
Appendix A

Aesthetics Technical Memorandum

MEMORANDUM

To: Michael Haberkorn, Gatzke Dillon & Ballance
From: Josh Saunders, Dudek
Subject: SDSU Brawley Sciences Building Project – Aesthetics and Visual Resources Technical Memorandum
Date: August 15, 2023
cc: Sarah Lozano, Kirsten Burrowes, Dudek
Attachments: Figures 1-6

Dudek has conducted an evaluation pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), California Public Resources Code 21000, et seq., to document existing visual conditions and potential impacts related to the aesthetic and visual character and views associated with construction and operation of the proposed San Diego State University (SDSU) Imperial Valley Campus Brawley Sciences Building Project (project or proposed project), located east of Brawley, California. This technical memorandum provides the results of the visual resources analysis.

1 Project Location and Setting

The project is located at 560 California State Route (SR) 78 (also referred to as Ben Hulse Highway) in Imperial County, east of the city of Brawley. Regional access to the campus is provided by SR 111 and SR 86 to the west and northwest, respectively, and SR 115 to the east. (See Figure 1, Regional/Campus Location.) The proposed project site is surrounded by agricultural uses to the north, south, and west. Undeveloped land and a solar farm are located directly east of the proposed project site. The proposed sciences building would be constructed northeast of existing campus Building 101, and the associated parking lot. Project construction staging areas would occupy the area of campus located southeast of the site and north of SR 78. (See Figure 2, SDSU Brawley Project Site and Staging Area.)

2 Project Description

In September 2003, CSU certified an environmental impact report and approved a Campus Master Plan for development of the SDSU Brawley campus (Brawley campus or campus), which would serve as an extension of the existing SDSU Imperial Valley Campus (IVC) located in Imperial County. The IVC is an extension of SDSU's main campus located in San Diego and furthers the university's regional educational mission to provide additional educational opportunities to the outlying communities of Imperial County. The approved Campus Master Plan and certified environmental impact report (EIR) provided sufficient environmental analysis and the authorization necessary for the enrollment of up to 850 full-time equivalent (FTE) students and corresponding faculty and staff and a framework for development of the facilities necessary to serve the approved campus enrollment.

The Brawley campus is approximately 200 acres in size and is located east of the city of Brawley (city). (See Figure 1.) Currently, the campus has been partially built out with educational and support facilities, although much of the campus remains undeveloped or used for active agriculture. As noted above, the environmental impacts associated

with development of the Brawley campus, including the student enrollment of up to 850 FTE, were evaluated at a program level of review in the previously certified 2003 SDSU Imperial Valley Campus Master Plan Project EIR (2003 EIR) (SCH 200251010). In CSU's effort to build out the IVC, consistent with the previously approved Campus Master Plan, SDSU now proposes construction and operation of a sciences building that would be located on the Brawley campus.

The proposed project involves the construction and operation of a STEM building (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) that would house teaching labs, lecture spaces, faculty/administration offices, research spaces, and conference rooms, as well as mechanical, electrical and telecom support spaces.

The proposed project site is approximately 3.2-acres in size and the construction staging areas would occupy approximately 1-acre in the area of campus located southeast of the site and north of SR 78. The project includes 61,119 sf of on-site landscaping including the construction of bio-retention areas to capture stormwater runoff from stormwater drainages systems that would be located throughout the project site. Hardscape improvements would include 41,297 sf of sidewalks and pedestrian walkways which would connect the project site to existing campus buildings and parking lot.

Additionally, the Project would require new points of connection to domestic water, fire water, and sewer lines from existing utility lines to serve the new building, as well as new domestic water line infrastructure. Potable water would be provided by the city of Brawley, as well as sewer and wastewater collection services. New utility infrastructure would also be required to support electrical services for the building, as well as a back-up diesel operated generator.

The proposed project building would have an area of 36,900 gross sf and be approximately 35 feet in height. The project would be built over the course of 19 months, with construction estimated to begin in January 2024. Construction and equipment staging would require 1-acre of space within the campus, directly east of the existing building (Building 101) and parking lot (See Figure 2). The project would involve site preparation, grading, and excavation associated with project construction. Excavation depths are anticipated to be 2-5 feet. Waste (i.e., excavated gravel/soil) generated during project construction would be balanced within the site.

