



**CITY OF SALINAS
COUNCIL STAFF REPORT**

DATE: MARCH 24, 2026
DEPARTMENT: LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
FROM: KRISTAN LUNDQUIST, LCS DIRECTOR
TITLE: DISTRICT 5 RECREATION CENTER FEASIBILITY STUDY AND INITIAL SITE PLAN DESIGN

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

A Motion to approve a Resolution accepting the District 5 Recreation Center Feasibility Study and initial Site Plan Design for CIP 9342 at Northgate Neighborhood Park.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On May 10, 2022, the City Council approved an \$8.1 million reserve to build a Recreation Center in City Council District 5. On March 11, 2025, the City Council appropriated those funds to CIP 9342 to initiate a feasibility study for the proposed project at Northgate Neighborhood Park.

Staff, in collaboration with ABA Studios, have now completed the District 5 Recreation Center Feasibility Study and initial Site Plan Design. This effort included extensive community engagement, site analysis, conceptual planning, and cost estimates for the recreation center and associated park improvements. The site plan is conceptual in nature and basically verifies how the Recreation Center and site amenities could be placed on the site. There are still opportunities to shift the building and site amenities in future design phases.

Staff recommend that the City Council accept the District 5 Recreation Center Feasibility Study and initial Site Plan Design for Northgate Neighborhood Park, allowing the project to proceed into environmental review and subsequent design development phases.

BACKGROUND:

The Library & Community Services Department and the Fire Department initially explored a shared-site concept for a new fire station and recreation center in City Council District 5, identifying Laurel Park as a potential location based on fire service response goals and safety considerations.

In February 2022, the City submitted a \$20 million request to Assemblymember Rivas' office for State funding to support the fire station and park improvements, contingent upon the City

allocating approximately \$8 million for the recreation center component of the project. The City did not receive State funding for the project, however, recognizing that District 5 is the only City Council District without a recreation center, the City Council moved forward with the appropriation of \$8.1 million to support the development of a recreation center within the district.

Once funding was allocated, the next step was to determine a suitable location for the new recreation center. To begin this process, staff initiated the first phase of community engagement in September 2022. This phase included an online survey that asked District 5 residents where they would like to see a recreation center built. One important parameter was that the location had to be on a City-owned parcel, which are limited in District 5. In addition to the online survey, we conducted several pop-up outreach activities throughout the community. Locations included the Dollar Tree/Grocery Outlet shopping center, Laurelwood Elementary School, and Santa Rita Elementary School. We also conducted outreach at the citywide Environmental Justice Workshops held as part of the General Plan process. Through the pop-up efforts, we collected a total of 130 responses, with the majority coming from residents in the 93906-zip code.

In October 2022, we held a community meeting to share the results from the survey and pop-up outreach activities. The top sites identified were Northgate, Santa Rita, and Laurel Neighborhood Parks. However, due to site constraints, Santa Rita was not considered a feasible option. Community members were then asked again, “Where in District 5 would you place a recreation center?” And once again, Northgate Neighborhood Park emerged as the top choice. This process led to the selection of Northgate Neighborhood Park as the preferred location.

The City currently operates seven recreation centers citywide; however, none are located within City Council District 5. Development of a recreation center in District 5 would expand equitable access to youth programs, senior services, and community gathering space, and provide critical recreational opportunities for residents. It is also worth noting, that the Parks, Recreation & Libraries Master Plan adopted by the City Council in 2019, also identified gaps of service in North Salinas. Northgate Park provides a viable location with adequate acreage and also is one of the most northern existing parks.

As an initial step in advancing the District 5 Recreation Center at Northgate Neighborhood Park, in February of 2025 the City entered into an agreement with ABA Studios to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study and conceptual site plan design. The feasibility study included a two-pronged process: robust community engagement to define program needs and priorities, coupled with a site feasibility analysis to evaluate exciting site conditions, suitability, accessibility, potential site constraints and how the identified interior and exterior program elements could best be situated within the park.

A critical phase of the feasibility study was establishing a vision for the recreation center and identifying community needs. ABA Studios and City staff facilitated an in-person community meeting to gather input on desired spaces, programs, and potential park improvements. This effort was supported by an electronic survey and pop-up events, resulting in feedback from over 627 residents combined. Based on the workshop, pop-up events and survey findings, ABA prepared a key findings summary and developed a draft interior and exterior space program for the proposed recreation center, reflecting community priorities and project goals (Attachment A).

Key findings from the engagement process included the need for standalone restrooms, outdoor recreational areas, and dedicated teen spaces (Teen Lounge). Residents also emphasized the importance of family and community empowerment programs, as well as health and wellness resources.

