



COUNTY OF IMPERIAL
LITHIUM
VALLEY
SPECIFIC PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2025 DRAFT



Executive Summary

The Executive Summary provides a high-level overview of each chapter of the Lithium Valley Specific Plan, highlighting key components like the land use designations and the infrastructure components.

Chapter 1 Introduction and Process

The Lithium Valley Specific Plan (the Plan), developed by the County of Imperial, outlines a comprehensive framework to transform the Imperial Valley into a hub for renewable energy, mineral recovery, manufacturing, and logistics across 51,662 acres adjacent to the Salton Sea. It creates new land use and zoning regulations to support the mineral recovery and geothermal energy industries, replacing the Imperial County's existing land use and zoning within the Plan Area. The Plan necessitates extensive infrastructure development, including roadways and utilities, to support the workforce and economic growth. The Plan provides land use regulations, development standards, design standards, policies and programs, all informed by feedback from community engagement efforts. Collaboration with stakeholders, educational institutions, and community organizations was key in the development of the Plan, aligning the initiative with California's clean energy goals and the rising demand for lithium. The Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), prepared under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines should assist in expediting development within the Plan area, consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c).

Chapter 2 Vision and Guiding Principles

The Vision and Guiding Principles chapter states the overall vision for the Lithium Valley Specific Plan, as well as the foundational guiding principles that support the vision. The vision and guiding principles were created organically through themes that surfaced from various community engagement efforts.

Vision Statement: Vision Statement: Lithium Valley is a dynamic and prosperous region that prioritizes public health and local

jobs in innovative clean energy industries. Lithium Valley aims to lead the way toward energy independence, a domestic supply of critical minerals, and a reduction in global emissions, by harnessing Imperial County's geothermal and other natural resources. Through collaboration, Lithium Valley increases economic opportunity, enhances infrastructure, and creates lasting benefits for the community.

The Guiding Principles utilized in the development of this Plan include:

- Leadership in Renewable Energy
- Environmental Justice
- Advancing Opportunity
- Job Creation and Local Economy
- Environmental Stewardship and Responsible Growth
- Acknowledgement and Respect to Indigenous Lands
- Community Engagement
- Transformative and Innovative Planning
- Proactive Infrastructure and Services
- Distinctive Community Identity

Chapter 3 Land Use

This chapter outlines the land use plan designations and what exact uses are permitted within each land use designation. The Land Use Map identifies which parcels are subject to the various land use designations.

Table 3-2, Use Table, specifies what uses are permitted by right, permitted with a Special Use Permit, or ancillary within each land use designation. Permitted uses typically do not require additional discretionary actions, while provisionally permitted uses require a Special

Use Permit with additional analysis and requirements (See Section 8.1.3A Special Use Permit Process). Ancillary uses are secondary to a primary use and are intended to be supportive.

Land Use Designations

- Green Industrial: Promotes industrial operations that decarbonize the energy and mineral recovery industries, with a focus on geothermal energy production and environmentally responsible mineral recovery operations.
- Manufacturing: Supports the assembly of clean energy products and accommodates industrial, office, and warehouse space for manufacturers, including geothermal energy and mineral recovery operations.
- Logistics: Facilitates the efficient movement of goods, accommodating warehousing, management, distribution activities, geothermal energy and mineral recovery operations.
- Playas Renewables: Promotes uses similar to Green Industrial, with restrictions to ensure compatibility with the environmental conditions of the Salton Sea and the exposed playas, including dust suppression measures.
- Community Opportunity Area: Addresses community needs of nearby residential areas, allowing for commercial hubs, social gathering areas, housing, recreational uses, healthcare services, and childcare services, planned in collaboration with neighboring communities.
- Interim Agriculture: Retains large agricultural areas until they are needed for industry-driven uses, including existing agricultural lands and other agriculture-related uses, transitioning to industrial uses in later phases.

- Solar: Supports the development of large-scale solar power generation facilities. The solar designations may transition to other uses like Logistics or Manufacturing after their project lifespans end.
- Playas Restoration: Supports Salton Sea restoration, habitat creation, and dust suppression while allowing very limited geothermal wells and passive recreation, focusing on environmental restoration and mitigation activities.
- Floodplain Drainage Basin: Maintains and enhances the Alamo River and New River drainage basins, including a buffer zone to improve water quality and environmental health while reducing flooding impacts.
- Conservation: Protects areas of environmental, cultural, and tribal significance, retaining areas for restoration and mitigation projects, including those under contract for restoration efforts and new areas for Salton Sea rehabilitation projects.

Phasing

To maintain flexibility and responsiveness, the Plan establishes proposed phasing of development with the Plan Area, as well as mechanisms for transferring and expanding development within different phase areas.

