



# Imperial's 'haunted hotel' comes back to life

By Alexis Soto Oct 27, 2021 Updated 38 min ago



Northpoint Hotel Development area located on the corner of Neckel Road and Highway 86.

Facebook, Twitter, Email, Print, Share

**IMPERIAL** – Imperial's abandoned hotel will receive a massive redevelopment after the Imperial City Council voted 4-1 to partner with Gafcon commercial contractors during a special meeting Monday, Oct. 25. The 34-year-old, family-owned Gafcon company will fully fund the \$22-million project to rehabilitate and open the Northpoint Hotel Development area located on the corner of Neckel Road and Highway 86.

As part of the arrangement, both parties have entered into a Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) sharing agreement that will see Gafcon receive \$5.2 million over a period of 20 years. That agreement mandates a hotel be established with a high caliber of standards that include it being operated by a full service, upscale, nationally-recognized brand with amenities.

These required amenities include a restaurant, bar, meeting rooms, a fitness center, a marketplace, and an indoor pool. A study determined the project will generate \$4 million in sales tax revenue and create 600 jobs at the start of construction, with 275 of those jobs being permanent.

Senior Vice President and General Counsel of Gafcon, Paul Najjar, said he's going to be a part owner of the new hotel and that they expect to finish construction in January 2023.

"We know that doing something and doing it fast is an incredible task ... We are going to get it done fast and we are going to get it done right," said Najjar.

Najjar said the new hotel will be a Cambria brand, which he called a new leading brand as one of the Choice Hotels franchise, which is one of the largest chains in the United States.

"We are going to have amenities that are not currently present at any of the hotels in the Imperial Valley, and we think that is going to be a driver for economic growth," said Najjar.

Najjar said the planned Cambria brand hotel will function as a beacon for other businesses to come and be a part of the new destinations center. The hotel will be the center of the new development of neighboring buildings designed for shops, restaurants, and multipurpose office space.

Chief Development Officer at Gafcon Bryan Benso said they expect the Hotel to make \$50 per person for every day they stay and that they will bring about other improvements to the area.

"There is some sewer infrastructure that's needed, there is some fire infrastructure that's needed, there's some water infrastructure and some power infrastructure and we think at the end of the day, that this project will provide much-needed infrastructure enhancements to that part of the community. Particularly along Neckel Road and Highway 86 because this project will ultimately clean up the blight that is currently there," said Benso.

Councilmember Robert Amparano was concerned about waiting two decades for the \$5.2 million to come back to the city. Amparano feared the slow return of investment could negatively impact the ability of the council to remedy other concerns because of a lack of finances.

"I think what I'm having issues with is time. In 20 years, by the time we get this paid off, I'm 48, I'm going to be 68 years old ... my 10-year-old daughter will be 30 ... Twenty years is a long time to pay back the \$5.2 million," he said. "The way I see this project, I want to see it happen, I really do ... but when we're spending \$5.2 million of our tax money, of our TOT money that we could be using for other infrastructure ... how do I tell Mr. Fernandez I can't pave the front of his house because I don't have the money."

Amparano felt strongly that Gafcon was not adequately negotiating with them because they have not moved off the \$5.2 million figure.

"There's no negotiation there ... we have money that we are going to put into it that we won't see back at least four, I guess for the first five years we're going to lose 100 percent ... so now we're at 88 percent, so we're going to make 12 percent," said Amparano.

City Manager Denis Morita stated at the beginning of the meeting that while Gafcon would be receiving nearly all of the money raised from the shared TOT, the city would see a slightly higher amount by the sixth year.

"The city share of the TOT goes up as the years go by ... after the first five years, the share changes, and the city gets a bigger share and at that point, what the city estimated to be its general fund cost for supporting the project would be covered, plus some amount of money," said Morita.

Roben Real Estate Broker-owner, Ray Roben, addressed the council to endorse the Gafcon team as the right kind of people to finally get the project done.

"The wrong person gets their hand on that development, and we're stuck with the same nightmare that we've been in for forever and forever and all we'll ever end up over there with is more houses and Imperial, bless their souls, we love houses and we're going to build a lot more houses but there's a lot more things we need than houses right now, and that's a tax base. And let's face it, the only way that that's going to happen is if we get a hotel right there," said Roben.

Mayor Pro-Tem Geoffrey Dale said the project will bring about more developments that will result in immediate tax money.

