



CITY OF SALINAS

JOINT CITY COUNCIL/PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

DATE: JUNE 10, 2025

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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TITLE: GENERAL PLAN UPDATE/VISIÓN SALINAS 2040 STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

Receive an administrative report on the Draft General Plan Update – Visión Salinas 2040 and provide direction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Since launching the General Plan Update in 2021, Community Development staff have provided quarterly progress reports to City Council. Throughout the process, staff held Study Sessions with City Council and Planning Commission to review draft policy on rising topics, including land use and circulation, health and safety and economic development. This Study Session focuses on the General Plan in its entirety and summarizes the update process, changes to state planning law, major themes and significant new additions to the document. The City is preparing a Public Review Draft of the General Plan for release this summer and is also working on the related Climate Action Plan and an Environmental Impact Report for both documents.

BACKGROUND:

Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan Development and Engagement

The roots of this General Plan start with the creation of the City's first Economic Development Element, which was accepted in 2014 and formally adopted in 2017 (2017 EDE). In 2010, a non-profit - the Salinas Planning and Research Corporation (SPARC) - formed to assist the City with creating a master economic plan to respond to the Great Recession of the late 2000s. Significant public engagement and a partnership with the community-based organization Building Healthy Communities evolved this effort into full General Plan element that included a more holistic and equitable approach to economic growth and success. The 2017 EDE was a foundational document for this General Plan Update, and its goals and policies actions are integrated throughout the document.

Visión Salinas was an initiative launched in 2017 to coordinate public outreach of multiple concurrent planning efforts and to develop an overarching core value and Guiding Principles for the eventual General Plan update. The Guiding Principles were vetted through public engagement and simultaneous planning efforts, including the Alisal Vibrancy Plan (AVP), Chinatown Revitalization Plan (CRP), and Parks, Recreation and Libraries Masterplan (PRLMP). Attachment 1 is the Guiding Principles booklet developed to describe the community engagement process and elaborate on each Principle.

The City launched Visión Salinas 2040 in 2021 as the umbrella project for its first comprehensive General Plan Update in over two decades and its associated documents. Along with updating existing chapters, or “Elements” of the General Plan, Visión Salinas includes the City’s first Environmental Justice Element and a separate Climate Action Plan (CAP). The City already adopted a [Housing Element Update](#) in December of 2023 to meet state statutory deadlines.

Community engagement is a critical component of the Visión Salinas 2040 process. Since 2021, staff has conducted dozens of workshops and webinars, Steering Committee meetings, Working Group meetings, and other stakeholder discussions. Pop-ups, surveys, house meetings, and radio interviews, are some examples of other tools used for General Plan outreach. See Attachment 2 General Plan Engagement Summary, and the Visión Salinas 2040 [website](#) for more information. This commitment to engagement has also included keeping City Council informed throughout the process. Since launch, staff has presented or prepared memos for Council quarterly, and conducted three previous Study Sessions for direction on early draft policy:

- [Land Use and Circulation – March 12, 2024](#)
- [Environmental Justice and Public Safety – April 23, 2024](#)
- [Economic Development – January 27, 2025](#)

In addition to the 2017 Economic Development Element, staff also incorporated priorities from policies and engagement of over 30 related City and regional planning documents completed in the last ten years. This includes the Downtown Vibrancy Plan, AVP, CRP, PRMLP, the Vision Zero Action Plan, the West and Central Area Specific Plans, and many others.

Changes to State Planning Law

Over the past two decades, California state law has evolved significantly, primarily in response to climate change and housing challenges. While housing legislation is primarily addressed in the 2023-2031 Housing Element, key legislation remaining includes:

Key State Legislation Assembly Bill (AB), Senate Bill (SB)	Addressing Document/Element
AB 32 (2006): Established the state's mandate to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with current targets aiming for carbon neutrality by 2045.	Climate Action Plan

