



CITY OF SALINAS PLANNING COMMISSION REPORT

DATE: APRIL 1, 2026

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: LISA BRINTON, DIRECTOR

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TITLE: 2025 PERMIT CENTER ANNUAL REPORT

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

No action required. This report presents information to the Planning Commission on the 2025 Permit Center Annual Report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The 2025 Annual Report covers the past calendar year and consists of this staff report, the attached 2025 Permit Center Annual Report Dashboard, the 2025 Permit Center Key Actions Taken, and the Draft Values in Action Plan. The staff report analyzes performance measure data, highlights current and future development projects, and summarizes implementation of the 2023 Community Development Organizational Assessment while establishing a new Draft Values in Action Plan for 2026. The Dashboard presents performance measure data visually and shows year-over-year (2023-2025) comparisons for Permit Services and other Community Development divisions and City departments (Current Planning, Code Enforcement, Development Engineering, Fire and Small Business Support), which are integral to Permit Center activities and processes. The 2025 Key Actions Taken and the Draft Values in Action Plan attachments present the changes made to improve staffing, workflow, communication, and training in more detail and include recommended actions for 2026.

BACKGROUND:

In May 2025, the Finance Committee received a presentation on Future Growth Area and Housing Permit processing. The report identified length of time, lack of clarity and the interpretation of

conflicting regulations as common applicant complaints. To address these barriers, staff identified opportunities for improvement through increased staffing, establishment of clear decision-making processes, strengthening compliance with legislation, codes, and regulations and identifying opportunities for streamlining processes through the Zoning Code Update, currently underway.

The Permit Center’s efforts in 2025 focused on preparing for the Future Growth Area (FGA) applications and continuing to meet steady permit demand, especially related to ADU permit coordination. The following sections highlight key accomplishments in increased staffing, efficiencies and coordination and the regulatory environment and the overall outcomes in 2025.

Staffing Resources

The FY 2025/2026 Operating Budget included several new positions to support processing subdivision maps for the FGA and prioritizing quality reviews of ADUs by increasing staff capacity to keep these reviews in house. Added full-time positions included Senior Planner, Associate Planner, Permit Technician, Permit Clerk, and Plan Checker I to focus on FGA and ADU application processing. As shown in the table below, in 2025, working collaboratively with Human Resources the department was able to fill several of these new positions and vacancies.

Division	Added	Vacant	Filled
Permit Services	Permit Tech Permit Clerk Plan Checker I	Permit Tech Permit Clerk Management Analyst Supervising Plan Checker Plan Checker I Combo Building Inspector I Combo Building Inspector II	Permit Tech (2) Permit Clerk (2) Management Analyst Supervising Plan Checker Plan Checker I (2) Combo Building Inspector I Combo Building Inspector II
Current Planning	Senior Planner Associate Planner	Senior Planner Administrative Aide	Senior Planner (1) Associate Planner Administrative Aide
Code Enforcement		Code Enforcement Officer I/II	Code Enforcement Officer I (2)

The added full-time Permit Clerk and two vacancies were filled to support customer service and simple permit processing. The added Permit Technician and two vacancies were filled to process building permit applications. In addition, Building Combination Inspector I and Building Combination Inspector II vacancies were filled. The Management Analyst position was filled to aid in processing improvements, organization, budgeting, data analysis and reporting, and to provide permitting technology support. The key position of Supervising Plan Checker was filled through an internal promotion after an extensive recruitment process and a two-year vacancy with much creative collaboration by Human Resources and Permit Services. Two Plan Checker I positions were filled at a lower level with a commitment to train up to the desired level of Plan Checker II. Current Planning filled a full-time Senior Planner position, and the new Associate Planner position was filled through internal promotion. One Administrative Aide vacancy was filled. Code Enforcement filled two full-time Code Enforcement Officer I vacancies.

