



LandWatch

monterey county

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The Honorable Anna Caballero, Mayor
City of Salinas
Salinas City Hall
200 Lincoln Avenue
Salinas, CA 93901

RE: Salinas General Plan Update

Dear Mayor Caballero and Council Members:

LandWatch Monterey County would like to commend the City of Salinas for initiating the General Plan Update process now getting underway.

Salinas has a unique opportunity to strengthen its assets through the redevelopment and revitalization of its existing core—creating numerous neighborhood nodes that support a Livable Communities model for the city. This model has been encouraged in numerous urban and suburban cities through the adoption of planning policies that emphasize infill development, compact neighborhoods, jobs and housing balance, and specific design standards. These policies can create an urban community that is designed to use natural resources efficiently, encourage personal interaction, and support access to services. We hope that the Livable Communities model will be the cornerstone principle of the updated Salinas General Plan.

LandWatch has close to 75 members in the Salinas area who will want to participate in the General Plan Update process. We will be happy to notify them of neighborhood meetings being conducted, and we will look forward to working closely with your staff and consultants, as work proceeds.

We have reviewed the July 27, 1999 administrative report to the Council, outlining the general plan update process work program. We have the following specific comments, which we hope you will consider, and also forward to your staff:

1. As the administrative report presented to you notes, the timing of the release of data from the year 2000 Census has created a significant difficulty. Without solid housing and demographic data, it will be difficult, if not impossible, properly to identify land use constraints and opportunities. A legally enforceable General Plan is required by law to be internally consistent, which means that the Housing Element data and policies must be integrally linked with the Land Use Element and other elements. Trying to work on all the elements except the Housing Element is not really a workable way to proceed. As you know, Monterey County and the City of Soledad are also initiating General Plan updates at this time, and we encourage Salinas to explore the possibility of sharing expenses for

alternative private demographic sources for the Salinas Valley. Obtaining data in this way could make it possible to do a timely and legally sufficient update.

2. With respect to cooperation with other jurisdictions, LandWatch has a general comment. We recommend that Salinas place a strong emphasis on inter-agency cooperation. We think there should be a formal link between Salinas, the County, and the other cities in the county as Salinas proceeds with its General Plan Update process. This kind of cooperation is necessary, we believe, to maximize available resources, and to define policies that can solve the complex regional problems that affect not only Salinas, but other jurisdictions as well. Issues such as housing demand, transportation, water supply, water quality, and the potential for the conversion and loss of agricultural lands can only be addressed through a cooperative strategy.
3. LandWatch also urges Salinas to work closely with the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), as it proceeds through the General Plan Update process. It is our understanding that AMBAG is conducting a study on "jobs and housing balance" that will assess the impacts that Santa Clara County is having on Monterey County. The City may be able to maximize its resources by working in concert with AMBAG to define regional demands.
4. The base data and public participation process are critical to develop the community's confidence in General Plan that will ultimately be adopted. The preliminary work program is unclear as to how and what base data are being collected. At a minimum, the subjects listed for the report should be those necessary to establish baseline data for the mandatory seven general plan elements. For instance, the City's information systems department has the ability to assess existing conditions of vacant land, residential density, and public safety. These indicators are not identified in the work program. In addition, it appears that the work program may intend to delay the noise, biological resources, and cultural resources analysis until the EIR. We think that this could lead to planning after the fact. The objective in obtaining this information first is to avoid environmental impacts as part of the planning process, not just to analyze them as part of the EIR.
5. The issues of base data and public participation are especially a concern since the administrative report presented to the Council says that the city staff have already completed "skeleton" drafts of the open space, conservation, health and safety, and noise elements. We hope that preliminary policies are not being drafted prior to release of the existing conditions report, or the opportunity for public participation, since we think that would undermine the chances that there will be strong public support for the final product.
6. Once solid base data are developed, the community can make informed decisions in the "visioning" process. The importance of the "visioning" process should not be overlooked. For instance, although technical data may show that current trends indicate a rise in housing demand resulting from Santa Clara County growth, the community "visioning" process may make clear that local residents do not want Salinas to become a bedroom community for the Silicon Valley. Nothing requires Salinas to accommodate the housing demands of the Silicon Valley, and we hope that the City Council will consider ways that a more independent and self-sufficient future for Salinas could be achieved.

Thank you for considering our comments. Again, we will look forward to working closely with you and the City staff as the General Plan Update process proceeds. Please feel free to contact us if there is any help or assistance that we can provide.

Yours truly,

Gary A. Patton,
Executive Director

Donna Kaufman,
Assistant Director