



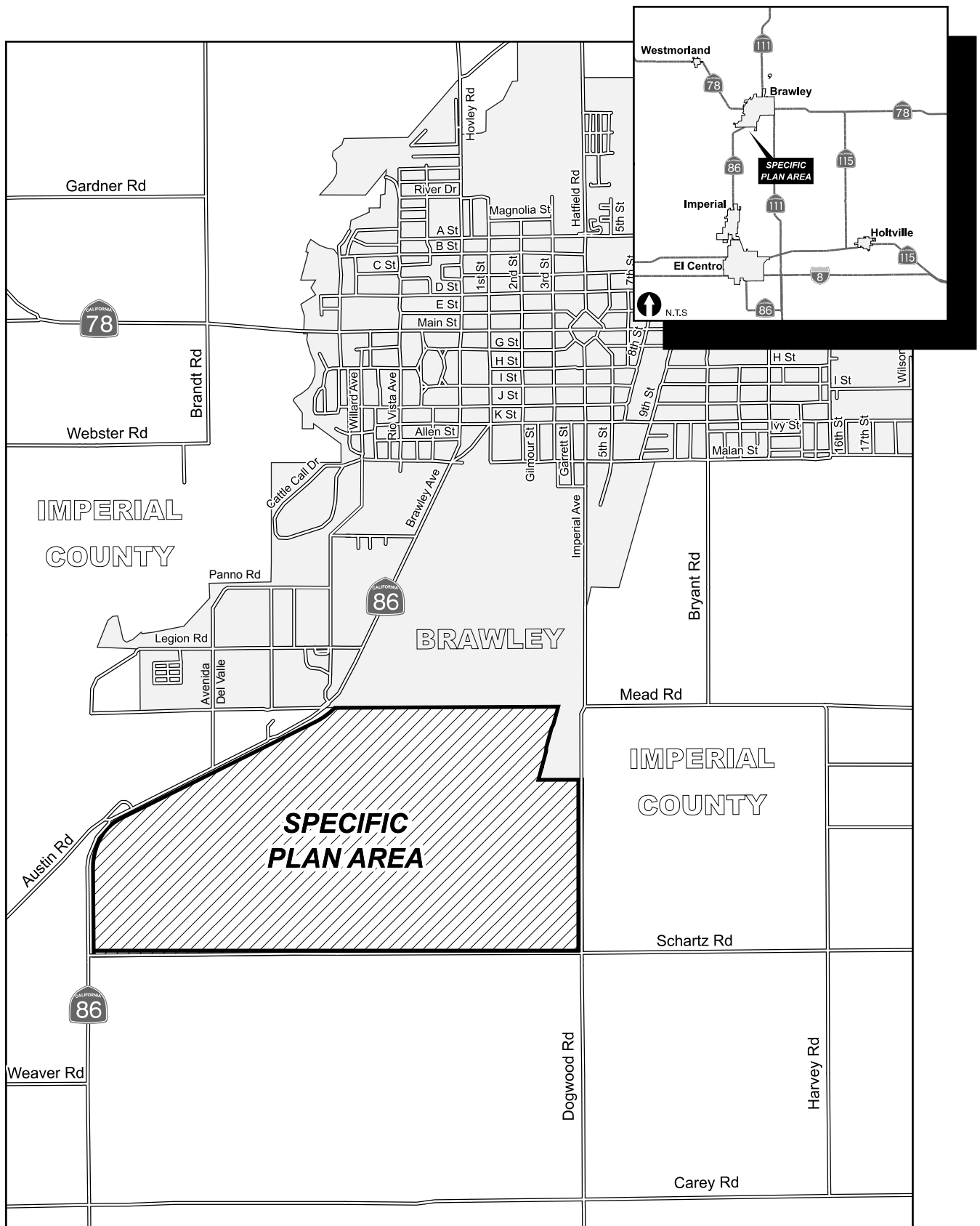
# Chapter One Introduction

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## 1.1 Overview of Specific Plan

This Specific Plan provides the planning tools necessary to guide development of the 1,076 +/- acre Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area (**Figure 1-1**). The Specific Plan area is located adjacent to the City of Brawley in Imperial County, California. The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan (the Plan) establishes a framework for development of the area, including:

- ❖ Proposed land uses, development regulations, and design standards (Chapter 2);
- ❖ A vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle circulation plan (Chapter 3);
- ❖ A plan for protecting and managing important natural resources (Chapter 4);
- ❖ Infrastructure facilities required, including financing and phasing, to support Plan development (Chapters 5, 6, and 7); and,
- ❖ Implementation and administrative processes needed to approve specific development projects in the Plan area (Chapter 8).



Source: TIGER Data, 2005

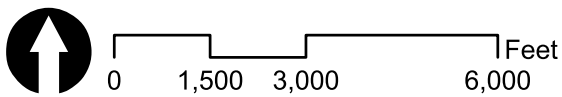


Figure 1-1  
Specific Plan Area Location

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is designed primarily as a pedestrian oriented, residential community where parks, schools and other amenities are within a short walk of most homes along pleasant, tree-lined streets. The Plan is comprised of four main components, the **conventional residential** area, the **active adult residential** area, the **golf course**, and the **business park**. Within these major areas are other uses including commercial, retail, mixed use, parks and schools.

The conventional residential areas of the Plan provide single-family detached, attached, and multi-family homes in a variety of floor plans and architectural styles to meet the growing demand for housing in the Imperial Valley. The conventional residential area also includes a commercial/multi-family mixed use area allowing neighborhood serving retail uses as well as apartments. Strong pedestrian connections are intended to link the commercial and residential land uses within this mixed use area. Vertical mixed use development such as offices or residential apartments above ground floor retail uses could also be developed. This portion of the Plan area also provides an option for a site for a fire station as well as an option for a religious use site that would serve the Plan area and surrounding community.

In addition to conventional residences, the Plan establishes a gated, active adult community, for residents age 55 and over. The active adult community offers detached and attached homes and includes a private homeowner's association (HOA) facility with associated recreational amenities. If market conditions preclude the development of an active adult component in the Plan area, a gated, conventional (non-age restricted) residential neighborhood may be developed in its place. An additional elementary school site would also be provided if needed to accommodate the additional students generated by non-age restricted housing units. The currently planned HOA Facility may not be provided if the active adult community is not developed.

Complementing these residential uses, the focal point for the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area is a 42-acre community park and a public, executive length, 18-hole golf course. Together the community park and golf course provide approximately 181 contiguous acres of visually appealing open space in the central Plan area. Furthermore, a series of lakes and water features are interspersed throughout the community park and golf course to enhance the identity of this unique community.