Remaining vacancies include two Plan Checker II, backfilling the Assistant Planner position now vacant due to promotion. When recruitment for the second Senior Planner position was unsuccessful, a position swap for a Management Analyst was requested and approved. Recruitment is currently in process for a new Management Analyst position. Staffing up Plan Checkers and Inspectors will continue to be top priority in 2026 as the residential subdivisions in the Future Growth Area (FGA) begin to submit applications for building permits. Plan review contracts with five consultants continue to be maintained to leverage staff workload for timely delivery of permits and to fill the void of higher-level Plan Checkers to review commercial work.

Communication and Training

Due to a limited availability of technically experienced and certified candidates in the labor market, the recruitment strategy for Permit Services was adjusted to hire entry-level staff with strong potential and a demonstrated commitment to public service. The department has prioritized investing in all employees through structured training, mentorship, and professional development to build the technical expertise and certifications needed to support operations. Mornings on the first Friday of the month, the Community Development Department continued to conduct training and team-building activities throughout 2025. Most of these sessions had an emphasis on interpersonal communication and the values of the Community Development Department and City. Staff were provided with additional training opportunities through Regional Government Services (RGS), DiSC Assessments, Sustainovation, and other technical training and certifications. Through these trainings a shift in the culture of our organization is occurring, which is strengthening leadership and communication, to improve collaboration, workflows, and responsiveness.

Division managers from the Community Development Department attended three all-day training sessions through the RGS Leadership Academy. The in-person training, exclusively for public sector managers, focused on practical leadership skills needed in local government. Key areas of learning include equipping managers to effectively lead and motivate staff by strengthening communication, influence, accountability, and performance management, while navigating supervisory and leadership responsibilities.

To improve communication, all Community Development staff completed a DiSC assessment to learn more about individual communication styles. The four main behavioral styles are Dominance, Influence, Conscientiousness and Steadiness. Next, the department attended a half-day training session where staff were grouped by behavioral style and learned about all of the DiSC behaviors. Finally, each division met separately to focus on how to use DiSC to aid internal and external communication and how we can improve to better meet our City and Department values.

The City launched the first Sustainovation cohort and five Community Development Department staff members were selected to attend. There were four full-day sessions which focused on effective teams, productivity, mission, vision, values and communication, goals, priorities, accountability and ownership. These trainings largely shaped the way we plan to focus on

improvements in 2026.

Technical training continued to be a priority in 2025. The American Planning Association held its convention in Monterey, and six of the seven Current Planning staff members were able to attend. The updates to the California Building Standards went into effect on January 1, 2026. All Permit Services Plan Checkers, Inspectors, their supervisors, and the Chief Building Official were able to attend training to better understand the updates to building codes. As of January 2025, all Plan Checkers have obtained their certification as Residential Plans Examiners through the International Code Council.

Based on the training management staff attended, Community Development has shifted methods for developing and implementing improvements. While the assessments provided by MRG in 2023 and 2024 were the catalyst for many needed improvements, a Draft Values in Action plan was created to align Department functions with City values (See attachment). These methods strengthen the connection of staff's daily work to City values, add a qualitative element that numbers alone do not address, create a benchmark for future annual reports and support continuous improvement.

Workflows Improvements

Several of the solutions to the problems identified in the May 2025 Finance Committee report require the refinement or creation of new workflows for processing tentative maps in the Future Growth Area and accessory dwelling units.

Future Growth Area. Improvements for the workflows for the FGA included designating a project manager to facilitate decision making and regularly scheduled FGA coordination meetings. The primary internal stakeholders currently meet twice monthly with meeting frequency increasing to weekly when more subdivisions get further along in the entitlement process. Individual planners have been assigned to projects to be the designated point of contact. This provides accountability and makes it easier for applicants to navigate the complex processes. The designated planner also serves as lead on tracking and ensuring compliance with regulatory steps in the discretionary process.

Tentative map processing under SB330 presents unique challenges. Specifically, SB330 tentative map processing will include requests for waivers, incentives and or concessions or any combination thereof. At which point, relief from zoning and/or specific plan regulations is expected to be requested. Recent review letters regarding tentative maps include a template table where the applicant can formally request the waivers and other requests for relief from development standards. This newly implemented staff process allows applicants and reviewers to communicate and collaborate better to move through the process more quickly.

