



Post Office Box 1876, Salinas, CA 93902

Email: LandWatch@mclw.org

Website: www.landwatch.org

Telephone: 831-422-9390

FAX: 831-422-9391

July 29, 2002

Jenny Mahoney, AICP, Senior Planner
City of Salinas
Department of Community Development
90 West Alisal Street
Salinas, CA 93901

RE: Comments on Draft EIR on Salinas General Plan (June 2002)

Dear Ms. Mahoney:

LandWatch Monterey County is a nonprofit membership organization, with a membership of about 1,000 persons from throughout Monterey County, including a substantial number of residents of Salinas. Our mission is to promote and inspire sound land use legislation at the city, county, and regional levels through grassroots community action. For us, “sound” land use policies are those that promote a healthy *economy*, achieve greater social *equity*, and protect the natural *environment*. All three of these objectives are equally important to LandWatch—and to the communities of Monterey County.

LandWatch very much appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) prepared on the Draft Salinas General Plan dated June 2002. We request the City of Salinas to respond to our comments, and to the comments of other organizations, agencies, and individuals, by revising and recirculating a new Draft EIR. We believe that the current DEIR is legally deficient, and that it is necessary to develop significant new information and analysis, properly and adequately to identify the possible adverse environmental impacts of the Draft Salinas General Plan, to explore realistic alternatives, and to recommend appropriate mitigation measures.

General Comments:

The DEIR properly notes at Page 1-1 that the purpose of an EIR is essentially threefold:

1. To identify the significant effects on the environment of a proposed project;
2. To identify alternatives to the project; and
3. To indicate the manner in which significant effects can be mitigated or avoided.

As will be noted in the specific comments below, the DEIR on the Draft Salinas General Plan dated June 2002 fails to identify some possible negative effects of the proposed project. It also fails to explore possible alternatives. Most importantly—and this is the most serious deficiency in the document—the DEIR does not really suggest effective mitigation measures that could eliminate or reduce a number of the negative impacts it identifies.

Because the proposed project (the Draft Salinas General Plan dated June 2002) is a set of proposed *policies*, CEQA requires the DEIR to examine alternative *policies*. The DEIR generally does not do that in an adequate way. Good faith compliance with CEQA requires the City to analyze and evaluate “alternatives” to the policies set out in the Draft Salinas General Plan—and this means actually to analyze and evaluate alternative land use policies, different from the policies that constitute the project as currently proposed in the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan.

Attached to this letter is a copy of a letter dated July 8, 2002, jointly sent to the City by LandWatch and Creekbridge Homes, with a set of proposed policies relating to the design of development within any proposed future growth area ultimately designated in the final Salinas General Plan. We believe that the incorporation of these policies into the final Salinas General Plan would help eliminate some of the adverse environmental impacts identified in the DEIR. This set of policies should be fully evaluated and analyzed in the revised DEIR and Final EIR.

An even more extensive set of policy recommendations is contained in the document entitled “A Community Plan For The City of Salinas.” A copy of this document is also attached to this letter. The “Community Plan” is being proposed by a local citizens’ group, Líderes Comunitarios de Salinas, and recommends policies relating to housing, density and design, agricultural land protection, school facilities, parks and libraries, and infrastructure finance. These suggested policies should be fully evaluated and analyzed in the revised DEIR and the Final EIR. These policies not only represent “alternatives” to the policies contained in the Draft Salinas General Plan, they should be considered as possible “mitigation measures,” as well, since the adoption of these policies—or policies like them—could eliminate or reduce some of the major impacts identified in the DEIR.

Table 2-1 (found at Pages 2-3 through 2-59 of the DEIR) summarizes significant environmental impacts and mitigation measures. The first section of the Table is devoted to what the DEIR believes are “Significant and Unavoidable Impacts (Pages 2-3 through 2-15).” Too often, the “Conclusion” column contains a finding that the specified impact “will remain significant and unavoidable.” As noted on the very first page of the DEIR, CEQA requires an Environmental Impact Report to “indicate the manner in which those significant effects can be mitigated or avoided.” In a policy document, like the Draft Salinas General Plan, additional or different policies can, in fact, eliminate or avoid identified impacts. The most significant inadequacy of this DEIR is that it doesn’t adequately specify what sort of policies could avoid or eliminate the negative impacts it often quite accurately diagnoses.

LandWatch hopes that the City will take seriously its obligation to consider, evaluate, and analyze “alternative” policies, different from those contained in the Draft Salinas General Plan. We also hope that the City will not just “identify” negative impacts, but will articulate and adopt

mitigation measures that could reduce or eliminate those impacts. Additional or different policies could do just that, and we hope that our comments, and the two policy documents mentioned above, will be seriously considered as a way to achieve the results that CEQA demands.

We have one final general comment, before listing our specific comments: The latest census says that 65% of the residents of Salinas are Hispanic, and a very significant percentage of the population is monolingual in Spanish. The Líderes Comunitarios de Salinas, with whom LandWatch has been working, is a group of Salinas residents who have been educating themselves on the critical land use and housing policies that will so profoundly affect their future. Most of the Líderes do not speak English. LandWatch has, accordingly, translated many city documents into Spanish, as a way to make it possible for the Líderes actually to be involved in the General Plan Update process. That is exactly what our mission statement requires LandWatch to do, and we believe that our efforts to provide such translations have been helpful. However, we are truly a small organization, and we simply can't do enough, ourselves, to make it possible for the residents of Salinas who are monolingual in Spanish to participate effectively in the General Plan Update process.

LandWatch urges the City of Salinas to begin making its planning documents available in Spanish, so that the very large percentage of the residents of Salinas who are monolingual in Spanish can effectively participate in the land use decision-making process. Specifically, if the City does revise and recirculate the DEIR, as we believe CEQA requires, we urge the City to make the document available in Spanish. Even more importantly, please make the General Plan document itself available in Spanish (and at an affordable cost) so that *all* the residents of the City can participate in a meaningful way.

