

# 1. SUMMARY

This *Imperial Center Specific Plan* has been prepared to establish policy and development guidelines for a regional commercial center that will be designed for specialty, retail and wholesale commercial businesses. The Imperial Center will be located on approximately 77.64 acres of farmland located within unincorporated area of the County of Imperial. The project area is considered to be in an ideal location due to its proximity to Federal and State highways. In addition, the project commercial area is just 4.5 miles north of the United States/Mexico international border, including the new Gateway to the Americas business park.

This Specific Plan is organized into two volumes. **Volume One** contains eleven chapters written to systematically implement the County of Imperial's General Plan<sup>1</sup> as it relates to the project area. The eleven chapters for Volume One include the following:

- Chapter 1 – SUMMARY
- Chapter 2 – INTRODUCTION
- Chapter 3 – AUTHORITY AND SCOPE
- Chapter 4 – GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
- Chapter 5 – LAND USE PLAN
- Chapter 6 – DESIGN STANDARDS
- Chapter 7 – LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES
- Chapter 8 – INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN
- Chapter 9 – PHASING
- Chapter 10 – IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES
- Chapter 11 – ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

**Volume Two** contains the summaries of key specific plan background data, information and all appendices that are referenced in Volume One.

The following documents have been prepared and are included in Volume Two of the *Imperial Center Specific Plan*:

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<sup>1</sup> Version: November 2002 Update

- Appendix A – Legal Description
- Appendix B – Traffic Study
- Appendix C – Addendum to Traffic Study
- Appendix D – Department of Transportation Letter
- Appendix E – Preliminary Infrastructure Study
- Appendix F – Burrowing Owl Study
- Appendix G – Preliminary Drainage Study
- Appendix H – Storm Water Management For Construction Activities
- Appendix I – Storm Water Pollution Plan
- Appendix J -- Heber Public Utility District Service Area Plan
- Appendix K – Water Supply Assessment and Verification Report



*Figure 1-A  
Imperial Center Project Site*

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The anticipated land uses at the Imperial Center will provide a variety of commercial uses that are intended to serve the needs of regional shoppers and the wholesale market. The Imperial Center will consist of general commercial uses that are typical to retail shopping centers. Specific uses allowed within the project site are listed in Chapter 5, Land Use. The Imperial Center is expected to provide approximately

900,000 square feet of commercial facilities. The following summarizes the primary potential uses of the project area:

- Information/Exhibit/Auction Center 15,000 square feet
- A wholesale outlet 460,000 square feet
- Food court 13,000 square feet
- Multiplex cinema 83,000 square feet
- Hotel (200 rooms) 135,000 square feet
- Plaza/Auction Court 95,000 square feet
- Hotel Plaza/Restaurant 5,000-10,000 square feet
- Convenience Market with a Filling Station 37,000 square feet
- Eleven pads each for 5,000 square feet of retail space

The highest and best uses identified above are driving the project. However, due to the changing economics and the expected long life of the project area, the listed land uses are subject to change. Chapter 5 of this Specific Plan lists all permitted land uses that could also be found in the project area.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

**Imperial Center** will be located near Heber, an unincorporated area in the county of Imperial, California, and 4.5 miles from the border between the United States and Mexico. It will be a branded wholesale outlet / auction center (the "**Outlet Center**"), and convenience store/gas station, along with a number of other retail concerns, within a commercial complex. The Outlet Center, convenience market, parking and Outdoor Areas will be constructed on a 77.64 – acre parcel.

The Imperial Center is planned to include an Outlet Center and/ retail and wholesale merchandising opportunities. Outlet Centers or mall is a type of shopping mall, in which manufacturers sell their products directly to the public through their own branded stores. Other stores in outlet malls are operated by retailers selling returned goods and discontinued products, often at heavily reduced prices. Clothing, sporting goods,

electrical products, cosmetics, and toys are among the types of items sold at outlet malls.

Wholesale merchandising opportunities include a wholesaler that buys and stores goods in large quantities from their manufacturers or importers, and then sells smaller quantities to retailers, who in turn sell to the general public. Retailers may also buy directly from manufacturers.

The Imperial Center may also contain traditional retail merchandisers. These merchandisers are involved with functions and activities involved in the selling of goods and commodities directly to consumers.