3 Analysis Methodology

The analysis presented here considers the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project relative to existing conditions. Establishment of the project site's existing visual resources conditions has been informed using information from the previously certified 2003 EIR (SDSU 2003) related to views and visual character, updated, as applicable, based on recent observations and photographic documentation of the campus conducted during a February 2023 site visit. Several photographs (i.e., Photos A through G) taken during the February 2023 site visit are referenced in Section 4.1.1 below and the location of the photographs relative to the Brawley campus and project is presented on Figure 3, Existing Conditions – Key Map. Photographs A through G are presented on Figures 4 and 5. Other information reviewed during preparation of this analysis includes the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Scenic Highway System Map, Imperial County General Plan (Circulation & Scenic Highways Element and Conservation and Open Space Element) and, and Imperial County General Plan EIR.

4 Visual Resources

4.1 Existing Conditions

Visual Character and Quality

Regional

The Brawley campus is located within central Imperial County, which lies within the southeastern corner of California near the Mexico border. Imperial County comprises a broad, relatively flat desert environment that is bordered on the west and east by distant mountainous and hilly terrain and is traversed by a number of state highways/routes and Interstate 8 (I-8). In addition to including several incorporated cities (including Brawley), portions of Imperial County including the areas surrounding the Brawley campus have been transformed into agricultural fields through the construction of canals (and drains) and importation of irrigation water. More recently, wind turbine and solar photovoltaic energy development has been proposed and constructed in Imperial Valley, both on previously undisturbed desert lands and on land formerly used for agriculture.

Project Site and Surrounding Area

The project site encompasses primarily vacant land previously designated and approved for development in the southwest portion of the previously approved SDSU Brawley Campus Master Plan. As shown on Figure 2, the project site generally overlies the footprint of Future Classroom 102, which is situated in the “Academic” area of the Brawley Campus Master Plan. The project site includes two gravel surfaced picnic bench areas featuring rectangular and metal canopies/pergolas (approximately 10 feet high) and generally undeveloped terrain. (See Figure 4, Photo A.) Approximately 50 percent of the project site extends outside an existing campus fence and encompasses an improved dirt path/road surrounding the fence, an adjacent drain/narrow canal, and active agricultural lands that appear to support low-growing row crops or grasses. (See Figure 4, Photo B.) Located approximately 175 feet to the southeast of the proposed project site is the proposed staging area (approximately 52,000 square feet in size). The staging area is a flat, rectangular-shaped area outside of the existing paved campus parking lot that currently supports thin metal framing/lighting elements (approximately 12-15 feet high) above rectangular metal siding as well as irrigation lines on the ground surface associated with indeterminate agricultural use (potentially research or exploratory agricultural). (See Figure 4, Photos C and D.)

The project site is surrounded by active agricultural fields to the north, agricultural fields and a miscellaneous staging/laydown area to the east, the existing campus parking lot and associated perimeter landscaping strip to the south, and the existing campus building (“William and Susan Brandt Building”) to the west. The agricultural fields to the north and east appear to support dark green, low-growing agricultural row crops (potentially spinach or similar) or grasses. (See Figure 5, Photo E.) A storage/laydown area is located to the east of the project site and features two metallic shipping containers (painted white (1) and forest green (1)), miscellaneous plastic piping, wood crates, a large plastic cylindrical water (or other liquid material) tank, and other indeterminate materials spread across an approximately 3.2-acre, L-shaped fenced area. (See Figure 5, Photo F.) An existing rack-mounted solar photovoltaic development is located approximately 1,000 feet to the northeast of the project site (the solar development is located east of an existing north-south dirt access road and irrigation drain). (See Figure 5, Photo G.) The paved driveway off SR 78 and campus parking lot is located to the south of the project site. The perimeter landscaping features drought-tolerant trees (including palms and other), shrubs (including agave and cacti),

decorative rock, and internal planting areas (parking lot islands). (See Figure 5, Photo H.) The existing Brawley campus building is generally rectangular in structure (approximately 11,000 sf and 15-20 feet high) featuring light cream/off-white painted, stucco clad exteriors with tan tile accents at pillars and along the lower portion of outward-facing building exteriors. (See Photo H.) In addition to the main entrance, areas off the north, south, and east wings of the building are topped with pitched, red-tiled roofs (the balance of the building is topped by a flat roof that supports HVAC and other building systems).