In addition to the golf course and community park, a variety of neighborhood parks and mini-parks are located throughout the Plan area providing residents additional recreation opportunities within easy walking distance of most homes. The majority of homes in the Plan area are within a three minute walk to a park. Also centrally located within the Plan area are two elementary schools located within easy walking distance of most residences. All of the neighborhood parks and schools are linked by an extensive trails system which also connects these amenities to the central community park. A variety of desert-appropriate plants and trees will comprise the majority of the plant material palette.

Oasis-type landscaping such as bougainvillea and turf grass will highlight important areas such as public spaces and selected streets.

Commercial land uses within the northeast corner of the Plan area, mixed use area and business park provide employment, retail, and entertainment opportunities for those living within the community. The portion of the Plan area located east of the Southern Pacific Railroad is proposed as a business park, which would provide employment opportunities to Plan area residents and the region at large. An electric substation and a wastewater treatment/reclamation plant may also be located within the business park area. The entire Plan area is surrounded by open space which buffers the residential neighborhoods from the business park, adjacent regional-serving roads, and the Southern Pacific Railroad.

The Plan's four main components, the conventional residential area, active adult residential area, the golf course, and the business park, will be developed independently of one another over several years based upon market conditions. Each component may be developed over several phases with associated infrastructure and with community facilities provided concurrently, generally proportionate to the percentage of residential units within the respective phase. The Plan also accommodates the potential inclusion of cultural uses such as religious and community facilities located at various sites throughout the Plan area.

Recognizing the projected long-term buildout of the Plan area and potential changes in market conditions over time, the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan assumes that certain variations to the Land Use Plan could occur, including the transfer of units between parcels and the mixture of unit types ultimately developed; however, the Specific Plan establishes a total allowable maximum number of 3,830 dwelling units in the Plan area.

## 1.2 Planning Objectives

A Specific Plan allows a developer to comprehensively plan the land uses and public facilities of a large contiguous land area while maintaining a degree of design flexibility to respond to future conditions. The following planning objectives have been established to guide the development of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area:

- ❖ Develop a highly walkable community plan that integrates a variety of residential uses, including an active adult community or conventional gated community, commercial areas, parks, schools, and other facilities essential to the daily lives of the residents.
- ❖ Use a series of parkland areas connected by a trails system to link compatible land uses that are within easy walking distance of each other.

- ❖ Promote an active lifestyle by providing a variety of recreational amenities such as the golf course, walking trails, bike routes, parks, and open spaces.
- ❖ Provide a park or open space within a three to five minute walking distance of most residences in the Plan area.
- ❖ Enhance the community's well-used sports facilities and reputation as a youth sports community by incorporating a variety of sports fields within many of the Plan's park areas.
- ❖ Provide a variety of housing opportunities, ranging in size and affordability, to meet the housing needs of the region.
- ❖ Incorporate commercial land uses to provide adequate service and shopping opportunities for both local residents and visitors.
- ❖ Incorporate design features that support a unique living environment with a strong sense of community and social interaction.
- ❖ Design a safe and efficient circulation system that adequately supports the anticipated level of traffic in and around the Plan area.
- ❖ Provide public services that meet the needs of development in the Plan area including a potential fire station site.
- ❖ Develop a financing and phasing plan that provides for the efficient and timely provision of infrastructure and public services as development occurs.

### **1.3 Specific Plan Purpose and Scope**

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan serves as the primary land use, policy, and regulatory document for the Plan area by providing for an efficient development planning and review process. This planning and review process emphasizes the direct and comprehensive correlation between land use, public services, and infrastructure necessary to support those land uses. When implemented together, the elements of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan support the logical development of the Plan area by establishing a comprehensive planning program that is responsive to the opportunities and constraints of the area.

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is both a policy and regulatory document. As a policy document, the Plan applies the broader goals and policies of the Imperial County General Plan by establishing specific objectives for the Plan area. As a regulatory document, the Plan specifies the land uses and associated development, as well as design and infrastructure standards that must be met to successfully implement the Plan. Through the inclusion of development, design, and infrastructure standards (as well as the incorporation by reference of the applicable County of Imperial Land Use Ordinance provisions) this Plan creates standards specifically applicable to the Plan area. As a

regulatory document, all subsequent design documents and development activities in the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area are required to be consistent with the Plan.

## 1.4 Specific Plan Authority

Specific Plans are authorized and described in California Government Code §65450 et seq. As set forth in the Government Code, Specific Plans are required to contain the following information:

- ❖ The distribution, location, and extent of the use of land, including open space, within the area covered by the Plan.
- ❖ The proposed distribution, location, extent, and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, wastewater, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities to be located within the Plan area and needed to support the proposed land uses.
- ❖ Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, as well as the standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources.
- ❖ A program of implementation measures, including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out the Plan.
- ❖ A statement of the relationship of the Specific Plan to the applicable General Plan.

## 1.5 Contents of the Specific Plan

To meet the requirements described above, the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan includes the following components and features:

- ❖ Planning objectives that expand upon the Imperial County General Plan regarding land use, circulation, resource management, as well as public services and utilities (Chapter 1);
- ❖ Written and graphic descriptions of proposed land uses within the Plan area, with clearly identified specific development patterns and design standards (Chapter 2);
- ❖ Written and graphic depictions of the proposed vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation system for the Plan area and how that system will tie into adjacent properties (Chapter 3);
- ❖ Textual descriptions and graphic illustrations of significant natural resources in the Plan area and a plan for the conservation of important resources (Chapter 4);
- ❖ A public service and utility plan that includes the location and extent of public services and utilities necessary to serve the Plan area (Chapters 5 and 6);

- ❖ A public facility financing and phasing plan that provides the general framework for the financing and phasing of public improvements in the Plan area (Chapter 7); and
- ❖ An implementation program that describes the project review procedures and regulations for specific development projects within the Plan area and any future Plan amendments (Chapter 8).

## **1.6 Plan Area Setting**

### **1.6.1 Regional and Local Setting**

The 1,076-acre Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area is located in Imperial County, California, adjacent to the southern border of the City of Brawley, within the City's Sphere of Influence. The Plan area is generally bounded by the Rockwood Canal to the north, Dogwood Road to the east, the Pearsol Drain to the south and SR-86 to the west. Adjacent land uses are predominantly characterized by irrigated agricultural fields in active cultivation with several existing buildings located just outside the northeast corner of the Plan area on two separate parcels. One parcel contains a regional electrical substation and a power station that satisfies electrical demand during periods of high energy usage. The other parcel is occupied by sheds associated with trucking operations. Development of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is not anticipated to impact the structures located on this parcel.

Regional access to the Plan area is provided by Interstate 8 (I-8) located south of the Plan area, State Route 86 (SR-86) bordering the Plan area on the west and northwest, State Route 78 (SR-78) north of the Plan area, and State Route 111 (SR-111) east of the Plan area. Dogwood Road provides local access to the eastern portion of the Plan area.

Several easements surround and traverse the Plan area. The Imperial Irrigation District (IDD) owns several easements associated with existing canals, drains and electrical lines. The easements and their associated facilities will be retained, vacated or realigned as appropriate. Additionally, the County of Imperial owns several easements associated with highways and roads adjacent to the Plan area.

