

CITY OF EL CENTRO BUSINESS GUIDE

EL CENTRO
CALIFORNIA



COMMUNITY SERVICES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
WWW.CITYOFELCENTRO.ORG





**ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
MAKES EL CENTRO
SHINE BRIGHTER**



Welcome to El Centro!

The City of El Centro's Business Guide is a synopsis of the procedures and regulations that will assist individuals who are interested in opening a business or are going through the permit process for development purposes. The purpose of this guide is to provide information about the city's regulatory process and expedite project development. Its goal is to provide step-by-step procedures to lessen the regulatory load on developers while simultaneously fulfilling the duty to protect the public's welfare.

The City of El Centro is the core urban area and principal city of Imperial County. It is the largest city in the county with a vibrant and a continuously growing population. El Centro strives to encourage new development of businesses and the renovation of existing structures within the city.

Due to unique circumstances and the unpredictable nature of any type of development, specific project situations cannot be anticipated. Therefore, the process may vary from project to project and this guide should only be used as a reference source. The City of El Centro's Economic Development Division of the Community Services Department and the Community Development Department are key resources available to guide proponents during the development process. A reference and contact list to related agencies and department personnel is provided at the end of this guide to assist with any questions or uncertainties.



STEPS TO OPENING A BUSINESS IN EL CENTRO

STEP 1: ZONING

As you begin to identify an appropriate space within the City of El Centro for your new business to locate, it is critical to verify the zoning of the property. The City of El Centro's Zoning Regulations allow for multiple uses, but not all uses are permitted in all zones. To confirm the zoning of your property, please contact the Planning Division at 760.337.4545. Alternatively, zoning information may also be found at the following website: www.mygov.us/task/city/knowledge_base/gis.php?cityname=403.

In addition to a verbal zoning confirmation, you may apply for a Zoning Verification Letter. This letter is issued by the Planning Division and states the property address, zoning, and whether a specific use is permitted. To request a Zoning Verification Letter, please submit a written request to the Planning Division.

STEP 2: CHANGE OF USE

The use and occupancy of building and tenant spaces change as new owners and tenant move in and out of spaces. There are basic components required in all building and tenant spaces, some of which vary depending on the use and occupancy proposed. It is important to confirm the permitted use and occupancy of the space in which you intend to locate. This can help mitigate unforeseen costs to your business. For use and occupancy information, please contact the Planning Division at 760.337.4545.

STEP 3: RENOVATIONS

Are you proposing to improve your building or space in any way? Adding partitions, walls, and moving electrical outlets are examples of improvements that require permits. All permits can be obtained from the Building Division located in City Hall. For more information on permits, please contact the Building Division at 760.337.4508.

STEP 4: CAPACITY FEES

The City of El Centro collects water and sewer capacity fees for commercial development. When a building or tenant space changes use and/or occupancy, it may incur additional capacity fees. For a complete list of impact fees, please contact the Planning Division at 760.337.4545.

STEP 5: BUSINESS ENTITY

The requirements for business registration depend upon the type of business ownership. The most common forms of business entities are: sole proprietorship, general partnership, limited partnership, limited liability partnership, limited liability company, and a corporation. If you need assistance identifying what type of business entity your business may consist of, contact the Small Business Development Center at 760.312.9800.





STEP 6: OBTAIN A FEDERAL TAX ID

Generally, businesses are required to obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN). The EIN is also known as a Federal Tax Identification number and is used to identify a business entity. Applying for an EIN is a free service offered by the Internal Revenue Service and you can get your EIN immediately. Beware of websites on the Internet that charge for this free service. You may apply for an EIN in various ways. To learn how, visit www.irs.gov or contact the Small Business Development Center at 760.312.9800.

STEP 7: SELLER'S PERMIT

If you intend on conducting retail sales, a seller's permit from the State will be necessary. For information regarding a seller's permit contact the Franchise Tax Board at 760.352.3431.