Scenic Vistas

While the Imperial County General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element does not identify scenic vistas (it does mention that Anza-Borrego Desert State Park features among other amenities and resources “sweeping vistas”), two overlooks – the Osborne Overlook and Juan Bautista Anza Overlook – are identified and described as offering scenic views of the surrounding landscape (Imperial County 1993). The Osborne Overlook is located approximately 20 miles to the east of the project site in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area and the project site is not visible from Osborne Overlook Park. The Juan Bautista de Anza Overlook is located in the southwestern corner of Imperial County and near the San Diego County border (i.e., approximately 30 miles from the project site) and, due to distance, is not visible from the project site nor vice versa. Although not considered scenic vistas, the County’s natural features, including deserts, sand dunes, mountains, and the Salton Sea, are identified as scenic visual resources by the County. Mountains located approximately 30 miles away from the campus, in the north central portion of Imperial County, are visible from SR-78 along the frontage of the proposed staging area. Representative northerly views from SR-78 near the project site and staging area are presented in Figure 6, Representative Views from SR 78.

Scenic Highways

The nearest State Scenic Highway (SR 78 at SR 86; an eligible state scenic highway) is located approximately 24 miles to the northwest of the project site.

Light and Glare

In addition to rural residential and minor industrial uses located east of the SDSU Brawley campus (approximately 0.3 miles to the east of the project site; lighting consists primarily of interior sources), the SDSU Brawley campus is the primary source of fixed lighting and potential glare in the immediate project area. Specifically, campus parking lot lighting (pole mounted lights are installed along the parking lot perimeter) and wall mounted lighting on the exterior of the Brawly campus building contribute light sources to the existing nighttime environment.

5 Impact Analysis and Conclusions

5.1 Thresholds of Significance

The thresholds of significance used to evaluate the impacts of the proposed project related to aesthetics and visual resources are based on Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. A significant impact under CEQA would occur if the proposed project would:

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

- b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
- c) In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?
- d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

5.2 Impact Analysis

a) *Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?*

The Initial Study (IS) prepared as part of the 2003 Campus Master Plan EIR determined that no impact would occur from development of the Campus Master Plan with regard to potential adverse effects to scenic vistas.

As described above, while the Imperial County General Plan does not identify “scenic vistas”, two overlooks – the Osborne Overlook and Juan de Bautista Anza Overlook – are identified in the General Plan and described as offering scenic views of the surrounding landscape (Imperial County 1993). The Osborne Overlook is located approximately 20 miles to the east of the project site in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area and due to the distance, the project site is not visible from Osborne Overlook Park. The Juan de Bautista Anza Overlook is in the southwestern corner of Imperial County and is approximately 30 miles from the project site. Similar to the Osborne Overlook, due to the distance, the Anza overlook does not provide views to the project site. Views to distant mountain terrain in the northern and northeastern portions of Imperial County are visible as SR 78 motorists approach and pass the SDSU Brawley campus. However, available views are occasionally interrupted by landscaping (trees on private property including the SDSU Brawley campus) and development (including the approximately 20-foot high William and Susan Brandt Building on the SDSU Brawley campus). While the construction and operation of the approximate 35-foot high, approximately 43,000 square foot STEM building (and proposed site landscape trees) would similarly interrupt available views to distant mountains, such views are available to SR 78 motorists throughout the County. In addition, the STEM building would be set back approximately 400 feet from SR 78. This distance would reduce the apparent scale of the proposed building as viewed from SR 78 and would be viewed within the context of the existing campus building and parking lot landscaping. Because the view corridor across the project site has been altered by existing development and landscaping on the campus, interruption of views from SR 78 to distant mountains would be brief in the visual experience of motorists, and because similar distant views are available to state route motorists throughout Imperial County, the construction and operation of the project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. Therefore, impacts would be **less than significant**.

b) *Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?*

The IS prepared for the 2003 EIR determined that no impact would occur with regard to substantial damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

The project site is located approximately 24 miles from the nearest State Scenic Highway (i.e., SR-78 from the San Diego/Imperial County border to SR-86). As a result, construction activities and operation of the project would not be visible from the nearest State Scenic Highway. In addition, the project site does not support trees, rock outcrops, historic buildings or other potentially scenic resources, including scenic visual resources identified in the County General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element (i.e., deserts, sand dunes, mountains, and the Salton Sea). Therefore, **no impacts** to scenic resources within a state scenic highway would occur.