### **1.6.2 Plan Area Physical Characteristics**

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area consists of generally flat terrain with very gentle topography sloping downward toward the southeast. The Plan area is under various phases of active cultivation and contains canals and drains that are used to transport water to and from the agricultural resources located on-site. Several canals and drains are located within the Plan area. Several unpaved roads traverse the site.

The Plan area is currently covered predominately by land designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance, with approximately 9 percent of the Plan area classified as Prime Farmlands. Crops grown in the Plan area typically include alfalfa and hay. These agricultural lands provide habitat for a variety of reptiles, mammals, and birds, including the burrowing owl.

The Plan area has no distinguishing natural features, although the man-made canals bordering the site include portions of the historic Imperial Irrigation District (IID) canal system, which is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.0 - Resource Management.

### **1.6.3 Property Ownership**

Separate individual entities currently own varying percentage interests, collectively as tenants in common, in the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area, which is comprised of two parcels. Parcel one consists of approximately 961 acres located west of the Southern Pacific railroad. Parcel two consists of approximately 115 acres located east of the Southern Pacific railroad. **Figure 1-2** depicts the two parcels that comprise the Plan area.

### **1.6.4 Summary of Factors that Influence the Specific Plan**

The opportunities and constraints described below are key factors influencing the development of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan. These include physical conditions, such as the existing agricultural canals and drains, the Southern Pacific Railroad, and a petroleum pipe line and two gas lines with associated setback requirements, as shown in **Figure 1-3**. Other existing influencing factors are also described below.

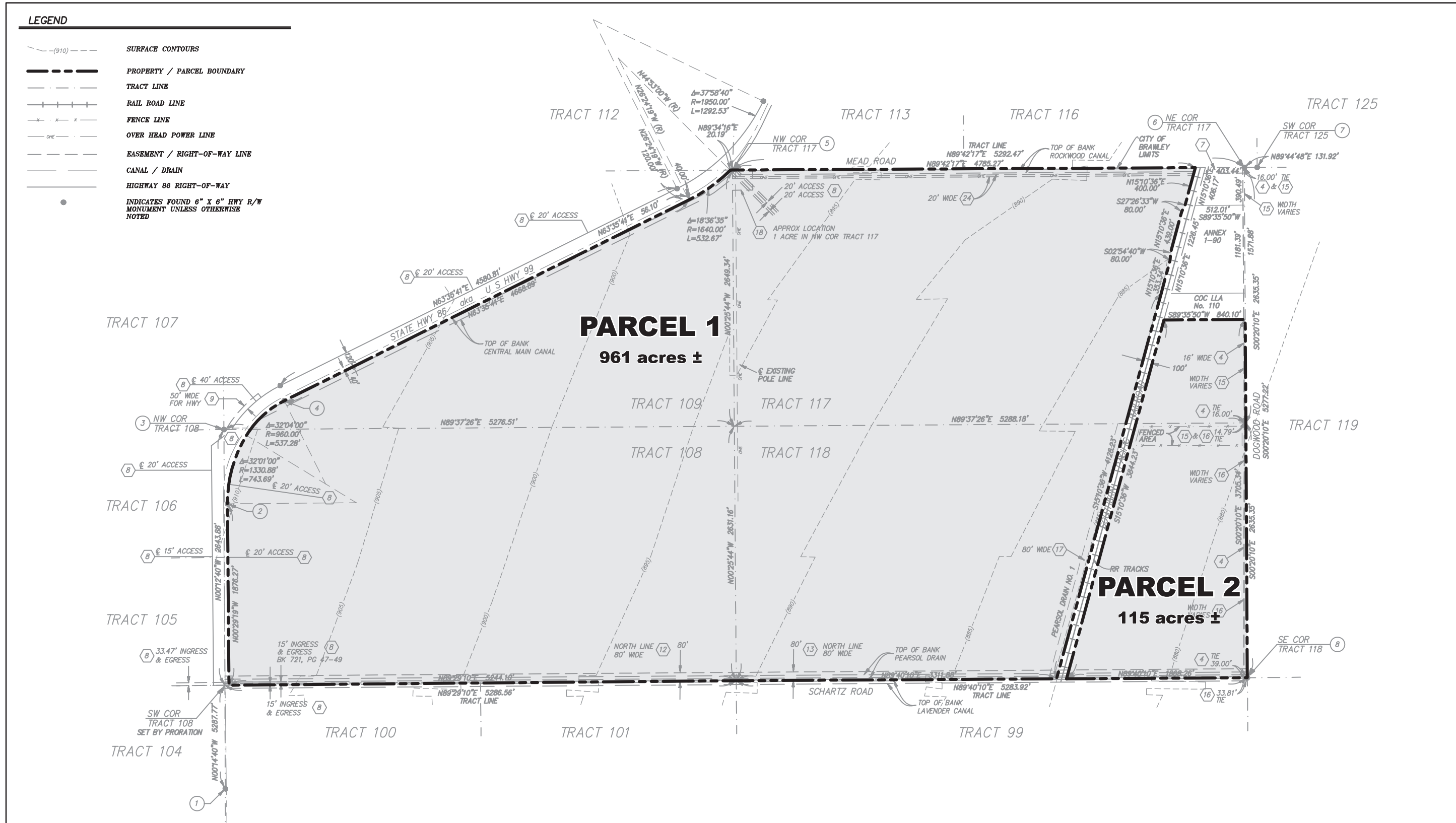
#### **General Location**

The Plan's proximity to SR-86, SR-111, SR-78 and I-8 provides opportunities for both residential and non-residential development that is highly visible and easily accessible. Additionally, medical facilities, public services, dining, shopping and cultural events are located a short distance away. Plan area roadways provide easy access to these amenities through connections to the State Highway system and regional arterial system. Location and accessibility of the Plan area provide local and regional residents easy access to the Plan's recreational amenities such as the golf course, community park, trails, and lake.

