bury utility wires in front of River Park was slated for the following spring, Stoddard suggested the jobs be combined to minimize disruption to the community, and expanded to eliminate the extra poles.

After meeting with county officials, Ben Lomond merchants, Stoddard, Pacific Bell

and TCI Cablevision, PG&E officials agreed earlier to the change and rescheduled the project to begin in March. Once the utility wires have been put below ground, the traffic light will be installed, and the county will build a promenade in front of the Mill Street park, also known as the Ben Lomond dam park.

A matter of efficiency

"The undergrounding needs to be completed before the signal can (be connected)," said Supervisor Fred Keeley, who represents the San Lorenzo Valley. "If we did it first, we'd have to redo parts of the project."

The combined Ben Lomond projects will cost about \$1.5 million, and funding has already been secured. Underground ex-

penses will be borne by the California Public Utilities Commission, and Santa Cruz County has been promised about \$30,000 in transportation grant funds to build the pedestrian area in front of the park. A combination of federal, state and local funds will be used to pay for the signal light and other traffic safety improvements.

If everything goes as planned, work to upgrade the core of the historic, San Lorenzo Valley community should be concluded by August 1996.

"The project will substantially enhance the downtown commercial area of Ben Lomond," Keeley said. "It will be the kind of improvements that should draw families into downtown Ben Lomond and make it more of a community gathering place."