



## **CITY OF SALINAS**

### **PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

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**DATE:** APRIL 16, 2025

**TO:** PLANNING COMMISSION

**FROM:** LISA BRINTON, DIRECTOR

**THROUGH:** GRANT LEONARD, PLANNING MANAGER

**BY:** MONICA GURMILAN, SENIOR PLANNER

**TITLE:** EAST AREA SPECIFIC PLAN STUDY SESSION

**RECOMMENDED MOTION:**

No action required. Receive report regarding preparation of the East Area Specific Plan.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The City adopted the West Area Specific Plan (2019) and the Central Area Specific Plan (2020) to establish land use and development and design standards for future development in the North of Boronda Future Growth Area (FGA). Preparation of the East Area Specific Plan (EASP) began in February 2024 to guide development of the final section of the FGA (See Attachment 2, Map of North of Boronda Road FGA Specific Plan Areas). This Study Session provides a review of work completed to date on development of the EASP, next steps for preparing a public review draft EASP, and a discussion of current developer interest. The EASP is anticipated to be completed by early 2026.

**BACKGROUND:**

In September 2008, the North of Boronda Future Growth Area (FGA), was annexed into the City of Salinas. The Future Growth Area (FGA) is located generally north of Boronda Road, west of Williams Road, east of San Juan Grade Road and south of Rogge Road (North of Boronda FG). Policy LU-4 of the Salinas General Plan requires the preparation of a specific plan(s) prior to the development of the North of Boronda FGA. The FGA is divided into four specific plan areas, which are located on the Community Development Department's Approved Plans page linked below:

- [The Gateway Specific Plan \(2011\)](#)
- [The West Area Specific Plan \(2019\)](#)
- [The Central Area Specific Plan \(2020\)](#)
- The East Area Specific Plan

In September 2023, the City released a Request for Proposal for planning services for the preparation and entitlement of the East Area Specific Plan, the final specific plan area for the North of Boronda FGA. Placeworks was selected as the primary consultant, and planning efforts began in February 2024.

### *Specific Plan Benefits*

A specific plan establishes the overall land use concept and development framework for an identified planning area (Plan Area). The specific plan development process involves planning, environmental, financial, and engineering analysis; public comment and contribution; developing a document (Specific Plan) that will guide the future development of the Plan Area; and subsequent implementation measures recommended by the Specific Plan. The contents of the Specific Plan reflect the physical characteristics of the Plan Area, as well as the City's goals for land use change in general and for the Plan Area in particular. The Specific Plan is a blueprint that provides a bridge between the Salinas General Plan and applications for individual development permits within the Specific Plan Area. Topics covered in the Specific Plan include:

- Land use and zoning designations,
- Development regulations and design standards and policies,
- Mobility and circulation,
- Public services and utilities,
- Resource conservation,
- Infrastructure and financing requirements; and
- Implementation and administrative processes.

A previous East Area Specific Plan (EASP) was initiated in the early to mid-2000s but did not move forward due to the economic downturn in 2008. The current General Plan Update (Visión Salinas 2040) presented an opportunity to revisit this task and leverage current advanced planning activities and to streamline the entitlement process for future development in the East FGA.

### *Connection to Visión Salinas 2040*

The City is nearing completion of the Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan Update, with a public review draft anticipated to be released in the spring of 2025. The East Area Specific Plan is currently being developed to be consistent with the vision, goals, and policies included in the Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan Update. Preparing the East Area Specific Plan now is allowing the City to leverage work already being completed for the Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan Update, such as:

- Background and existing conditions reports
- California Environmental Quality Act analysis
- Community engagement activities

Leveraging these ongoing activities fosters a more cohesive and efficient planning process. The GPU background documents provide a strong foundation for specific plan development, highlighting key areas for consideration. Additionally, past community engagement efforts have informed the EASP engagement strategy, ensuring that community interests and concerns are effectively addressed. Aligning with the GPU process has not only streamlined planning efforts but also generated cost savings by integrating this project into the GPU's California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis.

### EASP Planning Efforts

Placeworks and staff began EASP preparation in February 2024. In May 2024, community engagement efforts kicked off with an online stakeholder meeting for East Area property owners. The meeting was attended by city staff, consultants, and approximately half of the East Area property owners or their representatives. This session helped establish a foundation for the EASP and played a key role in refining materials for the first community-wide meeting.

The first community-wide open house was held on August 15, 2024, at the Cesar Chavez Library and was attended by over 70 community members, property owners, representatives from community organizations, and other agency representatives. This open house focused on gathering feedback on preferred housing types, commercial development, open space and community design options, circulation features, and different land use alternatives.

To date, Placeworks has completed the Area Profile Report and developed three Alternative Land Use scenarios (Attachment 3), which were the focus of community engagement efforts and refined into a Preferred Alternative (Attachment 4). The Preferred Alternative outlines potential land use designations and is based on the General Plan's new Place Type categories and was developed using feedback from the initial focus group, the community-wide open house, and discussions with City staff from the Community Development, Library and Community Services, Public Works, and Fire Departments.

### EASP Next Steps

Staff and Placeworks are currently preparing a public review draft East Area Specific Plan. A second online stakeholder meeting with East Area property owners took place on February 20<sup>th</sup> to review the Preferred Alternative. Input received from the property owners and from this Study Session will be used to support development of the public review draft East Area Specific Plan. A community-wide workshop to review the released public review draft Plan is anticipated to be held in the Spring of 2025.

### Property Owner Development Interest

Currently, one property owner within the East Area Specific Plan area is actively interested in developing. The proposed development, known as Bardin Ranch, is located northeast of Boronda Road between Rider Ave and Williams Rd, and proposes development of 852 housing units, of which 15 percent (128 units) would be restricted for affordable housing, plus land dedicated for parks and open space (Attachment 5). No commercial or industrial development is planned within Bardin Ranch. The concept for the proposed Bardin Ranch development dates back to the early 2000s, when the East Area Specific Plan was first discussed.

Although the City is currently preparing the East Area Specific Plan, the Bardin Ranch proposal is proceeding through a separate approval process. The applicant for Bardin Ranch is using a combination of recent State housing laws, including SB330, the Housing Accountability Act, and Density Bonus law, to move forward before the East Area Specific Plan is complete. By using these legislative processes, development standards for Bardin Ranch will be based on the current General Plan, Zoning Code, and other adopted ordinances, plans, and development regulations. There are also certain timelines and processes related to SB330 that apply to the application,

including completion of a preliminary application, and a limit on the total number of hearings for approval. Attachment 6 outlines the SB330 process.

Consistent with the SB330 process, Bardin Ranch has completed a preliminary application review and has submitted the required materials for a tentative map application, the first step in the Subdivision Map Act process. The Bardin Ranch application is currently undergoing tentative map application review, and staff are working with the applicant to determine the proposal's consistency with the City's adopted ordinances, plans, and development regulations, as well as determining what level of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis needs to be done, along with what supporting technical studies will be needed. Following completion of the CEQA analysis and associated parts, the applicant for Bardin Ranch could move forward with requesting approval for the Tentative Map and Request to Subdivide, which would be presented to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval.

#### 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.

#### ATTACHMENTS:

1. Maps of North of Boronda FGA Specific Plan Areas
2. Draft Placetype Descriptions
3. EASP Land Use Alternatives
4. EASP Preferred Alternative
5. Draft Bardin Ranch Concepts
6. SB330 Application Process
7. Presentation PowerPoint