#### **Topography and Site Drainage**

The Plan area is nearly level with very gentle topography sloping toward the southeast. This presents challenges for on-site drainage and detention, common to developments throughout the Imperial Valley. As a result, the Plan includes open space areas within the community that also play a role in the Plan area's comprehensive site drainage, detention, and storm water management system. These open space areas also allow for





Source: NOLTE, 2006

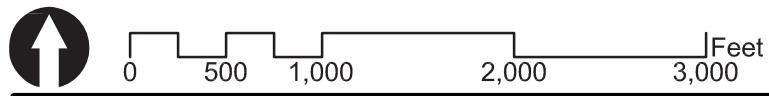
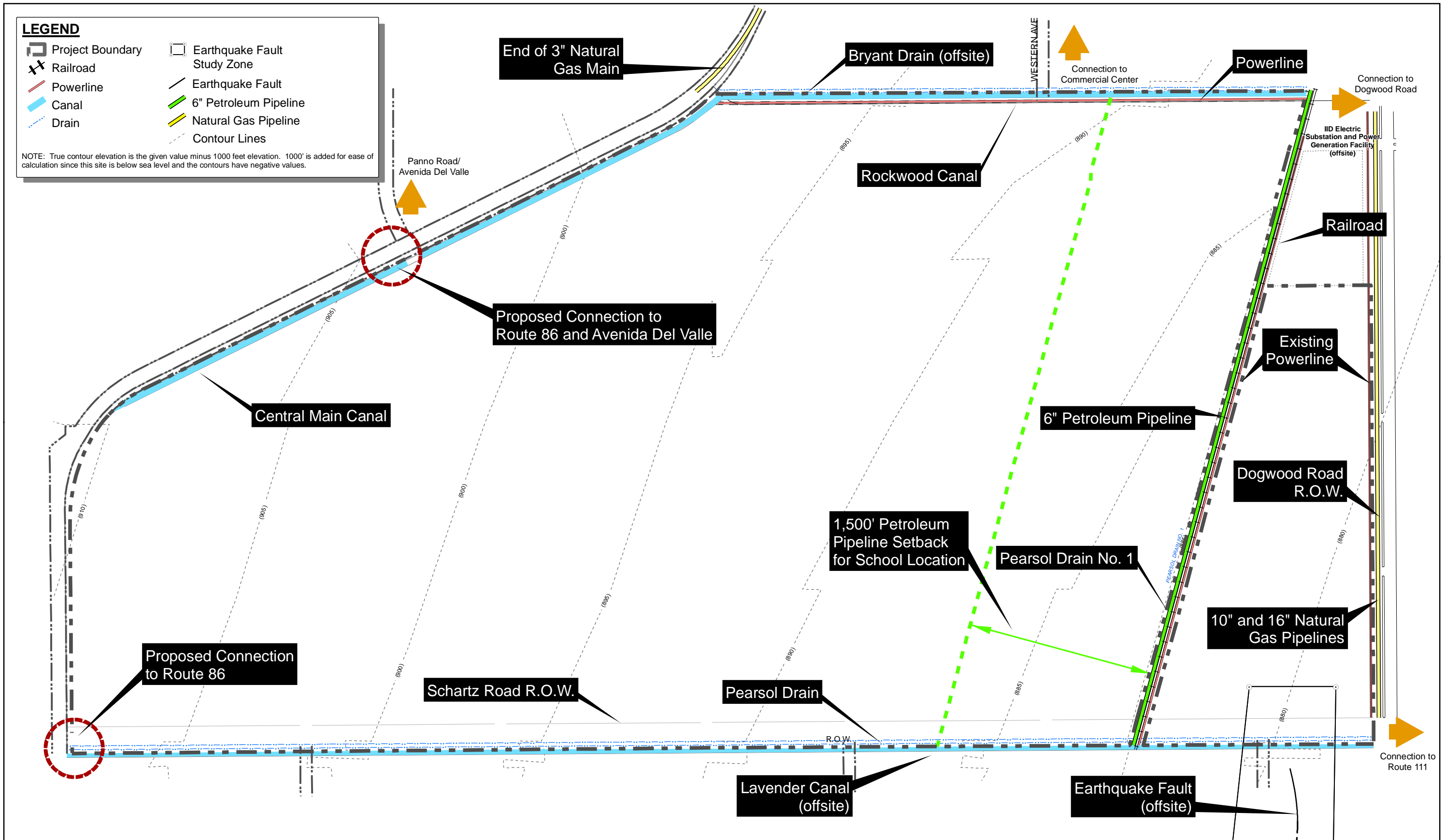
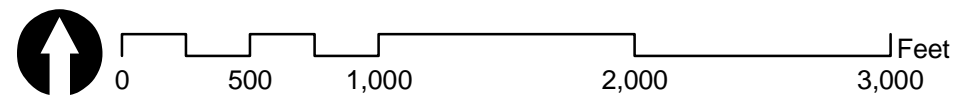


Figure 1-2  
Existing Parcel Map

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Source: P&D Consultants in conjunction with EDAW, 2006; State of California, 1990



P&D Consultants/EDAW

County of Imperial

Figure 1-3  
Opportunities and Constraints Map

Rancho Los Lagos

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better absorption and filtering of rain water, thereby reducing pollution and the potential for localized flooding.

### **Canals, Drains and Easements**

The Imperial Irrigation District provides irrigation water to existing agricultural operations within the Plan area through a system of canals and drains. The canals provide water to irrigate the farm fields while drains remove the excess water from the fields. In addition to the IID canals and drains, the fields within the Plan area contain a system of smaller private irrigation ditches that supplement the IID system by controlling the irrigation of specific fields.

The layout of the Specific Plan has avoided the disturbance of these IID canals and drains. The future Jameson Road right-of-way is located south of the Rockwood Canal and existing power line easements. The future Lavender (Schartz) Road right-of-way is located north of the Lavender Canal and Pearsol Drain easements. Pearsol Drain is anticipated to be upgraded to an underground pipe within a 40-foot easement along the southern boundary of the Plan area. The proposed roadway crossings over the canals are located where those crossings are most feasible; and, are limited to the minimum number necessary to provide adequate access to the Plan area and connection to adjacent properties.

The operation of IID canals and drains during and subsequent to development within the Plan area will be maintained. The potential also exists to draw raw water from the Central Main and Lavender Canals for irrigation of future landscaping and the golf course, particularly if no reclaimed water is available.

Several easements surround and traverse the Plan area. The Imperial Irrigation District (IDD) owns several easements associated with existing canals, drains and electrical lines. The easements and their associated facilities will be retained, vacated or realigned as appropriate. Additionally, the County of Imperial owns several easements associated with highways and roads adjacent to the Plan area.

### **Existing and Future Site Access**

The Plan area's westerly property line is adjacent to SR-86 and the easterly property line is adjacent to Dogwood Road. The north and south property lines are just north of future Jameson Road and just south of Lavender (Schartz) Road, respectively. The Southern Pacific Railroad separates the easterly 115 acres (Parcel 2) of the Plan area from the balance (Parcel 1) of the property.

Access to the Plan area from the existing and future roadways is limited by roadway and railroad regulatory policies, thereby impacting ingress and egress into the Plan area. SR-86 is a State highway passing through the City of Brawley. On a state highway in urban

areas, road access points are recommended to be no closer than ¼ mile (1,320 feet) apart. Local road access points to a State highway in rural areas are recommended to be no closer than ½ mile (2,640 feet) apart. The Plan area is in an area transitioning from rural to urban.

Dogwood Road is designated as a future six lane prime arterial. Local road access points are recommended to be no closer than approximately 1,320 foot spacing. Similarly, intersection spacing on Lavender (Schartz) Road is also recommended to be no less than 1,320 feet.