"I would imagine that the minute that we make some sort of a deal on this, that properties around this are going to be developed," said Dale.

Dale felt that the \$20-million price tag to build the hotel was not all that much considering all of the premium amenities, like a banquet hall and select restaurants, that are going to be included.

"Imperial has always been first, we're always thinking out of the box, we always want the best for our community, and again, I don't want to see a Rodeway Inn, I do not want that. Cambria is a great brand," said Dale. "When this thing is taken and finished up, it's going to be something so big for the Valley and you can't get any better, we're right here in the middle of the Valley, we are the center of the Valley."

Mayor Karin Eugenio was very optimistic about movement finally being made on the hotel and noted it was a key issue that kept coming up when she originally ran for city council.

"I'm not here to be sympathetic to developers, your bottom line is not a concern to me. The bottom line is what is going to improve the quality of life for our residents and for our community as a whole," she said. "From what I've seen of Gafcon, it's all been really impressive ... the potential growth, the potential projects, the potential revenue that we can generate from this project and this project being an eminent part of that growth and that revenue is immense."

Eugenio said if they were to reject the proposal, they would go back to square one and that wasn't something she wanted to do, considering it was a big part of her platform.

"When I ran for city council, the hotel, the haunted hotel as you showed us images of, was something that was really important to me because it's really important to the city of Imperial," said Eugenio. "Everyone that I talked to when I was running said, 'what are you going to do about that hotel,' ... We are now in a position to negotiate what we can for the future growth for this project and so, like Dale said, it's all about perspective."



Facebook, Twitter, Email, Print, Share

Tags: Bryan Benso, Denis Morita, Mayor, Imperial Valley, Ray Roben, Choice Hotels, Geoffrey Dale, Fire Infrastructure, City Manager, Keith Eugenio, Paul Najjar, Robert Amparano, Gafcon

**Alexis Soto**  
Reporter  
Follow Alexis Soto

### From the Web

Powered by Zestifit

- Matt Damon Makes His Stance On COVID Vaccines Clear
- White House Press Sec. Reveals The Reason She's Stepping Down
- When You Get Pfizer's COVID Vaccine, This Is What Happens To You
- It's Clear Why Kaley Cuoco's Transformation Is Turning Heads
- Kate Middleton's Bra Straps Never Show. Here's Why
- The Untold Truth Of Fireball
- Tom Cruise Re-Emerges After Viral Transformation Photos
- The White House Has Apparently Seen The Last Of Melania Trump

(0) COMMENTS

Welcome to the discussion.  
Log In

Workshop La Loma LEASING NOW! Call for more information (760) 939-3200

Search [ ] Search

Support Local Journalism Support Us

El Centro Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau

SMITH-KANDAL

### MOST POPULAR

- Freedom and Ivermectin prevail
- Ivermectin and The Soul of Medicine
- Imperial's 'haunted hotel' comes back to life
- Imperial County sets the date
- Inventor of mRNA banned by the New England Journal of Medicine
- City of Bradley to see two new developmental expansions
- Ivermectin - Truth and Totalitarianism
- Vaccines, Ivermectin and the Physicians' Rome Declaration

### TODAY'S POLL

Your go-to oil... Go.  
 Vegetable  
 Canola  
 Olive  
 Coconut  
 Avocado  
 Vote View Results

### PROMOTE YOUR EVENT

Create Tickets | Sign In

Nov 6 Local / Community  
 Saturday, November 6, 2021 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.  
 300 West Barioni Blvd, Imperial  
 Fall for Jesus Community Event  
 Imperial Community Church, Imperial @ 11:00 AM

Oct 31 Visual Arts  
 THE BOX Public Art Opportunity in El Centro  
 Utility Box Art Program Deadline  
 El Centro City Hall, El Centro @ 8:00 AM

Nov 2 Local / Community  
 Altar de Muertos  
 Carmen Durazo Cultural Arts Center... @ 5:30 PM

MORE EVENTS powered by eventbrite

THE DESERT REVIEW  
 LOCALS DISCUSS MANDATES, INVITE STATE TO HEAR CONCERNS  
 The Desert Review Vol. 8 Issue 8

CLICK HERE  
 The COURTROOM  
 BOURBONS & GRILLS  
 841 WEST MAIN STREET  
 EL CENTRO  
 760.355.5588

Learn more

powered by INSTICATOR