Specific Comments:

1. On Page 1-2, in the section entitled "Background," the DEIR lists comment letters received on the Notice of Preparation prepared by the City, and indicates that copies are included in Appendix A. In fact, a letter from LandWatch Monterey County and a letter from Schoolhouse Services (for Alisal Union School District) are indicated as having been received, but they are *not* included in the materials in Appendix A. A letter from the Environmental Policy Resource Agency of the County of Monterey is not listed as having been received, but is in fact included in Appendix A. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should properly list *all* comments on the NOP actually received by the City, and should include copies of the listed materials that have been omitted from Appendix A. For your convenience, we are attaching several items of past correspondence from LandWatch, which should be considered in the revised DEIR and in the Final EIR on the project.
2. On Page 2-1, the Executive Summary notes a number of impacts that the DEIR says "cannot be fully mitigated." The revised DEIR and the Final EIR must identify and propose measures that *will* mitigate identified impacts, to the greatest extent feasible. This DEIR doesn't do that. In fact, it suggests that future development under the proposed General Plan will result in growing and unacceptable traffic congestion, growing and unacceptable noise impacts, a possible degradation of air quality, significant water quality and water supply problems, a very significant loss of agricultural land

resources, the possible loss of cultural resources, and an increasing public service deficit. LandWatch does not believe that a Plan that is predicted to have these kinds of negative impact is the “right” plan for the future of Salinas. As will be noted below, LandWatch believes that there are possible mitigation measures (not evaluated by the DEIR) that could eliminate or significantly reduce the negative impacts listed. We believe that the revised DEIR and Final EIR must examine and recommend such measures.

3. On Page 2-3, Table 2-1 recites the conclusion that “until funding is identified, implementation of the proposed General Plan may result in a significant and unavoidable impact of the regional highway system.” This conclusion is based on the premise that the land use policies in the proposed General Plan will continue to permit development to proceed throughout the expected 20-year planning horizon covered by the General Plan even if the transportation infrastructure required to eliminate negative impacts is not built (because funding is not available). It would clearly be possible for the General Plan to contain policies that would “tie” development approvals under the Plan to the actual construction of the infrastructure needed to accommodate the expected impacts of development. The “Community Plan,” for instance, contains policies that would require that result. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must examine such policies as “alternatives,” and as possible “mitigation measures” that could reduce or eliminate identified impacts.
4. On Page 2-3, in discussing noise impacts, the “Conclusion” column says, “there is no guarantee that existing development within the noise impact contours will be retrofitted to reduce the noise impacts to a level less than significant.” Thus, the DEIR concludes that noise impacts will remain “significant and unavoidable.” This conclusion is another example of how the DEIR fails to explore and recommend possible mitigation measures, to help eliminate or reduce an identified impact. Nowhere in the DEIR are possible mitigations for this identified impact examined. The problem is that even if all new construction is conditioned to reduce noise impacts to be expected by growing noise levels within the city, the increase in noise levels expected with all the growth called for in the Plan will start causing adverse noise impacts in existing residences and businesses, and in areas where there currently is no noise problem. At least two possible mitigation approaches are possible. First, the city could regularly monitor noise levels in those areas where this kind of noise impact is expected, and stop new developments that would cause the impact to occur. Second, since this is a type of “cumulative impact,” not necessarily easily associated with discrete projects, the city could impose a “noise impact” fee from *all* new developments that might logically contribute to a cumulative noise impact problem, and use the funds to retrofit existing residences and businesses as noise impacts reach unacceptable levels. There may be other approaches as well. To be adequate, the revised DEIR and Final EIR must do more than identify the adversities to come; they must explore how to eliminate or reduce such impacts to the greatest degree possible. The DEIR is inadequate in this instance, with respect to noise.
5. On Page 2-6, Table 2-1 notes that the General Plan does not use the AMBAG population forecast as a basis for the population assumptions that underlie the Plan. This, as noted in the “Conclusion” column, means that “the inconsistency with the adopted AQMP will remain significant and unavoidable.” The revised DEIR and Final EIR should fully

explore two different approaches that could eliminate this inconsistency. First, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should consider using the AMBAG forecast. There is no real reason to “assume” that the population projections for Salinas are “significantly low.” In fact, recent growth history in Salinas reflects the “build out” of several massive subdivisions (Harden Ranch, Williams Ranch, and Creekbridge) over the past decade. As Salinas elected officials have noted on a number of occasions, construction within these previously approved subdivisions is now almost completed, and no comparable large subdivisions have been approved. The last large subdivision to be considered by the Salinas City Council, the proposed “Mountain Valley” subdivision, was withdrawn by the applicant after a citizen referendum effort succeeded in qualifying a referendum of the project approval for the ballot. There is no sound reason to “assume” that the AMBAG figures are in fact “low,” and that growth in Salinas over the next decade will match the most recent growth of the City. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze the Plan based on that official AMBAG forecast. Second, there is no reason that “growth management” techniques should not be considered to maintain future population growth within the AMBAG forecast figures. “Growth” is not something that happens independently of what communities choose to do. Population growth is directly related to the land use and planning decisions made by local jurisdictions. Thus, the decision by past City Councils to approve several large subdivisions, and to allow actual construction to be driven by “market demand,” in an area in which the “market” includes the mammoth Silicon Valley, has definitely contributed to the rapid population growth that the DEIR assumes is somehow independent of those past planning decisions. While not *all* growth can be controlled or specified by land use planning, such land use planning decisions can and do have a direct impact on the amount of growth actually experienced by a community over time. Thus, the revised DEIR and Final EIR must explore and examine possible “growth management” strategies that would allow the City of Salinas to eliminate this “significant” impact—but an impact that is almost certainly not “unavoidable.” The County of Santa Cruz has a basic growth management system that should be reviewed for its possible applicability. There are numerous other examples throughout the state and nation. In general, such a system establishes procedures by which the City Council, over time, can “match” actual growth and development to community capability and community desires. Again, such systems are not able to be “precise,” and are not all controlling. They do, however, provide a way for local communities to minimize or eliminate expected adverse impacts of projected growth. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must explore such a “growth management” alternative as one of the most likely way to eliminate or minimize the negative environmental impacts that the DEIR so accurately diagnoses.

