



**CITY OF SALINAS
COUNCIL STAFF REPORT**

DATE: MARCH 3, 2020

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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TITLE: STUDY SESSION ON THE GENERAL PLAN AND RESOLUTION
REAFFIRMING THE GENERAL PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

A motion to accept the report on the General Plan and to approve a resolution reaffirming the Guiding Principles for the General Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that City Council accept the report on the General Plan and approve a resolution reaffirming the Guiding Principles for the General Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City’s existing General Plan adopted in 2002 is nearly twenty (20) years old and long overdue for an update. So much has changed in Salinas since the Plan was initiated in 1998. New state laws have also significantly altered the planning landscape. Given these circumstances, it is more critical than ever to embark on the General Plan Update. As the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) states “The general plan is more than the legal underpinning for land use decisions; it is a vision about how a community will grow, reflecting community priorities and values while shaping the future.”

The General Plan Update is a significant endeavor and even on an expedited schedule will not be completed until June 2023. The Plan will cost approximately \$2.5 million even with an estimated \$500,000 in consultant savings by strategically using staff to draft large sections of the plan and lead outreach efforts. It is anticipated that the General Plan Update will require an Environmental Impact Report and will include a comprehensive revision to the Zoning Code.

In the past, it took the City of Salinas four years to complete the General Plan and another four years to complete the Zoning Code revisions. This time, it is expected that both will be completed by 2023. This is feasible because of the preceding planning efforts, enabling early visioning to occur with residents and community stakeholders resulting in the development of Guiding Principles. In addition, the City has been able to reach thousands of residents and community stakeholders who have been able to articulate goals, objectives, policies, and actions through multiple planning efforts starting in 2013 including the Downtown Vibrancy Plan, Economic

Development Element, Housing Element, Parks, Rec, and Libraries Master Plan, the Alisal Vibrancy Plan, and the Chinatown Revitalization Plan.

BACKGROUND:

California law requires that each county and city in the state develop and adopt a General Plan. The General Plan consists of a statement of development policies and includes a diagram or diagrams and text setting forth objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals. It is a comprehensive long-term plan for the physical development of the City. Essentially, a General Plan is the local government's long-term "blueprint" for future growth. Prior to 2018, the General Plan was required to contain seven (7) state-mandated elements including: Land Use, Open Space, Conservation, Housing, Circulation, Noise, and Safety. In 2018, the State required that cities and counties that have disadvantaged communities incorporate environmental justice (EJ) policies into their general plans, either in a separate Environmental Justice element or by integrating related goals, policies, and objectives throughout the other elements. The City of Salinas will be required to include Environmental Justice into the General Plan.

A General Plan may also contain other elements that the City Council wishes to adopt. For example, the current Salinas General Plan includes two optional elements: Community Design and Economic Development. Once added into the General Plan, each element, regardless of statutory requirement, assumes the same legal standing, and must be consistent with other elements (Gov. Code § 65300.5). The format and content of general plans can vary between jurisdictions. Although the General Plan must address mandatory elements, jurisdictions have the discretion to organize the general plan based on the needs and priorities identified during public engagement.

The Governor's Officer of Planning and Research (OPR) is statutorily required by Government Code Section 65040.2 to adopt and periodically revise the State General Plan Guidelines (GPG) for the preparation and content of general plans for all cities and counties in California. These guidelines were last updated in 2017 and include clear recommendations to promote infill development, protect environmental and agricultural resources, and encourage efficient development patterns. In addition, OPR recommends that jurisdictions incorporate the following four key themes into the General Plan: 1) Climate Change, 2) Economics, 3) Healthy Communities, and 4) Equitable Opportunities.

