



CITY OF SALINAS COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

DATE: JANUARY 27, 2025

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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TITLE: GENERAL PLAN UPDATE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
ELEMENT STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

Administrative Report - No action is required.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Since launching the General Plan Update in 2021, Community Development staff have presented quarterly progress reports to City Council and in 2024 conducted Study Sessions with City Council in 2024 to review draft policy on the key topics, including land use and circulation, health, and safety. This Study Session focuses on economic development, shares engagement with stakeholders, and summarizes the draft policies of the proposed draft Economic Development Element. Staff is currently preparing a Public Review Draft General Plan for release in the spring of 2025 and is also working on the related Climate Action Plan and an Environmental Impact Report covering both documents. It is anticipated that the Council will consider adoption of the updated General Plan at the December 2025 meeting.

BACKGROUND:

Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan Update

The City launched Visión Salinas 2040 in 2021 as the umbrella project for its first comprehensive General Plan Update since 2002 and associated documents. Along with updating existing chapters, or “Elements” of the General Plan, Visión Salinas includes the City’s first Environmental Justice Element and Climate Action Plan (CAP), and a comprehensive Zoning Code update. Advanced Planning and Project Implementation Division staff (staff) are completing edits to a second administrative draft General Plan, which will be transferred to our consultant team to prepare a Public Review Draft. For more information, see Attachment 1, General Plan Update Progress Memo Q4 2024.

Zoning Code Update

The City of Salinas is embarking on a comprehensive update to its Zoning Code (ZCU), which has the potential to significantly shape the city's growth and the operations of the Community Development Department (CDD). The primary goal of the ZCU is to create a user-friendly, clear, and concise Zoning Code that will simplify the entitlement process for all stakeholders through objective development and design standards. This is an opportunity to improve how entitlement applications are processed, providing greater clarity regarding project requirements. The current Zoning Code is often complex and difficult for both staff and applicants to navigate. Streamlining the Zoning Code will establish more straightforward pathways for project approvals, potentially accelerating timelines for hearings and determinations, and enhancing the overall experience for those seeking to develop in Salinas. Community stakeholders including professionals, designers, contractors, business associations, business and property owners, and residents will be actively engaged in the ZCU process.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is a critical component of the Visión Salinas process. Since 2021, staff has conducted dozens of workshops and webinars, Steering Committee and Working Group meetings, and hosted other stakeholder discussions. Pop-ups, surveys, house meetings, and radio interviews, are some examples of other tools used for General Plan outreach. Attachment 2 provides a more detailed General Plan engagement summary. This commitment to engagement has also included keeping City Council informed throughout the process. Since launch, staff has presented or prepared memos for Council quarterly, and conducted two previous Study Sessions for direction on early draft policy:

- [Land Use and Circulation – March 12, 2024](#)
- [Environmental Justice and Public Safety – April 23, 2024](#)

Economic Development Element Background

The City's current Economic Development Element was adopted in 2017 (2017 EDE), after being accepted as a strategic planning document in 2014. It is an optional General Plan Element under state law and started as an initiative to chart a path to local economic recovery following the Great Recession. The 2017 EDE turned into a mini-General Plan update in and of itself, expanding beyond standard economic development topics into housing, neighborhoods, transportation, quality of life, and other topics through the lens of equity. The 2017 EDE established a vision of a prosperous and healthy community centered on jobs, safety, and health through over 400 goals policies and actions. The 2017 EDE also focused on economic development through land use planning, designating much of Salinas as various Opportunity Areas with identified development foci and strategies. These Opportunity Areas influenced the creation of the draft Place Type land use designations and related policies in the Land Use Element (see link above to Land Use and Circulation Study Session above for more details on Place Types).

Economic Development Engagement

Attachment 2 provides a comprehensive summary of both Vision Salinas and General Plan Update community engagement strategy and efforts. Multiple General Plan Update community engagement efforts on the topic of economic development, included the Socioeconomic Systems Pillar Working Group, Steering Committee business organizations and organizations, and ag

industry representatives. More recently, the City held a business stakeholder meeting on November 15, 2024, attended by leaders and representatives of local business groups to review draft Economic Development Element policy (see below) and current economic development efforts and challenges. A more detailed meeting summary is provided as Attachment 3.

