

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

When the city decided to purchase the farm ground on the east edge of Imperial, now known as the Cornerstone Development, plenty of skeptics questioned whether that was the right decision.

At the time, I sat on the Citizens Advisory Board to the LB 840 sales tax fund. As a board, we unanimously recommended to the council to purchase the land, using economic development funds set aside from the LB 840 city sales tax.

I've always believed this parcel of land would be a benefit to the Imperial community, one way or another.

Through the dedicated work of former city economic developer Leslie Carlholm, Imperial was designated as a certified economic development community.

One of the prerequisites for that designation required Imperial to have a designated tract of land under its control for economic development purposes. This land fit that purpose.

That designation proved to be a key factor in the approval of federal housing tax credit funds for a rental housing project in Imperial to be located in Cornerstone.

Imperial's designation as a certified economic development community earned the developer of the project an extra two points in the application review process. While that may not sound like much, the developer said those two points were huge in terms of scoring the application.

For years, Imperial has battled having enough rental housing inventory. While the problem won't be alleviated, Imperial will have 10 new three-bedroom homes for rent on a rent-control basis, two more market-rate rental homes and two new spec homes that will go on the market after construction is completed.

Dana Point Development, headquartered in Turlock, Calif., will develop and build the project. Construction is now slated to begin in mid- to late September.

Without the Cornerstone Development area, it's unlikely that Imperial would have been considered for the project.

Kudos to the council for initially purchasing the land and kudos to the present council for moving ahead with the investment to develop infrastructure in Cornerstone.

With this project alone, Cornerstone has already begun to pay dividends to the community. Imperial can take great pride in having the foresight to move forward with this development.

As you've often heard me say in this space—"If a community isn't moving forward, it's moving backwards."