Future offsite roadway extensions also impact the access locations for the Plan area. Avenida Del Valle to the northwest of the Plan area is planned to be extended by others south to intersect with SR-86. The Specific Plan proposes to extend Avenida Del Valle from SR-86 over the Central Main Canal and into the Plan area to the western edge of the community park. Western Avenue to the north of the Plan area is planned to be extended south (by others) to intersect with future Jameson Road. One of the Entry Avenues in the Plan area is in alignment with the future extension Western Avenue to allow for a seamless connection into the Plan area south of future Jameson Road.

The layout of the Plan maintains the 2,640 foot recommended intersection spacing on SR-86 with approximately 5,400 feet between the intersections of SR-86 with Avenida Del Valle and Lavender (Schartz) Road. The Plan area's local road intersections along Dogwood Road and Lavender (Schartz) Road average more than 1,320 feet.

### **Railroad**

The Southern Pacific Railroad property divides the property into two parcels, the 961-acre westerly parcel and the 115-acre easterly parcel. As such, the railroad limits access to certain portions of the Plan area.

Three at-grade crossings of the railroad tracks currently occur in the Plan area. These include at-grade crossings just south of the Rockwood Canal, just north of the Pearsol Drain (at Lavender (Schartz) Road), and at the Section line mid-way between the Rockwood Canal and Pearsol Drain. The Specific Plan proposes to participate on a fair share basis in the construction costs of a grade-separated bridge crossing over the railroad tracks at Lavender (Schartz) Road at such time as the improvement of the segment of Lavender (Schartz) Road from the west side of the Plan Area to Dogwood Road is required. The Specific Plan also proposes to relocate and expand the at-grade crossing just south of the Rockwood Canal to the new Jameson Road alignment. Finally, the Specific Plan proposes that the third at-grade crossing at the mid-point between the Rockwood Canal and Pearsol Drain would be abandoned.

## **Underground Utilities**

Two natural gas lines run along Dogwood Road. These pipes parallel the Dogwood Road centerline and are separated from each other by approximately 16 feet. These pipes provide the closest gas conduits to the Plan area and are located more than 3,000 feet from the nearest proposed elementary school site.

In addition, an underground petroleum pipeline runs parallel to the Southern Pacific Railroad, approximately 50 feet west of the tracks. The State of California has established recommended minimum setbacks from such pipelines to the nearest schools. The location of the two elementary schools is outside of the 1,500 foot setback line recommended by the State of California.

## **Imperial Earthquake Fault**

As shown on **Figure 1-3**, an Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone for the Imperial Earthquake Fault extends approximately 500 feet into the southeastern portion of the Plan area. Based on a fault trenching program performed by Geotechnics Inc., it was determined that there is no evidence of fault surface within the Plan area and no active fault is present below the Plan area. Regardless, no habitable residential structures are planned within this area.

## **Residential, Commercial, and Business Park Markets**

Population and employment growth throughout Southern California, Imperial County and Brawley have contributed to increased housing demand as people search for affordable housing opportunities and different kinds of housing products. The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan creates a range of housing choices on a variety of different lot sizes that accommodates a wide income range. Numerous recreational amenities such as the community park and lake and an 18-hole golf course enhance the appeal of the Plan area. The more compact lot arrangements as well as the housing choices accommodate a broader spectrum of price points.

The active adult community meets the growing demand in the southwest for active lifestyle communities that provide numerous recreational amenities. The active adult community also provides a variety of housing choices at different prices. The gated aspect of the active adult community appeals to residents seeking enhanced privacy and security. If development of the active adult community is precluded by market conditions, a gated, conventional residential community may be developed in its place.

The local community retail commercial market is expected to be satisfied by the Gateway Project to the north of the Plan area. However, a market for local convenience retail is expected to remain serving both the needs of the Plan area residents and drive by traffic on SR-86. The Plan provides commercial land uses in a commercial area, mixed use

area, and the business park. Commercial uses allow for employment, services, retail, and entertainment opportunities for Plan area residents. Pedestrian links encourage residents to walk or bike to the mixed use area.

The eastern portion (Parcel 2) of the Plan area is designated within a Manufacturing Enhancement (EM) Enterprise Zone until December 31, 2012. The EM zone is intended to stimulate job creation through business tax credits and other incentives. Manufacturing businesses looking to locate in this area that meet program requirements are eligible for certain financial and project streamlining benefits. The business park uses proposed in the eastern portion of the Plan area provide an opportunity for businesses to take advantage of program benefits that are not readily available elsewhere.

Parcel configuration, site location and access also influenced the specific land use designation of the business park site. The Southern Pacific Railroad abuts the business park site (Parcel 2) on the west, effectively creating a physical barrier to the balance of the Plan area. Dogwood Road, the site's eastern boundary, is planned as one of Imperial County's major north-south arterials and utility corridors. To the north, the site is bounded by an existing industrial storage and transportation yard, as well as a major IID electrical substation and natural gas power plant. The site is also bounded on the south by the planned extension of Lavender (Schartz) Road as a planned arterial roadway. Wedged between these physical barriers, the site is elongated in shape with little area available for buffering sensitive uses from these major infrastructure facilities. Additionally, intersection spacing requirements along both Dogwood Road and Lavender (Schartz) Road severely constrain the number and location of access points. For these reasons, general business park commercial, manufacturing and warehousing uses are appropriate for this site.

Additionally, the location and size of the business park as an employment base, while separated from the balance of the Plan area, offers employment opportunities to both the Rancho Los Lagos residents and nearby existing and emerging communities to foster a jobs-housing balance. These opportunities are magnified by the existing designation of the business park area as within the Brawley Enterprise Zone with all the attendant employer tax benefits.

At the same time, the business park provides development opportunities for facilities and services related to and supportive of both nearby existing communities and those evolving planned communities. Such uses and services could include such building related industries as construction contractors and tradesmen, material suppliers, landscape installers, nurseries, maintenance companies and suppliers, and other building related industries, as well as resident-oriented self-storage, boat and RV storage facilities, and certain types of community and recreational facilities.

Finally, due to location and relative elevation, portions of the site may be most appropriate for certain required infrastructure facilities such as an electrical substation



specifically serving the Plan area, and a potential wastewater reclamation facility and/or sewage pump station to serve the Plan area.

### **Public Facilities and Recreation Needs**

The Plan provides a community park, neighborhood parks, mini-parks, lakes, a golf course, open space areas, bike routes, tree-lined sidewalks, and various trails for walking and hiking. The variety of recreational amenities provides recreational opportunities for a wide segment of the community.

The Plan provides public facilities to meet the needs of Plan area residents as well as residents beyond the Plan area. A potential fire station site would serve the Plan area and surrounding community. An electrical substation would provide for the energy needs of the community. In addition, the Plan also accommodates the potential inclusion of cultural uses such as religious and community facilities located at various sites throughout the Plan area.