6. On Page 2-8, the “Conclusion” column says, “overdrafting and seawater intrusion associated with the increased pumping of groundwater will remain significant and unavoidable.” This statement is accurate *only* if the City does not adopt and enforce appropriate mitigation measures to eliminate or reduce this expected impact. The revised DEIR and Final EIR *must* explore and recommend feasible actions that could mitigate this expected impact. In fact, the City can refuse to permit new developments that would contribute to increased groundwater overdraft. This is simply one possible option. The Salinas General Plan, as finally adopted can include policy provisions that would ensure

that development decisions by the City do not in fact lead to this very serious (but “avoidable”) impact. The Implementation Programs contained in the Plan are not adequate, because while they commit the City to “monitor” the problem, they do not forbid the City from taking actions that would in fact exacerbate it. The revised DEIR and Final EIR need to analyze possible programs to ensure that the future development of the City does not lead to continuing a water overdraft that can ultimately become a water supply crisis. As the DEIR notes, seawater has intruded to within two miles of the Salinas City limits. A Plan that says that the City will simply “monitor” a worsening situation does not meet the requirements of CEQA.

7. On Pages 2-10 and 2-11, Table 2-1 notes that “there is no assurance at this time that the historic/architectural preservation ordinance [discussed in the DEIR] will actually be adopted and implemented by the City....” Thus, the DEIR concludes that “the impact to historic and archaeological resources is significant and unavoidable.” Once again, the DEIR is inadequate in its development and discussion of possible mitigation measures. It is true that, absent appropriate policies within the Salinas General Plan, the identified impact will occur. The impact, however, is *not* unavoidable. The impact can be avoided by placing appropriate archaeological and historic resource protection policies within the General Plan itself. State law requires all project level planning decisions, to be “consistent” with the local General Plan. Therefore, if the Salinas General Plan contains policies that provide adequate protection to historic and archaeological resources, the identified impacts will not occur. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must identify and analyze what General Plan policies could eliminate this identified impact.
8. On Pages 2-11 and 2-12, the DEIR concludes that “the impact related to the loss of agricultural resources will remain significant and unavoidable.” The DEIR has not adequately explored alternatives and possible mitigation measures that could feasibly and significantly reduce the impact identified. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must do so. In the “Community Plan” submitted with this letter, several specific policy proposals are presented in the section called, “Protecting Our Agricultural Land.” Adding these policies to the Salinas General Plan would help mitigate the expected impact on agricultural resources. Developing an alternative approach to the kind and density of housing to be provided in the proposed “Future Growth Areas” can also significantly reduce the loss of agricultural resources. The “Community Plan” contains a section on “Density and Design” that could also reduce the need to convert agricultural land for urban uses. Finally, the County of Monterey is considering a mitigation fee program that would require the permanent protection of agricultural land on a 2:1 ratio for every acre of agricultural land converted to non-agricultural use. The City of Davis, and other local jurisdictions in California and the nation, also employ this approach. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must analyze and evaluate *all* these approaches as possible alternatives, and as possible mitigation measures, and must better articulate feasible ways to reduce the impact of the Plan on the agricultural resources that are so important to the local economy.
9. On Page 2-15, the DEIR says, “Since the Regional Facilities Expansion EIR has not yet been adopted, a significant impact associated with the landfill capacity may occur if an

expansion plan is not adopted to provide long term capacity to meet the needs generated by the proposed General Plan. Again, the DEIR acts as though the development permitted by the Plan will occur “automatically,” and that decisions by the City will not have an impact on what growth in fact does occur. Nothing would prevent the City from including a policy within the General Plan that would suspend the approval of new development *if* landfill capacity were not available. Such a policy would eliminate this possible impact. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must analyze and evaluate such a policy.

10. On Page 2-17, Table 2-1 says, “A significant impact would occur if implementation of the proposed General Plan results in the development of land uses that are not compatible with the Salinas Municipal Airport Master Plan.” More importantly, such significant impacts will occur if implementation of the proposed General Plan is not compatible with height, use, noise, safety, and density criteria compatible with airport operations, as referred to in the Airport Land Use Planning Handbook, and mandated upon local governments by Sections 21670 ff of the California Public Utilities Code. In fact, the DEIR is significantly inadequate in not evaluating the Draft Salinas General Plan against the state-mandated criteria established in the cited provisions of State law. The revised DEIR and Final EIR need to analyze and examine Airport-related impacts much more seriously.
11. For instance, Figure 5.6-3 in the DEIR depicts the Salinas Municipal Airport Area of Influence. The Airport Area of Influence described in this figure is insufficient and inadequate. First, Figure 5.6-3 fails to identify Runway 14/32. This runway is currently in active use. It is critically important that the Airport Area of Influence and the DEIR analysis be based on actual operations at the Airport, including the use of Runway 14/32. Further, the environmental analysis required by CEQA must take into account all current and projected activities on the Airport, and that definitely includes the use of Runway 14/32. An attachment to this letter identifies Runway 14/32, for your convenience. Second, Figure 5.63 fails to identify the area affected by the low-level flight path utilized during the California International Airshow. An attachment to this letter identifies that area. This is important because Federal Air Regulation 91.303 requires the evacuation of all individuals from the area affected by the low-level flight path utilized during the four days of the California International Airshow. As a practical matter, building new residential and other structures in the designated area, as proposed in the draft Salinas General Plan, would probably mean the end of the Salinas Airshow. We believe that the Draft EIR fails adequately to evaluate the environmental impacts of the draft Salinas General Plan with respect to its impacts on the Airport.
12. Page 5.1-4 of the DEIR states that the Salinas Municipal Airport Master Plan, scheduled for an update, must address limitations on surrounding land uses to allow continuation of airport operations and the California International Airshow. Land Use Implementation Program LU-21 requires the City to update the Salinas Municipal Airport Master Plan as a proposed “mitigation” for impacts associated with planned use in the Airport Area of Influence. In fact, the Salinas Airport Master Plan *and* the Salinas General Plan must both be consistent with the requirements of the Public Utilities Code, as ultimately reflected in

