

CITY OF COOS BAY CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Staff Report

MEETING DATE	AGENDA ITEM NUMBER
May 5, 2026	4.e

TO: Mayor Benetti, Council President DiNovo, and City Councilors

FROM: Jennifer Wirsing, Public Works Director

THROUGH: Nichole Rutherford, City Manager

ISSUE: Discussion Regarding Undergrounding Overhead Utilities Along North Front Street Between Market Street and Fir Avenue

SUMMARY:

The City is advancing design for the Front Street Corridor consistent with the 2022 Front Street Blueprint, which envisions a revitalized corridor supporting economic development, tourism, multimodal transportation, and improved public spaces. A key consideration identified during final design is the presence of significant overhead electrical and telecommunications infrastructure. Undergrounding these utilities could enhance the corridor's visual quality and better align with the Blueprint vision.

ACTION REQUESTED:

No formal recommendation. Staff seeks Council direction on whether to further evaluate undergrounding overhead utilities as part of the Front Street Corridor improvements.

BACKGROUND:

Undergrounding utilities presents an opportunity to improve the long-term appearance and function of the corridor but introduces substantial costs and potential impacts to property owners. Staff is requesting Council direction on whether to further evaluate this option. The following are discussion points for Council consideration:

Benefits

Undergrounding utilities would improve streetscape aesthetics, reduce visual clutter, and support tourism and private investment. It is also more compatible with pedestrian-oriented design and may reduce weather-related outages. These improvements are commonly associated with successful downtown and waterfront redevelopment efforts.

Cost and Funding

Preliminary estimates place electrical undergrounding at approximately \$300,000; however, this is a high-level estimate (does not include trenching, or installation of vaults and conduit) and subject to change. Under Oregon law, utilities such as Pacific Power require full reimbursement, with costs typically passed on through assessments or other financing mechanisms. This estimate does not include telecommunications undergrounding, private-side service upgrades, or unknown subsurface conditions. As a result, total costs could be significantly higher.

Impacts to Property Owners

Property owners citywide may be responsible for a portion of undergrounding costs depending on the funding approach. In addition, some properties along Front Street may need to upgrade private electrical connections to meet current standards. Construction would create temporary disruptions to access, parking, and business operations and may require coordination with multiple utilities and the railroad.

However, it should be noted that long term, improved aesthetics may support increased property values and reduced maintenance associated with overhead infrastructure.

Urban Renewal Considerations

Urban Renewal Agency (URA) funding may be a potential source if the Council does not want to impose these costs citywide and if the project is eligible and aligns with the URA plan. Use of URA funds would need to be balanced against other priorities and available capacity. Additional analysis would be required to determine feasibility and the extent to which URA could offset costs to property owners.

Policy Considerations

Council direction is needed on whether the long-term benefits justify the added cost and potential impacts. Key considerations include the acceptable level of cost to property owners, whether undergrounding should occur corridor-wide or in targeted areas, potential funding strategies, and how this investment aligns with other City priorities, including the Boardwalk project.

Next Steps

If directed by Council, staff would refine cost estimates, evaluate funding options, coordinate with utility providers, and engage affected property owners and stakeholders.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:

Further discussion regarding budget impacts will occur at a later date and is dependent on Council direction.

ATTACHMENT(S):

- Pictures of Before and After Undergrounding - AI Generated.docx