



CITY OF SALINAS COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

DATE: MAY 13, 2025

DEPARTMENT: SALINAS POLICE DEPARTMENT

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TITLE: HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND PROSTITUTION RESPONSE

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

Receive a report on human trafficking and prostitution response and provide direction to staff.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

During public comment at multiple City Council meetings residents of Las Casas de Madera and the surrounding neighborhood raised concerns regarding prostitution activities occurring in the area and the impact it has on safety, quality of life, etc. This administrative report describes the prostitution issue, current law enforcement legislative limitations and actions taken, and proposed strategies to deter the unwanted activity. These strategies include increased lighting, placement of cameras in key locations, and consideration of no parking zones and the relocation of food trucks from Kern Street. Based on community feedback and Council direction, staff will continue to work collaboratively to address the issue for the community and provide outreach and resources to the sex workers.

BACKGROUND:

Prostitution enforcement in the City of Salinas has evolved significantly over the years, shaped by legislative changes, law enforcement strategies, and community efforts aimed at addressing the complex challenges surrounding this issue.

In the 1990s, Salinas, along with many other California cities, experienced a noticeable increase in street-level prostitution. In response in 1995, California State Senator Charles Calderon introduced Senate Bill 1378. The bill was signed into law by Governor Pete Wilson and went into effect on January 1, 1996, establishing California Penal Code 653.22. This statute addressed loitering with the intent to commit prostitution, providing law enforcement with a proactive tool to address suspected activity before a transaction occurred. It also served as a means for officers to engage with individuals involved in sex work and connect them with available resources and services.

In 2022, California State Senator Scott Wiener introduced Senate Bill 357, known as the Safer Streets for All Act. The bill was signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom. It went into effect on January 1, 2023, and repealed Penal Code 653.22. The stated intent of SB 357 was to reduce supposed discriminatory policing practices and improve protections for marginalized communities, including sex workers, transgender individuals, and people of color. Governor Newsom cautioned that the intent, in signing the legislation, was to decriminalize loitering, not to decriminalize prostitution.

Nevertheless, the actual impact of this repeal was felt immediately in Salinas. The visible presence of sex workers increased particularly affecting neighborhoods between East Alisal and East Market Streets along Kern, Kings, and Roosevelt Streets, and North Madeira Avenue. In response, the Salinas Police Department has increased our presence in the affected areas.

At the time of the state change in law, the City already had, and continues to have, in place a City Ordinance against loitering for the purpose of engaging in prostitution that subjects violators to criminal prosecution under City law, Sec. 21-32(b) of the Salinas Municipal Code. Prior to appeal the State law had subjected individuals to misdemeanor charges whereas under the City's law, loitering for the purpose of prostitution is initially an infraction. In response to the increase in the presence of sex workers, the Salinas Police Department increased our presence in the affected areas. Since the repeal, the Police Department, with the support of the City Attorney's Office, has issued and prosecuted 39 citations for violations of the City Code.

In recent months, the Salinas Police Department carried out an operation targeting both human traffickers and individuals purchasing sex. This operation was intended to disrupt the supply of these sex workers and to identify and rescue potential victims of human trafficking. This weeklong operation resulted in the arrest of four adult males each charged with pimping, pandering, and conspiracy.

To address the broader issue, the Police Department is working closely with local hotels, churches, and businesses to ensure proper signage is posted regarding human trafficking and trespassing laws. Coordination efforts have expanded to include the City Attorney's Office, Monterey County District Attorney's Office, City leaders, department directors, as well as state and federal representatives. Together, these stakeholders are developing a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the negative impacts on the community.

Cross Department Coordination

A City Cross Department Coordination Team (Team) was formed and has been meeting over the past three (3) months to discuss the human trafficking and prostitution issue. A first step was to establish area of focus boundaries for a broader neighborhood area as it was anticipated that initial efforts to deter activity would result in a shift of activities to adjacent areas. The initial pilot area of focus would be the neighborhood between East Alisal and East Market Streets along Kern, Kings, and Roosevelt Streets, and North Madeira Avenue, which could be expanded in the future to other areas citywide. The Team then explored the following strategies to deter human trafficking and prostitution activities.

- 1) Install solar street lighting along Kern Street between East Alisal and Roosevelt Streets.
- 2) Install four (4) cameras at key intersections/angles.
- 3) Consider No Parking Zones along Kern Street between East Alisal and East Market Streets.
- 4) Evaluate the correlation between prostitution and food truck activity.

Lighting.

It is recognized that lack of lighting is a concern throughout the surrounding neighborhood and the Alisal (East Salinas). The Alisal community identified the need to address dark spaces in public areas; streets and parks, as a priority in the Alisal Vibrancy Plan (AVP, 2019), with a first action of conducting a lighting needs assessment. The AVP Budget (CIP 9246) appropriates \$50,000 towards preparation of a lighting needs assessment. Kimley Horn is currently conducting a lighting assessment that will map existing lighting infrastructure, describe its condition, and will identify and prioritize dark spaces. The assessment will also provide recommended phasing and a cost estimate for installing proposed lighting. It is anticipated that other funding sources, such as Community Development Block Grant funds, would be needed to leverage AVP CIP funds to prepare and implement initial phases of the lighting assessment which covers the majority of the AVP planning area.

Cameras.

The installation of cameras in this focus area will help reduce crime and enhance public safety. These cameras serve as a proactive deterrent to criminal activity, as individuals are less likely to engage in unlawful behavior when they know they are being monitored. In addition, surveillance footage provides critical evidence that assists law enforcement in identifying suspects and solving crimes more efficiently. The presence of cameras also reassures residents and business owners, fostering a greater sense of security and community confidence.

No Parking Zone Pilot Program and Correlation between prostitution and food truck activity.

It has been observed that the presence of parked or standing vehicles and three (3) food trucks along Kern Street may contribute to the human trafficking and prostitution activity in the area. Currently there are two permitted food trucks with designated spaces along Kern Street between East Alisal and East Market Streets. In addition, there is a permitted roaming food truck that is operating in the 300 block of Kern Street, on the opposite side of the street from the two designated space food truck vendors. It has been observed that the presence of the three (3) food trucks may also contribute to the human trafficking and prostitution activity in the area. A recommendation for consideration is to conduct a 6-month pilot program which would establish No Parking Zones

along Kern Street between East Alisal and East Market Street. The pilot program would also include relocation of the food trucks to another area during the to determine whether there is a correlation between activities.

Next Steps

While staff believes the strategies identified will further assist in deterring human trafficking and prostitution, it is important that they be vetted through the community. Staff recommends holding a community meeting with a focus on the target area to engage with residents and seek their input on street lighting, installation of cameras and adding no parking zones within the target area. In addition, it will be important to see if residents who live in the area have other ideas that can support this effort.

CEQA CONSIDERATION:

Not a Project. The City of Salinas has determined that this administrative report 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 formation of the Collaboration Team furthers the City Council Goals of Effective and Culturally Responsive Government and Public Safety. The multi-departmental team worked collaboratively to address community safety concerns through a range of proactive approaches.

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:

Representatives from the Salinas Police Department, City Attorney's Office and Community Development, Library and Community Services and Public Works Departments formed the City Collaboration Team and contributed to this report.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with this report. Depending on what activities are selected to move forward, the cost can range between \$12,000 (for cameras only) up to \$750,000 (cameras, lighting, striping, and signage).

Fund	Appropriation	Appropriation Name	Total Appropriation	Amount for recommendation	FY 24-25 Operating Budget Page	Last Budget Action (Date, Resolution)
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

ATTACHMENTS:

Human Trafficking and Prostitution Response Pilot Area map