Following the visioning and needs assessment, and informed technical evaluation of the site, ABA explored a variety of prototypes to address community concerns surrounding parking and building placement within the park. The prototypes were evaluated for functionality, site compatibility, and cost. The illustration below highlights the prototypes explored with 5 determined to be most suitable and aligned with the project's budget.

Exploration - Studied many options.

Informed Option - One best location for building & parking for cost effectiveness & preservation of open space.

Phasing - Create an initial phase 1 that is within budget while establishing a "master" plan for future improvements.



Prototype 5 was further developed into two design options, which were presented to the community through an in-person meeting, electronic survey, and pop-up activities. Both design options incorporated a phased approach. Phase I, highlighted in white, includes construction of the recreation center, parking (though not required by code), landscaping, and either an amphitheater or picnic area. Phase II represents potential long-term improvements that could be implemented if additional funding becomes available. Having a comprehensive park concept provides the City with a clear framework to pursue grant funding opportunities.

Community members were asked to evaluate each design concept based on flexibility and functionality, preservation of open space, and the overall concept. Both options were well received, and this engagement effort reached more than 1,316 residents.



4.2 Feasibility Design Study Option 1



4.3 Feasibility Design Study Option 2



Overall, Option 1 was the community’s preferred design; however, when considering feedback from District 5 residents specifically, Option 2 emerged as the preferred option and it is staff’s recommended Site Plan Design to proceed forward with into the next phases of the design process.



Throughout this process, staff prioritized developing a design that is responsive to community needs while remaining aligned with available funding. Ensuring that the proposed improvements could be realistically delivered within the project’s established budget.

On March 11, 2026, the Library and Community Services Commission reviewed and considered the District 5 Recreation Center Feasibility Study and Site Plan Design. Following discussion, the Commission recommended that the Salinas City Council reconsider the proposed placement of the Recreation Center at the site, evaluate opportunities to provide additional parking, conduct additional neighborhood engagement, and explore alternative locations within District 5 for the project.

Valid concerns were raised at the Commission meeting; however, it is also important that we recognize the overall community voices that have participated in the engagement conducted thus far through a very extensive community outreach effort. While it has been determined via the community input that Northgate Park is the most suitable location, it is important to stress that this action does not preclude further exploration of the placement of the recreation center and/or of other amenities in the schematic design phase.

Examples of elements where further consideration could occur are identified below:

Parking: Onsite parking for a project like this is not required. However, based on concerns raised during outreach efforts, staff felt it was important to provide onsite parking to not burden the neighborhood. Upon further consideration, it may be determined that parking be moved or eliminated altogether.

Recreation Center Placement: The placement of the building in the initial Site Plan was intentional in order to group amenities to allow for synergy, utilize existing utilities and access to restroom facilities. It also was the most cost effective to ensure the project would stay in line with existing budget. Future consideration in the next phase of design could continue to look at placement and evaluate the approximate \$300,000 it would take to move utilities to accommodate movement of the building closer to the Cherokee side of the park.

Traffic Calming: Some residents have raised concerns about the need for traffic calming on Cherokee and have felt strongly that the Recreation Center project should not move forward without this component. While the funding allocated for the District 5 Recreation Center does not allow for traffic calming without eliminating other key amenities identified by community as critical, this could also be further considered in the next phase of design. Another option would be for the LCS Department to collaborate with Public Works in order to evaluate the need for traffic calming on Cherokee and potential add this component to the overall project.

Based on the above, staff recommend that the City Council accept the District 5 Recreation Center Feasibility Study and initial Site Plan Design for Northgate Neighborhood Park, allowing the project to proceed into environmental review and subsequent design development phases. While Council is being asked to accept the initial site plan, no formal design has been developed and as indicated previously, many elements could be further explored in the future design phases. Community engagement will continue to be a priority and will be front and center as we move forward.

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).

CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE §84308 APPLIES:

No.

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE:

This action supports the City Council Strategic Plan in the following areas:

Infrastructure: Continue to invest in recreational and public facilities that strengthen community assets and enhance quality of life.

Youth and Seniors: Improve, expand, and develop youth and senior facilities and programs to better serve the needs of the community.

City Services: Promote equitable access to City services, foster inclusive development, provide high-quality customer service, and engage residents through meaningful communication and outreach.

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:

The Library & Community Services Department has taken the lead in the feasibility study and community engagement efforts for the District 5 Recreation Center project. Moving forward, LCS will continue to work closely with Public Works and Community Development throughout the entitlement, bidding, and construction phases of the project.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

The previously appropriated \$8.1 million to CIP 9342 funded the feasibility and site plan design phase for the recreation center at Northgate Neighborhood Park. Acceptance of the Feasibility Study and Site Plan Design does not appropriate additional funds for the project.

Fund	General Ledger Number (Operating/CIP)	General Ledger Account Name	Remaining Budget Appropriation	Amount Requested
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution
Feasibility Study and Site Pan Design Presentation