AB 1358 (2008): Mandates that circulation elements address the mobility needs of all users, promoting healthier and more sustainable transportation.	Circulation Element
SB 743 (2013): Shifted the environmental impact metric under CEQA from traffic congestion (Level of Service) to Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), prioritizing reduced travel distances over reduced congestion.	Circulation Element/Environmental Impact Report Update to Interim VMT Policy
SB 379 (2015): Requires cities to conduct climate vulnerability assessments and incorporate adaptation strategies into their General Plans.	Conservation and Environmental Safety Element
SB 1000 (2016): Introduced the Environmental Justice Element, requiring cities to address the health impacts of the built environment on disadvantaged communities.	Health and Environmental Justice Element

General Plan Structure

California law (Government Code section 65302) requires every City and County to prepare and adopt a comprehensive and long-range General Plan that addresses eight topics (or “elements”): land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, safety, and environmental justice. The format of these elements can be tailored to meet the needs of the community, provided that required topics are addressed and elements are internally consistent, as is the case with Visión Salinas 2040. A General Plan may also have additional elements beyond the eight required by Government Code. Visión Salinas 2040 also includes a Community Design Element; Economic Development Element; Arts, Culture and Youth Element; and a Public Safety Element.

Visión Salinas 2040 starts with three context-setting chapters (Introduction, Community Profile, Community Engagement) and then consolidates the eight mandated elements and the additional custom elements for Salinas into three “Pillars” (i.e., chapters):

State-Mandated Element	Visión Salinas 2040 Element	Pillar
Land Use	Land Use Element	Built Environment Pillar
Housing	Housing Element (adopted in 2023)	
Circulation	Circulation Element	
Noise	Noise Element	
<i>Optional</i>	Community Design Element	
Conservation	Conservation and Environmental Safety Element	Environment and Sustainability Pillar
Safety		
Open Space	Open Space Element	
Environmental Justice	Health and Environmental Justice Element	Socioeconomic Systems Pillar
<i>Optional</i>	Public Safety Element	

<i>Optional</i>	Economic Development Element	
<i>Optional</i>	Arts, Culture, and Youth	

Each of the three Pillars also has an introduction chapter describing how the elements therein relate to and further the Guiding Principles, equity in Salinas, and relative community planning documents.

Each element contains the City’s long-range goals for the future, and the policies and actions to meet those goals. Each element is organized in the following sections:

Element section	Purpose
Introduction	Describes the context and legal requirements (if applicable) for the Element
Assets and Challenges	Details relevant existing conditions, positive projects or opportunities, and community needs.
Goals and Policies	Sets the Goals and Policies of each element with supporting narrative.
Implementation	Discusses how the Goals and Policies can be implemented and lists actions for each Policy.

Together, these components convey a long-term community vision and guide local decision making to achieve that vision. City staff apply General Plan goals and policies to provide direction to development applicants and land use analysis for the City Council, Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions. General Plan actions also comprise a detailed program to further focus City department work programs, priorities, and budgeting.

General Plan Pillar Topic Summary

Attachment 2 includes the draft goals, policies, and actions for each draft element (not including the adopted Housing Element). Attachments 3 and 4 are the draft Place Type land use designation descriptions and Place Type land use map. These attachments and the Pillar summaries below are meant as a review aid, and not a supplement for, the entire Public Review Draft.

The Built Environment Pillar is comprised of the Land Use Element, the Community Design Element, the Circulation Element, and the Noise Element. While each element of the Built Environment Pillar makes up a separate piece of the General Plan, they are interconnected with one another and work together to advance the community’s vision for Salinas. Together, the elements of the Built Environment Pillar focus on how existing and future development can meet the needs of the community in terms of where people live, work, play, and how they get around.

Built Environment Pillar Summary	
Major policy themes	Key additions or changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more flexible land uses • Increase housing production, and address affordability and homelessness • Focus community design on making great places for people • Revitalize existing neighborhoods and preserve local history • Encourage high quality, safe, active transportation and transit • Mitigate traffic congestion and parking challenges • Maintain roads, sidewalks, and other infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New land use designation system – Place Types • More land use flexibility, mixed use designations, and opportunities for housing • Placemaking and centering design on people • Complete streets and incorporating recommendations for multi-modal and safety improvements from Active Transportation Plan and Vision Zero • Management of parking resources

The Environment and Sustainability Pillar is comprised of the Conservation and Environmental Safety Element and the Open Space Element. Both elements focus on the interface between humans and the natural environment and seek to support those who are most vulnerable to natural hazards such as drought, high heat, flooding, severe weather, sea level rise, landslides, and wildfires. Together, these elements work in collaboration to enhance the quality of and access to the natural environment and open space.