the Monterey County Airport Land Use Plan. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must undertake the required analysis now, and not attempt to deal with a likely adverse impact by having the City say, “we will get to this later (in the scheduled revision of the Salinas Airport Master Plan), and will amend the General Plan later on, if we need to.” In essence, that is what LU-21 proposes, and this is not consistent with the requirements of CEQA. In the revised DEIR and Final EIR, the Salinas Municipal Airport Area of Influence should be expanded to reflect the additional area necessary to accommodate Runway 14/32 and the area affected by the low-level flight path utilized during the California International Airshow. Given the severity of federal requirements for continued operation of the Airshow and the general incompatibility of aviation with many other uses, one reasonable alternative that must be analyzed in the revised DEIR and Final EIR is for the General Plan to be modified to prohibit any new above ground development outside the airport boundary and within the Airport Area of Influence. This alternative would maintain current agricultural land uses in this area, and would also reduce the impacts associated with the loss of agricultural land, noted in the DEIR. The DEIR must be revised to analyze the alternative of maintaining current agricultural uses within the Airport Area of Influence.

13. Placement of an “Eastern Bypass” immediately adjacent to the Airport, as proposed in the Salinas General Plan, raises issues about the long-term ability of the Airport to expand, to accommodate changes in the local agricultural economy. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should examine these impacts. In addition, the revised DEIR and Final EIR must explore the consistency of the proposed placement of the “Eastern Bypass” with the provisions of the Public Utilities Code.
14. The Conservation/Open Space Element Implementation Program (COS-9) seeks to mitigate the significant land use impacts that might occur if agricultural land to the west and south of the City were converted to urban uses. COS-9 seeks to mitigate this impact by committing the City to comply with the Boronda MOU, and to identify areas to the north and east away from the most productive farmland. In fact, the Draft General Plan has identified new areas for urban growth in violation of the provisions of the Boronda MOU, which specifically states that new growth should occur between San Juan Grade Road to the north and Williams Road to the south. By directing new residential and other urban uses south of Williams Road, the Draft General Plan is in direct contradiction of the provisions of the Boronda MOU. Note that such areas designated for residential and urban development south of Williams Road are also within the Airport’s Area of Influence. The DEIR is inadequate in that it advances compliance with the Boronda Memorandum of Understanding as a recommended “mitigation measure” for the loss of agricultural land when the Draft General Plan itself directly violates the Boronda Memorandum of Understanding. The revised DEIR and the Final EIR must recommend changes in the Land Use Element to eliminate any inconsistency with the Boronda Memorandum of Understanding, or must identify some other, and effective, mitigation measure.
15. On Page 2-19, Table 2-1 proposes that the City “consider” including allowing the use of Traffic Impacts Fees for alternative modes of transportation (bicycle and pedestrian). The

DEIR is unclear about this mitigation measure. If the development of alternative modes of transportation are important or even necessary mitigations, then the revised DEIR and Final EIR should make that clear, and then the appropriate policy would be for the City to “include” such alternative transportation projects as projects eligible for use of Traffic Impact Fees. A mitigation measure that simply asks the City to “consider” doing something in the future is not an effective mitigation.

16. Also on Page 2-19, Table 2-1 says, in the “Potential Impacts” Column, “without the improvements depicted in the General Plan and in **Table 5.2-7**, a significant impact to the local roadway system may occur.” Again, the revised DEIR and Final EIR must analyze policy changes to the Draft Salinas General Plan that would link future development approvals to the completion of necessary infrastructure. The possible negative traffic impacts predicted are not “inevitable” or “unavoidable.” They can be avoided by a policy in the Salinas General Plan that requires the City, prior to approving significant new developments, to ensure that the needed infrastructure is actually in place. Such policies are often known as “concurrency” requirements. The “Community Plan” attached to this letter contains a section entitled, “Making Development Pay For Itself.” Within that section, a proposed policy on “Adequate Infrastructure” suggests one way to address the problem of future development leading to unacceptable impacts on local roadways. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must analyze this and other possible mitigation measures that would eliminate or reduce the identified impact by “tying” future development approvals to the actual construction of the needed transportation infrastructure.
17. On Page 2-26, Table 2-1 proposes as a “mitigation” measure a statement that the “City *may* [emphasis added] require a hydrological/drainage analysis to be performed....” when issues of stormwater drainage are at issue. Again, a proposed mitigation that is not an actual requirement is no mitigation at all. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze and propose an appropriate policy addition to the General Plan, establishing a *requirement*, for a hydrological/drainage analysis in those circumstances in which it would be necessary as an effective mitigation for the expected impact.
18. On Pages 2-33 and 2-34, Table 2-1 discusses the impacts related to streambed alterations. COS-17 is designated as an adequate mitigation measure, since it will require developers to retain creeks and wetlands in their natural state *when feasible* [emphasis added]. Because this requirement is so vague, this proposed mitigation is not actually effective. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must either propose a policy for inclusion in the Salinas General Plan that would simply require developers to retain creeks and wetlands in their existing condition, or that would specify exactly when that requirement will be excused. Otherwise, a significant impact will have been identified, but no adequate policy mitigation will actually have been proposed or incorporated into the General Plan.
19. On Page 2-45, continued implementation of the “Boronda Memorandum of Understanding” is mentioned as a “mitigation” measure. As noted earlier, this is not an effective mitigation measure because the Salinas General Plan directly contradicts provisions of the Boronda MOU. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze and consider a much broader and more effective set of possible mitigations for the loss of

agricultural land that would be caused by adoption and implementation of the Salinas General Plan as currently proposed, as this comment letter has noted before.