The Future Growth Area GIS Dashboard is currently being developed to provide a comprehensive overview of the status of subdivision tentative maps and related development applications. The Dashboard serves as both a communication tool and a milestone-tracking system, enabling

departments to monitor project progress, help troubleshoot issues which arise, and better forecast staffing and resource needs. To support compliance with the State's subdivision processing timeline requirements, the Public Works GIS team is leading the development of the dashboard within the City's GIS software system. Through collaboration among the Community Development, Public Works, and Fire Prevention Departments, a coordinated tracking platform is being created to improve communication and facilitate subdivision project management. While the City monitors statutory timelines, project schedules are also influenced by applicant decisions and external market conditions, including labor availability, material costs, and interest rates. Overall, the Future Growth Area GIS Dashboard strengthens interdepartmental coordination, improves transparency in subdivision tracking, and supports more effective long-term planning for staff resources and development activity.

Accessory Dwelling Units. Data shows most of Permit Services staff time is spent on Building Permits for ADUs. Homeowners are often unfamiliar with preparing plans and constructing an entire home, which leads to more staff time being spent by Plan Checkers and Inspectors supporting ADU construction. Permit Services has begun training Plan Checkers with the goal of creating an ADU team to keep the majority of ADU plan reviews in house because the community often expresses the preference of working with City staff over outside consultants. The Plan Checkers and Inspectors began meeting monthly to analyze issues that are frequently coming up, apply regulations consistently, and find solutions to help the public. A common issue for owner-builders constructing ADUs is understanding the timing and type of inspection to request. Permit Services Inspectors created a visual aid to help homeowners connect the name of an inspection to the part of the building constructed and it is currently being used. Owner-Designer-City meetings are a goal which is still in development. These meetings will minimize resubmissions through early communication and education. Without a Senior Planner to schedule and facilitate these meetings, expanded discussion occurs during Design Review C and Permit Coordination meetings. The pivot to a management analyst should help facilitate the scheduling and coordination of these meetings in 2026.

Legislation, Codes, and Regulations

The City started a comprehensive Zoning Code Update (ZCU) in 2025, which also provides an opportunity to streamline regulations, standards, and processes, all of which expedite permit processing. The primary goal of the ZCU is to create a user-friendly, clear, and concise Zoning Code that will simplify the entitlement process for all stakeholders through objective development and design standards. This is an opportunity to improve how entitlement applications are processed, providing greater clarity regarding project requirements. Streamlining the Zoning Code will establish more straightforward pathways for project approvals, potentially accelerating timelines for hearings and determinations, and enhancing the overall experience for those seeking to develop in Salinas. In 2025, the City selected PlaceWorks Inc. as the consultant to support this three-phase effort and drafted an engagement plan to ensure stakeholders including professionals, designers, contractors, business associations, business and property owners, and residents will be actively engaged in the ZCU process.

The ZCU is split into three phases to address compliance and priority needs, ensure consistency with the General Plan Update once adopted, and ultimately develop a new code. Phase One will address amendments to the current Zoning Code to bring it into compliance with State Housing Law prior to completion of the General Plan Update and will consider opportunities for streamlining and clarification that do not need to wait for the full comprehensive update. Completion of Phase One is anticipated by mid-2026. Phase Two includes bridge amendments to bring the current Zoning Code into consistency with the General Plan Update once the latter is adopted. Phase Two will include map and text amendments to the current Zoning Code to ensure consistency with the proposed Place Types and Land Use Element. By drafting these amendments concurrently with the completion of the General Plan Update, the City will avoid a long period of inconsistency. Completion of Phase Two is anticipated by early-2027 but exact timing will depend on adoption of the General Plan Update. Phase Three is the completion of a new and revised Zoning Code. Objectives of the new Zoning Code include a code that is easier for the public and staff to understand and use, visually rich with easily shareable graphics, and streamlined with objective development standards that are consistent with development needs and community vision. This also includes full implementation of relevant portions of the General Plan Update. Completion of Phase 3 is anticipated by the end of 2027, early 2028.