### **Development Phasing / Agricultural Operations**

The Plan area is currently an ongoing agricultural operation. For a long term development plan such as the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan, these operations need to be maintained on those portions of the property that have not been developed. This requires development phasing to be structured around the maintenance and access to irrigation water and other agricultural operation factors.

The layout of the Plan and the phased development of the Plan allows for the continuation of agricultural operations and access to irrigation water. Slight modifications to the on-site private irrigation ditch system will be required. Where developed land is adjacent to agricultural fields, buffering practices such as temporary landscaping and berms may be used to minimize any potential incompatibilities.

### **New Community Planning and Development Techniques**

Throughout the United States, the overall approach to master planned communities has changed significantly in the last 15 years. The emphasis is on techniques to create stronger communities with a wider variety of housing types, public facilities and transportation options.

The Plan contains a stronger orientation towards pedestrian and bicycle access while still accommodating vehicular needs. The Plan emphasizes walkability through residential neighborhood design by featuring more compact lot arrangements, front porches and residential units that front the street. In addition, a series of interconnected streets and a variety of public spaces such as sidewalks, parks and trails connect various land uses and

provide increased access and travel options to residents. The Plan applies a variety of these techniques in the context of the Plan area's unique environment.

### **Hazardous Materials**

A Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment was prepared by Geotechnics Inc. (Geotechnics) for the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area. The results of the Phase 1 study did not reveal any obvious Recognized Environmental Conditions except:

- ❖ Probable historical use of bio-accumulative pesticides in the Plan area and adjacent properties. Based on the testing performed by Geotechnics at similar agricultural sites in the Imperial Valley, Geotechnics concluded that the potential health risk posed by pesticide residues that may exist on-site is probably not significant.
- ❖ Lead-based paint (LBP) and asbestos containing material (ACM) were commonly used in construction prior to the late 1970's. Based on the pre-1980 construction of a residence located within the Plan area, it is highly likely that lead-based paint and asbestos containing material may exist at this site. Geotechnics concluded that due to the age of the residence located in the Plan area, the presence of ACM and LBP is highly likely and would require mitigation prior to the renovation or demolition of the building.

Subsequent to the Phase 1 study and the approval of the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District, the City of Brawley Fire Department burned the residence for training purposes. Prior to the burn, testing for LBP and ACM revealed the presence of ACM in floor tiles which were then removed and properly disposed of prior to the burn.

## **1.7 Planning Background**

### **1.7.1 Specific Plan Initiation**

A prior concept master plan for the development of Rancho Los Lagos was prepared in 1992. The central amenity of the plan was a 200-acre championship golf course. A mix of single and multi-family residential, as well as commercial space, schools, parks and open space were envisioned to surround the golf course. Due to market conditions in the early to mid 1990's that plan was never entitled or implemented.

In response to a range of significant changed conditions, the Rancho Los Lagos ownership group decided in 2005 to re-evaluate the goals and planning approach of the 1992 plan. These significant changed conditions included the evolving market for varying residential lot sizes and housing types, an evolving market for commercial development, a perceived emerging market for retirement communities with a wide range of age-targeted recreational amenities, and the increased pace of development in Imperial County including both traditional subdivisions and master planned communities.

In addition, certain new key philosophies have emerged since 1992 in concepts of community planning with a stronger orientation towards pedestrian and bicycle access and circulation while accommodating vehicular needs in a safer manner. These new community planning concepts enhance the community identity by creating a linked system of public spaces that include trails, parks, schools and local-serving commercial.

### **1.7.2 Community Participation**

As described in California Government Code §65453, a specific plan shall be prepared, adopted, and amended in the same manner as a general plan. Accordingly, Government Code §65351 states that during the preparation or amendment of the general plan, the planning agency shall provide opportunities for the involvement of citizens, California Native American Indian tribes, public agencies, public utility companies, and civic, education, and other community groups, through public hearings and any other means the planning agency deems appropriate.

Additionally, at least one public hearing is required before the Imperial County Planning Commission, and one public hearing is required before the Imperial County Board of Supervisors. Thus, at a minimum, public input regarding the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is provided at the Imperial County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors meetings prior to the adoption of this Specific Plan. However, additional meetings may be held with community groups as well as other interested parties to address issues related to the Plan and the Plan area.

## **1.8 Relationship to Existing Plans and Regulations**

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is closely related to several documents that will also have a bearing on development within the Plan area. This section describes the relationship between this Plan and other applicable regulatory documents.

The Plan area is within the jurisdiction of unincorporated Imperial County. The Imperial County General Plan serves as the blueprint for future growth and development and establishes policies for lands located within the unincorporated areas of Imperial County. The Land Use Element of the Imperial County General Plan designates the Plan area as an Urban Area. Urban Areas are characterized by a full level of urban services, in particular public water and sewer systems, and contain or propose a broad range of residential, commercial, and industrial uses.

In reference to Urban Areas, the Imperial County General Plan states “it is anticipated that these areas will eventually be annexed or incorporated and should be provided with the full range of public infrastructure normally associated with cities. Therefore,

development in Urban Areas shall provide for the extension of full urban services such as public sewer and water, drainage improvements, street lights, fire hydrants, and fully improved paved streets with curbs and, in many cases, sidewalks. If located within an urban area, such improvements shall be consistent with City standards as determined by the City Engineer, Department of Public Works, Fire Marshall, and the Planning/Building Department.” As the Plan area is adjacent to the City of Brawley, the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan has been planned to be consistent with standards for the City of Brawley, as qualified by the specific standards incorporated into this Specific Plan. The Plan’s consistency with the Brawley General Plan is discussed in Section 1.8.2.

## **1.8.1 Imperial County General Plan**

### **Specific Plans**

The Imperial County General Plan describes specific plans as planning tools used to implement the General Plan for large development projects such as a planned community. In addition, the General Plan states that specific plans should be utilized where existing conventional zoning regulations do not provide adequate controls over land use and development. Upon adoption, a specific plan serves as an amendment to the Imperial County General Plan for a very defined and detailed area.

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan implements the goals and policies of the Imperial County General Plan by providing development guidelines that reflect the unique opportunities and constraints of the Plan area. According to Government Code §65454, a Specific Plan must be consistent with the adopted General Plan. The Specific Plan’s consistency with the Imperial County General Plan and the proposed General Plan amendments are described in general below in relation to each individual General Plan Element.

### **Land Use Element**

The Imperial County General Plan designates the Plan area as “Urban” and areas designated as such “shall provide for the extension of full urban services such as public sewer and water, drainage improvements, street lights, fire hydrants, and fully improved paved streets with curbs and, in many cases sidewalks.” The Urban area classification is intended to provide for low to high density residential, commercial, and industrial development, and a full level of urban services. The urban level of services to be provided to the Plan area is described in Sections 3.0, 5.0 and 6.0 of the Specific Plan. The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is consistent with the goals of an “Urban Area” as described in the Imperial County General Plan.

