



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

UPDATE JANUARY 2026

PROJECT DETAILS AND BENEFITS

Q: WHY IS VIC TRACE RESERVOIR IMPORTANT?

A: The Vic Trace Reservoir was originally constructed in 1956 as a partially buried, 10-million-gallon concrete reservoir used for drinking water storage and named after a historic water manager. The reservoir is a cornerstone of the City's water delivery system - providing water to 60,000 people equal to nearly 70 percent of Santa Barbara.

Q: WHY DOES THE RESERVOIR NEED TO BE REPLACED?

A: Proper maintenance and replacement of all the City's water infrastructure is critical to maintaining a highly functional water system. Replacing aging infrastructure minimizes the potential for breaks that can cause costly flooding, property damage, water loss, expensive emergency repairs, and temporary water outages. The Vic Trace Reservoir is nearly 70 years old and is nearing the end of its expected service life. By strategically investing and replacing the reservoir now, the City is avoiding future high-cost repair expenses and unexpected water service disruptions.

Q: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT?

A: There are several benefits achieved by this project. The 70-year-old reservoir will be replaced to meet today's engineering requirements, helping ensure water is available during future earthquake events or other emergencies. The new split-tank design will improve serviceability, enhance resiliency, and strengthen the City's ability to deliver water to the community. Once the Project is complete, the site will have enhanced security fencing, new fire and drought-resistant landscaping, as well as improved site drainage and stormwater capture.

Q: WHAT IS THE PROJECT SCHEDULE?

The anticipated project schedule is outlined below based on today's understanding of the project. The timeline is subject to change.

- **Community Outreach:** Performed throughout the life of the project
- **Design:** Summer 2024 – Spring 2027
- **Environmental Review:** Winter 2025 – Spring 2027
- **Preconstruction:** Winter 2027 – Spring 2028
- **Construction:** Spring 2028 - 2031

Q: HOW IS THE PROJECT BEING PAID FOR?

A: The current total cost estimate for the Project is \$130 million. The City is exploring various funding mechanisms to help fund the Project, including low-interest loans from the State's Drinking Water Revolving Funds (SRF), grants, and possible bond measures.

Q: HOW IS THIS PROJECT GOING TO BE COORDINATED WITH THE CLIFF DRIVE VISION ZERO PROJECT?

A: Staff from each of the project teams continue to work closely with one another to ensure that the scope of work, traffic impacts, and schedules minimize compounding impacts for the surrounding community during construction. Each project will be performing studies to determine how construction might impact local traffic, which will further inform them of how they can plan to mitigate these impacts.

Q: WHY IS THE RESERVOIR NAMED VIC TRACE?

A: The reservoir is named after Victor "Vic" Trace. He was a City water superintendent from 1900 to 1934.



CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS AND NOTIFICATIONS

Q: WHAT TYPE OF NOTIFICATION CAN I EXPECT TO RECEIVE DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A: During construction, regular project updates will be sent to subscribers via the email project list. You can subscribe to project emails by visiting SantaBarbaraCA.gov/VicTrace and selecting “Subscribe.” Additionally, notifications will be mailed to community members near the project site regarding upcoming meetings and ahead of any anticipated construction impacts.

Q: HOW CAN I STAY INFORMED ABOUT THE PROJECT?

Email, digital, and mailed updates will be sent regularly throughout the life of the project. You can subscribe to project emails by visiting SantaBarbaraCA.gov/VicTrace and selecting “Subscribe.” The City will also be providing some Project updates via email through the [Community News in Brief](#) newsletter.

Q: WHAT TYPE OF IMPACTS CAN I EXPECT DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A: You can expect noise from construction equipment associated with demolishing the existing reservoir and constructing the new reservoirs. There will also be some level of dust associated with this earth work and excavation. As we get closer to the start of construction, the City will be hosting community meetings to provide additional information about construction impacts, mitigation efforts, and to answer questions.

Q: WILL THERE BE NOISE LIMITS DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A: Yes. The City’s General Plan establishes an average ambient outdoor noise level of 60 to 65 A-weighted decibels (dBA) or less as the level considered normally acceptable for residential outdoor living areas. However, equipment required for the demolition and construction of the concrete reservoirs will require noise levels greater than 65 dBA. A noise study will be conducted alongside the Project’s Environmental Impact Report, which will propose several noise mitigation measures, such as sound walls and noise dampening devices. We will share information on this aspect of the project as it develops.