STEP 8: FILING A FICTITIOUS NAME

The name you select for your business is very important. If the name you select is your legal surname (first and last name) and a one word description (ex. John Smith Roofing) you are not required to register a fictitious business name. However, if you select a business name that does not include your full legal surname (ex. JS Roofing) you must file a Fictitious Business Name Statement with the County of Imperial. The application can be found at the following website: Clerk Services – County Clerk-Recorder Department (imperialcounty.org).

STEP 9: CITY BUSINESS LICENSE

Before opening your doors, you will need to obtain a Business License from the Finance Department. For information on business licenses, please contact the Finance Department at 760.337.4573. For a copy of the application, visit the Finance Department website at: <http://www.cityofelcentro.org/finance>.

STEP 10: SIGNAGE

It is important to ensure the signage for your new business is code compliant. Before designing and purchasing any signage, you are encouraged to review the City of El Centro's Sign Regulations. A copy of the Sign Regulations can be obtained at: Chapter 22.1 - SIGNS | Code of Ordinances | El Centro, CA | Municode Library.

To facilitate the process of establishing a business in the City of El Centro or Imperial County, please contact the Imperial Valley Small Business Development Center (IVSBDC) for assistance or guidance with the steps to start a business. The IVSBDC offers one-on-one confidential business advising at no cost to you.

For more information about their services or to schedule an appointment please contact:

**Imperial Valley Small Business
Development Center**
2799 S. 4th Street, El Centro, CA
(760) 312-9800
www.ivsbdc.org

STEPS TO OBTAIN A BUSINESS LICENSE

All businesses operating in the City of El Centro are required to obtain a business license from the City of El Centro. Although particular businesses may require a different procedure, most businesses follow the steps indicated below.

STEP 1: APPLICATION

A business license application can be picked up at the Finance Customer Service Counter or the Community Development Department Counter. Alternatively, the application may be found online within the Department of Finance's webpage www.cityofelcentro.org/finance.

STEP 2: SUBMIT APPLICATION

After the business license application has been completed in its entirety, the application will need to be submitted at the Community Development Department Counter for zoning, building, and safety compliance. There is a 24-hour turnaround for the Community Development Department approval.

- In town business must complete and sign the Fire Department Questionnaire forms.
- Home-based occupations must complete and sign the Planning Department Supplemental forms.
- These forms are available at the following website: www.cityofelcentro.org/finance.

STEP 3: PAYMENT OF FEES

Pick-up the business license application from the Community Development Department and submit it to the Finance Department Customer Service Counter and pay applicable fees. The Finance Department will process and issue a City Business License Certificate within 3 weeks. For questions regarding business licenses, contact the Finance Department at 760.337.4573.

OUT OF TOWN CONTRACTOR'S

Out of town contractors and sub-contractors must present proof of current State Contractor's License.

A temporary business license may be issued within 24 hours.

Fee schedule

New Business - Other (Office/Building)

Application Fee	\$166 ³⁷
Building Department Fee	\$47
AB1379 Fee	\$4

New Business - Other (Out of town)

Application Fee	\$166 ³⁷
AB1379 Fee	\$4
Annual License Fees	\$46
Annual License Fee for Contractors and Subcontractors	\$92

DEVELOPER'S GUIDE

After discussing the project with the Economic Development Division Staff or the Planning Division Staff, you may be informed that your project requires a Site Plan Review, or other types of entitlements. The section that follows includes instructions and processes that you may need to follow. The section is meant to be a guide and may not be all encompassing as each individual project poses unique circumstances.

PRE-APPLICATION MEETING

Prior to submitting any entitlement application, it is recommended to coordinate a Pre-Application Meeting to avoid project delays. To initiate a Pre-Application Meeting, please contact the Planning Division at 760.337.4545.

WHAT IS A PRE-APPLICATION MEETING?

