

4.6 LAND USE AND PLANNING

The purpose of this section of the DEIR is to determine the impact and compatibility of the Proposed Project on the existing and planned land uses in the area. Information has been obtained from the applicable land use plans and ordinances published by the City. Excerpts from the relevant planning documents and ordinances are presented below; complete copies of the documents and ordinances may be available by contacting the Planning Department.

4.6.1 Existing Conditions

The Proposed Project site is composed of five parcels that are currently vacant. The site was previously used for alfalfa/hay bale storage. The site is situated in the southeast portion of the City, north of Danenberg Drive and east of Dogwood Avenue. Dogwood Canal runs along the western boundary of the Proposed Project site. The combined acreage of the five parcels that compose the site is approximately 38 acres.

The surrounding land uses consist of light industrial businesses to the west, including the old Valley Nitrogen Producers Incorporated located west of Dogwood Avenue. Several industrial businesses (hay processing plant, machinery shop, etc.) are located southwest of the site. Interstate 8 (I-8) is located approximately 0.25 mile north of the Proposed Project site. Uses to the north include several small businesses such as International Farm Services, Rudy's Automotive, and Southern Building and Concrete. The Imperial Valley Mall is located to the south, and fallow agricultural land is located to the east. An application and EIR for a proposed commercial retail development project (Imperial Valley Commons) has been submitted for the adjacent parcels to the east.

City of El Centro General Plan

The City publishes and maintains the City of El Centro General Plan (City GP) to guide development within its boundaries and sphere of influence. The City GP was last updated in 2004. The following discussion presents City GP information, goals, and policies relevant to the Proposed Project.

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element of the City GP is intended to describe present and planned land use activities that achieve the community's long-range goals for the future. The Land Use Element identifies the proposed general distribution, location, and extent of land uses.

Urban Development Program. The City GP Land Use Element sets forth the City's Urban Development Program (UDP), a land use plan that divides developing and developable areas of the City and the City's sphere of influence into separate tiers to identify where growth is most feasible, or to determine where special studies would be required to determine the feasibility of growth. The UDP divides the City and the sphere of influence into three tiers of growth areas: Development Tiers I, II, and III. The three growth levels are not necessarily meant to provide a sequence of development, but to delineate areas where different levels of planning efforts would be necessary due to the greater or lesser extent of existing services and facilities. The Proposed Project site is designated as a Development Tier I growth area, which indicates that public services are generally available, although improvements or new facilities may be needed to adequately accommodate new development. (City of El Centro 2004)

The following goals and policies contained in the City GP Land Use Element are pertinent to the Proposed Project:

Land Use Goal 1: Provide planning and strategies for physical land use to create a healthy and aesthetically pleasing environment that balances the social and economic needs of the community.

- Policy 1.1:** Ensure that new development is consistent and compatible with the existing character of the community and meets City development standards.
- Policy 1.2:** Prevent the incompatible intrusion of land uses into existing developments, such as incompatible non-residential development into residential areas.
- Policy 1.4:** Achieve a balance of commercial uses that provides for the retail business, professional, and other service needs of City residents and which will attract customers from the greater Imperial Valley and other areas.
- Policy 1.5:** Balance new commercial development elsewhere in the City with the need to maintain a financially viable downtown.
- Policy 1.8:** Improve the relationship between commercial areas and adjacent noncommercial uses through the use of landscape buffers and masonry walls for separation.
- Policy 1.14:** Require new development adjacent to open drains and canals to underground these facilities to ensure public safety. The undergrounding of facilities shall be done in concordance with and coordination with the Imperial Irrigation District.

Land Use Goal 2: Control and direct growth so that new development is compatible with existing development and occurs in appropriate locations when adequate public services are available.

- Policy 2.1:** Continue to direct and control growth in the City and sphere of influence through the application of the City's Urban Development Program.
- Policy 2.2:** Ensure that development corresponds with the provision of public facilities and services.
- Policy 2.5:** Encourage infill development to occur within the urbanized community before expanding new development onto agricultural lands surrounding El Centro.