DISCUSSION:

The City of Salinas adopted its General Plan in 2002 and updated its Zoning Code in 2006. Since then, Salinas has experienced tremendous change and growth and nearly twenty years later, the current General Plan is outdated and hindering development opportunity. Moreover, the General Plan has not kept up with new state regulations and policies or best practices in planning. An updated General Plan will allow the City to:

- Coalesce around a unified vision for Salinas' future;
- Address demographic change and economic conditions;
- Implement newly adopted plans (Alisal and Downtown Vibrancy Plans, Chinatown Revitalization Plan, and Parks and Recreation Master Plan) by incorporating them into the General Plan;

- Account for new state legislation; and
- Provide adequate environmental review to enable development streamlining.

A new General Plan will reflect contemporary community values and priorities and provide the framework to balance economic and housing opportunities, fiscal conditions, and quality of life over the next twenty (20) years. The goals, policies, and actions of the General Plan will serve as the City’s roadmap for future decision-making and provide the community, staff, and elected and appointed officials with clear direction on where the City wants to go and what needs to happen in order to get there.

Context with Other Plans

Since the General Plan adoption in 2002, the City has updated the Housing Element (2015), added a new Economic Development Element and undertaken multiple plans and planning efforts; some addressing citywide topics, with others focusing on geographical areas. City wide plans include the Consolidated Five-Year Action Plan (2015), Regional Farmworker Housing Study and Action Plan (July 2018), Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (2019), Parks, Recreation and Libraries Master Plan (July 2019), and Public Art Master Plan (February 2020). Area specific plans include the Alisal Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy (2015), Downtown Vibrancy Plan (2015), East Alisal Corridor Plan (January 2019), the Alisal Vibrancy Plan (November 2019), and Chinatown Revitalization Plan (December 2019). All plans are available on the City’s website. Due to multiple planning efforts occurring at once, the City formed “Visión Salinas” (2017) to coordinate the public outreach efforts of the Alisal Vibrancy Plan, the Chinatown Revitalization Plan and the Parks, Recreation and Libraries Master Plan, to develop “Guiding Principles” to inform the preparation of the three plans, and to ensure policy consistency across documents. It is anticipated that many of the recommendations in these plans will be formally codified in the updated General Plan.

Guiding Principles

One of the primary purposes of Visión Salinas was to develop “Guiding Principles” to inform the preparation of the three plans and the subsequent update of the City’s General Plan. The Guiding Principles are intended to be aspirational in nature and reflect the community’s values and vision for the future. The City began drafting the Guiding Principles based upon prior public input through the development of the Downtown Vibrancy Plan, and Housing and Economic Development Elements, and the recently adopted Alisal Vibrancy and Corridor Plans, Chinatown Revitalization Plan, and Library, Parks and Recreation Master Plan. To ensure the Guiding Principles accurately reflected the community’s values and vision, the City undertook an extensive bilingual public engagement process between May and August of 2018 to obtain feedback. This engagement process included stakeholder meetings, 9 pop-up events and an online survey, which was sent to approximately 1,200 community members. Over 500 members of the community were ultimately engaged as part of this process, with the majority of community members indicating strong support for the draft Guiding Principles.

In January 2019, the Guiding Principles were presented to the City Council and accepted as part of the East Alisal Corridor Plan. During the meeting, City staff explained that the same Guiding Principles would be adopted in future plans. Since that meeting, the Guiding Principles have been

incorporated into the East Alisal Corridor Plan, Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Master Plan, the Alisal Vibrancy Plan, and the Chinatown Revitalization Plan. Prior to formally initiating the General Plan Update process, it is recommended that City Council reaffirm these Guiding Principles through the adoption of an accompanying resolution to this report. Below is a summary of the Guiding Principles. The complete Guiding Principles in English and Spanish are included as an attachment to this report.

Summary of Guiding Principles

The City of Salinas has adopted the following Core Value to guide the Visión process: ***An Inclusive, Diverse, and Welcoming City where all Persons can Thrive.***

Salinas believes that an inclusive, diverse and welcoming environment is essential to developing and sustaining a livable City, which is working as a community to ensure that all members have equitable access to opportunities to advance their well-being regardless of their circumstances.