The City adopted the 2025 California Building Standards, which went into effect January 1, 2026. In addition, the state legislature continues to create large quantities of new laws which impact development, construction, and permitting requirements. Many of these laws require the creation of new processes, the development and purchase of technology, and education of the public, in addition to the regular triennial California Building Standards. During 2025, measures were developed and implemented to gain compliance with the following laws that impact permit processing:

- AB 42 Tiny homes: temporary sleeping cabins: fire sprinkler requirements
- AB 306 Freeze on Local Residential Code Amendments
- AB 1132 Solar energy systems: permit fees.
- AB 1332 Accessory dwelling units: preapproved plans.
 - A process has been developed and will be implemented in the first quarter of 2026.
- AB 1738 Building standards: installation of electric vehicle charging stations: existing buildings.
- AB 253 Residential Private Permitting Review Act
- SB 379 The Solar Access Act
 - A process has been developed and will be implemented in the first quarter of 2026.
- AB 2579 Exterior Elevated Elements Inspection Update

Compliance with the following laws will be a focus in 2026:

- SB 79 Abundant and Affordable Homes Near Transit Act
- AB 130 California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): housing development:

environmental review exemptions.

- SB 131 CEQA streamlining and procedural reforms for qualifying housing projects.
- SB 808 Housing Entitlement and Permitting Dispute Resolution
- AB 2114 (2025) - Expand Inspector Qualifications
- AB1046 Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act: exemptions.
- AB 2234 Planning and zoning: housing: post-entitlement phase permits.
 - Currently in compliance, but data collection for tracking will be improved in 2026.
- SB 897 Accessory dwelling units: junior accessory dwelling units.
- SB 9 California Housing Opportunity and More Efficiency Act

Planning Entitlement and Construction Permitting Processes

Current Planning, at the Permit Center, processes and reviews development applications to ensure compliance with the City's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance and other applicable plans, regulations and standards. A project within the City's jurisdiction will require either a permit or a land use entitlement. Land use entitlements are legal rights granted to property owners or developers to use land for specific purposes, such as residential, commercial, or industrial development. During the entitlement review process, the City planner acts as a project manager and coordinates with various City divisions/departments such as Engineering, Fire, Housing, Building, Parks and Police for inputs. Land use entitlements projects would involve a discretionary action which would require CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) review and would also be subject to the Permit Streamlining Act.

Many projects in the City qualify for Categorical Exemptions such as Section 15332 (Class 32) of the CEQA Guidelines. Therefore, no hearing is required, the project would be approved by the City Planner unless a protest is received from the public. If a project requires a public hearing due to the requirements outlined in the Zoning Code, the decision maker, such as the Planning Commission and/or City Council would take action. If a project is not exempt under CEQA, additional environmental analysis would be required under CEQA. This would involve the preparation of an Initial Study (IS) and/or Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The lead agency has 6 months to prepare an IS and 12 months to prepare an EIR. This environmental analysis would result in a Negative Declaration or Mitigation measures to reduce environmental impacts to less than significant impacts. Once the planning entitlement is approved by the appropriate hearing body, the project goes into the building permit phase submittal. Depending on the complexity of each project, it could take an additional 6 to 12 months for review prior to the issuance of the building permit and includes coordination with the designer or architect. A flowchart of the process for the Mortensen Subdivision is provided on slide 25 of Attachment 1, the 2025 Permit Center Annual Report Dashboard.

The construction permit process is structured to ensure projects comply with applicable codes and development standards while providing an efficient path to approval. Permits are divided into two categories: simple permits and building permits, each designed to address different levels of project complexity.

Simple permits apply to very small construction projects, such as re-roofs with no change in roofing material, residential electrical panel upgrades, and residential water heater replacements. These permits are approved administratively and do not require plan review. Once an application is received, staff verify the scope of work and applicable requirements, the permit is approved, and typically ready to be issued within one to two business days. This process is shown as a flow chart on slide 15 of Attachment 4, the 2025 Permit Center Annual Report PowerPoint Presentation.