Land Use Designations

The City General Plan Land Use Policy map shows the land use designation for the Proposed Project site as ML. The classifications and standards for ML developments are as follows:

The ML land use designation provides for the development of industrial uses that include the fabrication, manufacturing, assembly or processing of materials that are in refined form and which do not, in their transformation, create smoke, gas, odor, dust, noise, vibration of earth, soot or lighting to a degree that is offensive when measured at the property line of the subject property. Most operations within this designation are conducted within enclosed buildings. A maximum floor area ratio of 0.40:1 is allowed. (City of El Centro 2004)

The City General Plan Land Use Policy map shows a RC Overlay on the Proposed Project site. The RC Overlay is intended to allow consideration of a regional or community shopping center as an alternative to the base land use designation within specifically identified locations on the Land Use Plan. Commercial uses intended by this designation include: regional or community level shopping centers serving the existing and surrounding communities for all retail and specialized commercial activities (City of El

Centro 2004). According to the Planning Department, the intent of the RC Overlay was met with development of the Imperial Valley Mall and the proposed Commons development adjacent to the Proposed Project site. Consequently, additional commercial development in the RC Overlay requires a General Plan amendment to modify the base land use designation to a CG designation.

The Proposed Project includes approximately 38 acres of CG uses. The CG category contains the following three land use categories. A description of the allowable uses is provided for each category.

- **Neighborhood Commercial:** The Neighborhood Commercial land use designation provides for retail and service-oriented business activities serving a local community area and population. Other uses that are determined to be compatible with primary uses, such as public facilities, may also be allowed. A maximum floor area ratio of 0.25:1 is allowed.
- **Office Commercial:** The Office Commercial land use designation provides for the establishment of professional and administrative offices, medical care centers and ancillary services with appropriate landscaping and development standards that provide relative compatibility for such uses near residential areas. A maximum floor area ratio of 0.40:1 is allowed.
- **Heavy Commercial:** The Heavy Commercial land use designation provides for general commercial uses, business and consumer services, and light manufacturing. A maximum floor area ratio of 0.50:1 is allowed.

Circulation Element

The purpose of the Circulation Element is to provide a safe, efficient and adequate circulation system for the City. The Circulation Element addresses the circulation improvements needed to provide adequate capacity for future land uses.

Circulation Goal 1: Provide a system of roadways that meets the needs of the community.

- Policy 1.1:** Provide and maintain a circulation system that is in balance with the land uses in El Centro by implementing the Circulation Master Plan.
- Policy 1.2:** Improve El Centro circulation system roadways in concert with land development to ensure sufficient levels of service.
- Policy 1.3:** Review new development proposals to ensure that the proposed development...would not increase traffic on roadways and intersections to a level of service (LOS) worse than "C" unless the project will provide overriding socioeconomic benefits to the City.
- Policy 1.7:** Enforce minimum design standards for streets as established in the General Plan and City Ordinances.
- Policy 1.8:** Encourage site planning and subdivision design that best utilizes available traffic capacity on abutting streets through design techniques such as lot orientation, limitations on intersecting streets, and driveway locations and spacing.

Circulation Goal 2: Promote a public transportation network that allows for convenient access to major destinations, both within El Centro as well as within the region.

- Policy 2.3:** Provide for the location of necessary transit infrastructure, such as bus stops, in major activity centers.

Circulation Goal 3: Provide for adequate bicycle and pedestrian access throughout the community.

- Policy 3.1:** Provide and maintain a system of pedestrian and bicycle access ways that link residential areas with parks, schools, libraries, civic center, major employment and retail centers, and other areas of congregation within El Centro and the surrounding area.
- Policy 3.2:** Continue to improve the accessibility of public facilities and commercial centers to improve access and mobility of the elderly and the disabled.
- Policy 3.4:** Maintain the pedestrian and bicycle system, including improving the road surface and sidewalk, to reduce the safety hazard associated with drainage grates, manholes, potholes, and uneven surfaces.

