

# City of Calexico

## Draft General Plan Introduction

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# INTRODUCTION

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*The Calexico General Plan is the primary source of long-range planning and policy direction that will guide growth and preserve the quality of life within the community. The future of Calexico, like that of all cities, will be the result of past and current decision making by those who have a local role in the development process, including residents, property and business owners, elected officials and City staff. The 2015 General Plan Update, upon adoption will replace the 2007 General Plan. Implementation of the Calexico General Plan will ensure that future projects and improvements are consistent with the community's goals, policies and objectives.*

## 1.1 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PLANNING GRANT

 **THE Strategic Growth Council** awarded the City of Calexico a Sustainable Communities Planning Grant in 2013. The Sustainable Communities Planning Grants fund climate action plans, infill development plans, sustainable community strategies, and other planning efforts, all specifically aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions consistent with State climate goals.

All awards are funded through Proposition 84 bond allocations which were approved by the voters in 2006.

Funded activities are intended to achieve the following Program Objectives:

- Improve air and water quality
- Promote public health
- Promote equity
- Increase housing affordability
- Promote infill and compact development
- Revitalize urban and community centers
- Protect natural resources and agricultural lands
- Reduce automobile usage and fuel consumption
- Improve infrastructure systems
- Promote water conservation
- Promote energy efficiency and conservation
- Strengthen the economy

For the City of Calexico, the funds from the Sustainable Communities Planning Grant are dedicated to the completion of three major Tasks:

- Task 1 Targeted General Plan Update
- Task 2 Climate Action Plan
- Task 3 Agricultural Element

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The Agricultural Element is Section 10.0 of this *2015 General Plan Update*.

The City was awarded the Planning Grant because its planning efforts would contribute to achieving the Program Objectives listed above through a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and initiatives, for example, to promote infill development, protect agricultural lands, and strengthen the economy.

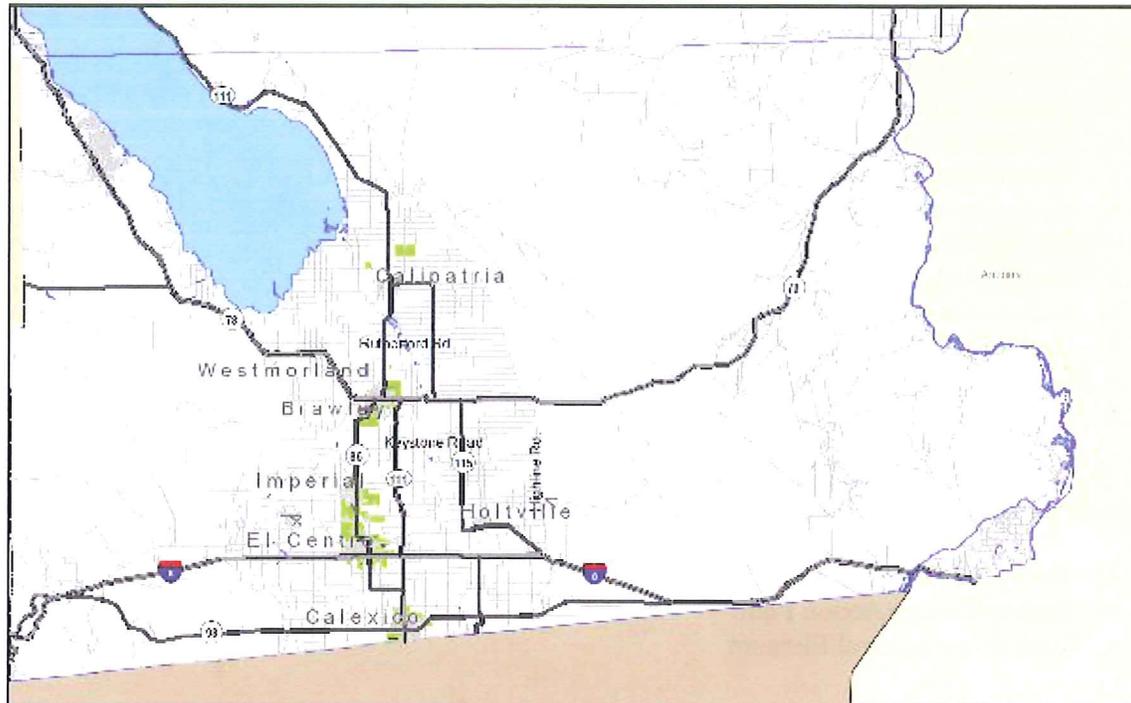


## 1.2 REGIONAL SETTING

Calexico is one of seven incorporated cities located in Imperial County and is:

- 198 miles southeast of Los Angeles
- 122 miles east of San Diego
- 62 miles west of Yuma

The City is situated directly along the U.S./Mexico International border, adjacent to the City of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico.