- The Pre-Application Meeting is free of charge and allows the business proponent to obtain a better insight as to the development process and what to expect during the development phases. The meeting provides the applicant initial feedback from department directors and staff and will aid in identifying potential issues and concerns with a project.
- A detailed project description and a conceptual Site Plan formulated by a developer or engineer should be submitted prior to the Pre-Application Meeting for preliminary review by staff.

WHAT IS A SITE PLAN?

A Site Plan is a detailed drawing depicting the site or existing project and how it will be developed. It is a legally binding professionally prepared proposal for the use and development of a specific property. Key elements of a Site Plan include property boundaries, land topography, vegetation, proposed and/or existing structures, roadways and easements.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SITE PLAN?

1. Provides a process for the reviewing official or body to verify a proposed project's compliance with development, design, and use standards;
2. Assures land owners, business owners and developers that proposed uses, structures and site improvements comply with the provisions before the preparation of plans for building permits; and
3. Provides a means of streamlining the development review process through administrative review of development proposals.

HOW DO I PREPARE A SITE PLAN?

Site Plans are accurate and to scale graphical representations of a proposed structure with dimensions. At minimum, a Site Plan indicates building setbacks, building footprint, property line, a north arrow and city right-of-ways/easements with distances identified. You may consider hiring a drafter, architect, or engineer to draw the Site Plan. For guidance in preparing a Site Plan, contact the Planning Division at 760.337.4545.

STEPS TO COMPLETING A SITE PLAN REVIEW

After consulting with City Staff, you may be informed that you need a Site Plan Review. The steps below outline the Site Plan Review Process.

STEP 1: APPLICATION

File a completed Site-Plan Review Application with the Planning Division of the Community Development Department. If you need assistance completing the application, contact a planner 760.337.4545. The application will need to be filed by the property or lessee having a leasehold interest of not less than five (5) years. If you do not own the property and do not have a lease, you may submit the application with written permission from the property owner on record.

STEP 2: FILING FEE

The fee to process a site plan review is \$776³⁸. The fee defrays the costs incidental to the proceedings, thus, the fee cannot be waived.

STEP 3: STAFF INVESTIGATION

Planning Division Staff will review the Site Plan Review Application and Site Plan for accuracy, in accordance with the El Centro Municipal Code.

STEP 4: DECISION

Planning Division staff will issue you a letter informing you of the decision along with the project conditions established for the project.



Site Plan Checklist

Ensure the site plan includes the following information:

- Lot dimensions.
- All buildings and structures- location, size, height, proposed use, location of doors.
- Walls, fences, and landscaping- location, number of spaces and/or dimensions of parking area, arrangement of spaces, internal circulation patterns.
- Access- pedestrian, vehicular, points of ingress and egress.
- Loading- location dimensions, number of spaces, internal circulation.
- Lighting- location and general nature, hooding devices.
- Street dedications and improvements.
- Storm water storage area.
- Landscaping.
- Outdoor storage or screening devices.
- Waste disposal facilities.

STEPS TO OBTAIN A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT

After consulting with City Staff, you may be informed that you need a Conditional Use Permit. The steps below outline the Conditional Use Permit process.

WHAT IS A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT?

The Conditional Use Permit is intended for types of land uses that require special consideration in a particular zone or within the City. In granting the permit, certain safeguards to protect the health, safety, and general welfare may be required as conditions of approval.

STEP 1: APPLICATION

File a completed Conditional Use Permit with the Planning Division of the Community Development Department. If you need assistance completing the application, contact a planner 760.337.4545. The application will need to be filed by the property or lessee having a leasehold interest of not less than five (5) years. If you do not own the property and do not have a lease, you may submit the application with written permission from the property owner on record.

STEP 2: FILING FEE

The fee to process a conditional use permit application is \$2,994.62. The fee defrays the costs incidental to the proceedings, thus, the fee cannot be waived.

STEP 3: STAFF INVESTIGATION

Planning Division Staff will review the Conditional Use Permit Application and the Site Plan submitted with the application for accuracy, in accordance with the El Ciento Zoning Code.

