



CITY OF SALINAS COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

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DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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TITLE: GENERAL PLAN UPDATE/VISION SALINAS 2040 LAND USE
AND CIRCULATION STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

Receive study session presentation and provide comment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report and study session discusses and seeks Council guidance on Land Use and Circulation Elements emerging topics of conversation and identified challenges. Land use and circulation are two of the most important and interrelated topics in the General Plan. The City is considering new Place Type land use designations emphasizing flexible placemaking instead of singular uses. How the City plans for circulation in the City is also changing, due to continued growth, and new state laws around how environmental traffic impacts are measured and focus on balanced transportation systems. Draft Circulation Element policies seek to create a balanced, safe transportation network that contributes to community health and sustainability, while moving people and goods efficiently.

BACKGROUND:

Study Session Purpose:

As staff begins drafting the Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan it is important to keep the Council and community involved. General Plan study sessions are meant to give the Council an opportunity to shape draft policy before the formal adoption process. Land use and circulation are two of the most legally important and closely related topics in any general plan. Where businesses and housing are located influences how far people must travel and their transportation options. Streets, highways, bike lanes, and paths not only connect destinations, but their size and design also impact how places feel and are experienced by people. Land use and Draft Place Type designations have been discussed at previous Council meetings, including on [September 26, 2023](#). A complete set

of draft Land Use and Infrastructure Element and Circulation Element policies which incorporate Steering Committee and stakeholder comments are provided as Attachments 1 and 5 to the staff report.

Land Use Changes and Impacts:

The Draft Place Type designations represent a new direction in land use, focusing on placemaking and prioritizing form instead of use. Place Types respond to community identified needs (see Attachment 3 Land Use Recurring Themes) by increasing flexibility to make the most of limited infill opportunities, with most designations seeing increased, density, height, or allowed uses. By focusing less on strict use found in typical land use designations, the Draft Place Types seek to limit a significant increase in nonconforming uses through increased flexibility. Certain areas may change names but would not experience much change in terms of allowed uses, such as shifts from Business Park to Employment Center, or from Office to Neighborhood Center.

As in any major land use/zoning code update, there is still the possibility of creating nonconforming uses. Nonconforming uses occur when land use and zoning designations change but an existing use continues. The most potential conflicts in allowed uses will come in areas changing to one of the mixed-use designations from industrial/light to industrial areas, and retail areas to a lesser degree. Changes like this are proposed in areas such as the Alisal Marketplace, some large shopping centers, and along major corridors like East Alisal Street and East Market Street.

One of the big differences between the Draft Place Types and current designations are the three kinds of mixed-use designations, plus special Place Types for the downtown and Alisal Marketplace. These are intentionally designed to respect existing context while increasing flexibility and minimizing the friction that could occur from relying on the existing mixed-use land use/zoning designation. Even with this flexibility, auto sales, drive-throughs, industrial, and waste management/recycling may still become nonconforming in these areas depending on the Place Type and eventual zoning regulations.

The City is not proposing eminent domain, amortization (timed phase out of uses), or other similar tools to force change. Any present legal uses/businesses that would become nonconforming through the adoption of the Draft Place Types, would be allowed to remain, and operate without an intensification of use, and would not be forced to relocate or close via land use change. Currently, Zoning Code [Sec. 37-50.160](#) does not allow the intensification (expansion) of nonconforming uses, and limits resumption of the nonconforming use following structural damage or the discontinuation of the nonconforming use for more than 180 days. Draft land use policy calls for creating new nonconforming regulations to protect existing businesses in areas transitioning from light-industrial/commercial to a form of mixed-use (Attachment 1, Action LUI-1.6.6). This could include pathways for nonconforming uses to expand, lengthening the time allowed to reestablish a similar use, and/or making it easier to resume the use after building damage. This policy demonstrates that the intent behind the Place Types is to open future possibilities, not to force change.

Land Use Engagement:

Staff conducted targeted outreach to businesses in areas of changing land use designations in February, sending over 1,300 postcards to businesses and owners in identified areas with information. Staff also sent more detailed letters (Attachment 2) to over 100 businesses that may become legal nonconforming uses and followed up with direct canvassing. These mailers also invited recipients to three virtual information sessions to discuss changes, held February 27-29, at 7 AM, 11 AM, and 6 PM respectively. Seventy people registered for these sessions and 46 attended. Staff also responded to over 30 calls. Common feedback from the sessions directly included concerns regarding whether proposed land use changes would directly force anyone to move and the feeling that current nonconforming use regulations are too strict.

Land Use and Infrastructure Policy:

The Draft Land Use goals, policies, and actions in Attachment 1 reflect community engagement throughout the General Plan Update, recommendations from other recent planning efforts, and Steering Committee review. The draft policies and actions summarized below are organized under three goals:

Goal LUI-1: Support a balanced, diverse, and equitable land use pattern that provides a wide range of jobs, housing, recreation, and services.