**Imperial County  
Regional Setting**

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Calexico's port of entry is a major entrance point for thousands of persons as well as large amounts of goods traveling between the two countries. Its economy reflects its proximity to the Mexican border and its location in an agriculturally-oriented California county.

Calexico, in recent years, has also been providing alternative housing options for some commuters from Mexicali that choose to live in the U.S. and work across the border. As housing prices become unaffordable in other parts of Southern California, commuters from San Diego County may also be looking to Imperial County for affordable housing options. Calexico's location on Highway 98 and near Interstate 8 makes it a logical provider of housing and services for this new segment of future residents.

Calexico has grown from a population of 27,109 persons in 2000 to 41,033 in 2010, an increase of 51%. According to the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), Calexico is projected have the largest population of all Imperial County cities by 2020 or soon thereafter.

The community of Calexico faces challenges ahead as it attempts to accommodate future growth, while protecting its agricultural heritage, international border community ties and quality of life.

## 1.3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Calexico, which began as a tent city of the Imperial Land Company, was founded in 1899 and incorporated in 1908. The Imperial Land Company converted desert land into a fertile setting for year-round agriculture. The name Calexico was coined from a combination of the words California and Mexico.

To understand the history of Calexico, it is important to understand the history of the Imperial Valley.



Geological evidence indicates that hundreds of years ago a salt-water lake of approximately 4,500 square miles occupied the area that is now the Imperial Valley. This body of water, named Cahuilla after the area's Indian inhabitants, was fed by the Colorado River. The lake gradually evaporated over 600 years ago, leaving a vast depression covered with salt deposits.

Following the discovery of the Colorado River by Europeans in 1540, various expeditions led by Spanish explorers crossed the Imperial Valley. Soon after the initial expeditions, Lt. Juan Bautista de Anza established an overland route from Mexico to the California Pacific Coast for colonists and supplies. This overland route resulted in the first secular European settlements in California. Some of these settlements were founded in the Imperial Valley and served as the way stations for all overland travel from Mexico to California.

In 1892, the Colorado River Irrigation Company, under the direction of C.R. Rockwood, Chief Engineer, began planning to build a canal to bring fresh water into the Imperial Valley. The canal was to connect with the overflow channel of the Colorado River and extend several miles south into Mexico. The first water diversion project was completed in 1901. Construction on the main canal, however, was hampered by financial and legal difficulties as well as by natural

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disasters. In the period from 1902-1907, the flooding Colorado River changed its course, flowing northward into the Imperial Valley and remaining in the northern portion to create what is now the Salton Sea. In 1940, the All American Canal was completed, creating a means of irrigating land which has become one of the most productive agricultural areas in the nation.

On April 4, 2010 the El Mayor earthquake caused moderate to heavy damage throughout Calexico and across the border in Mexicali. Measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale, the quake was centered about 40 miles south of the U.S.-Mexico border near Mexicali. A state of emergency was declared and officials cordoned off First and Second streets between Paulin and Heber Avenues. Glass and debris littered the streets of downtown Calexico and two buildings partially collapsed. The Calexico water treatment plant sustained severe damage.

## 1.4 PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

The State of California mandates that each jurisdiction prepare and adopt a comprehensive general plan. Government Code Section 65300 et. seq. requires the general plan to address all issues that affect the physical development of the community, as well as land outside its boundaries that potentially affect the City's long-term planning. The role of a general plan is to act as a "constitution" for development, the foundation upon which all land use decisions are based.

All general plans in California must meet minimum requirements, as stipulated in the State Government Code. Each general plan is required to address State mandated issues as they apply to the particular community. State mandated issues, more commonly referred to as "elements," include: Land Use; Housing; Circulation; Open Space; Conservation; Noise; and Safety. Each jurisdiction has the authority to include additional elements if the issue is important to the long-term development of the community.

### State-Mandated General Plan Elements

The **Land Use Element** designates the general distribution of uses of land for housing, business, industry, open space, education, public buildings and grounds, waste disposal facilities, and other categories of public and private uses. The Land Use Element also sets forth standards for population density and building intensity.

The **Circulation Element** is correlated with the land use element, and identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities. Overall, the objective of the Circulation Element is to promote the movement of people and goods.