Salinas Agriculture Economic and Land Use Study and Agricultural Policy Framework

Through a California Department of Conservation Planning Grant, the City established a Technical Advisory Committee (Ag TAC) to assist with the development and review of a Salinas Agriculture Economic and Land Use Study (Study), which is provided as Attachment 4. The Ag TAC included representatives from Western Growers, the Monterey County Farm Bureau, Monterey County Vintners Association, and the Grower-Shipper Association who supported the development of the scope of work for the Study consultant, participated in interviews, assisted with connecting the consultants with other agriculture stakeholders, and reviewed and provided feedback on the Study's findings and recommendations. The Study served as the foundation of the Salinas Agricultural Policy Framework (Framework; Attachment 5) which highlights existing conditions, recommendations, and draft policies to be incorporated into General Plan Update, as seen in Goal ED-1 below.

Draft Economic Development Element Summary

The 2017 EDE is still the backbone of the draft EDE update, but because Visión Salinas 2040 is a comprehensive overhaul of the General Plan, significant portions of 2017 EDE goals, policies and actions have been shifted to more topic-aligned Elements (i.e.: land use to the Land Use Element, housing, and neighborhood content to the Housing Element, etc.). The Draft Economic Development goals, policies, and actions listed in Attachment 6 are the remaining 2017 EDE economic development priorities updated to reflect recent studies and community engagement. Draft policies, which were reviewed by the Steering Committee, are summarized below, are organized under five goals.

Goal ED-1: Cultivate a diverse and adaptive economy that aligns with future economic trends and reinforces Salinas' leadership in the agricultural industry.

- Encourage economic expansion while supporting the advancement of agricultural production and technology.
- Attract new businesses on and adjacent to the agri-business supply chain.

Goal ED-2: Encourage a thriving business environment through supporting start-ups, growing current businesses, and attracting new industry to build a dynamic economic landscape in Salinas with higher paying employment opportunities.

- Develop a business retention program and streamline licensing and permitting processes.
- Improve access to capital for all stages of business growth and support entrepreneurship and innovation.

Goal ED-3: Narrow social and economic disparities in the City of Salinas through workforce development and community support.

- Increase access to education and vocational training for youth and adults to prepare them for relevant and high-quality job opportunities.

- Support residents in improving their neighborhoods.

Goal ED-4: Enhance retail, entertainment, and tourism opportunities throughout the City.

- Promote the City and its unique neighborhoods as cultural, arts and shopping destinations.
- Develop a Citywide strategy to combat sales tax leakage and strengthen local retail.

Goal ED-5: Coordinate public and private investment along disinvested commercial corridors.

- Improve the appearance of commercial corridors through design guidelines that strengthen district identity and programs such as façade improvements.
- Support business owners with ADA compliance and increasing accessibility.

EDE and General Plan Update Next Steps

The next EDE/business stakeholder meeting is scheduled for February 14, 2025. Staff will continue to work with this core group of stakeholders to refine EDE goals, policies and actions and will expand engagement to include business and property owners, industry representatives and residents. Concurrently, city staff and the consultant team are preparing a Public Review Draft General Plan for release late spring 2025. Prior to releasing the draft, staff will hold another Study Session with Council to give a broad overview of the draft General Plan. Staff also continues to work with the consultant team on engagement for and preparation of a draft Climate Action Plan, and a draft Environmental Impact Report for the General Plan and Climate Action Plan.

CEQA CONSIDERATION:

Not a Project. The City of Salinas has determined that the proposed action is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (CEQA Guidelines Section 15378). In addition, CEQA Guidelines Section 15061 includes the general rule that CEQA applies only to activities which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. Because the proposed action and this matter have no potential to cause any effect on the environment, or because it falls within a category of activities excluded as projects pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378, this matter is not a project. Because the matter does not cause a direct or foreseeable indirect physical change on or in the environment, this matter is not a project. Any subsequent discretionary projects resulting from this action will be assessed for CEQA applicability.

CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE §84308 APPLIES:

No.

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE:

The General Plan Update is an objective in the 2023-2025 City Council Strategic Plan under Effective and Culturally Responsive Government.

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:

Community Development Department (CDD) staff coordinated with Library and Community Services, Public Works, Police, and Fire staff to review draft policies and documents to ensure internal consistency and direction. CDD staff is also working closely with the City Attorney and their outside special counsel on the review of the draft General Plan and related environmental documents.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

There is no cost associated with this study session. Funding for the General Plan Update comes from State grants and the General Plan fund, which is funded through General Plan/Zoning maintenance fees.

Fund	Appropriation	Appropriation Name	Total Appropriation	Amount for recommendation	FY 24-25 Operating Budget Page	Last Budget Action
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

ATTACHMENTS:

1. General Plan Update Progress Memo Q4 2024
2. General Plan Engagement Summary
3. Salinas Agriculture Economic and Land Use Study
4. Economic Development Stakeholder Meeting Summary
5. Draft Economic Development Element Goals, Policies and Actions
6. PowerPoint Presentation