- Phase 1 is intended for initial development stemming from existing infrastructure and geothermal plants. Phase 1 is reflective of foreseeable development projects that can aid the installation of essential infrastructure. Phase 1 is anticipated to occur over the first 10 years with 2025 as the inaugural year.
- Phase 2 extends outward from the first phase into areas with less established infrastructure. Phase 2 is anticipated to occur between 2035 and 2045.
- Phase 3 includes areas within the Playas Restoration and Interim Agriculture land use designations. The Interim Agriculture designation is intended to remain as useable agriculture until there is

a need to transition these lands to industry-driven uses that have expanded outside of their initial land use designated areas. Phase 3 is anticipated to occur between 2045 and 2055, and beyond.

Chapter 4 Development and Design Standards

The Development and Design Standards includes requirements for future development within the Plan Area, including regulations related to different development use types, intensities, and locations. Development standards and design standards both guide the form and function of projects but serve different purposes. Development standards focus on measurable requirements related to the physical form of development, such as height limits and lot coverage, ensuring projects meet regulatory and functional needs. Design standards, address the aesthetic and functional aspects of a development, such as building materials, landscaping, and signage. This chapter also establishes development standards that apply to unique locations.

Development Standards are provided for:

- Minimum Lot Size
- Setbacks
- Maximum Building Height
- Maximum Utility Structure Height
- Maximum Lot Coverage
- Minimum Area for Landscaping and Dust Suppression
- Parking

Design Standards are included for:

- Site Design Standards
- Campus Design Standards
- Building Design

- Landscape
- Lighting
- Perimeter Walls and Fences
- Off-Street Loading Facilities
- Waste and Recycling Storage
- Mechanical Screening
- Signage

Chapter 5 Circulation & Transportation

Chapter 5, Circulation & Transportation, describes the transportation networks for automobiles, trucks, bikes, pedestrians, and rail traffic. There are three roadway classifications proposed in the Specific Plan Area: State Highways, Major Industrial Collectors, and Industrial Local Streets. The Circulation & Transportation chapter includes proposed truck routes, designed to optimize regional connectivity, support economic growth, and enhance community safety and environmental sustainability.

The proposed rail alignment is designed to serve foreseeable users over the next five to ten years. The rail alignment will enter the Plan Area from the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) Calexico Subdivision and will serve as the backbone of the railroad network. Additional tracks may be constructed to connect individual developments to the rail spur.

Public transit improvements are shown in Figure 5-10 Transit Network Map, and will be completed in phases, based upon rates of employment growth and trends in transit ridership.

Chapter 6 Infrastructure

The Infrastructure chapter addresses the foundational systems and services important for the growth and operational efficiency of Lithium Valley. This chapter provides recommended infrastructure improvements

for future consideration to meet the anticipated needs of development as it occurs within the Specific Plan Area. Infrastructure topics addressed in this section include water, wastewater (sewage), stormwater and drainage, electrical transmission, solid waste disposal, telecommunications and broadband, and essential services. The essential services included are police services, fire services, and healthcare and hospital facilities. The County of Imperial plans on establishing a new Infrastructure Special District (Special District) to provide and maintain services to development within the Plan Area.

Water

The Special District will purchase water from the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) to serve projects within the Plan Area, with the option for the City of Calipatria and the town of Niland to join as municipal water users. Phase 1 water supply, estimated at approximately 48,023 acre-feet per year, will be secured through negotiations with IID. Water supply may be provided by surface water, groundwater, and reclaimed water. Future water supply for subsequent phases are intended to be guided by a comprehensive Water Master Plan (WMP).

Wastewater

Initial developments will utilize engineered septic systems to manage non-process and sanitary wastewater, transitioning to centralized treatment as development progresses.

Two new wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) are proposed for Phase 1, strategically located within the Green Industrial Area on both sides of the Alamo River, as shown in Figure 6-2 Proposed Wastewater System. These locations are designed to efficiently manage projected wastewater demand, minimizing long-distance conveyance and addressing topographical challenges. Both WWTPs will incorporate advanced tertiary treatment to meet National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requirements, enabling treated effluent to be safely returned to the Alamo River and Salton Sea.

Upgrades to existing WWTPs in Niland and Calipatria, as well as the construction of the new facilities, will align with regulatory compliance, enhance water quality, and contribute to Salton Sea mitigation efforts. Tertiary treatment offers significant benefits, including reduced nutrient pollution, improved aquatic ecosystem health, and opportunities for water reuse in irrigation and industrial processes.