The **Housing Element** includes a comprehensive assessment of current and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community. It embodies policy for providing adequate housing for all economic segments of the community, and includes a five-year action program.

The **Conservation Element** addresses the conservation, management, and use of natural resources, including water, soils, biological habitats, and mineral deposits. Specific requirements are set forth to ensure the coordination of water resource planning and future development.

The **Open Space Element** details programs for preserving open space for natural resource protection, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, and protection of public health and safety.

The **Noise Element** evaluates present and projected noise levels within the community as a guide for establishing a pattern of land uses in the land use element that minimizes the exposure of community residents to excessive noise.

The **Safety Element** establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risk associated with seismic, geologic, flood, and fire hazards, including identification of hazards, establishment of safety standards, and delineation of evacuation routes.

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The organization of the general plan is also determined by the local jurisdiction. Most general plans are organized by individual issue sections, or elements. Although the State allows the local jurisdiction the latitude to combine or place the elements in any order, all elements must be internally consistent and have equal status. Equal status means that each element is equally important, thereby giving the same authority to the Land Use Element as to the Noise Element or any other element, including any optional elements the local jurisdiction elects to include in their general plan.

The City of Calexico General Plan contains goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures which are intended to guide land use and development decisions.

The General Plan consists of a Land Use Map and the following elements, or chapters, which together fulfill the state requirements for a General Plan:

## State Mandated Elements

- Land Use
- Circulation
- Conservation/Open Space
- Noise
- Safety

## Optional Elements

- Public Facilities/Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Economic Development
- Agricultural

The City has elected to combine the Conservation Element and Open Space Element.

The Housing Element was updated in 2014 and will be updated again in 2021. It is a stand-alone document which is available at the Planning Division and Housing Division.

As further mandated by the State planning law, the General Plan must serve to:

- Identify land use, circulation, environmental, and economic goals and policies for the City and its surrounding planning area as they relate to land use and development;
- Provide a framework within which the City's Planning Commission and City Council can make land use decisions;
- Provide residents, businesses and property owners the opportunity to participate in the planning and decision-making process affecting the City and its surrounding planning area; and
- Inform residents, developers, decision-makers, and other agencies, as appropriate, of the City's basic rules that will guide both environmental protection and land development decisions within the City and surrounding planning area.

## **1.5 ADMINISTERING THE GENERAL PLAN**

It is the intent of the City Council to implement this General Plan by establishing annual planning goals based on the Plan, developing implementing ordinances and regulations, and providing the requisite staff resources. The City Council is also mindful that its intention to implement this General Plan is based on the availability of funding and that some goals, objective, policies, and programs might not be achieved if funds are unavailable.

Once adopted, the General Plan does not remain static. As time goes on, the City may determine that it is necessary to revise portions of the text or add policies or programs to reflect changing circumstances or philosophy. State law provides direction on how cities can maintain the

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General Plan as a contemporary policy guide: it requires each planning department or division to report annually to the City Council on “the status of the plan and progress in its implementation” (§65400[b]). The City Council may respond to the Planning Division’s review by setting goals for the coming year.

## 1.6 AMENDING THE PLAN

It is necessary to periodically review, update and revise the General Plan as the City and its resources are developed. State law permits General Plan amendments up to four times per year for each mandatory element (Government Code §65358[b]). Optional elements are permitted by State law (Government Code §65303), and once adopted, the optional elements carry the same legal weight as the seven mandated elements. However, State law does not specify any limitations regarding the number of times an optional element can be amended per year.

## 1.7 RELATION TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

The City regulates the use of property within its jurisdiction through the General Plan and zoning, subdivision, and building regulations for the purpose of promoting the health, safety, and welfare of the public. The General Plan is a legal document, adopted by the City Council, which concerns development and revitalization in the City.

Other legal documents are also adopted by the City Council and affect development in the City. They include the Zoning Ordinance, Specific Plans, and building regulations. The General Plan is the guiding document for all other land use regulations. Following adoption of the General Plan, any regulations in the zoning, subdivision, building, and other ordinances that are not consistent with the Plan will be amended to insure consistency.

The Zoning Ordinance is one of the many programs that implement the General Plan. It is more detailed than the Plan and regulates development lot-by-lot, based on the General Plan’s goals, objectives, policies, and land use map. The Zoning Ordinance divides the City into districts, or zones, that specify allowable uses for real property, and size restrictions for buildings within these districts and other factors. The Specific Plans regulate and control the design and improvement of areas which are designated within the Specific Plan areas. All Specific Plans within the City must remain consistent with the General Plan and the subsequent General Plan Updates.