There are eight (8) Guiding Principles:

Economic Prosperity, Equity and Diversity - A City where all persons have equitable access to prosperity through a diversified economy, jobs and educational/ training opportunities.

Housing Opportunities for All – A City with a diversity of housing types and affordability levels for its residents.

Healthy and Safe Community – A City which strives to protect and improve the personal safety, health and welfare of the people who live, work, and visit.

Youth are the Future – A City where youth flourish and have equitable access to education, recreation and a healthy urban environment.

Collaborative, Inclusive and Engaged Decision-Making – A transparent and responsive City Government driven by the voices of a participatory community.

Livable and Sustainable Community – A well-planned City with a thriving community core and commercial corridors, excellent infrastructure (streets, sewers, parks, trees and open spaces, libraries, and community facilities, etc.) that meet the unique and changing needs of the community.

Connectivity, Access and Mobility – An active City with a well-connected, eco-friendly network of multi-modal streets, bikeways, greenways and trails, and effective public transportation options.

A Community to Celebrate – A City that celebrates, promotes, preserves and honors the diversity, history, art, and culture of its community.

General Plan Process

It is anticipated that the General Plan will be completed by June 2023. Completion of the Zoning Code may trail behind the General Plan by three to six months. Below is an outline of the major steps in the General Plan Update:

1. Document Existing Conditions

To prepare a meaningful General Plan, existing conditions must be understood and documented. Through the compilation of the Existing Conditions Report, demographic trends, development patterns and opportunities, natural resources, socioeconomic conditions, and environmental constraints and regulatory barriers will be identified. This report will be a resource for the City Council, the Planning Commission, and the public throughout the General Plan Update process.

2. General Plan Vision

The General Plan Vision, or a statement of desired future conditions, values and characteristics to be achieved or reinforced by the plan, lays the foundation for the policies and programs developed for each of the general plan elements. The visioning process often provides an opportunity for the public to participate in the preparation of the general plan. Visioning can reveal values and identify needs of the community as well as distinguish the planning issues that are important to its residents and are used to shape the policies and programs of the general plan elements.

Much of the early visioning work for the General Plan has already been conducted resulting in the development of the Guiding Principles. Additional input will be collected to provide guidance on specific objectives and policies of the elements and to refine land use options and opportunities.

3. General Plan Update

Based upon existing conditions and the community's shared vision and identified key opportunities and land use options, a comprehensive update to the General Plan will be drafted. To ensure that General Plan captures the community's preferences for future development, City staff will engage the public throughout the planning process. Like the Alisal Vibrancy and Chinatown Revitalization planning efforts, it is likely that a Steering Committee and Working Groups will be formed to drive the content of the General Plan.

Consistent with the expectations of the Governor's Officer of Planning and Research (OPR), the General Plan will incorporate policies related to Climate Change, Healthy Communities, and Equitable Opportunities. Fortunately, the City thoroughly addressed the economy with the addition of the robust Economic Development Element (EDE). Through the General Plan Update, the EDE will be revisited and revised if necessary. Like the EDE, the policies of the strategic planning documents including the Downtown and Alisal Vibrancy Plans; Chinatown Revitalization Plan; Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Master Plan; and Public Art Master Plan will be reflected in the General Plan.

The Alisal Vibrancy Plan included a new concept for land use that is centered around the vision of a "place type" instead of merely a category of use. This reflects best practices in land use

planning and helps elevate zoning to “placemaking” incorporating design elements instead of merely restricting uses. In the end, this concept is easier for the public to understand the City’s land use vision and allows for better flexibility of uses while preserving neighborhood character.

4. Environmental Review

Because a General Plan is considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act, the City must determine the potential environmental impacts associated with implementing the General Plan. To satisfy all potential environmental impacts, the City will prepare a Program-level Environmental Impact Report (EIR). This will allow the EIR to serve as a “tiering document”, facilitating streamlined environmental review of all subsequent development and infrastructure projects undertaken in the City which are consistent with the General Plan. The EIR will be released simultaneously with the Public Review Draft General Plan, providing the community with the opportunity to review and comment.