Building permits are required for more complex construction projects, ranging from residential remodels to new commercial construction. Applicants typically begin by consulting with planning staff to confirm zoning requirements and applicable development standards. Then the applicant researches project costs, secures financing, and has detailed construction plans prepared. The plans must comply with State building codes. After submission, staff conduct a formal plan review to evaluate compliance with all relevant regulations. Any required corrections must be addressed before approval. Once the permit is issued, construction may begin, with inspections conducted at key stages to ensure compliance. The process concludes with final inspections, after which the project is considered complete. A timeline depicting a real permit example and a flowchart of the building permit process are provided on slides 16 and 17 of Attachment 4, the 2025 Permit Center Annual Report PowerPoint Presentation.

In 2024 plan review turnaround times slowed down due to vacancies and the use of consultants with a slower industry standard. As a result, the percentage of on-time plan reviews for 2024 was 61%. In 2025, the Supervising Plan Checker and two Plan Checker I positions were filled. With adequate staffing levels, plan review improved providing on time plan reviews with a significant increase in reviews completed on time between 2024 and 2025.

2025 Major Projects

In 2025, construction valuation of submitted applications was just over \$253.5 million, which is about a 50% decrease from 2024. This was expected, because the 2024 construction valuation was primarily tied to the 3.5 million square foot Amazon Fulfillment Center. The major projects constructed in 2025 are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 1: Highlighted 2025 Major Projects

Project Name	Address	Status
Dave and Buster’s, commercial, recreational, and entertainment use,	1104 Northridge Mall Salinas, CA 93906	Planning Entitlement Approved
Change use of 9,000 sf. Building from Retail to Dental office	110 John St. Salinas, CA 93901	Planning Entitlement Approved
New Concrete Tilt-up - RSD Distribution Warehouse	641 Work St. Salinas, CA 9390	Building Permit Issued

Chick-fil-a restaurant	4363 E Market St. Salinas, CA93905	Building Permit Issued
Renovation of Fire Station 1	216 W Alisal St. Salinas, CA 93901	Building Permit Finaled
New Warehouse Building with Office	681 Work St. Salinas CA 9390	Building Permit Finaled
5 Apartment Buildings, totaling 50 dwelling units	Constitution Blvd. Salinas, CA 9390	Building Permits Finaled
Cannacruz Commercial Cannabis Business	1228 S Main St, CA 93901	Building Permit Finaled and use operating

Building permit applications for Phase 1 of East Boronda in the Central Area of the Future Growth Area, along with site improvements for 11 Hill Circle residential subdivisions, were received in late 2025. Additional building permit applications related to the Future Growth Area are anticipated in 2026. To meet this demand, staff will focus on filling plan review staff vacancies and will be requesting additional inspection staff through the budget process for FYs 2026/27 and 2027/28.

In conclusion, Community Development is committed to enhancing productivity and reducing permit processing timelines for the members of our community through collaboration and working as a team. The attached 2025 Dashboard and PowerPoint presentation provide a detailed overview of the data analyzed by staff to understand and improve our work processes. The highlighted data sets illustrate key areas of impact, showcasing the positive outcomes of changes implemented in 2025. The attached Draft Values in Action Plan points towards the Permit Center’s goals for 2026. The Permit Center team remains dedicated to continuous evaluation and improvement, with a strong focus on delivering exceptional customer service and continued improvements and advancements to serve the community efficiently and effectively. Staff invite the City Council to review and provide feedback on the information provided.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1: 2025 Permit Center Annual Report Dashboard
- Attachment 2: 2025 Permit Center Key Actions Taken
- Attachment 3: 2025 Permit Center Annual Report PowerPoint Presentation
- Attachment 4: 2025 Draft Values in Action Plan
- Attachment 5: 2025 Finance Committee Presentation