STEP 4: ENVIRONMENTAL

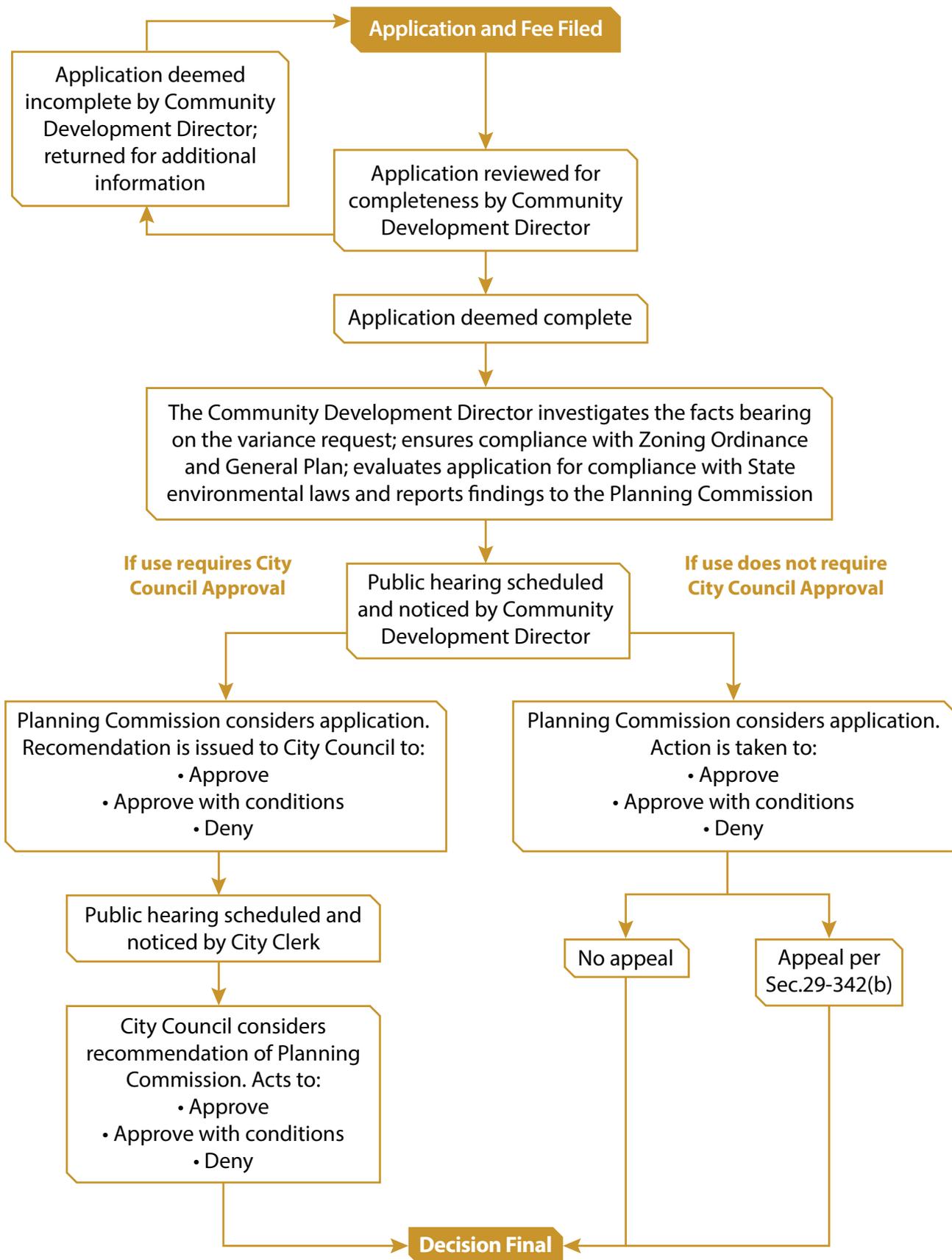
During the application submittal, you may be informed that your project is subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and requires the preparation of an environmental document. An additional application and filing fee may be warranted if your project is subject to CEQA.