## **Housing Element**

Residential development in the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area will provide up to 3,830 additional dwelling units in the region. The extensive variety of detached, attached, and multi-family units, including rental units, enhances opportunities for affordable housing in the region consistent with the goals and policies of the Housing Element.

## **Circulation and Scenic Highway Element**

The Specific Plan area includes an internal circulation system that expands upon the current General Plan circulation system. An amendment to the Circulation Element of the County of Imperial General Plan is proposed in conjunction with the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan to incorporate the additional or revised Circulation Element roadways proposed by the Specific Plan, and to ensure that the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is consistent with the goals of the County's General Plan. Proposed revisions to the Circulation Element Circulation Plan include:

- Extension of Lavender (Schartz) Road from Dogwood Road to SR-86 with classification as a 4-lane Major Collector;
- Extension of Lavender (Schartz) Road from SR-86 to Austin Road with classification as a 2-lane Minor Collector;
- Re-classification of Austin road from Lavender (Schartz) Road to SR-86 as a 2-lane Minor Collector;
- Elimination of the intersection of Mead Road and SR-86 per the request of Caltrans; and, establishment of Jameson Road on-site running west of Dogwood Road then swinging south to connect to Avenida Del Valle and Lavender (Schartz) Road on-site as a 2-lane Minor Collector to serve the same function of Mead Road; and, extending further off-site to Keystone Road as a 2-lane Minor Collector, generally east of and parallel to SR-86;
- Establishment of Western Avenue from Jameson Road running south connecting to Avenida Del Valle and Lavender (Schartz) Road on-site as a 2-lane Minor Collector with off-set connection at Jameson Road to Western Avenue in the City of Brawley; and, with further extension off-site to Harris Road as a 2-lane Minor Collector, generally east of and parallel to SR-86;
- Establishment of Avenida Del Valle as a 4-lane Major Collector from SR-86 to Jameson Road and, as a 2-lane Minor Collector from Jameson Road to Western Avenue on-site; and, as a 2-lane Minor Collector from SR-86 to existing Avenida Del Valle off-site in the City of Brawley.

There are no Imperial County General Plan designated, or potentially designated, scenic highways within, adjacent or within the vicinity of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area. The Specific Plan is consistent with the goals and objectives of the scenic highway portion of the Imperial County General Plan Circulation and Scenic Highway Element.

### **Noise Element**

Certain portions of the Specific Plan area surrounding roadways and the Southern Pacific Railroad are located within a Noise Impact Zone. The Imperial County General Plan defines Noise Impact Zones as an area which may be exposed to noise greater than 60 dBA CNEL. No portion of the Specific Plan area is located within a noise contour of any airport. The Specific Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report identify the measures necessary to ensure that sensitive receptors in the Plan area are not negatively impacted by noise from surrounding roadways and the Southern Pacific Railroad beyond those thresholds established in the Imperial County General Plan.

### **Seismic and Public Safety Element**

The Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone for the Imperial Earthquake Fault extends approximately 500 feet into the southeastern portion of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area. This portion of the Plan area is east of the Southern Pacific Railroad as shown in **Figure 1-3**, Opportunities and Constraints Map. The proposed land use for this portion of the Plan area is designated business park. The Specific Plan area is not located within any other identified hazard areas and is consistent with the policies of the Seismic and Public Safety Element.

### **Conservation and Open Space Element**

The Conservation and Open Space Element addresses the following eight environmental resources: 1) biological resources; 2) cultural resources; 3) soils; 4) minerals; 5) energy; 6) regional aesthetics; 7) air quality; and 8) open space. The proposed project is consistent with the goals and policies of this Element, with the exception of Goal 4 which encourages the preservation of contiguous farmlands and prime soil areas. More than 99 percent of the Plan area is located on land classified as agricultural land by the Department of Conservation, with approximately 90 percent of the Plan area designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance and 9 percent Prime Farmland. However, the Imperial County General Plan also designates the Plan area as Urban, which designated areas are anticipated to develop at urban levels of density and intensity with a broad range of residential, commercial and industrial uses; and, which areas are characterized by the requirement for a full level of urban services, in particular public water and sewer systems, necessary to serve those uses. As previously described, the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is consistent with the Imperial County General Plan designation of Urban.

### **Agricultural Element**

Goal 1 of the Agricultural Element encourages the preservation of Important Farmlands. More than 99 percent of the Plan area is located on Farmland of Statewide Importance and Prime Farmland. However, Objective 1.1 states “maintain existing agricultural land outside of urbanizing areas...” while Objective 1.6 states “recognize and preserve

unincorporated areas of the County, outside of city sphere of influence areas...” The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is located in an urbanizing area within the City of Brawley Sphere of Influence. Additionally, the Land Use Element of the Imperial County General Plan designates the Plan area as an Urban Area. As such, even though characterized as Important Farmland, the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Agricultural Element as applied to lands within urbanizing areas.

### **Geothermal and Transmission Element**

The Specific Plan area is not located within any geothermal resource area mapped by the State of California, the nearest mapped geothermal resource area being the Mesquite Geothermal Field lying south of Carey Road and east of the southern Pacific Railroad line.. Land uses for geothermal purposes are regulated by the Imperial County Planning/Building Department through zoning and conditional use permits (CUPs). The Specific Plan is consistent with the goals and policies of the Geothermal and Transmission Element.

### **Water Element**

The Water Element identifies and analyzes the types of water resources within Imperial County and establishes goals and policies to preserve and enhance water availability, distribution, conservation, and quality. The Specific Plan is consistent with the goals and policies of the Water Element.

## **1.8.2 City of Brawley General Plan**

Since the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area is located adjacent to the City of Brawley and within the City’s Sphere of Influence, this section describes the general consistency of this Specific Plan with the City of Brawley’s current General Plan.

### **Land Use Element**

The current City of Brawley General Plan designation for the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area located within the sphere of influence of the City of Brawley is "Agricultural." The City's agricultural land use designation provides for the continuation of agricultural production and related industries. Policy 12.2 of the City's General Plan states: "Restrict uses on agricultural designated lands to agricultural uses, accessory uses, and appropriate conditional uses where feasible recognizing that the City could not substantially grow without removing some agricultural land from production." As such, the City's General Plan policies related to agricultural lands recognize that some agriculturally designated lands must be removed from production to accommodate growth. This would be particularly true for areas immediately adjacent to the City boundary.

While within the sphere of influence of the City of Brawley, the entire Rancho Los Lagos property is within the unincorporated jurisdiction of the County of Imperial; and, as such, development of the property is regulated by the land use designations of the County of Imperial General Plan and the Imperial County Zoning Ordinance. The County of Imperial General Plan designates the Rancho Los Lagos property as an "Urban Area" as previously discussed in Section 1.8.1.