- c) *In non-urbanized areas, would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?*

The 2003 EIR did not analyze potential impacts to the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings. A discussion regarding the proposed project's potential to substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings is provided below.

As of July 1, 2021, the estimated population of the City of Brawley was 26,539 persons (United States Census Bureau 2023). The City of Brawley is not contiguous with any of the other incorporated cities in Imperial County and therefore, pursuant to Public Resource Code Section 21071, the City and project site are within a non-urbanized area.

Views of the project site and SDSU Brawley campus are primarily available to the public from nearby SR 78. Representative views to the project site from eastbound and westbound SR 78 are provided in Figure 6, Representative Public Views to Project Site. As shown in this figure, existing visual character reflects a primarily agricultural environment as evidenced by the presence of relatively flat, altered, and irrigated terrain. However, the existing SDSU Brawley campus (specifically, parking lot, site landscaping, and the approximately 20-foot high, 11,000 square foot William and Susan Brandt Building) also contribute to the local visual environment and add a developed element with verticality and mass to the existing landscape. As proposed, the STEM building would be situated near the existing campus parking lot and would encompass an area supporting covered picnic tables, an unimproved access road, adjacent earthen drain, and agricultural fields. The building would also be situated approximately 90 feet to the northeast of the existing campus building. Public views towards the proposed building from SR 78 would be filtered (and partially screened by) intervening campus landscaping, a research agricultural "project" on the site of the proposed staging area, and the existing campus building. While the proposed STEM building bulk and scale would be larger than the existing campus building, apparent bulk and scale as perceived from SR 78 would be reduced due to the presence of intervening development, landscape, and the STEM buildings' 400-foot setback from the state route. Further, the introduction of the STEM building would be softened by proposed landscaping and would include perimeter and common area landscaping consisting of shrubs, trees, decorative rock, and potentially, disintegrated granite. In addition to softening building introduction, proposed landscaping would be consistent with existing campus development and blend the project into to the existing setting. Lastly, the quality of transient public views of the site and surrounding area would not be substantially degraded by project implementation because development would progress in an orderly phased fashion and the STEM building would be viewed within the context of existing development and landscaping at the Brawley campus. Therefore, the project would not substantially degrade the existing

visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings. Impacts would be **less than significant**.

d) ***Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?***

The IS prepared for the Campus Master Plan 2003 EIR determined that with implementation of lighting standards in compliance with relevant goals and policies of the County of Imperial General Plan, the incorporation of artificial lighting mitigation measures, and the siting of recreational fields (and associated field lighting) away from planned residential housing areas, potential lighting and glare impacts would be **less than significant**. The referenced mitigation measure is found in Section 3.1, Land Use and Planning, of the 2003 EIR and it requires compliance with Title 24 (or California Green Building Standards Code) of the California Code of Regulations, which includes requirements for indoor and outdoor lighting systems associated with new development (see MMRP page 11-1)¹

Construction of the project would occur over an approximate 19-month timeframe. While a detailed lighting plan or schedule has not been prepared, lighting sources anticipated to be installed on the project site to support the STEM building would be similar to those installed on the existing SDSU Brawley campus. For example, sidewalk and walkway lighting consisting of low post or standard pole lighting is anticipated to be installed as is wall mounted (“wall pack”) fixtures on the exterior of the future STEM building. Overhead lighting in common areas (i.e., pathways, near building entrance) may also be installed. Consistent with existing uses at the Brawley campus, new lighting sources would be of appropriate intensity for the intended use (e.g., safety, security, and/or general illumination for pedestrians), and would generally be hooded and directed downward to minimize potential for skyglow, glare, and/or light trespass to off-campus areas [**Note to Reviewers: please confirm lighting details described in this paragraph, above**]. In addition, all exterior lighting sources installed on the project site would be compliant with California Energy Code allowances for lighting power and lighting control requirements and with Title 24, Part 6, the California Green Building Standards Code requirements related to light pollution reduction. For example, Title 24, Part 6, Section 130 outlines mandatory requirements for lighting systems and equipment for nonresidential occupancies. These include but are not limited to wattage requirements, lighting controls, and light shielding/glare requirements in accordance with American National Standards Institute/Illuminating Engineering Society (ANSI/IES) standards. Because lighting installed on the project site would be of a similar distribution and intensity of existing sources on the SDSU Brawley campus, and because lighting sources would be hooded, directed downward, and compliant with applicable standards (i.e., Title 24, ANSI/IES) for lighting control and light pollution reduction, the project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. Impacts would be **less than significant**, and no additional mitigation is required.