Environment and Sustainability Pillar	
Major policy themes	Key additions or changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting Salinas’ vulnerable populations, infrastructure, and industries from climate change • Ensuring a safe and adequate water supply with regional cooperation • Protecting the community from environmental hazards • Preserving open space and parks for community and environmental use • Prioritizing maintenance and improvements in existing park facilities • Expanding fair access to open space and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate adaptation and resiliency • Ties to work with the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency • Aligns Open Space Element with Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Masterplan • Focus on improving and maintaining existing parks and recreational facilities while strategically adding new spaces when possible.

The Socioeconomic Systems Pillar is comprised of the Health and Environmental Justice Element, the Economic Development Element, the Arts, Culture, and Youth Element, and the Public Safety Element. All elements that make up the Socioeconomic Systems Pillar focus on quality-of-life aspects for Salinas residents, businesses, and visitors. These elements help bring color and life into the city and are foundation for Salinas’ vibrant neighborhoods and a prosperous and safe future.

Socioeconomic Systems Pillar	
Major policy themes	Key additions or changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reversing negative health impacts on underserved communities • Addressing environmental burdens • Making Salinas a place where businesses can and want to grow • Building pathways to economic prosperity • Creating tools for non-violent conflict resolution • Providing adequate emergency response services and safety infrastructure • Building on the culture, art, and heritage of Salinas • Supporting youth leadership and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Environmental Justice ○ Public Safety ○ Arts, Culture, and Youth • Focused Economic Development Element <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthening agricultural base while diversifying economy ○ Improved business environment ○ Education and workforce development ○ Retail, entertainment, tourism ○ Commercial corridors and shopping centers

Economic Development Element Status

On January 27, 2025, the Council conducted a General Plan Study Session focused on the Economic Development Element. Since January, staff has continued to refine the draft Economic Development Element and has held monthly meetings with economic development stakeholders, particularly those directly involved with the development of the 2017 EDE, including SPARK, the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, SCCIA, and SUBA. A draft Economic Development Element will be included with the revised draft General Plan released with the Environmental Impact Report in the late summer/early fall of 2025.

Next Steps

City staff and the consultant team are preparing a Public Review Draft for release in July. There will be a 30-day comment period once the draft is released, during which time staff will conduct additional engagement workshops and other events. Staff also continues to work with the consultant team on engagement for and preparation of a draft Climate Action Plan, and a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the General Plan and Climate Action Plan. The EIR release will start a mandatory 45-day comment period for that document. The projected General Plan Update schedule through the end of 2025 is included as Attachment 5.

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.

CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE §84308 APPLIES:

No

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE:

Continuing work on the General Plan Update is a component of the Strategic Plan under City Services. Many General Plan policies align with and further the goals and key strategies of the Strategic Plan, including development process streamlining, increasing housing production, promoting economic development, and improving public safety and services for youth and seniors.

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:

Community Development Department (CDD) staff worked 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 their outside special counsel firm Meyers Nave on the development of the General Plan and related environmental documents.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

There is no cost associated with this study session. Funding for the General Plan Update comes from State grants and the General Plan fund, which is funded through General Plan/Zoning maintenance fees.

Fund	Appropriation	Appropriation Name	Total Appropriation	Amount for recommendation	FY 24-25 Operating Budget Page	Last Budget Action
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Visión Salinas Guiding Principles Booklet
2. General Plan Engagement Summary
3. Administrative Draft General Plan Goals, Policies, and Actions
4. Draft Citywide Place Type Description Table
5. Draft Place Types Land Use Map May 2025
6. Projected Schedule