



August 3, 2026

Mayor Dennis Donahue and Salinas City Council
City of Salinas
200 Lincoln Ave.
Salinas, CA 93901

By Email: cclerk@ci.salinas.ca.us

Subject: Fulfilling Housing Commitments in Existing General Plan

Dear Mayor Donahue and Councilmembers,

LandWatch appreciates the City of Salinas Community Development Department's efforts to update the City's zoning code to comply with state housing laws, but urges additional reforms —ones that go beyond state minimums to fulfill existing General Plan policies and programs that were adopted to address the housing shortage and have not yet been completed.

Staff will be presenting Phase 1 of a three-phase comprehensive zoning code update (ZCU) to the Council at an upcoming meeting. Phase 2 would align the Code with the new General Plan, anticipated to be adopted within the next 6-12 months. Phase 3 would enact any additional zoning code modifications necessary to make the regulations clearer and more user-friendly, with adoption planned by the end of 2027.

Given the urgent need for housing in the City of Salinas, we urge the City Council and staff to review and adopt objective design standards for all residential units proposed within the City limits where such units are consistent with existing zoning. LandWatch further urges the City to review and modify its protest and appeals procedures for residential development in the City limits. We ask that the Council act on both items separately from the phased zoning code update, with a target date of December 2026.

We believe these two policy changes would fulfill commitments already made in the City's Housing Element and Economic Development Element. These are existing General Plan policies and programs that should already have been completed. First, Housing Element Program 6 commits the City to "Develop and adopt Objective Design Standards for residential and mixed-use development consistent with the Housing Accountability Act and increase opportunities for ministerial review." The deadline for completing this task was July 1, 2026 — a deadline the City has already missed. (City of Salinas Housing Element 2023-2031, Program 6 Implementation Action item (c), p. 175.) Phase 1 already adopts objective design standards for Accessory Dwelling Units, so City staff are familiar with the concept and can readily expand it to other residential unit types. Numerous

examples of objective design standards are available online, as they have become a popular tool among jurisdictions for accelerating housing approvals.

Regarding the City's protest process, the General Plan includes multiple references to removing housing constraints, including the following action item: "Continue efforts on streamlining and enhancing the efficiency of the planning and permit approval process as well as building inspection services. Additionally continue supporting affordable housing developers through the entitlement and development process. Track the average processing time for housing planning and permit approvals and reduce time by 10 percent by the end of 2026." (City of Salinas Housing Element 2023-2031, Program 7 Implementation Action item (f), p. 177.)

The City's code allows neighbors to file a "protest" without stating any reason, triggering a hearing process for certain minor permits that may affect a residential development. This process has been used to challenge ADUs simply because neighbors don't want additional residential units in their neighborhood. While Phase 1 resolves this problem for ADUs that meet certain definitions, it does not address ADUs that don't meet those definitions, or other residential developments. The City should also review its appeal process (separate from the protest process) with the goal of reducing obstacles to residential development. Currently, the City requires a hearing before the Planning Commission and/or City Council for appeals; scheduling time for the entire body can be difficult, and full agendas often delay a hearing by several months. Some hearings could instead be conducted by an administrative law judge or by a panel of three members of the Commission or Council.

This is not an exhaustive list of suggestions; numerous other potential modifications to the City's code would facilitate housing, and LandWatch has advocated, and will continue to advocate, for additional policy changes proven to accelerate the creation of high-density, infill housing. We have chosen to target these two concepts – objective design standards and reducing delays caused by protests/appeals – because we believe both ordinances can realistically be completed by the end of 2026.

We appreciate the hard work of staff and the leadership of the Salinas City Council in addressing the housing shortage. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael DeLapa", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael DeLapa
Executive Director