20. On Page 2-47, Table 2-1 says, in the “Conclusion” Column, “Implementation of Mitigation Measures PH1 through PH7 will reduce the impact to substantial growth within the planning area to a level less than significant.” The reference to these proposed Mitigation Measures is not clear. I could not locate measures PH1 through PH7. The text in the DEIR does not make clear what impacts it believes are being reduced to “less than significant.” The revised DEIR and Final EIR need to clarify this matter.
21. On Page 2-48, Table 2-1 notes that the City’s proposed use of the Smart Growth Network’s publication, “Getting to Smart Growth: *100 Policies for Implementation*,” will be an effective mitigation measure for population and growth impacts. LandWatch urges the City to ensure that the revised DEIR and Final EIR in fact outline a set of specific “Smart Growth” measures to be incorporated into the General Plan as policy requirements. A promise to consult a “Smart Growth” publication in the future is not an effective mitigation measure under CEQA, and actual policy requirements need to be incorporated into the Final General Plan. In this regard, LandWatch urges the City to have the revised DEIR and Final EIR analyze for possible inclusion the policies jointly endorsed by LandWatch and Creekbridge Homes, as attached to this letter. Additionally, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should consider a mitigation measure committing the City to hire an experienced attorney or land use consultant, to incorporate “Smart Growth” and “New Urbanism” principles into the Salinas Zoning Code. That, much more than consulting a “Smart Growth” booklet, would actually result in the kind of mitigations that CEQA requires.
22. On Page 2-57, the “Conclusion” Column in Table 2-1 notes that the Salinas General Plan, as proposed, will cause the loss of approximately 4,000 acres of agricultural land. This loss would have an extremely significant economic effect on Salinas, and Monterey County in general. Each acre of agricultural land in Monterey County produces, on the average, \$10,000 per year in gross revenues. This means that the conversion of 4,000 acres of agricultural land to urban uses will mean a loss to the local economy of about \$40,000,000 of gross revenues each year. That is a loss of \$800,000,000 over the 20-year planning horizon contained within the Plan—though it should be understood that this figure would only be accurate if all the 4,000 acres were converted in the first year, which is unlikely. Because the impacts of the conversion of this much agricultural land is so great, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should seek all feasible means to reduce the impact. To say that the 4,000-acre loss is “unavoidable” is simply not accurate. This comment letter has noted, earlier, that there are a number of possible mitigation measures that have not been adequately explored in the DEIR. Furthermore, even within the context of the current DEIR, it is not accurate to say that the loss of 4,000 acres of agricultural land is “unavoidable.” The “alternatives” analysis done within the current DEIR notes that a restructuring of the General Plan to reduce the amount of agricultural land converted is “environmentally superior.” Adopting an “environmentally superior” set of General Plan policies will definitely reduce, if it doesn’t completely “avoid” the impact noted.

23. On Page 3-1, the DEIR begins a “Project Description” that includes a section entitled, “Regional Setting.” The DEIR fails adequately to describe or analyze the regional setting in which Salinas is planning for the future. The revised DEIR and Final EIR need to correct this error. The most important fact impacting the future of the City of Salinas, and of Monterey County generally, is the incredible growth pressures that the City and Monterey County will experience from the Silicon Valley. The revised DEIR and Final EIR needs to analyze the regional setting quantitatively, to be able to describe, adequately, the potential impacts that Salinas can expect, and to make clear what sorts of policy mitigations will be needed to help eliminate those impacts. The Silicon Valley is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing business centers in the world. Average salaries there are on the order of 50% higher than salaries in the City of Salinas. While Silicon Valley local governments are continuing to stimulate job development, they are not allowing for the development of the housing necessary to accommodate that economic growth. For each seven jobs created in the Silicon Valley, only about one new home is constructed. This means that local governments in the Silicon Valley are intentionally “spinning off” their residential growth demand to outlying areas, specifically including the City of Salinas. Armed with higher salaries, Silicon Valley workers who can’t find affordable housing locally are coming to Salinas, and to other Monterey County locations, and are “outbidding” local residents and workers, driving them out of their current housing, and preempting large portions of any new housing constructed.

The revised DEIR and Final EIR *must* address and analyze these very real impacts, and consider mitigation measures that can help reduce or eliminate the impacts. Specifically, an adequate EIR will first quantify the impacts on Salinas that will be directly caused by residential developments here that are constructed to meet the “market demand” coming from outside the City, and from outside Monterey County, and will then analyze an alternative not included in the current DEIR—what might be called the “growth management” alternative—which is designed specifically to deal with these immense growth pressures. Absent some focused attention on this “Elephant in the Bedroom,” the EIR will not meet the requirements of CEQA. Acting as though Salinas is a “stand alone” city, and can be understood as such, isn’t realistic, or accurate. The revised DEIR and Final EIR need to “figure out” what amount of expected new growth and development will be generated by economic and population growth from within the community, and what amount of expected new growth and development will be related to the “spin off” of Silicon Valley housing demand into Salinas. If the EIR makes that clear, it will be possible to develop appropriate alternative policies and mitigation measures that will minimize environmental and community impacts, and that will meet the test of CEQA.

