



CITY OF SALINAS COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 2020

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

FROM: MEGAN HUNTER, DIRECTOR

BY: LISA BRINTON, PLANNING MANAGER
JONATHAN MOORE, SENIOR PLANNER

TITLE: STUDY SESSION ON THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

No action is recommended on this item. This item is an Administrative Report on the General Plan Update.

RECOMMENDATION:

No recommended action is required at this time.

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, as has the effects of the global pandemic and economic crisis. 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 ("GPU") is a significant endeavor and even on an expedited schedule will not be completed until the end of 2023. The GPU 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 community engagement and outreach efforts. The GPU will include a Climate Action Plan and a comprehensive revision to the Zoning Code and will require an Environmental Impact Report.

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, a three-year schedule is feasible because of preceding community planning efforts and development of the Core Values and Guiding Principles. In addition, both the General Plan and Zoning Code will be updated concurrently with the Zoning Code trailing by six months.

Since the previous General Plan Update Study Session in March 2020, Community Development has pursued multiple grants and reorganized staff to support the GPU, developed state-mandated Vehicle Miles Traveled policy, participated in Climate Action Plan training, undertaken environmental analysis of re-zoning city-owned surface parking lots in the Downtown, and started to develop a community engagement strategy that recognizes current challenges of conducting outreach.

BACKGROUND:

On March 3, 2020, staff presented an administrative report on the General Plan and the Guiding Principles. This Study Session discussed California laws and new requirements surrounding General Plans, context of the General Plan Update with the City's numerous recent planning efforts. At that meeting, City Council adopted a resolution reaffirming the Visión Salinas Core Values and Guiding Principles. The March 2020 study session report is available on the City's [website](#).

This report discusses actions taken since March 2020 in preparation and support of General Plan Update and details next steps and major components of the process. The March Study Session was held just two weeks before the County of Monterey issued its first Shelter-in-Place order for COVID-19. The rapid shifting of priorities to respond to the pandemic, staffing challenges, and contention with the recent wildfires has put the General Plan Update about six months behind the anticipated schedule in March. Staff has still accomplished much in preparation for the GPU, as detailed below.

Community Development Staff Changes

In September 2020, the manager of the Advanced Planning Division (which leads long-range planning efforts, including the General Plan) retired after 21 years of service to the City of Salinas. COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of city operations and has resulted in significant budget impacts. Recruiting and filling the Planning Manager with that level of technical expertise and local institutional knowledge is not feasible. Recognizing the impracticality of this, and in order to save funds, given financial uncertainty due to COVID, the proposed staffing plan is to merge Advanced Planning with the Plan and Project Implementation Division and underfill the Planning Manager position with a Management Analyst.

Recognizing the need to maintain staff capacity to develop the General Plan despite the loss of the Planning Manager, Community Development hired a Management Analyst, who will start on October 19, 2020. The Management Analyst will be able to assume complex administrative tasks to support the new division and the General Plan Update, giving existing staff more freedom and flexibility to focus on leading community engagement and developing General Plan content. The reorganization will result in overall staff cost savings while still creating the support needed to complete significant portions of the GPU in-house. The Community Development Department (CDD) estimates saving of approximately \$500,000 by using staff to complete the Existing Conditions Report, lead and conduct community engagement, and develop large portions of General Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Zoning Code content. To ensure robust community

engagement especially during the pandemic, additional part-time outreach staff will be hired. CDD will present the proposed merger of these two divisions to City Council for consideration in October.

Grant Funding

In addition to anticipated consultant savings through developing sections of the General Plan and related documents in-house, CDD is also pursuing multiple grants to offset budget impacts and ensure the process is adequately funded. CDD applied for \$855,000 from the state Local Government Planning Support Grant Program (the Program), made available through the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-2020 California Budget. In June 2020, Community Development received City Council authorization to apply for \$500,000 in Local Early Action Planning (LEAP) Grant funds through the Program, \$325,000 of which would go towards the Update. The City is also applying for \$530,000 in Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) Grant funds. REAP is managed regionally and made available through the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) in our portion of the Central Coast. A resolution authorizing application for REAP will be on Council's agenda on October 13, 2020. Both LEAP and REAP are entitlement grants, and it is anticipated that agreements with the state and AMBAG will be entered into before the end of 2020.

In August 2020, Community Development also applied for a \$250,000 competitive Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program Planning Grant. If awarded, this grant would fund an agricultural framework to fully incorporate agriculture as a core theme in the General Plan. The agricultural framework would include technical economic and land use studies, support direct outreach to agricultural workers and the convening of an Agriculture Working Group to help guide policy.

Vehicle Miles Traveled Policy

In 2013, Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 743 into law, which fundamentally changed transportation impact analysis as part of California Environmental Quality Act (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 traffic and transportation 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.

SB 743 went into effect statewide on July 1, 2020. CDD and Public Works have developed an interim SB 743 Implementation Vehicle Miles Traveled Policy. On September 16, 2020, the City of Salinas Planning Commission voted 7-0 to recommend that City Council adopt this policy, which will be presented to the Council on October 13, 2020. If this interim policy is not adopted, any development requiring discretionary approval could be seriously delayed.

