

CITY OF EL CENTRO

1275 W. Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243
www.cityofelcentro.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mario Renteria
Public Information Officer – City Manager’s Office
Office: (760) 337-4541, Mobile: (760) 234-2307
MarioRenteria@cityofelcentro.org

LAFCO to provide the City of El Centro with proper CEQA proceedings

El Centro, Ca. — September 15, 2023 — The Imperial County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) agreed it must provide the City of El Centro with a proper California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, including a comment period for a Negative Declaration during an injunction hearing at an Imperial County Superior Courthouse on Thursday in El Centro.

While the City of El Centro lost the injunction request, the original intent of the request was to get LAFCO to correct its current CEQA process, which was accomplished. The intent of the injunction request was not to stop the Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District’s (PMHD) expansion application but to request that LAFCO properly follow the CEQA guidelines.

LAFCO is currently processing a feasibility study for the expansion application by PMHD. Part of the feasibility study is a CEQA document that would determine the potential environmental impacts of the proposed district expansion. That expansion would include the annexation of El Centro Regional Medical Center (ECRMC) in the City of El Centro.

LAFCO previously approved preparing a Negative Declaration finding during a May 25 regular meeting. The Negative Declaration from an initial study by LAFCO determined there would be no significant effect on the City of El Centro.

On September 6, LAFCO submitted a response to the court regarding the City’s injunction request. In that document, LAFCO admitted it had not prepared a Negative Declaration, and to do so, a proposed Negative Declaration must be circulated, notices must be given, and comments on the proposed negative declaration have to be reviewed and responded to, among other things.

The court confirmed the need for additional CEQA review before any project can be approved.

While the City does not own ECRMC, it holds the real property where ECRMC is located and is interested in how a proposed annexation would affect its property and other functions.

In addition, LAFCO failed to provide the City of El Centro or the public with reasonable advance notice and comment period for the Negative Declaration in the manners required by the CEQA guidelines. LAFCO also failed to notice its intention to adopt the Negative Declaration to be posted by the Imperial County Clerk per CEQA guidelines.

The City contended that LAFCO had proceeded with the annexation proceeding without following the appropriate process. In response, LAFCO changed its position and indicated that it had not approved a Negative Declaration. Therefore, for LAFCO to move forward with its feasibility study, it will require proper completion of the CEQA process.

The City of El Centro has made numerous attempts to communicate with LAFCO regarding the CEQA process since the City filed the injunction request in August but has not received any replies.

The CEQA review is already late. Any Negative Declaration must be prepared and approved within 180 days of the project application, which was in January 2023, the date LAFCO received PMHD's expansion application.

It's essential for the City that LAFCO follow the proper CEQA guidelines since the feasibility study could be used as part of AB 918, which cleared the Senate Floor with a 40-0 vote count and the Assembly floor for a concurrence vote with a 78-0 overwhelming vote Thursday night. Governor Gavin Newsom will have until October 14 to veto it. If Newsom doesn't sign it, the bill will automatically become law. If the Governor signs it, it will become law immediately.

##