¹ **3.1 Land Use and Planning Mitigation Measure** included on Page 11-1 of the 2003 EIR: SDSU will make best efforts to comply with local government design guidelines, and all construction will comply with Title 24.

6 References

Caltrans (California Department of Transportation). 2023. State Scenic Highway System Map. Accessed March 3, 2023.

Imperial County. 1993a. Final Program EIR for the County of Imperial General Plan.

Imperial County. 1993b. General Plan.

SDSU (San Diego State University). 2003. SDSU Imperial Valley Campus Master Plan Project (SCH No. 200251010).

United States Census Bureau. 2023. QuickFact, Brawley city, California. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/brawleycitycalifornia>. Accessed March 3, 2023.

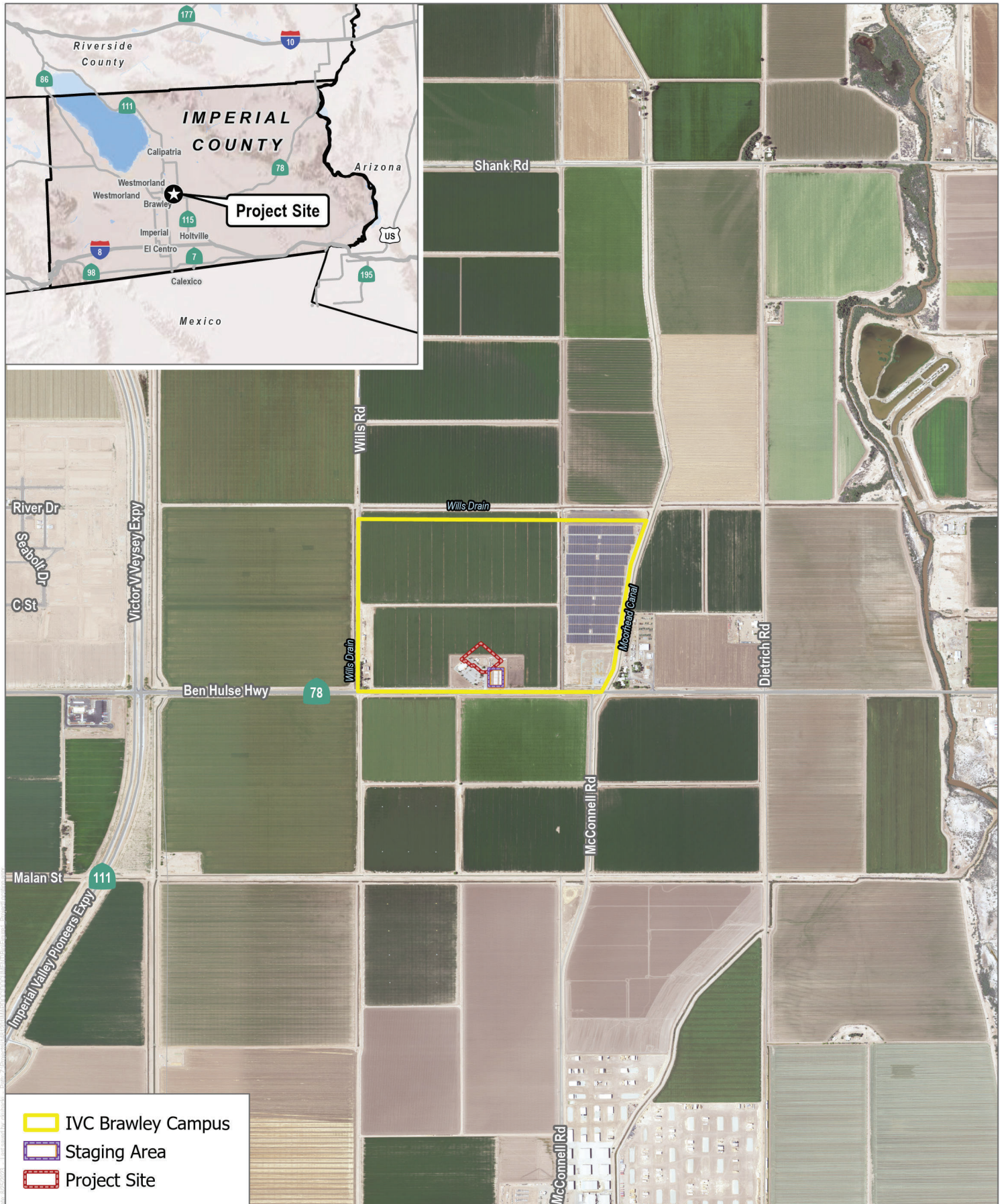


FIGURE 1

Regional/Campus Location

SDSU Brawley Sciences Building Project



Photo A: View NE from SDSU Brawley Campus parking lot towards project site



Photo B: View N from SDSU Brawley Campus driveway towards project site and existing agricultural fields



Photo C: View NE from SR-78/Bixby Lane intersection towards staging area site and campus gate