Circulation Master Plan: As part of the City GP Circulation Element, the City maintains a circulation master plan that indicates the intended roadway classifications for streets throughout the City boundaries and sphere of influence. Roadways are classified as freeways, four-lane arterials, two-lane arterials, or collectors. These designations relate to roadway cross-section standards also maintained in the Circulation Element. Streets adjacent to the Proposed Project site that are shown in the Circulation Master Plan include Dogwood Avenue, designated as a four-lane arterial, and Danenberg Drive, designated as a two-lane arterial. Wake Avenue currently ends west of the Proposed Project site and therefore is not shown on the map. After construction of the Proposed Project, the new portion of Wake Avenue would likely be designated as a collector; this would be consistent with the designation for existing portion of Wake Avenue. It should be noted that the El Centro GP Circulation Element is currently being updated.

Conservation/Open Space Element

Goals and policies set forth in the Conservation/Open Space Element are discussed in Section 4.1, *Agricultural Resources*.

City of El Centro Zoning Ordinance

The Proposed Project site is zoned ML with the RC Overlay. The Proposed Project is not consistent with the base ML zoning designation, which is intended to “provide for the development of industrial uses that include fabrication, manufacturing, assembly or processing of materials, that are in refined form” (City of El Centro, 2004). Because the intent of the RC Overlay Zone has been accomplished, the overlay does not apply to the Proposed Project. Consequently, the Proposed Project requires a change in zoning to CG. The CG zone is intended “for general business, light service and retail uses, as well as large-scale planned shopping districts” (City of El Centro 1995).

Southern California Association of Governments

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) has been designated by the federal government as the Southern California region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA). SCAG has sought to address regional planning concerns through various documents, including the 1996 Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide and the 2004 Regional Transportation Plan.

The Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide “[i]s intended to serve the region as a framework for decision making with respect to the growth and changes that can be anticipated during the next 20 years and beyond.” In addition, the Plan “describes how the southern California region will meet certain federal and state requirements with respect to Transportation, Growth Management, Air Quality, Housing, Hazardous Waste Management, and Water Quality Management” (SCAG 1996).

The SCAG Regional Transportation Plan serves as the primary transportation planning document for the southern California region. It describes local and regional trends that affect the transportation system and recommends transportation investments to improve mobility and accessibility.

4.6.2 Impact Significance Criteria

The Proposed Project would have a potentially significant impact on land use and community character if it would do any of the following.

- Physically divide an established community.
- Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the project (including, but not limited to the General Plan, specific plan, local coastal program, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect.
- Conflict with the goals, objectives or guidelines to create a well-balanced community as defined in the adopted City GP and certified General Plan EIR, Zoning Ordinance, and CEQA Guidelines.
- Conflict with any applicable HCP or NCCP.

4.6.3 Impact Analysis

Compatibility with Nearby Land Uses

The Proposed Project would be located in a generally industrial and commercial area and would not conflict with those land uses. The Imperial Valley Mall would be located to the south and a proposed commercial development (currently undeveloped land) would be located to the east. The Proposed Project would be designed to be consistent with these commercial uses. There are several industrial uses located to the north and west of the Proposed Project site. The Proposed Project would not introduce sensitive land uses that would be inconsistent with industrial uses. The Proposed Project would not conflict with nearby agricultural uses (see Section 4.01, *Agricultural Resources*).

The Wake Avenue extension and intersection improvements required to mitigate traffic impacts would be consistent with the Land Use and Circulation elements of the El Centro General Plan.

Community Cohesion

There are a variety of existing land uses within the adjacent properties in the vicinity of the Proposed Project site. The Proposed Project site is located within a sparsely settled area dominated by agricultural, undeveloped, industrial and commercial land uses. The large open site separates the industrial uses to the west and north from the existing and proposed commercial uses to the south and east. Building an additional commercial development would not physically divide an established community because the land uses on either side of the project do not constitute a cohesive community.