Q: WILL MY STREET PARKING BE IMPACTED DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A: Yes. There will be temporary street parking restrictions during construction to accommodate truck traffic and pipeline relocation work. Notifications will be distributed in advance of any anticipated street parking impact, and signage will be installed along those streets outlining the days and hours of street parking restrictions. Parking restrictions are not anticipated to begin until 2028.

Q: WHAT ROUTES WILL TRUCKS BE USING TO GET TO AND FROM THE VIC TRACE SITE DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A: The Project’s construction traffic routes have not been determined yet. A detailed construction traffic plan will be developed to determine the safest route for trucks, crews and equipment to use. Once developed, this plan will be shared with the public and made available on the project’s website.

Q: WHAT DAYS AND HOURS WILL CONSTRUCTION BE OCCURRING?

A: The majority of work onsite and within the surrounding streets will take place during City-approved working days and hours, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. However, some critical components of the new reservoir construction and large pipeline installations will require crews to work outside of typical working hours. Advanced notice will be distributed to the surrounding community before this work would occur and will be minimized to the extent feasible.



WATER SERVICE

Q: HOW WILL I CONTINUE TO HAVE WATER SERVICE ONCE THE EXISTING RESERVOIR IS DEMOLISHED?

A: Drinking water supply and fire protection will be maintained throughout the project. However, there may be elements of the Project that require temporary water shutoffs. These infrequent water outages will be planned and communicated to impacted properties in advance. These shutoffs are likely not to exceed eight hours in duration. When design for the Project is completed in 2027, the City will know more about the extent to which water service may be interrupted and for how long. If a water interruption is needed, impacted properties will receive advanced notice.

Q: WILL THE RESERVOIR CONTINUE TO BE IN SERVICE WHILE IT'S BEING REPLACED?

A: During construction, the reservoir will be taken offline for approximately 1.5 years. A City analysis performed in 2019 confirmed the Vic Trace Reservoir could be taken completely offline after other improvements in the system were completed, which are currently taking place. As part of the Project design effort, the Project team is performing additional hydraulic analysis to prepare for potential emergencies during construction when the reservoir is demolished.

Q: WILL THIS PROJECT CHANGE THE QUALITY OF WATER I RECEIVE?

A: The project is focused on replacing the Vic Trace Reservoir and relocating some of the pipelines that service the reservoir. The City's drinking water system is continually monitored to ensure the system performs optimally and produces safe, reliable water. Because of the tank's new modernized design, the City anticipates improved circulation and water quality as a result of this project.

Q: WILL THE WATER PRESSURE AT MY HOME OR BUSINESS BE IMPACTED WHILE THE RESERVOIR IS OFFLINE?

A: The Project team is not anticipating any negative impacts to water pressure for residents or businesses while the reservoir is offline. The system of pipelines and pump stations that currently provide water service are expected to continue to maintain adequate water pressure throughout construction of the new reservoir. Any lasting changes in system pressure will be communicated ahead of reservoir construction.

SITE SAFETY AND SECURITY

Q: HOW WILL THE PROJECT ADDRESS WILDFIRE AND SAFETY CONCERN RELATED TO THE BRUSH AND VEGETATION AT THE VIC TRACE RESERVOIR?

A: The Project team is working closely with the City's Fire Department. The new design will have improved fire personnel access and fire-fighting capabilities, fire-wise landscaping, as well as enhanced site security. The Project team will engage with the Fire Department to assess fire safety and security of the existing site to minimize concerns prior to and during construction. To sign up for fire and other emergency alerts, visit ReadySBC.org.

Q: WILL THE PROJECT BE REPLACING FENCING BORDERING THE VIC TRACE RESERVOIR SITE?

A: The main gate and the fencing at the City's entrance off of La Coronilla Drive will be replaced to increase site security. The fencing surrounding the Vic Trace reservoir site will be further assessed for possible replacement. Any fences identified as insecure and/or with pedestrian access gates will be replaced to prevent trespassing.



ENVIRONMENTAL AND WILDLIFE

Q: WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS AND PERMITS ARE REQUIRED FOR THIS PROJECT?

A: The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) be developed for this Project. The City anticipates sharing the CEQA EIR Initial Study and hosting a Public Scoping Meeting for the EIR in Fall 2025. The Project will also be applying for the City's Conditional Use Permit and will follow a permitting review process similar to any new development within the City.

Q: IS RENEWABLE ENERGY BEING CONSIDERED FOR THIS SITE?