Photo D: View N from southern boundary of proposed staging area site.



Photo E: View W from offcampus access road towards agricultural fields to north of project site and staging area (project site located 950 feet away)



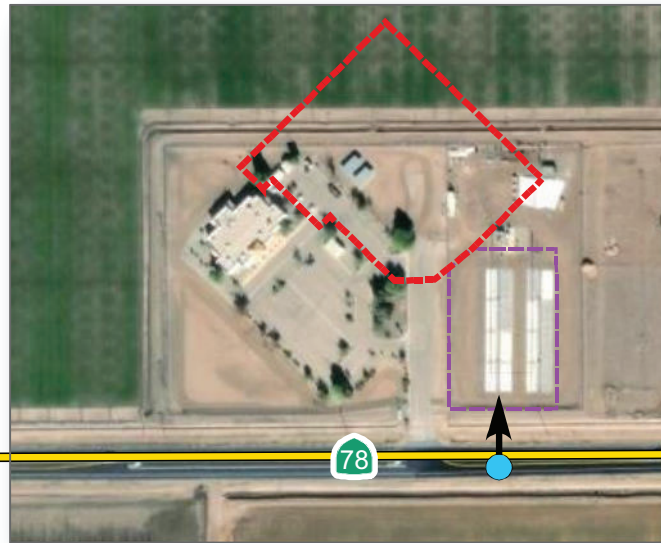
Photo F: View W-NW towards existing fenced storage and laydown area



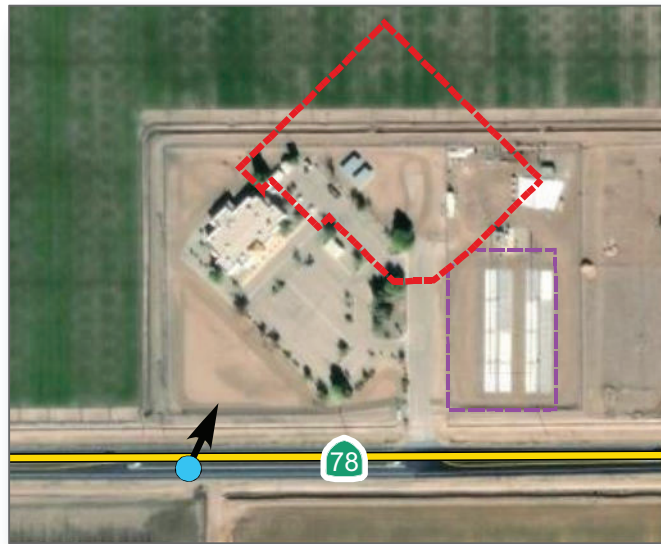
Photo G: View N from offcampus access road towards utility corridor, solar farm, and distant mountains



Photo H: View northwest from SDSU Brawley Campus parking lot towards existing campus building (i.e., William and Susan Brandt Building)



View N from SR-78 towards staging area (distant mountains faint but visible in background)



View NE from SR-78 towards SDSU Brawley Campus building and parking lot (distant mountains visible but regularly blocked by landscaping)

- Photo Point Location
- IVC Brawley Campus Boundary
- Project Site
- Staging Area

SOURCE: DUDEK 2023

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FIGURE 6

Representative Views from SR-78

SDSU Brawley Sciences Building Project