24. On Page 3-7 of the DEIR, Table 3-1 makes a “Comparison of Existing Land Uses and General Plan Land Uses.” This Table reflects the policy choices encompassed in the Land Use and Circulation Policy Map (Figure LU-3 in the Draft Salinas General Plan) and the accompanying Table LU-2, “Development Capacity,” found on Page LU-37 in the General Plan. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must consider “alternatives” with respect to the land use proposals contained in the Salinas General Plan, and depicted on the Land

Use and Circulation Policy Map. There are a number of ways to accomplish the objectives of the Salinas General Plan, and the purpose of an EIR is to analyze such feasible and realistic alternatives. Unfortunately, the DEIR doesn't really "analyze" possible alternatives, and a quantitative exploration of different approaches is necessary to comply with CEQA. We are attaching a chart entitled, "Salinas GPU – Densities in Future Growth Areas," to show how a different configuration of land uses could achieve the housing unit goals and the population goals contained in the Draft Salinas General Plan while being more economical of land use. LandWatch requests that the revised DEIR and Final EIR fully explore, in quantitative terms, the kind of land use alternatives that the City should consider, prior to making its final decision on the Salinas General Plan.

25. On Page 5.1-1, the DEIR says that open space lands currently comprise approximately 35 percent, or 4,670 acres, of the planning area. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should reveal what percent of the planning area will be open space *after* some the conversion of 4,000 of those acres to urban uses, as proposed by the Salinas General Plan. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should also discuss and analyze the change in community character that can be expected with an open space conversion of this magnitude.
26. On Page 5.1-5, in Figure 5.1-2, the DEIR outlines current Redevelopment Project Areas. LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR should include an analysis of an alternative land use pattern that would target additional lower income areas in East Salinas for inclusion in the proposed "Focused Growth Areas" (found in Figure 5.1-6), accompanied by the extension of an existing Redevelopment Area, or the creation of a new Redevelopment Area. This alternative could help provide increased housing opportunities without the need to convert additional agricultural land, and would result in the redevelopment and revitalization of areas in significant need of new investment.
27. On Page 5.1-6, the DEIR suggests that there is some sort of "Specific Plan" adopted for "Mountain Valley." This statement should be checked for accuracy, and the revised DEIR and Final EIR (including Figure 5.1-3) should remove this description if there is not, in fact, an adopted Specific Plan for the designated area. Generally, the "Mountain Valley" area was proposed for development, and the City Council approved the development proposal. However, a citizens' group then initiated a referendum effort, and obtained enough signatures to place the development approval on the ballot. Faced with the prospect of a popular vote, the developer withdrew the project. LandWatch believes that there is no existing "Specific Plan" for the area designated as "Mountain Valley" in the Draft Salinas General Plan, and that there is no approved project for the area, either. The Salinas General Plan and the revised DEIR and Final EIR should be accurate on this matter.
28. On Page 5.1-8, the DEIR mentions the commitment of the Salinas General Plan to "New Urbanism." LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze the suggested principles submitted by LandWatch and Creekbridge Homes, and consider their adoption into the Plan as a set of more definitive and stronger "New Urbanism" policies.

29. On Page 5.1-13, the DEIR includes the “Land Use Classification System,” specifying the densities and intensities of use that will be permitted in the various land use designations. LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR must consider the effect of including a requirement for *minimum* (not just maximum) densities within the Salinas General Plan, as a way to help eliminate the negative impacts caused by the inefficient use of lands to be annexed to the City and developed.
30. Figure 5.1-7, the “Land Use and Circulation Policy Map” included in the Salinas General Plan, shows three major new roads in the Carr Lake area. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze the option of removing these three roads, which generally violate the idea that Carr Lake should serve as a flood control area for the City. Similarly, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should consider an alternative that would remove both the “Eastern” and the “Western” bypasses. As the DEIR makes clear, the City’s ability to construct these roads within the 20-year planning horizon of the Plan is very problematic. In order to study reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze what the environmental and other effects of removing these proposed new roads would be, and should specifically consider how the land use designations in the Plan would need to be changed, if the roads were not in fact constructed.
31. LandWatch notes that the agricultural land protection policies contained in the “Community Plan,” which the revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze, would result in agricultural protection policies being applied as to all the lands shown as “Agriculture” (Light Green) on Figure 5.1-7.
32. On Page 5.1-18 of the DEIR, it is stated that all but 20 acres of the 4,000 acres of agricultural land currently located in the planning area will be converted to urban uses. These 20 acres are located, apparently, along Highway 101. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze whether these 20 acres will in fact be “viable” for agricultural production, and if not, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should list the loss of these lands, too—or (much better) should propose policies to provide substantial mitigation to avoid the loss of such a great amount of agricultural land.
33. On Page 5.1-19, the DEIR notes that a significant impact “would occur” if implementation of the proposed General Plan resulted in the development of land uses that are not compatible with the Monterey County Airport Land Use Plan. As noted earlier, this document, not the Salinas Airport Master Plan, is the definitive document for the purposes of land use policy. The revised DEIR and Final EIR must review the consistency of the Draft Salinas General Plan with the requirements of the Monterey County Airport Land Use Plan, and with the requirements of State and Federal law.
34. The “alternatives” outlined in the DEIR related to traffic and circulation are not genuine “alternatives,” in the sense that CEQA requires a full “alternatives” analysis of a proposed project. Essentially, as is noted in Appendix B, the “Traffic Report,” at Page 6 of that document, the analysis “describes...several network alternatives to accommodate

the proposed land use plan.” In other words, the traffic analysis in the DEIR *presumes* that the land uses contained in the Draft Salinas General Plan will be the project, and then considers three (or perhaps four) different alternative roadway systems (“network alternatives”) to accommodate the given land use plan. To comply with CEQA, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should review alternatives that posit *changing* the land use plan, in connection with different traffic alternatives. This letter has already suggested one exploration that the revised DEIR and Final EIR should accomplish—namely, looking at what sort of land use plan would be appropriate without the various new bypasses that are quite problematic, from a fiscal point of view.