A: The City's Water Resources and Sustainability & Resilience teams are studying the feasibility of potential renewable energy generation and storage across all Water Resources sites, including Vic Trace Reservoir. The goal of the study is to offset energy costs and make the Water and Wastewater systems more resilient to energy outages and climate change.

Q: HOW WILL THE PROJECT ADDRESS IMPACTS THAT MAY OCCUR TO WILDLIFE LIVING IN AND AROUND THE PROJECT SITE DURING AND AFTER CONSTRUCTION?

A: As part of the environmental review process, the Project team will be investigating what impacts may occur to wildlife during construction and determining what mitigation methods will be put in place to lessen those impacts. The Project's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be available for public review and comments in 2026.

Q: IS THE LANDSCAPING AND VEGETATION SHOWN IN THE PROJECT RENDERINGS FINAL?

A: The landscaping plan for the Project is still being finalized. The current Project renderings are meant to offer an example of what the site may look like once the Project is completed and is reflective of the preliminary landscape plan. The landscaping plan will be posted to the Project webpage and will be discussed at future public workshops, when available.

Q: WHY IS THE CITY PROPOSING TO CUT DOWN TREES AROUND THE PROJECT SITE? HOW MANY?

A: The Project team's goal is to retain as many existing trees on the site as feasible. However, the Project's construction footprint is extensive, and tree removals are required to excavate and construct the new buried reservoirs and facilities. There are 108 existing trees within the Vic Trace Reservoir property, comprised of 33 native trees and 75 ornamental trees. Of the 108 Project trees, 55 trees are proposed for removal (10 native and 46 ornamental). The Project's preliminary landscape design includes planting 55 replacement trees (all native) on the Vic Trace Reservoir property. Proposed replacement tree locations avoid plantings over buried infrastructure and will meet updated fire code regulations, limiting large trees around structures and adjacent homes.



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PUBLIC ACCESS

Q: WILL THIS PROJECT BE DEVELOPING LA CORONILLA PARK (PARK LOCATED ON DOLORES DRIVE)?

A: No. Project work in La Coronilla Park is limited to the replacement of an existing water pipeline. State regulations and the City Municipal Code do not allow water rate-payer funds to pay the development of a park. Funds for a possible park project would come from the City's General Fund. Feedback regarding the City's parks will be provided to the City's Parks and Recreation Department for consideration.

Q: WILL THE VIC TRACE RESERVOIR SITE BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AFTER PROJECT COMPLETION?

A: No. The site is owned and operated by the City's Water Resources Department for the purpose of providing a public utility (drinking water). Federal regulations now require increased site security at drinking water facilities, including water reservoirs. Enhanced site security protects our water supply and water infrastructure. Additionally, critical Fire and Police radio communication facilities are co-located onsite and require the same level of site security to ensure public safety officials have uninterrupted communications.

Q: WILL THIS PROJECT INSTALL A PUBLIC WALKWAY AROUND THE VIC TRACE RESERVOIR SITE?

A: No. The Project is focused on increasing the security of the site and ensuring that it can only be accessed by City personnel to meet new Federal regulations and to protect the City's water system. The Mesa neighborhood is also home to many parks and open space, nine of which are located within one mile of the reservoir site. Feedback regarding the City's parks will be provided to the City's Parks and Recreation Department for consideration.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Q: WHO DO I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT?

A: Please email VicTrace@SantaBarbaraCA.gov or call Kelly Bourque, Senior Project Engineer at 805-564-5579.

Q: WILL FUTURE PUBLIC WORKSHOPS BE HELD BEFORE CONSTRUCTION STARTS ON THE PROJECT?

A: Yes. The City will be providing regular opportunities for feedback from the public prior to and during construction focused on environmental and construction impacts, final design, project timeline, and more. In 2025, the City hosted an in-person and virtual Stakeholder Engagement Workshop, a Neighborhood Meet & Greet event, and scoping meeting for the environmental review process. Upcoming opportunities in 2026 to provide feedback include several Neighborhood Meet & Greet events as well as public meetings to obtain feedback on the Draft EIR document planned for Summer 2026. Additionally, Project information and updates will also be presented at the City's Water Commission, Planning Commission, and the Architectural Board of Review on a regular basis.



For more information:

To sign up for Project-specific email updates, visit SantaBarbaraCA.gov/VicTrace, enter your email address and select “Subscribe.”

For questions, please contact VicTrace@SantaBarbaraCA.gov or call 805-564-5579.