### **Infrastructure (Circulation) Element**

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area includes an internal circulation system that expands upon the current City of Brawley General Plan circulation system. Some of the infrastructure improvements proposed in this Specific Plan may differ from the criteria, goals and policies outlined in the City of Brawley Infrastructure Element.

The Circulation Plan of the City of Brawley shows one road extending to the northern border of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area. This Circulation Element roadway is identified as First Street, but subsequent project approvals within the City of Brawley have revised that connecting road to be an extension of Western Avenue. The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan proposes the extension of Western Avenue as a Circulation Element 2-lane Collector road with an off-set at Jameson Road extending south through the Specific Plan area connecting to Avenida Del Valle and Lavender (Schartz) Road, and extending further southerly off-site to Harris Road.

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan also proposes the establishment of Avenida Del Valle as a 4-lane Collector from SR-86 to Jameson Road within the Specific Plan area and as a 2-lane Minor Collector from Jameson Road to the western edge of the community park.

The City of Brawley General Plan Circulation Element, as well as the Imperial County General Plan Circulation Element, identifies Mead Road north of the Rockwood Canal outside the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area as a future 2-lane Minor Collector connecting from SR-86 to Old Highway 111, which currently connects to the north at Panno Road to Highway 111. However, Caltrans has indicated that it would not approve a full movement intersection connection of Mead Road to SR-86, and prefers no connection at all. If connected to SR-86, the Mead Road intersection would be restricted by Caltrans to right in/right out movements only. A circulation element road connection to a state highway with only right in/right out movements has very limited function. Additionally, Mead Road is not planned to connect directly with Highway 111. As such, its value as a regional collector is further limited. Within the Specific Plan area, a 2-lane Minor Collector road, Jameson Road, is proposed to serve a similar regional purpose as the City-planned Mead Road by providing an east-west connection between SR-86 and Dogwood Road generally along the Rockwood Canal location. In this case, however, the Jameson Road connection to SR-86 is made via its connection to proposed Avenida Del Valle, which intersects SR-86 at a location approved by Caltrans and is proposed to



extend northwesterly to the existing southern terminus of Avenida Del Valle in the City of Brawley.

The Brawley General Plan, like the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan, classifies Lavender (Schartz) Road on the southern border of the Plan area as a 4-lane Major Collector.

### **Resource Management (Conservation) Element**

The Resource Management Element of the city of Brawley General Plan addresses eight major issue areas: 1) air quality; 2) natural resources and unique natural features; 3) water resources; 4) solid waste recycling; 5) energy resource conservation; 6) historic and archaeological resources; 7) agricultural soils/lands; and 8) geothermal resources. The proposed project is consistent with the goals and policies of this Element, with the exception of Policy 13.1 which encourages the preservation of all Important Farmland. More than 99 percent of the Plan area is located on land classified as agricultural land by the Department of Conservation, with approximately 90 percent of the Plan area designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance and 9 percent Prime Farmland. However, as previously described, the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is within the land use jurisdiction of the County of Imperial, which has designated the land use as Urban within the County General Plan and therefore to be developed with a variety of residential, commercial and industrial uses at urban levels of density and intensity.

### **Open Space/Recreation Element**

The Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan is consistent with the goals and policies of the City of Brawley General Plan Open Space/Recreation Element. As discussed in greater detail in Section 2.0 - Land Use Plan, the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan will provide a variety of parks and open spaces that meet the requirements of the corresponding park types described in the City's General Plan.

### **Public Safety/Noise Element**

The Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone for the Imperial Earthquake Fault extends approximately 500 feet into the southeastern portion of the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area. This portion of the Plan area is east of the Southern Pacific Railroad as shown in **Figure 1-3**, Opportunities and Constraints Map. The proposed land use for this portion of the Plan area is designated business park. Consistent with the City's General Plan policy investigation of areas within mapped fault zones, a fault-trenching program was performed by Geotechnics Inc. Based on the results of that trenching program, it was determined that there is no geomorphic evidence of fault surface within the Plan area and that no active fault is present beneath the Plan area. Although the potential for surface rupture due to faulting beneath the site is low, significant ground shaking could occur from rupture near the site and therefore appropriate engineering parameters pursuant to state law for construction will be developed. The Specific Plan area is not

located within any other identified hazard areas and is consistent with the policies of the Public Safety/Noise Element.

Certain portions of the Specific Plan area are located within the 60 dBA noise contours associated with surrounding roadways and the Southern Pacific Railroad. No portion of the Specific Plan area is located within a noise contour of any airport. The Specific Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report identify the measures necessary to ensure that sensitive receptors in the Plan area are not negatively impacted by noise from surrounding roadways and the Southern Pacific Railroad beyond those thresholds established in the City's General Plan.

### **Economic Development Element**

The Plan's mixture of residential, recreational and commercial land uses help the City achieve its goals for fiscal strength and stability, business promotion, and balanced employment and housing identified in the Economic Development Element. The residential uses provide customers and employees for surrounding commercial development, while the proposed business park and commercial uses provide local shopping and employment opportunities for members of the community. No amendment to the Economic Development Element is required to ensure consistency with the Specific Plan.

### **Housing Element**

Residential development in the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan area will provide approximately 3,830 additional dwelling units in the region. The extensive variety of detached, attached, and multi-family units enhances opportunities for affordable housing in the region consistent with the goals of the Housing Element.

## **1.8.3 Imperial County Zoning Ordinance**

The Imperial County Zoning Ordinance is the primary implementation tool for the Land Use Element of the Imperial County General Plan. The Zoning Ordinance identifies specific types of land use, intensity of use, and development performance standards applicable to specific areas and parcels of land within the City. The land use types, use regulations, and development design standards within this Plan supersede the standards contained within the Zoning Ordinance. However, the Zoning Ordinance applies to all other topic areas not specifically discussed in the Plan.

## **1.9 Compliance with CEQA**

An EIR for the Rancho Los Lagos Specific Plan project accompanies the Plan. The EIR, prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA),

examines the potential environmental impacts of the implementation of the Specific Plan and identifies mitigation to reduce impacts to below a level of significance. It serves as the base environmental document for the purposes of evaluating subsequent entitlements associated with the Plan. The EIR is to be certified concurrently with the adoption of the Specific Plan.

A mitigation monitoring and reporting program (MMRP) is adopted in accordance with Public Resources Code §21081.6 to ensure implementation of the EIR mitigation measures. As applicable, future development within the Plan area is required to implement the mitigation measures specified in the MMRP.

In accordance with California Government Code §65457, subsequent development proposals within the Plan area, if consistent with this Plan and the impact analysis and mitigation measures of the certified EIR, may be approved and implemented in accordance with and based upon the certified EIR without further environmental review. Imperial County staff will determine if further environmental analysis is required for any proposed Amendment to the Specific Plan.

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