



Staff Report

Agenda Item No. D-1

To: City of Imperial Planning Commission

From: Yvonne Cordero

Date: April 15, 2026

Applicant:	Ricardo Cortez
Project Location:	400 N. Imperial Avenue
Project Description:	Conditional Use Permit 26-01 to allow the assembly of a religious institution
Zoning:	Village Commercial (VC)
Environmental:	Categorically Exempt
Recommendation:	Approve, subject to Conditions of Approval

Background

Ricardo Cortez is requesting approval of a Conditional Use Permit to establish a place of worship at 400. N. Imperial Avenue, Unit 2 (APN 063-224-004). Mr. Cortez, as Pastor of the 15-member congregation, intends to have a positive impact on the community as he and his wife pioneer the establishment of The Potter's House Christian Fellowship-Imperial Campus and inspire people to find purpose and joy in their lives.

The project site is located within the Village Commercial (VC) Zone, where semi-public uses, such as religious institutions, are permitted land uses with an approved Conditional Use Permit. The three-unit building currently houses a barber shop to the west and adjacent tutoring services in the easternmost unit. Mr. Cortez will occupy the middle 1,320 sf space, and the property owner has agreed to lease the space contingent on approval of the Conditional Use Permit.

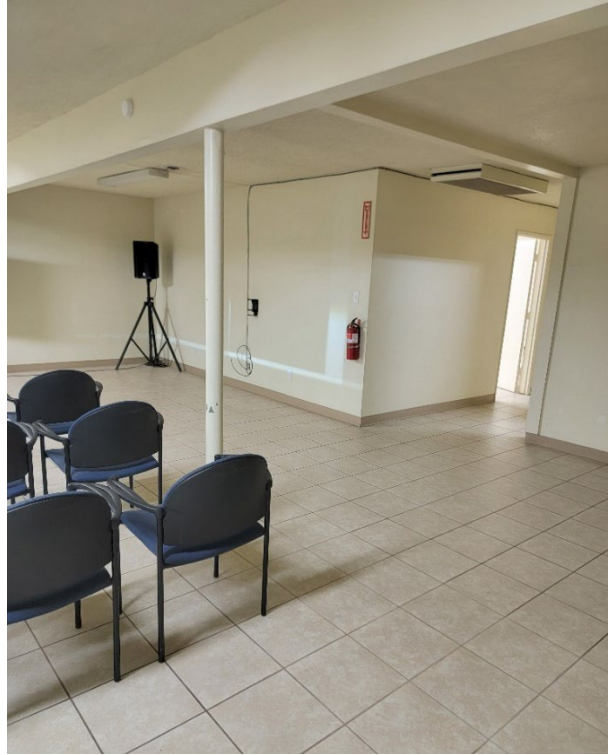
Mr. Cortez proposes a sanctuary at the unit's main entrance, with a prayer room and restroom in the rear of the building. Worship services will be held on Sundays from 10 am to 1 pm and from 5:30 pm to 8 pm. The Wednesday night service will start at 6:30 pm. and end by 8 pm. The project site accommodates 9 parking spaces, with ample on-street parking available around the site in the

VC Zone. Although the church will share the building with adjacent tenants, its schedule will fall outside typical business hours, minimizing potential overlap in the site's demand.

Project Location



Sanctuary



Prayer Room



Restrooms



Discussion/Analysis

The designated land use for the project site is Village Commercial (VC). Adjacent land uses include nonconforming residential structures situated within both the Village Commercial and Residential Condominium Zones. To the south, a high school facility is located within the Village Commercial Zone, while to the east, across SR 86, are nonconforming residential structures within the Neighborhood Commercial Zone.

Direction	Land Use	Zone
North	Residential Apartments	Village Commercial (VC)
South	Imperial Avenue Holbrook High School	Village Commercial (VC)
West	Single Family Residential	Residential Condominium (RC)
East	Single Family Residential	Neighborhood Commercial (C-1)

The project site was assessed for its feasibility within an active commercial zone in Downtown Imperial. The vacant tenant suite is capable of supporting the intended use without necessitating structural modifications or compromising the existing infrastructure, thereby maintaining the family-friendly character of the Village Commercial district.