5. Adoption

The Final General Plan will be presented to the Planning Commission and the City Council at public hearings, with the City Council having the authority to adopt the document. The community will have the opportunity to provide input to both bodies during the hearings as well as throughout the entire process.

Other Components of the General Plan Update Process

For many years, the City needed to undertake a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to implement State mandates to reduce Greenhouse House Gas (GHG) emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. Unfortunately, developing a CAP outside of the General Plan update was difficult to do since GHG emissions are usually directly tied to development decisions. Thus, the CAP was delayed until the City began the General Plan Update process and will be completed simultaneously. The CAP will build upon the information gathered by greenhouse gas inventories and generally focus on those activities that can achieve the relatively greatest emission reductions in the most cost-effective manner. The completion of a CAP will help streamline new development projects through the CEQA process for GHG emissions and make Salinas more competitive for many statewide grants. Salinas is receiving free technical assistance from the Institute for Local Government (ILG) to assist in the development of the CAP.

On September 27, 2013, Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 743 into law, which fundamentally changed transportation impact analysis as part of CEQA compliance. These changes include elimination of auto delay, level of service (LOS), and other similar measures of vehicular capacity or traffic congestion as a basis for determining significant impacts. Instead Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is to be used as the metric for analyzing transportation impacts under CEQA. VMT refers to a metric that accounts for the number of vehicle trips generated plus the length or distance of those trips. For transportation impact analysis, VMT is generally expressed as VMT per capita for a typical weekday. For the General Plan CEQA analysis, the City will need to set new thresholds for transportation impacts based on VMT. Although VMT is the basis for CEQA, the City under its police power still can use LOS for planning purposes. Therefore, the City may employ a more complex analysis for transportation that includes both VMT and LOS.

Due to changes in how transportation impacts are analyzed the City will have to expedite the analysis of VMT and set new thresholds as soon as possible as all development after July 1st will be subject to VMT. If this is not done, any development requiring discretionary approval could be seriously delayed. In addition, the City will use the VMT modeling to update the Traffic Fee Ordinance (TFO). Concurrent with the General Plan Update, the City will undertake an update to its Traffic Fee Ordinance to be compliant with new State requirements.

DEPARTMENT COORDINATION:

Although the development of this report was led by Community Development, it is expected that all departments will be involved in the General Plan Update. Multiple departments were actively involved in drafting of the Guiding Principles. All departments were consulted before the Guiding Principles were finalized and included in the East Alisal Corridor Plan, Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Master Plan, the Alisal Vibrancy Plan, and the Chinatown Revitalization Plan.

CEQA CONSIDERATION:

Not a Project. The City of Salinas has determined that the proposed action, acceptance of an administrative report on the General Plan and adoption of the General Plan Guiding Principles is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (CEQA Guidelines Section 15378).

The General Plan Update will involve further CEQA analysis, likely an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be required.

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE:

The General Plan is the City's blueprint for all development. As such, the General Plan guides investment strategies, helps generate new revenue, improves the City's operational efficiencies, and advances overall public safety. No other document is more influential in implementing the City Council strategic plan and setting the City on a healthy and prosperous course for its development.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

The Study Session Report and resolution have no direct fiscal impact. However, it is anticipated that the three-year General Plan process will cost approximately \$2.5 million. With the addition of staffing, the City was able to reduce the cost of the General Plan by \$500,000. A General Plan/Zoning Maintenance Fee was established in 2015 and surpassed the original estimate of generating between \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually. The City currently has almost \$2.1 million for this effort including over \$1.1 million generated by the General Plan Maintenance Fee.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Resolution Reaffirming Guiding Principles
- Complete Version of Guiding Principles (English & Spanish)