STEP 5: PUBLIC HEARING & DECISION

A public hearing is required for all conditional use permits. The majority of conditional use permits are reviewed by the Planning Commission with some exceptions. After the decision is final, a letter will be sent to you informing you of the decision along with a resolution including the project's conditions of approval.

Some conditional use permits that might go before the City Council for approval include the following: buildings or structures with heights greater than permitted by the zone, density bonus projects, mobile home parks, planned unit developments, recreational vehicle parks, clustered single family dwellings in the RAP Zone, and uses within the Civic Center Zone.

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT PROCESS



STEPS TO OBTAIN A ZONE CHANGE

After consulting with City Staff, you may be informed that a Zone Change may be required in order to move forward with your project. For example, it may be necessary to change the zoning designation from a particular property from General Commercial to Light Manufacturing in order to operate a land use you intend to operate.

WHAT IS A ZONE CHANGE?

A zone change is the process of changing the current zone designation to a different zone designation. A property owner may choose to change the designation to use their property differently from what the existing zoning allows (e.g. residential vs. commercial).

STEP 1: APPLICATION

File a completed Zone Change Application with the Planning Division of the Community Development Department. If you need assistance completing the application, contact a planner 760.337.4545. The application will need to be filed by the property or lessee having a leasehold interest of not less than five (5) years. If you do not own the property and do not have a lease, you may submit the application with written permission from the property owner on record.

STEP 2: FILING FEE

The fee to process a zone change application is \$3,105.53. The fee defrays the costs incidental to the proceedings, thus, the fee cannot be waived.

STEP 3: STAFF INVESTIGATION

Planning Division Staff will review the Zone Change Application for accuracy. After the application is reviewed for accuracy, a Staff Report will be prepared to ensure the action is consistent with the Zoning Code and the General Plan. Planning Commission will be given a report on the findings and recommendation.