Construction activities would be generally limited to the Proposed Project site, and would not physically divide the community or neighborhood. No barriers would be used during construction to impede entrance to areas that are currently accessible. Access to nearby commercial and industrial sites would not be disrupted during construction.

Consistency with the City of El Centro General Plan

City GP Land Use Element policies applicable to this Proposed Project are listed above. These policies are designed to ensure that the goals and objectives of the City GP are met for each individual land use. The consistency of the Proposed Project with the City GP land use goals is discussed in Table 4.6-1.

TABLE 4.6-1: CONSISTENCY WITH LAND USE GOALS

Policy 1.1	The Proposed Project site is located in an area that has been designated by the City for regional commercial uses. The Proposed Project would be designed to be visually compatible with the surrounding commercial developments and would meet City development standards (see design description in Chapter 2, <i>Project Description</i>).
Policy 1.2	The Proposed Project would be consistent with surrounding land uses and would not introduce a new incompatible land use. Land uses to the north and west are generally industrial and undeveloped. Proposed and existing land uses to the south and east are commercial. There are no existing or planned residential land uses adjacent to the Proposed Project site. There is one agricultural field currently located east of the site, but the city has received an application for a commercial development on the site. Additionally, the proposed detention pond on the east side of the site would provide a buffer between the Proposed Project and existing agricultural uses east of the site (see Section 4.01, <i>Agricultural Resources</i> for additional discussion of the Proposed Project's compatibility with agricultural uses in the area).
Policy 1.4	The Proposed Project would add up to approximately 350,000 square feet of retail commercial uses in the southeastern portion of the City of El Centro Service Area serving those existing and proposed residents south of I-8 and close to the Proposed Project site. This would balance the existing commercial areas in the northern area of the City. In addition, the Proposed Project will complement the existing Imperial Valley Mall and attract customers from the greater Imperial Valley and other areas.
Policy 1.5	The downtown area generally provides different uses and offers different types of retail and service commercial opportunities at a smaller scale focused towards a more local market than the Proposed Project, which is intended to be a more large-scale, regionally oriented retail center. Therefore, the Proposed Project will not impact the financial viability of the downtown.
Policy 1.8	To eliminate views of the loading and trash areas, the Proposed Project would include masonry walls as screening, with landscaping and trellis features. At least 10 percent of the total Proposed Project site would be landscaped. Approximately 80 percent of the landscaping would be located in the frontage area or visible from the public street. The proposed detention ponds would also serve as a buffer along the eastern site boundary.
Policy 1.14	The Proposed Project would involve the burial and piping of the Dogwood Canal along the western site boundary. Coordination with IID would occur prior to construction to ensure that the burial was handled in accordance with IID policies and procedures.
Policy 2.1	The Proposed Project site is located within a Development Tier I growth area, which is an area that has been delineated by the City for new development.
Policy 2.2	The Proposed Project would minimally increase the demand for public services associated with operation of a 350,000 square foot commercial development. However, the Proposed Project would not result in new housing or population growth that would substantially increase the demand for public services. Measures would be required to offset cumulative impacts to public services (see Section 7, <i>Cumulative Impacts</i>).
Policy 2.5	The Proposed Project site is located within an area that is planned for development in the City's GP. The Proposed Project would not affect any active agricultural operations and has not been farmed in more than 45 years (see Section 4.01, <i>Agricultural Resources</i>). The Proposed Project would be consistent with the City's policy to promote infill development.

City GP Circulation Element policies applicable to this Proposed Project are listed above. These policies are designed to ensure that the goals and objectives of the City GP are met for each individual land use. The consistency of the Proposed Project with the City GP circulation goals is discussed in Table 4.6-2 below.

