



CITY OF CALEXICO NEW RIVER COMMITTEE

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P.O. Box 2374
Calexico, CA 92231
Ph: (760) 357-8389
Fax: (760) 357-8779
E-mail:
info@calexiconewriver.com

RODOLFO MALDONADO
CHAIRPERSON

JAVIER ALATORRE
DIRECTOR

JOSE CARRILLO
DIRECTOR

LUIS ESTRADA
DIRECTOR

RAY FALCON
DIRECTOR

AIDA GATES
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DIRECTOR

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DIRECTOR

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DIRECTOR

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.org**

*To enhance the social,
political, and economic
climate of the City of
Calexico and the Imperial
Valley and provide residents,
visitors, and our international
neighbors with a safe and
healthy environment by
eliminating exposure to New
River pollution*

January 25, 2006

Ricardo Hinojosa, Planning Director
City of Calexico
608 Heber Avenue
Calexico, CA 92231

Dear Director Hinojosa:

Please accept the following comments on behalf of the Calexico New River Committee regarding the City of Calexico's Draft General Plan Update (November 2005) and the associated Draft Environmental Impact Report ((SCH#2004071015). We appreciate the opportunity to provide suggested edits to the Draft GPU and DEIR, and welcome the chance to work with the City in the months and years to come to make the New River an asset rather than a liability to Calexico and Imperial County.

The Calexico New River Committee (CNRC) was established in 2001. The Committee is dedicated to eliminating the negative impact of the New River in Calexico and the rest of the Imperial County. The Committee has also recognized that the ultimate solution to cleaning up New River pollution will involve complex international negotiations with Mexico, the U.S. Government and the State of California.

Our overall goal in providing comments on the Draft GPU and DEIR is to provide editing suggestions that cut across the various Plan elements to stress that the New River's health and environmental impacts on Calexico need to be addressed via General Plan policies, and that the GPU should set the stage for realizing the recreational, open space and habitat values the River will provide once it is cleaned up.

Here are our specific editing suggestions. Any new suggested language is in ***bold and italics*** and we have used strikethrough to indicate suggested text deletions.

5.0 Conservation/Open Space Element

- 5.2.5 Open Space and the New River

Please edit the last part of this section to read:

Currently within the city, there is a local effort toward New River cleanup by the *Calexico New River Committee*. The group has, among other things, developed a local vision and has sought and received federal and other funding sources aimed at *implementing the New River Improvement Project*. *The purpose of this Project is to provide a regional vision and strategic plan to transform the New River in, and downstream from, the City of Calexico from its current highly polluted condition into a resource with significantly improved water quality that minimizes threats to public health and improves the condition of water flowing into the Salton Sea.*

The main project components (e.g., trash screen, river encasement, and natural treatment wetlands) have evolved from sanitation concepts most recently advanced by the City of Calexico, the City of Calexico New River Committee and the Citizens Congressional Task Force on the New River. possibly piping the New River from the international border to the city's western boundary for the purpose of reclaiming the open space for public use. The Project can be developed and implemented in six phases, each of which is described below. For its main component (the river encasement), a design flow of 1,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) is used herein to estimate project costs.

Project Phases

Phase 1 - Project Development and Planning: This phase provides a road map to complete the Project in a reasonable and environmentally sound manner. Its major components are preliminary site assessments (e.g. hydro-geological investigations and surveying/mapping) and preparation of supporting environmental studies required under NEPA and CEQA; engineering plans and specifications; and Project permits.

Phase 2 (Option 1) – Project Headworks: This phase consists of the construction and installation of

headworks for the proposed river encasements. These will be constructed near the Border where the New River enters the United States, and will protect the integrity of the box culvert, as well as track hydraulic and baseline water quality conditions of the river as it crosses the border. The headworks would include three major components:

- *An automatic bar screen to remove trash from Mexico. It is imperative that the trash removed from the river be taken back to Mexico, its original source, for proper disposition;*
- *A channel transition/diversion structure to send design flood river flows directly into the culverts and direct design normal river flows into the bar screen; and*
- *A monitoring station for flow and baseline water quality.*

Phase 2 (Option 2) – Project Headworks and Disinfection Facilities: In addition to including items and features identified in option 1, option 2 would assist in ensuring that discharges of

wastes from Mexico do not violate USEPA approved Pathogen Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the New River, and it includes two other major components:

- *The necessary flow diversion facilities to capture the average flows from International Drain and route them to the existing Calexico Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP); and*
- *Construction of disinfection facilities at the WWTP to disinfect the International Drain flows prior to discharge to the New River.*

Phase 3 – Project Box Culvert: This is the main construction phase of the Project, in which a double box culvert (i.e., two enclosed parallel canals) would be constructed to contain and re-route the New River from the International Boundary, through the developed areas of Calexico, and to a point immediately downstream of Highway 98. The major components of this phase are:

- *Cleaning of the river bottom and of the contaminated soil;*
- *Construction of about 3.5 miles of a double box culvert capable of handling 1,500 cfs to re-route the river through Calexico; and*
- *Construction, as necessary, of an energy dissipater at the end of the culverts to insure erosion protection of the natural streamlined channel downstream of the culvert.*

Phase 4 – Project Wastewater Polishing System: This phase includes construction of a waste wastewater polishing system at the end of the box culverts, just north of Highway 98, to provide treatment of residual pollution from Mexico.

Phase 5 – Project Wetlands: This phase includes continued construction of wetlands downstream from the improvements described in phase 4, above, to address overall New River pollution, including pollution from sources downstream from the Border.

Phase 6 – Project Community Greenbelts and Habitat Restoration: This phase consists of the reclamation of open space for community facilities such as walking and running trails and soccer/baseball field, and preservation/restoration of natural habitat in the area along the existing river channel in the Calexico area and between Seeley and Brawley. Other appropriate mitigation measures that are identified during Phase 1 of the Project should be incorporated in this Phase.

- 5.4 Goals, Objectives and Policies

- 5.4.1.1 Water Supply and Quality

- Policy 1

- h. Support efforts to improve the water quality of the New River or other proposals aimed at improving the area surrounding the River, *such as the development and implementation of an integrated regional water management plan that meets the goals and objectives of the Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board (Region 7) for the River.*

- 5.4.1.3 Ecological and Biological Resources

- Policy 3

a. Support regional and sub-regional efforts to conserve ecological and biological resources in the city and surrounding areas.

b. Support efforts to integrate natural wetlands treatment systems as part of the New River Improvement Project described in Section 5.2.5.

~~b.~~ ***c.*** Projects of one acre or more involving alteration or development of undisturbed land shall be required to submit a biological survey conducted by a qualified biologist to the city of Calexico. A focused biological study may be required if habitat that could potentially support a listed or threatened species exists on the site.

4.0 Public Facilities/Services Element

- 4.4.1.4 Storm Water

Policy 4

b. The City should continue to work with the appropriate agencies to develop new arrangements for the discharge of storm water into the New River. ***To the maximum extent feasible, these arrangements shall be consistent with the New River Improvement Project referenced and described in Section 5.2.5 of the Conservation/Open Space Element.***

6.0 Parks and Recreation Element

- 6.4 Goals, Objectives and Policies

Policy 3

- 6.4.1.3 Financing

d. The City should explore increasing parks and recreational facilities through the upgrade of existing open space or the conversion of other public or quasi-public lands, such as utility right-of-ways ***and the designated open space lands along the New River upon successful implementation and cleanup of the New River via the New River Improvement Project described in Section 5.2.5 of the Conservation Element.***

8.0 Safety Element

- 8.5 Goals, Objectives and Policies

- 8.5.1.4 The New River

Policy 4

c. The City shall cooperate with ***international***, federal, ***state and regional*** responsible agencies in projects aimed at cleaning up or ***encasing*** ~~re-routing~~ the River **through the**

implementation of the New River Improvement Project as described in 5.2.5 of the Conservation Element.

Conclusion

The Calexico New River Committee thanks the City for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft General Plan Update. We anticipate attending City Council meetings in the coming months to provide further elaboration on the New River Improvement Project, and the development of a formal “memorandum of understanding” with the City regarding New River cleanup.

If you have any questions regarding our comments please contact myself at (760) 357-8389 or our land use and legal consultant John McCaull at 530/979-7586.

Sincerely,



Pablo Orozco
Executive Director

CC: Marlene D. Best, City Manager