35. On Page 5.2-59, the DEIR says, “If one or more of these roadway modifications occur and affect the General Plan circulation system, a significant impact may occur.” The revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze and suggest policies that would tie future action on development proposals to the expected status of the roadway system, so that if something happens that is not now expected, and that would result in an adverse impact, the City of Salinas will change its implementation decisions, instead of simply letting the impact occur.
36. On Page 5.2-61, a similar comment is appropriate. The DEIR says, in the last lines of the last paragraph on that page, that “until funding is identified, implementation of the proposed General Plan may result in a significant and unavoidable impact to the regional highway system.” Whether the impact is to the local roadway system, or to the regional highway system, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze and suggest policies that could prevent this kind of adverse impact. As an example the Carmel Valley Master Plan, adopted some years ago by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, contained a set of “traffic triggers” related to possible (but not certain) traffic impacts that would occur if certain roadway improvements were not made. The Hatton Canyon Freeway, a major State highway improvement, was planned for construction at the time that the Carmel Valley Master Plan was adopted, and the Plan was premised on its completion. In fact, however, the freeway was ultimately not constructed, but the Master Plan contained a policy provision that required (because the freeway wasn’t built) a change in future development. The revised DEIR and Final EIR for the Salinas General Plan need to analyze and propose similar policies.
37. The DEIR does not analyze whatsoever the impacts to be expected from the extension of CALTRAIN service to Salinas. The section on “Rail Service” on Page 5.2-63 needs to include a full analysis of what the impacts of CALTRAIN service would be.
38. On Page 5.2-65, the DEIR mentions the Salinas Capital Improvement Plan. In fully analyzing the impacts expected in connection with the Salinas General Plan adoption, the revised DEIR and Final EIR should analyze the current CIP, to see if it in fact can accommodate and meet the needs of the growth and development projected in the General Plan.
39. On Page 5.3-2, the DEIR says that noise barriers may need to be constructed in the future, if the General Plan is adopted as proposed, and development proceeds according

to the Plan. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should evaluate the impact of such barriers, and suggest an alternative approach, that would prohibit further use of such barriers, which have a divisive and isolating effect on neighborhoods, and are the antithesis of the “New Urbanism” that the General Plan seeks to embrace.

40. The discussion of school impacts in the DEIR, beginning on Page 5.13-8, is generally neither quantitative nor detailed. The City Council and the public should understand how badly the schools will be impacted if development proceeds as proposed in the Draft Salinas General Plan. The DEIR doesn’t really reveal that—only that there will be “impacts.” Because the State Legislature has made it almost impossible for local governments to deny development projects because of their school impacts (a City Council can turn down a proposed development because it will cause stormwater impacts, or air quality impacts, or traffic impacts, but they are explicitly forbidden to turn down a development because it will adversely impact the local schools), the revised DEIR and Final EIR should explore possible “mitigation” measures. LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR should review and analyze, specifically, the proposed policies relating to schools contained in the “Community Plan” attached to this letter.
41. The DEIR examines impacts on libraries and parks beginning on Page 5.13-16. The current Draft Salinas General Plan does not “operationalize” by any specific policy its commitment to libraries and parks. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should evaluate the policies contained in the “Community Plan” attached to this letter, as mitigations that could help avoid adverse impacts, and that could provide more certain support for libraries and parks as development occurs.
42. The DEIR examines water quality and water supply issues beginning on Page 5.13-27. As previously noted, LandWatch does not believe that the DEIR adequately analyzes the possible impacts. The revised DEIR and Final EIR should attempt to quantify the groundwater overdraft that could be caused by development under the proposed Salinas General Plan, and analyze and propose specific policies that could eliminate or reduce these impacts.
43. LandWatch believes that the “alternatives” section of the DEIR (beginning on Page 6-1) is inadequate. The analysis is less an “analysis” than an anecdotal review of different approaches—two of which are revealed as “environmentally superior” to the proposed project. This observation is never highlighted or mentioned again, as far as we can determine. We believe that the revised DEIR and Final EIR must undertake some quantitative analysis, to see how different land use patterns would affect the other parameters of the Plan. In addition, we believe that the revised DEIR and Final EIR must consider what might be called a “growth management” alternative, in which the Plan will be revised to contain policies that will tie future development decisions to available infrastructure (water and traffic, particularly). As noted earlier, the DEIR acts as though the impacts will inevitably occur, and in fact, the impacts will largely be created by developments that can either be permitted, or not, in the future. One reasonable and feasible alternative to the current Draft Salinas General Plan would be a plan that

contains the identical policies, but that will ensure that impacts are in fact mitigated by requiring that the impacts be eliminated *before or concurrently with* development approvals. Such systems are widely used throughout the state and nation; The revised DEIR and Final EIR needs to analyze such a system for Salinas, to comply with CEQA.