STEP 4: PLANNING COMMISSION

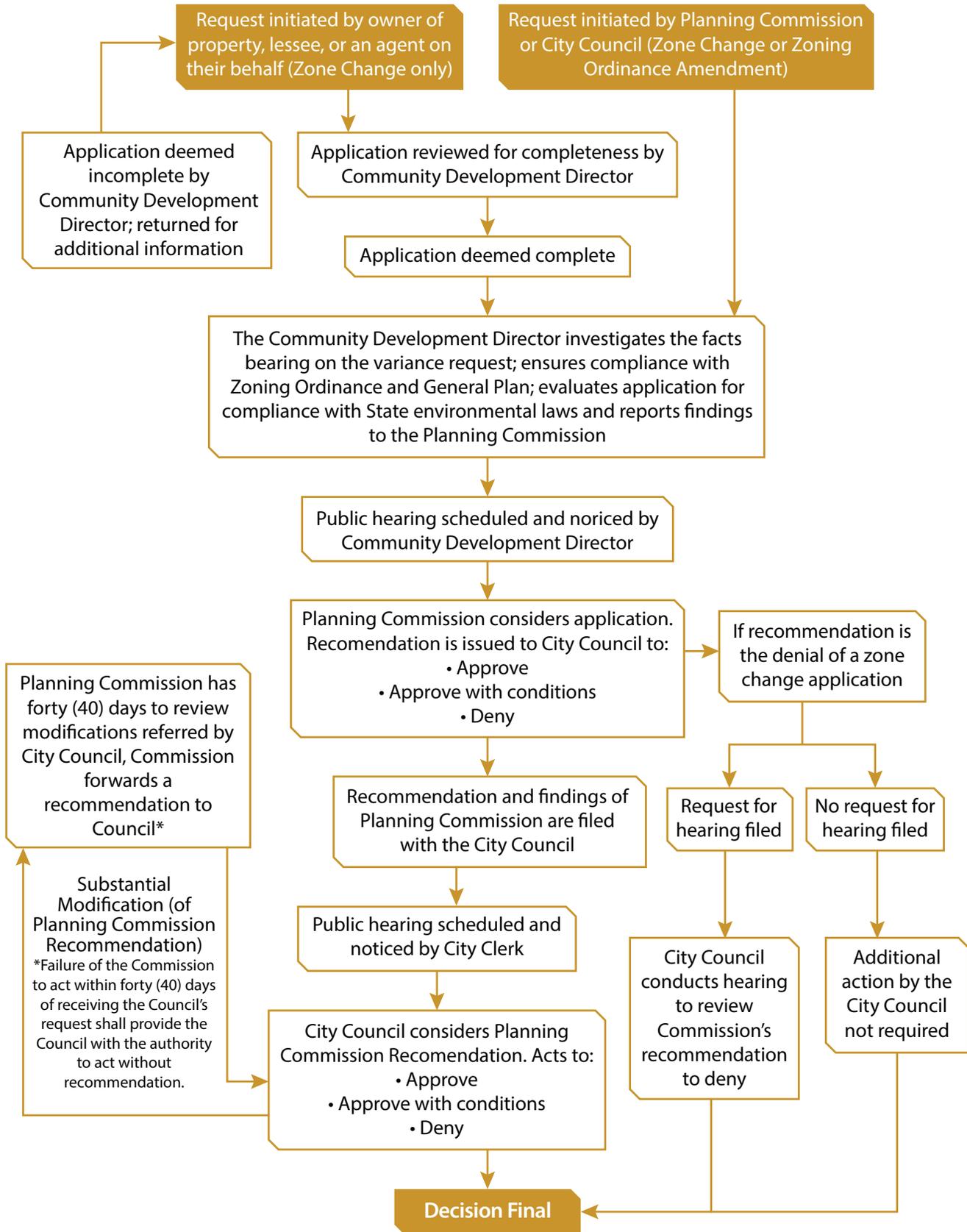
A public hearing will be required before the Planning Commission and the Planning Commission will consider the change of zone. After the conclusion of the public hearing, the Planning Commission will either recommend approval or disapproval of the zone change and will set forth findings in support of the recommendation to the City Council.

STEP 4: CITY COUNCIL

A public hearing will be required before the City Council. The City Council may approve, modify, or disapprove the recommendation of the Planning Commission. After the decision is final, a letter will be sent to you informing you of the decision along with a copy of the Ordinance.



ZONE CHANGE PROCESS



EL CENTRO BUSINESS PROGRAMS

• EL CENTRO BUSINESS INCUBATOR

The City of El Centro Business Incubator offers seven suites with affordable lease rates. The size of the suites range from 1,125 to 1,195 square feet. Water, sewer, and trash pick-up is paid for by the City.

• BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION PROGRAM

The City manages a business retention and expansion programs, which includes various components. The City's Business Visitation Program includes two monthly visits with the Mayor, City Manager, and the Community Services Director.

• FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The façade improvement program is a reimbursement program to improve the façade of commercial buildings. This program is currently on hold until further funding can be identified.

• FOREIGN TRADE ZONE (FTZ)

The City's FTZ provides duty deferral, duty avoidance, weekly entry, fee deferral, enhanced security, expedited logistics, paperwork reduction, and manipulations authorized and completed without physical United States Customs supervision.

• MICRO-ENTERPRISE LOAN PROGRAM

The Micro-Enterprise Loan Program is targeted to businesses and projects that have the greatest potential for job creation, particularly jobs created for low and moderate income persons. The maximum loan amount is \$10,000.

• REVOLVING LOAN FUND PROGRAM

The Revolving Loan Fund Program provides low interest loans to businesses within El Centro. Loan amounts are based on job creation or retention. The loans range from \$5,000 to \$100,000.

• KEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY SITES

A list and illustration identifying potential commercial and industrial land available for development in El Centro and can be obtained at the following location: www.cityofelcentro.org/communityservices.