### **The Project Components**

A number of different enterprises will be constructed, to serve diverse commercial appetites. The following is a preliminary list of projects expected to be included, with an approximation of space needed, in square-feet:



*Figure 1-B  
Architectural Rendering of Space Walk*

## 1. Outlet Center

- An Information Center / Exhibit center / Auction Center (15,000 s.f.)
- A Wholesale Outlet / Show Rooms (460,000 s.f.)
- A Food Court (13,000 s.f.)
- A Multiplex cinema complex, with sixteen (16) screens (83,000 s.f.)
- A Two Hundred-Room Hotel, with provisions for retail shops & a restaurant (135,000 s.f.)
- Central Plaza / Auction Court (95,000 s.f.)
- Cinema Plaza / Retail Court (44,000 s.f.)
- Hotel Plaza Restaurant / View Court (5,000-10,000 s.f.)
- Loading areas (expansive docks with 50 truck loading spaces and 70 automobile loading spaces)
- Convenience Store with Gas Station (37,000 s.f.)

## 2. Other Components

- Eleven (11) Free-Standing Pads (Five to Nine Thousand (5,000-9,000) s.f. each)
- General Automobile Parking (2,500 spaces)

## Development Potential

The demand for **Imperial Center** currently exists, is substantial, and is projected to dramatically increase, both near-term and in the long-term future.

This demand is a function of a number of things, including:

1. The lack of substantive competition in Imperial County for an Outlet Store. With regards to the wholesale outlet and auction court, no "factory outlet" exists in the area.
2. The **Center's** strategic location at the southeast junction of State Route 111 ("SR 111") and Heber Road. SR 111 is a major arterial road / highway linking Coachella Valley and the Border at Calexico / Mexicali. Imperial County reports that currently thousands of automotive vehicles per day use SR 111. (The County's reported truck figures is an estimate based upon a mechanical axle count, local business activity and border crossing reported by U.S. customs).

3. There is a large cluster of retail establishments' development within a five mile radius of the project site. A "retail cluster" is a group of same or similar retail establishments that locate in close vicinity of each other. Retail establishments cluster together as a strategy to attract more shoppers to an area that can offer a variety of products to consumers. The Imperial Center will be located just a few miles North on Hwy 111 of the recently opened Super Wal-Mart. It is the first Wal-Mart "Superstore" in Imperial Valley. The Imperial Valley Mall has also opened within close vicinity to the proposed Imperial Center site. Several other large retail establishments are expected to locate within a close vicinity of the Imperial Valley Mall in an effort to increase the size of the retail cluster. The Imperial Center will be located between the two large retail centers mentioned above creating a large regional retail cluster of retail. It is expected that this clustering of retail establishments within close vicinity will greatly benefit the Imperial Center.
4. The robust automotive, pedestrian and truck traffic through the Calexico Port of Entry ("Calexico POE"), which has been the main border crossing area in the Imperial County between the United States and Mexico for decades, and the Calexico East Federal Port of Entry ("Calexico East POE"), which opened in December 1996. Calexico East POE was constructed to ease congestion (i.e., heavy truck traffic) at the Calexico POE; northbound truck traffic that formerly used the Calexico POE now must use Calexico East POE. According to U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, 188,614 non-immigrants passed through the two Calexico ports in fiscal year 2002<sup>2</sup> - the most recent year for which this information is available.
5. The Gateway of the Americas Project ("Gateway"), a 1,775 gross-acre / 1,421 net-acre multi-use industrial, warehouse and distribution land development project, through which commercial / retail lots will be available for sale, or built-to-suit. Gateway is contiguous to Calexico East POE and is strategically positioned to take full advantage of the new wave of border business opportunities on the United States

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics; Table 609, Fiscal Year 2002:  
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/yearbook/s002/fy2002table609.xls>.

side arising from the North America Free Trade Agreement (“NAFTA”).

6. The continuing effects of NAFTA on trade and commerce between the United States and Mexico. The Border region in the Imperial-Mexicali Valleys is particularly well positioned to capitalize on economic and business growth attendant to NAFTA and increased industrial and manufacturing development in Mexico; this should result in a significant increase in truck traffic at Calexico East POE.
7. The special requirements of the Border area relating to lack or inadequacy of communications, services, parts and fuel in Mexico, and the stringent requirements of the U.S. government relating to trucks entering the United States from Mexico.

### **Design Concept**

The **Imperial Center** project is designed as independent but interwoven cluster of buildings, plazas and functions.

The heart of the development is the “**Outlet Center**”. The general layout is fashioned after an out door mall for the display, shopping area while a functional and efficient network of loading area is provided at the perimeter of the mall behind the warehouse area.



*Figure 1 – C  
The multiple commercial uses planned for the Imperial Center  
are proposed to share a water feature and unified design*

The “**Outlet Center**” is anchored by a major hotel complex to facilitate the international clientele as well as local travelers at the South end, and an entertainment complex composed of a 16-screen cinema, and arcades at the North end.

