

AGENDA
ITEM

13



CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA STAFF REPORT

DATE: May 7, 2025
TO: Mayor and City Council
APPROVED BY: Richard Daniels, Interim City Manager *RDK*
PREPARED BY: Richard Daniels, Interim City Manager
SUBJECT: Letter of Support for Senate Bill 534 (Padilla): Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone

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Recommendation:

Approval of letter of Support for Senate Bill 534 (Padilla): Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone.

Background:

The Salton Sea Region has historically faced insufficient public and private investment, leading to inadequate infrastructure for economic growth, poor air quality, high unemployment, and restricted access to healthcare. In December 2022, the Blue Ribbon Commission proposed creating an economic zone encompassing Imperial County as well as the Eastern Coachella and Palo Verde Valleys.

Discussion and Analysis:

Calexico City Endorses Senate Bill 534 (Padilla): Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone This legislation aims to draw both public and private investments to areas in the region that have historically been neglected and underserved. SB 534 establishes a procedure for starting the creation of the Empowerment Zone. A 54-member board of directors, comprising both voting and non-voting members, would govern this Zone. The establishment of an executive committee to assist in carrying out the Board's functions would be necessary. This Bill aims to prioritize eligibility for tax incentives, grants, and loan programs, while authorizing the designation of an empowerment zone encompassing certain lands and communities within the Imperial and Eastern Coachella regions. Access to tax incentives, grants and loan programs would be some of the benefits. A sustained effort is underway to support the state's equitable transition to a net-zero-emissions economy. This includes developing reliable and ongoing renewable energy sources.

Fiscal Impact:

None at this time.

Coordinated With:

None.

Attachment(s):

Letter of Support.



CALEXICO *California*

WHERE CALIFORNIA AND MEXICO MEET

May 7, 2025

Honorable Senator Maria Elena Durazo
Capitol Office, 1021 O Street, Suite 7530
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Senate Bill 534 (Padilla): Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone

Dear Senator Maria Elena Durazo,

On behalf of the City of Calexico, I am pleased to offer our strong support of SB 534, which would establish the Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone.

The City of Calexico operates under a City Council/City Manager form of government. As the Mayor for the City of Calexico, it is my job to manage staff and dedicated professionals who together work around the clock to ensure we are providing the very highest level of service to our community.

The Salton Sea Region suffers from a historic lack of public and private investment, which results in inadequate infrastructure to support economic development, poor air quality, high unemployment, workers without advanced and specialized skills, and limited access to health care. The California Environmental Protection Agency's [CalEnviroScreen mapping tool](#) identifies a majority of census tracts in the region as disadvantaged and disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution.

Today, the Salton Sea Region stands at a critical juncture, with a chance to become a major domestic supplier of lithium. This opportunity could drive regional prosperity and create high-paid jobs, supported by well-articulated workforce training programs, expanded local supply chains, and new battery manufacturing and related R&D facilities. Central to this prosperity scenario is the region's ability to unite and attract private and public investment, paving the way for a brighter future.

Unfortunately, the region has experienced major boom-and-bust cycles - economic promises that have failed to deliver sustainable quality-of-life improvements to the residents and local communities. Name the state statistic, and Imperial County is usually near the top or the bottom, whichever is worse: unemployment, per capita income, welfare recipients, families below the poverty line, elderly living in poverty, and so on.

In 2020, Governor Newsom [signed legislation](#) establishing the [Blue Ribbon Commission on Lithium Extraction in California](#). The commission brought together a broad spectrum of

government, nonprofit, and other private sector stakeholders to help the state better understand lithium recovery's opportunities and potential challenges in California and the Salton Sea Region.

In its December 2022 report, the Blue Ribbon Commission recommended the establishment of an economic zone that would include Imperial County and the Eastern Coachella and Palo Verde Valleys. Federal, state, and local governments would recognize this zone, which would be eligible to compete for funding and investments.

To capture the full benefits of Lithium Valley renewable energy development, the southeastern desert valleys need a definitive economic development designation and structure that supports efficient resource attraction and fosters economic relationships between business, labor, and community

For these reasons, SB 534 (Padilla) would further City of Calexico goals, and we are proud to support SB 534(Padilla) and encourage your “aye” vote when it is heard in your committee.

Best regards,

Diana Nuricumbo, Mayor
City of Calexico