For the General Plan CEQA analysis, the City will need to set new thresholds for traffic and transportation impacts based on VMT. Although VMT is to be the metric used 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. The City will update the interim policy concurrently with the General Plan to align these documents and its Traffic Fee Ordinance in compliance with new requirements.

BOOST Collaboration

In 2019, the City was selected as a participant in the BOOST pilot program, an initiative of the California Strategic Growth Council to help communities with climate action and housing planning. Through BOOST, the City entered into an agreement with the Institute for Local Government (ILG) in January 2020, for free technical assistance from ILG and PlaceWorks to assist with the City's first Climate Action Plan (CAP). This includes two climate action planning trainings for staff and commissioners (held in August 2020), a communications and engagement training, reviewing GHG emission inventories, developing a framework for the CAP, and assistance with early outreach.

SB-2 Planning Grants to Promote Housing Production

In September 2019, the City Council authorized the submission of a SB-2 grant application and execution of a Standard Agreement in the amount of \$310,000 with the state Housing and Community Development Department (HCD). Grant funds are to be used to undertake the environmental analysis and technical studies to amend land use and zoning designations in four identified areas to allow for increased housing production as envisioned in the Economic Development Element, Downtown Vibrancy Plan and Alisal Vibrancy Plan. The four areas are 1) Downtown city-owned surface parking lots and the Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC), 2) the Alisal Market Place, 3) Shopping Center Opportunity Sites (Northridge Mall, OSH/Kmart, Foods Co and Cardenas Market, and 4) parcels at Soledad and John.

To date, staff have contracted with Rincon Consultants, Inc to prepare an Initial Study evaluating zone changes and General Plan amendments that would facilitate the development of up to 500 housing units (assuming 100 units per year for five years—and 125,000 square feet of commercial uses (assuming 1,000 square feet of commercial uses per dwelling unit) on city-owned surface parking lots, the ITC parking lot and the Permit Center and Salinas Parking Garage. These sites are in areas designated as Federal Opportunity Zones with access to public transit. It is anticipated that the proposed zone changes and General Plan amendments and the associated environmental review would be presented to the Planning Commission and the City Council Spring of 2021 for consideration. The goal is to undertake these amendments prior to the GPU in order to facilitate the production of housing.

DISCUSSION:

General Plan Process

It is anticipated that the General Plan will be completed by the end of 2023. Completion of the Zoning Code may trail behind the General Plan by three to six months. Please see Attachment A,

Draft General Plan Update Schedule for anticipated quarterly tasks. Below is an outline of the major steps in the General Plan Update:

1. Finalize General Plan Update framework and Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for outside services (Fourth Quarter 2020 – First Quarter 2021)

Remaining tasks in preparation for the General Plan Update include completing major grant applications and processing agreements and developing RFPs for General Plan and Environmental Review consultant services. CDD will also finalize its community engagement strategy, start establishing advisory committees and prepare a General Plan Update and Climate Action Plan website.

2. Document Existing Conditions (Fourth Quarter 2020 – First Quarter 2021)

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.

3. Launch Community Engagement (Launch Fourth Quarter 2020 – Engagement to continue throughout)

As the General Plan is the blueprint for Salinas' future it is critical that the blueprint is developed by the community. The City of Salinas is committed to authentic engagement with its residents and stakeholders that removes barriers to participation for the vulnerable and the under-represented and creates a process for true policy collaboration with the community. COVID-19 brings new challenges to outreach and requires new and deliberate strategies for making sure the Update process is equitable and inclusive of Salinas' diverse voices. City staff will engage the public throughout the entire planning and Update 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.

The General Plan Update must also recognize and build off the incredible amount of engagement undertaken in the numerous recent planning efforts completed by the City and its residents. 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, to confirm community priorities, and to refine land use options and opportunities.

4. Draft General Plan and Climate Action Plan (Third Quarter 2021 – Fourth Quarter 2022), and Zoning Code (Second Quarter 2022 – Third Quarter 2023)

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.

For years, the City has 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.

5. Environmental Review (Second Quarter 2022 – Fourth Quarter 2023)

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, including the Zoning Code. The EIR will be released simultaneously with the Public Review Draft General Plan, providing the community with the opportunity to review and comment.

6. Adoption (Fourth Quarter 2023 – Second Quarter 2024)

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. The same is also true for the Climate Action Plan and Zoning Code.

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. The Update will also require significant coordination with regional agencies, including but not limited to, the County of

Monterey, Monterey-Salinas Transit, the Transportation Agency for Monterey County, and the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments.

CEQA CONSIDERATION:

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

The General Plan Update will involve further CEQA analysis and the preparation of 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 has 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 has surpassed the original estimate of generating between \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually. The City currently has almost \$1.89 million for this effort in the CIP budget, including over \$1.1 million generated by the General Plan Maintenance Fee. The LEAP and REAP entitlement grants would cover the remaining gap, bringing the total budget to over \$2.7 million.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Draft General Plan Update Schedule