At the center of the wholesale outlet mall is the information center, show area connected by a meandering pedestrian traffic spine with shopping façade along it. Each wholesale store will have a front shopping / display area facing the pedestrian walkway, with a warehouse facility in the back facing the loading zone.

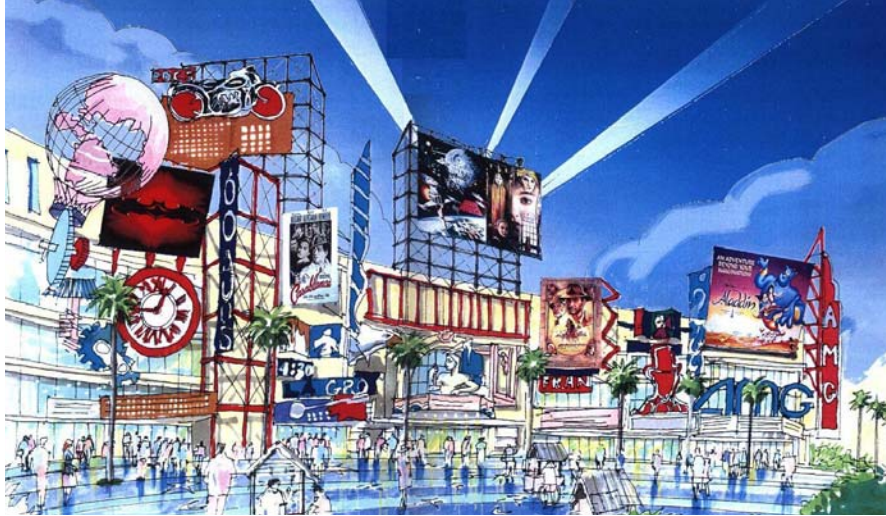
The overall design is an interpretation on a Southern California / Latin American flavors. There are many plazas /courtyards; geometric design patterns and heavy saturated color schemes. The design theme is taken from the sunny naturalistic aspect of its environment. Everything is bright and colorful, and the motifs are taken from elements such as sun, water, river, and stars. The combined experience is that of a cheerful, festivity shopping experience.

Finally there are 11 free standing pads for any future developments that will add diversity and enhance the total experience of the Imperial Center. These pads may include retail, restaurants or other uses listed in Chapter 5. There are also total of 2,500 parking spaces to ensure convenient parking to the center.

### **Graphic Package**

The graphic and signage package incorporate the essence of Latin America and contemporary California themes. The floor designs are patterned after the natural environment of Southern California and organized into Water Court (at Hotel Complex), Sun Court (Information Center / Auction Center / Food Court); Star Court (Entertainment Complex), River Walk and Space Walk (Wholesale Outlet).





*Figure 1 - D  
Architectural Rendering of the proposed Star Court and Cinema*

## **DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION ISSUES**

The Imperial Center Specific Plan identifies development and conservation issues that will be addressed throughout this Plan. The following issues have been identified:

1. Compatibility with surrounding land uses due to proposed buffering next to agricultural activities,
  - a. Buffering will include a minimum 200 feet buffer zone to mitigate any potential significant impact upon agricultural land both along both the eastern and northerly borders of the project site. This buffer zone will be measured from the edge of a building within the project site to the edge of the agriculture zone. The agriculture zone is the area which contains agriculture operations. Drains, canals, parking lots and

roads are not considered to be the start of an agriculture zone.

- b. Install a 6 foot solid block wall along the easterly property line. The truck loading area located directly adjacent to the agriculture property to the east of the project site will act as a sufficient buffer to the property.
  - c. More information regarding surrounding land use compatibility issues can be found in Chapter 11.
2. Providing safe and efficient traffic circulation and site access, including:
    - a. Safe and adequate access for both private and emergency vehicles while complementing the regional circulation; and
    - b. Providing adequate facilities for the delivery of all public services to the proposed development within the project,
  3. Providing a unique commercial neighborhood with a compatible mixture of commercial facilities:
  4.
    - a. Providing Public Services for:
      - i. Sewer;
      - ii. Drinking Water;
      - iii. Electricity; and
      - iv. Storm Water Retention.
    - b. Phasing;
    - c. Architectural variety and enhanced landscaping opportunities;
    - d. Maintaining design criteria and compliance with policies and

## Regulations.

The above noted issues are addressed through objectives, policies, and programs identified later in this plan.