• "QUALITY OF LIFE" NEWSLETTER

The newsletter is published two times a year and focuses on business, community services, and quality of life issues in El Centro.

For information regarding the programs listed on this page, contact the Community Services Department at 760.337.4543.



BUSINESS CONTACT INFORMATION

CITY OF EL CENTRO DEPARTMENTS

Community Development Department

1275 W. Main Street

Tel: 760.337.4545

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

Community Services Department

1249 W. Main Street

Tel: 760.337.4543

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

City Manager's Office

1275 W. Main Street

Tel: 760.337.4540

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

Engineering Division

1275 W. Main Street

Tel: 760.337.5182

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

Finance Department

1275 W. Main Street

Tel: 760.337.4510

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

Public Works

307 W. Brighton Avenue

Tel: 760.337.4505

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

Fire Department

1910 N. Waterman Avenue

Tel: 760.337.4530

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

Police Department

150 N. 11th Street

Tel: 760.352.2111

Web: <https://cityofelcentro.org/>

SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

Imperial Valley Regional

Chamber of Commerce

1095 South 4th Street

El Centro, CA 92243

Tel: 760.352.7413

Web: <https://www.ivregionalchamber.com/>

Imperial Valley Small Business

Development Center

2799 South 4th Street

El Centro, CA 92243

Tel: 760.312.9800

Web: <https://sdivsbdc.org/imperial-valley-sbdc/>

SCORE Business Assistance

8825 Aero Drive, Suite 101

San Diego, CA 92123

Tel: 619.557.7272

Web: www.sandiego.score.org

Small Business Administration

550 West C Street, Suite 550

San Diego, CA 92101

Tel: 619.557.7250

Web: www.sba.gov/district/san-diego

IMPERIAL COUNTY AGENCIES

Air Pollution Control District

150 S. 9th Street, El Centro, CA 92243

Tel: 442.265.1800

Web: www.apcd.imperialcounty.org

Clerk Recorder's Office

940 W. Main Street Suite 202, El Centro, CA 92243

Tel: 442.265.1076

Web: www.recorder.imperialcounty.org

Public Health Department

Environmental Health

797 Main Street, Suite B, El Centro, CA 92243

Tel: 442.265.1888

Web: <http://www.icphd.org/>

BUSINESS CONTACT INFORMATION

UTILITY COMPANIES

Imperial Irrigation District - Power

333 E. Barioni Boulevard
Imperial, CA 92251
Tel: 760.335.3640
Web: www.iid.com/power

Imperial Irrigation District - Water

333 E. Barioni Boulevard
Imperial, CA 92251
Tel: 760.339.9287
Web: www.iid.com/water

Spectrum

580 E. Danenberg Drive, Suite 201
El Centro, CA 92243
Tel: 888.406.7063
Web: www.spectrum.com

Southern California Gas

602 E. Ross Avenue
El Centro, CA 92243
Tel: 877.238.0092
Web: <https://www.socalgas.com/>

OTHER AGENCIES

Local Agency Formation Commission

1122 W. State Street, Ste. D
El Centro, CA 92243
Tel: 760.353.4115
Web: <https://www.iclafco.com/>

Employment Development Department

1550 W. Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243
Tel: 760.339.2722
Web: <http://www.edd.ca.gov/>

Franchise Tax Board/Equalization Board

1550 W. Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243
Tel: 760.352.3431
Web: <http://www.boe.ca.gov/>

Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

2345 S. 2nd Street, Suite B
El Centro, CA 92243
Tel: 760.592.2085
Web: <https://www.irs.gov/>

Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation

2415 Imperial Business Park Dr., Suite A
Imperial, CA 92251
Tel: 760.353.8332
Web: <https://www.ivedc.com>





COMMUNITY SERVICES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

For more information, please contact the
Economic Development Division at **(760) 337-4543**

WWW.CITYOFELCENTRO.ORG