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IID fighting for property for key power line

BY GARY REDFERN
Staff Writer

EL CENTRO — The Imperial Irrigation District has called a special meeting for Thursday to hold a public hearing on using eminent domain to acquire an easement interest in property from several landowners needed for renovation of a key power line.

The meeting will start at 4 p.m. and be held in the district's Condit Auditorium at 1285 Broadway in El Centro. It will allow "all parties interested in the affected properties ... an opportunity to be heard," an IID report states.

Landowners were notified of the hearing on Feb. 2 in accordance with state law, according to the report.

The report adds IID

staff recommends the IID board adopt resolutions declaring the acquisition of easement interest a necessity for the project.

Specifically, the project is the so-called "S-line" that is getting upgraded poles and lines at a cost of \$55 million, \$40 million of which is being funded by Citizens Energy Corp. A formal groundbreaking for the project was held in December.

"IID staff and its consultants have continued to meet and be available to discuss the offer and need for the subject property rights," the district report states. "However, no terms have yet to be agreed upon."

The report also states, "Contractual obligations with regard to the upgrade require the line

be in service in 2023. Failure to advance the project could result in civil liability for the Imperial Irrigation District."

The report states, "The offer of just compensation has been made," but does not specify amounts. There are 11 parcels involved.

Property owners include B&B McNeece LLC; Farmland Reserve, Inc.; Gloria Fortin and Brian R. Paul Lerno; Nancy M. Hart and Lawrence K. and Robin P. Brock; Joseph W. Heger; George J. and Clemence V. Lerno; Cynthia and Steven Nickus; WHB Enterprises, Alex Abatti Jr. and one property owned by several individuals.

SEE IID | A6



These wooden power poles south of Seeley owned by the Imperial Irrigation District will soon be replaced by steel ones in a \$55 million upgrade.

IVP FILE PHOTO/GARY REDFERN

New Biden pandemic plan: Closer to normal for the nation



White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeff Zients removes a face mask as he prepares to speak at a press briefing at the White House in 2021. AP PHOTO/PATRICK SEMANSKY

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's time for America to stop letting the coronavirus "dictate how we live," President Joe Biden's White House declared Wednesday, outlining a strategy to allow people to return to many normal activities safely after two years of pandemic disruptions.

One highlight is a new "test to treat" plan to provide free antiviral pills at pharmacies to people who test positive for the virus.

The 90-page National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan spells out initiatives and investments to continue to drive down serious illness and deaths from the virus, while preparing for potential new variants and providing employers and schools the resources to remain open.

"We know how to keep our businesses and our schools open with the

tools that we have at our disposal," said White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients.

Meanwhile, 140 million Americans, or 43% have now had COVID, according to a new assessment from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That estimate comes from a surveillance program that tested nearly 72,000 blood samples that were sent to commercial labs from late December to late January. The samples were checked for antibodies from infection, and were distinguishable from antibodies that came from vaccination.

More than 947,000 people in the U.S. have died from the virus according to the CDC.

Wednesday's White House announcement follows Biden's Tuesday night State of the Union speech, in which he pointed

to progress against the pandemic since last year, with a dramatic reduction in cases, along with readily available vaccines and the likelihood of new tests and therapeutics soon becoming more accessible.

"This plan lays out the roadmap to help us fight COVID-19 in the future as we move America from crisis to a time when COVID-19 does not disrupt our daily lives and is something we prevent, protect against, and treat," the White House said. "We are not going to just 'live with COVID.' Because of our work, we are no longer going to let COVID-19 dictate how we live."

That tracked Biden's speech statement, "Tonight, I can say we are moving forward safely, back to more normal routines. It's time for Americans to get back to work and fill our great

downtowns again."

COVID-19 cases have fallen to their lowest level since last summer in recent weeks, after a winter spike from the highly transmissible omicron variant. Deaths, though, which lag cases by weeks, are still elevated, with an average of nearly 1,700 people dying in the U.S. each day. Officials emphasize that most instances of serious illnesses and death in the U.S. occur among those who are unvaccinated or who have not received a booster dose of vaccine.

The White House's strategy comes days after the CDC loosened its guidance for when face masks should be worn in public indoor settings, placing more emphasis on local capacity to treat serious disease than overall case counts.

SEE PLAN | A6

Rehab under way at shuttered Roberta Hotel



The Roberta Hotel, 465 W. State St., El Centro, as seen on Nov. 16. Tenants there were cleared out Nov. 18 due to the building being red-tagged by the city for safety violations. IVP FILE PHOTO/CORISSA IBARRA

BY GARY REDFERN
Staff Writer

EL CENTRO — The owner of the Roberta Hotel, ordered closed by the city in November amid numerous hazardous code violations, said he is renovating the building and hopes to reopen it.

"I'm going to fix the whole place," Kris Patel said Tuesday morning as workers were seen at the building at 465 W. State St. "Thanks to the city for working with me. They understand the whole community."

Patel said he has not yet determined what type of facility it will be. Though a hotel permitted for short-term tenants, the city was allowing long-term housing there due to the local housing shortage, city building official Frank

Soto said at the time.

However, code violations were found during an October inspection and that triggered enforcement action, Soto added. When a follow-up inspection on Nov. 15 revealed the ordered repairs had not been made, the city "red tagged" the building and it was closed on Nov. 18, forcing dozens of residents to scramble to find another place to live.

Among the violations, there had been small fires in two rooms and repairs were not permitted or up to code, Soto added.

A report provided by the city states Patel is rehabilitating 37 rooms at the hotel. The project includes plumbing, electrical and mechanical work. Further information was not immediately available.

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