TABLE 4.6-2: CONSISTENCY WITH CIRCULATION GOALS

Policy 1.1	The physical configuration of the roads in the project vicinity is currently consistent with the Circulation Master Plan. Dogwood Avenue is a four-lane paved roadway from I-8 to 0.5 mile south of Danenberg Drive. Danenberg Drive is a four-lane road from Dogwood Avenue east to Pitzer Road. The Proposed Project would not affect the physical configuration of these roads. Some physical improvements (e.g., installation of new signals and turn lanes) may be required to mitigate the direct impacts of traffic associated with the Proposed Project. These improvements would be consistent with the circulation element and would improve traffic conditions. Wake Avenue would also be extended as a result of the Proposed Project. The extension of Wake Avenue is not specifically shown in the circulation element, but is required by the city to serve the Proposed Project.
Policy 1.2	The Proposed Project would result in direct impacts at 6 intersections and one street segment and would contribute to cumulative impacts at 6 intersections and 6 road segments. Traffic impacts would be minimized to the extent feasible through transportation system modifications (e.g., new signals and turn lanes). The project proponent would provide fair share contributions to the City of El Centro Traffic Impact Fee Program to compensate for the projects contribution to regional/cumulative traffic impacts. Traffic impacts are discussed in Section 4.09, <i>Traffic and Circulation</i> .
Policy 1.3	The Proposed Project would increase traffic on roadways and intersections; however, the Proposed Project would also provide overriding socioeconomic benefits to the City. The Proposed Project would result in an increased tax base and employment base in the City. The anticipated economic growth from the Proposed Project would contribute directly to the surrounding community as the employment base is expected to come from the local areas.
Policy 1.7	Street improvements resulting from the Proposed Project would occur in accordance with the City's minimum design standards.
Policy 1.8	Driveways accessing the Proposed Project have been analyzed as part of the traffic study. The driveway locations would not adversely affect traffic and circulation after the implementation of mitigation measures. Traffic impacts are discussed in Section 4.09, <i>Traffic and Circulation</i> .
Policy 2.3	Bus stops could be accommodated along Dogwood Avenue, Danenberg Drive, or Wake Avenue if necessary.
Policy 3.1	The Proposed Project site would include sidewalks to accommodate pedestrian access.
Policy 3.2	The Proposed Project site is located in a regional commercial area that is publicly accessible. The City and County are responsible for providing transportation services that accommodate the elderly and disabled.
Policy 3.4	The Proposed Project site would include sidewalks to accommodate pedestrian access.

Overall the Proposed Project would be consistent with the land use and transportation policies contained in the City GP.

Consistency with the El Centro Zoning Ordinance

Although a zoning change is required, the Proposed Project is consistent with the existing and proposed land uses located in the vicinity of the site. The underlying industrial zoning, is not necessarily consistent with the development patterns that have emerged in southeastern El Centro over the last several years. More residential and commercial developments have been built or a planned in this area. Industrial land uses are less appropriate for the site than when the plan was implemented. Consequently, the zoning change would have a less than significant impact on land use.

Consistency with Other Plans and Policies

The Proposed Project is not considered regionally significant under the SCAG Intergovernmental Review Criteria (SCAG 2005). The Intergovernmental Review Criteria include 22 types of projects that could have regionally significant air quality, noise, traffic, or other impacts (SCAG 1995). Since the Proposed Project is not regionally significant and is consistent with the growth policies established by the City of El Centro, the Proposed Project is considered to be consistent with the SCAG Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide policies and the Regional Transportation Plan.

Development of the Proposed Project would not conflict with any Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) or Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP), as the site has been previously farmed and is not covered by an HCP or NCCP.

4.6.4 Significant Impacts

There would be no significant impacts.

4.6.5 Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures would be required.

4.6.6 Level of Significance After Mitigation

No significant impacts to Land Use and Planning were found; therefore, no mitigation measures would be required and impacts would be less than significant.