Floodplain, Drainage, and Stormwater Quality

Floodplain strategies focus on long-term resilience and include creating wide river corridors for the Alamo and New Rivers to accommodate 100-year peak flows or raising buildings above flood levels. The proposed Alamo River corridor would require a width of 950 feet, while the New River corridor would necessitate 1,275 feet. These corridors would reduce floodplain constraints, eliminate the need for individual FEMA approvals for future developments, and enable stream restoration, habitat creation, and mitigation credit generation. Establishing these corridors would involve coordination, including obtaining permits from resource agencies such as the California State Water Resources Control Board and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

For drainage, projects must typically prepare drainage studies, and public facilities must manage stormwater up to a 100-year frequency. Converting IID drains to stormwater channels is also proposed, potentially under the management of a newly formed Flood Control District funded by development impact fees.

Development within the 100-year floodplain will require FEMA approvals, including Conditional Letters of Map Revision (CLOMR) and Letters of Map Revision (LOMR), and associated studies to address increases in base flood water surface elevations (BFE). Local entities such as the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) and Imperial County oversee compliance, maintenance, and flood control objectives, including hydrologic data collection, flood warnings, and ensuring private development compliance with FEMA policies.

Electrical Transmission

Due to the high investment costs to construct transmission lines, the existing process constructs transmission lines only when there is shovel-ready development to support. To accommodate future energy demand, the recommended electrical transmission network provides the voltage and locations of what transmission lines may need upgrades and/or extensions into the Specific Plan Area as development is proposed.

Solid Waste Disposal

New development within the Specific Plan Area will be required to establish waste collection services that transport solid waste to permitted landfills with adequate capacity. As the Specific Plan Area develops, the newly formed Special District is expected to coordinate solid waste collection in accordance with the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1383, which mandates organic waste diversion and reductions in landfill disposal.

For specialized waste types like hazardous materials or large-scale commercial waste, including any hazardous materials from mineral extraction activities, specialized companies and facilities are equipped to manage these safely and in compliance with environmental regulations. While it is expected that some mineral extractions processes will not generate any hazardous waste, any hazardous waste produced shall be legally and properly disposed of.

To address solid waste disposal needs, the new Special District will oversee waste management services, establish contracts with specialized companies, and enforce compliance through reporting and inspections. The Special District will focus on minimizing waste, maximizing recycling, and ensuring safe disposal practices while protecting environmental quality.

Telecommunications and Broadband

Reliable telecommunications and broadband infrastructure are important for the success of Lithium Valley. It is recommended that broadband fiber

cables be installed along the major ingress/egress routes of English Road, Pound Road, Sinclair Road, and Brandt Road connecting the Phase 1 users to the Statewide broadband network. Furthermore, a high-level design summary for the Plan Area is recommended to better refine the broadband network map included in this Specific Plan as development occurs.

Essential Services

Law enforcement in the Specific Plan Area is managed by the Imperial County Sheriff's Office (ICSO), with the nearest station located in Niland. Given the anticipated workforce growth from industrial development, ICSO will need to expand its facilities, staffing, and equipment to maintain service efficiency and response times. A joint fire/police substation is proposed during Phase 1 to enhance emergency response capabilities, accommodating personnel, training facilities, and operational needs.

Fire protection services are provided by the City of Calipatria Fire Department and the Imperial County Fire Department (ICFD). Workforce increases will necessitate the construction of a larger fire station and additional infrastructure to improve emergency response times and inter-agency coordination. ICFD will expand personnel, apparatus, and water supply systems, leveraging mutual aid agreements and aligning with national response standards.

Currently, healthcare services in Imperial County are primarily delivered by key institutions like Pioneers Memorial Hospital in Brawley and El Centro Regional Medical Center. In addition, the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Innercare operates clinics in rural areas like Brawley and Niland. Healthcare services will be overseen by the Imperial Valley Healthcare District (IVHD), established to consolidate and improve healthcare access in underserved communities. IVHD will collaborate with hospitals and clinics to address gaps in emergency care, specialty services, and preventive care, particularly in rural areas like Calipatria and Niland. Strategies may include expanding telehealth services, deploying mobile clinics, and implementing workforce training and recruitment programs to meet healthcare demands.

Chapter 7 Community Health and Prosperity

The Community Health and Prosperity chapter outlines new and existing tools for fostering community health and prosperity within the Lithium Valley Specific Plan Area. The importance of community health and prosperity spans beyond the authority of this document, a land use regulatory document, which is why the County has undertaken multiple supplemental initiatives to provide economic and quality of life improvements to the local community.

The goals, policies, and programs included in this chapter serve as critical tools toward economic empowerment, public health, and workforce development.

Chapter 8 Implementation

The Implementation Chapter details the development application review process, maintenance responsibilities for infrastructure, and development incentives to attract investment. Additionally, it outlines potential financing and funding mechanisms to support program initiatives.