- Encourage mixed-use development with a blend of housing, businesses, and services.
- Promote economic development through land use and infrastructure planning.

Goal LUI-2: Ensure that above- and below-ground infrastructure meets the existing and future community needs.

- Maintain, improve, and expand flood, water, and sewer systems to meet current and future needs and expand infrastructure financing options.
- Increase other infrastructure such as internet/communication systems and green infrastructure.

Goal LUI-3: Support the development and continued evolution of the Salinas Municipal Airport.

- Encourage development of the airport and surrounding area with compatible businesses and its capacity to support aviation innovation.
- Continue to make safety the top priority in and around the airport.

Circulation Element:

Circulation is one of the required elements of a general plan under California state law. It identifies a policy vision to address local transportation needs and defines roadway classifications and locations. According to Government Code Section 65302 (b), a circulation element must show major transportation routes and facilities, plan for a multimodal network, and correlate directly to the land use element. New state laws since the 2002 Salinas General Plan and Circulation Element have changed transportation planning significantly. The Complete Streets Act of 2008 (AB 1358) requires cities and counties to modify their circulation elements to plan for a balanced transportation system that meets the needs of all users. SB 743 changed the basis for determining

significant environmental impacts from transportation from delay and congestion (level of service/LOS) to vehicle miles traveled (VMT). In response, the City adopted an [Interim VMT Policy](#) in 2020. Both changes aim to improve community health and sustainability, and reduce emissions, by making it easier to use transit, walk, or bike as realistic alternatives. Along with the General Plan, City will be updating its VMT policy and the Traffic Fee Ordinance, which are critical to implementing the Circulation Element.

As Salinas grows, especially with the anticipated buildout of the North of Boronda neighborhoods and other commercial/industrial future growth areas, mitigating VMT and LOS will be challenging. Historically, road widening and constructing new roads were the tools agencies used to reduce congestion. The efficacy of these tools is limited because of induced demand, so Salinas will have to utilize different tools as there is limited space to expand most existing roadways and SB 743 coupled with increasing costs makes bypass construction financially infeasible.

Circulation Engagement:

Circulation and transportation have been important engagement topics throughout the General Plan Update process. From the Council District Land Use meetings, Built Environment Working Group Meetings, Community Design Workshop, and Transportation Survey, staff has heard about many of the circulation challenges and needs of Salinas. Some of the recurring themes summarized in Attachment 4 include:

- Significant road and sidewalk maintenance needs.
- Safety concerns for all modes (drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, etc.).
- Traffic congestion makes some local commutes very time consuming.
- Circulation and freight movement is a major infrastructure concern for the agricultural industry, particularly access to US 101 and the condition of Abbott Street.

Staff is also considering feedback from concurrent transportation planning processes, such as the Active Transportation Plan (ATP) and Alisal Streetscape Masterplan. A list of recurring themes from community engagement is included as Attachment 4 to this staff report.

Draft Circulation Element Policy:

The Draft Circulation Element goals, policies, and actions in Attachment 5 are written to address Salinas' transportation needs, respond to state direction and law, and reflect recent local circulation planning. The draft policies and actions summarized below are organized under three goals:

Goal C-1: Provide and maintain a safe and integrated circulation system that meets the current and future needs of the community for all modes of travel.

- Implement the [Vision Zero Action Plan](#), and other safety improvements.
- Strive for LOS D and implement systems to reduce peak-hour congestion.

Goal C-2: Create and support sustainable and healthy transportation options that encourage a reduction in single-occupancy vehicle commutes and overall Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT).

- Invest in active transportation infrastructure and eliminate gaps in the active transportation network.

- Support Monterey-Salinas Transit and other forms of public transportation.

Goal C-3: Support the local economy through a circulation system that moves products safely and efficiently.

- Improve freight options and access to major routes.
- Improve street maintenance of designated truck routes.

CEQA CONSIDERATION:

Not a Project. The City of Salinas has determined that this administrative report and study session 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. An Environmental Impact Report is being prepared for the General Plan Update.

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE:

The General Plan Update itself is specifically reflected in the Strategic Plan as an objective under Effective and Culturally Responsive Government. Proposed General Plan policies such as LUI-1, LUI-1.2, and C-2.3, support the Strategic Plan objectives of “Encouraging transit-oriented housing development” through a more sustainable mix of land uses, increasing density near transit and major corridors, and supporting a robust transit system. Proposed policies LUI-2.2, C-1, and C-2, support Strategic Plan objectives around improving local streets, sidewalks, and city facilities.

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:

Community Development Department (CDD) staff is working with Public Works, Library and Community Services, 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 Meyers Nave, outside special counsel, on the development of the General Plan and related environmental documents.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

There is no cost associated with this study session.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Land Use and Infrastructure Element Goals, Policies, and Actions

2. Land Use Postcard and Letter Mailers
3. Land Use Recurring Themes
4. Circulation Recurring Themes
5. Draft Circulation Element Goals, Policies, and Actions