Environmental Compliance

The existing structure at 400 N. Imperial Avenue qualifies for a Categorical Exemption pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per Section 15301 – Existing Facilities, Class 1, consisting of the operation of an existing public or private structure involving no expansion of existing or former use. The project site will have no significant environmental impact, and no sensitive environmental resources, such as wetlands or endangered species habitats, are present at or near the location. The project will not significantly impact air quality, noise levels, or result in an increase in demand for public services.

The religious assembly at the project site will be conducted outside typical business hours and will not affect traffic or parking at the existing surrounding residences or businesses. Any potential traffic or parking concerns will be addressed through compliance with local traffic ordinances and regulations.

Evaluation

The Zoning Ordinance provides flexibility in the regulation of uses to ensure that unusual characteristics of certain uses are properly addressed in furtherance of the Imperial Zoning Ordinance. Section 24.19.340 of the City of Imperial Zoning Ordinance requires that the Commission make specific findings when reviewing a Conditional Use Permit. The required findings are listed below in ***bold italics***, followed by an evaluation:

- 1. That the proposed location, size, design, and operating characteristics of the proposed use is in accord with the Title and Purpose of this Ordinance, the purpose of the zone in which the site is located, the Imperial General Plan, and the development policies and standard of the City.***

The project site is within the Village Commercial (VC) Zone, intended as the social and civic heart of the City. The assembly of religious services aligns with this zoning by providing a semi-public service desirable to the City's

community needs. Its operations support the goals of the City's General Plan, which is consistent with the objectives of the Village Commercial Zone and the City's development policies.

2. ***That the location, size, design, and operating characteristics of the proposed use will be compatible with and will not adversely affect or be materially detrimental to adjacent uses, residents, buildings, structures, or natural resources with consideration given to those items listed in Section 24.19.340.B of the Imperial Zoning Ordinance.***

The proposed site within the City's Downtown Core area benefits from a vibrant mix of restaurants, retail, and residential uses that are fully compatible with the intended project. The project aims to benefit the community by providing guidance and social support for the community's collective well-being and will have no negative impacts or significant detriments on nearby land uses, residents, buildings, structures, or natural resources. Based on these considerations, the project will have no adverse effects on the community or the environment and will align entirely with the objectives outlined in Section 24.19.340.B of the Imperial Zoning Ordinance.

3. ***That the proposed location, size, design, and operating characteristics of the proposed use and the conditions under which it would be operated or maintained will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or materially injurious to properties or improvements in the vicinity.***

In accordance with the established Conditions of Approval, the proposed project will not negatively impact public health, safety, or welfare. The church will be open to the community and operate at times that do not disrupt surrounding businesses or significantly increase traffic.

4. ***That the proposed Conditional Use will comply with each of the applicable provisions of the Zoning Ordinance, except for any approved Variance.***

The proposed project complies with all applicable provisions of the City of Imperial's Zoning Ordinance. The church will be located in the Village Commercial (VC) Zone, where religious assembly and institutions are a permitted use with an approved Conditional Use Permit. There are no variances requested or required for this project, and all zoning regulations and requirements will be fully adhered to. By meeting these conditions, the project ensures alignment with the City's zoning standards and regulations.

Public Notification

The public hearing scheduled for April 22, 2026, was duly noticed in newspapers of general circulation on April 9, 2026. A Notice of Public Hearing was mailed to all property owners within 300 feet of the property. The City of Imperial has not received any public comments for or against this project as of the date of this report's publication.

Recommendation

The Development Review Committee reviewed the request for the Conditional Use Permit and recommends that the Planning Commission conduct a public hearing to receive comments for and against the project. Unless sufficient evidence to the contrary is presented at the public hearing, staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve Conditional Use Permit 26-01 to allow the operation of a church at 400 N. Imperial Ave., Unit 2.

Attachments

- Attachment A – Resolution PC2026-04 with Conditions of Approval

Respectfully submitted,



Othon Mora, MCM, CBO
Community Development Director