44. On Page 7-1, LandWatch wants to note that the DEIR says that the AMBAG countywide forecast was “fairly accurate” when it predicted the total county population within 855 persons (out of a total of 401,762 persons in the county). This seems unfairly to diminish what was an astoundingly accurate prediction.
45. On Page 7-3, the DEIR again says, in the last sentence of the “Traffic/Circulation” section, that a funding failure might lead to an “unavoidable” impact. The failure of funding may well be “unavoidable,” but the “impact” can be avoided, in the event that funding does not appear, by tying future development approvals to adequate infrastructure. This repeats an often-made comment.
46. The DEIR says that Monterey County has a total of 1,300,749 acres of “agricultural land.” This figure is correct, but only when the county’s 1,076,031 acres of “grazing land” are taken into account. In fact, the county has only 224,718 acres of what the State calls “Important Farmland.” Virtually all the farmland surrounding Salinas is of this type. The conversion of 4,000 acres of “Important Farmland” represents the loss of almost 2% {1.8%} of the “Important Farmland” in the entire county. The DEIR minimizes the adverse impacts of the extent of the agricultural land conversion called for by the Draft Salinas General Plan.
47. Appendix A contains some (as previously noted, not all) of the comments submitted on the City’s Notice of Preparation. The following comments made at the very earliest stage of EIR preparation do not appear to have been considered in the current DEIR:
 - The Regional Water Quality Control Board asked for a requirement for pervious surfaces.
 - The Regional Water Quality Control Board said that there should be no development in Carr Lake.
 - The Regional Water Quality Control Board asked for a policy restricting filling, particularly in floodplains, wetlands, creeks, and riparian corridors.
 - The Housing Authority asked for a focus on the integration of low-income and minority households into upper income neighborhoods.
 - The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District said that where LOS will decline from D or better to E or F, dispersion modeling should be undertaken.
 - LAFCO said that the EIR should consider the various soil types and productivity of the various agricultural lands that would be converted to urban uses.

LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR should fully evaluate all of these issues.

48. LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR should consider the Abbott Street area as an area that might be designated as a “Focused Growth Area,” allowing for further housing production without the need to sacrifice agricultural land.
49. LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR should further explore the “mixed use” opportunities in the City of Salinas, and should pay particular attention to the possible conversion of shopping centers to mixed-use commercial and professional office and housing developments. This is an alternative to the conversion of additional agricultural land that should be explicitly analyzed in the revised DEIR and Final EIR.
50. LandWatch believes that the revised DEIR and Final EIR must explicitly evaluate the possible traffic impacts of two projects that would generate considerable truck traffic through Salinas, if approved. Both are in the permit process now. One project, mentioned in the DEIR, is the proposed new Regional Solid Waste Facility, proposed by the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority, to be located south of Salinas. While the project was noted in the DEIR, truck traffic associated with it was apparently not considered. In addition, Granite Construction Company is currently proposing the development of a major new rock quarry, to be located in the Gonzales area. Information can be obtained from the County Planning and Building Department, which is currently processing the permit. If approved as requested, the Granite Construction mine will generate up to 870 one-way truck trips per day. If each of those trucks were sixty feet long, and maintained a one truck-length separation from the next truck, the line of trucks generated by the mine would stretch for twenty miles along Highway 101. The impacts of this proposed project should be analyzed in the revised DEIR and Final EIR.
51. LandWatch believes that the DEIR needs to analyze in more depth the possible adverse impacts on housing for lower income families that would likely be caused by implementation of the Draft Salinas General Plan. Table LU-3 in the General Plan documents the land use designations made by the Land Use and Circulation Policy Map. This Table indicates that of the 1,717 acres proposed for residential development in Future Growth Areas, 1,042 acres will be reserved for “Residential Low Density” development. 515 acres will be reserved for “Residential Medium Density” development. Only 160 acres will be dedicated to “Residential High Density” development. In a “market situation,” this means that the homes to be built on *most* of the new land taken into the City will be totally unaffordable to ordinary working families who live in Salinas. In fact, persons whose income is generated out of Monterey County will likely purchase it. The revised DEIR and Final EIR need to analyze this likely effect of the proposed Salinas General Plan.

The housing and other policies contained in the “Community Plan” attached to this letter attempt to respond to the housing impacts that will be caused by the Salinas General Plan as proposed. They suggest a different alternative, which could make more affordable housing available. LandWatch strongly urges the revised DEIR and Final EIR to quantify the impacts, and seriously to consider policies to change the result that will otherwise occur, if the Draft General Plan is adopted and implemented in its current form. In addition, LandWatch urges an analysis of the so-called “CHISPA Plan,” proposed by a

local nonprofit developer of affordable homes. A copy of the Plan can be obtained from CHISPA. This plan proposes that 10% of all housing constructed in Future Growth Areas must be affordable to very low income families; 15% must be affordable to low income families; and 15% to “moderate” income families.

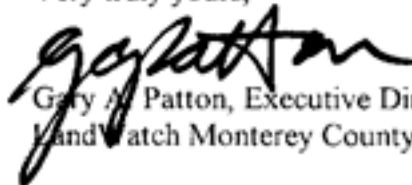
If policies like those contained in the “Community Plan,” or in the “CHISPA Plan” are placed into the Salinas General Plan, landowners and developers can take them into account before annexations occur. Since the land value for lands currently outside the City are about \$20,000 per acre (agricultural value), and the land values go to about \$200,000 per acre once lands are annexed for urban development, the policies described will have the effect of capturing this “windfall” to benefit the community, instead of individual property owners.

Conclusion:

LandWatch believes that CEQA requires the City to respond to these and other comments and then to recirculate a redrafted DEIR for further comment. We urge the City to do this, and seriously to consider the possibility of adopting some or all of the policy suggestions made in this letter, and its attachments. We particularly urge the City to consider a “growth management” approach to the future development of the City, so that growth decisions will not proceed unless they can be accomplished in a manner that does not overstress necessary social and physical infrastructure, and the natural environment.

Thank you for taking our strongly felt views into account.

Very truly yours,



Gary A. Patton, Executive Director
LandWatch Monterey County

cc: Members, Salinas City Council
Members, City Planning Commission

Creekbridge Homes

21025 E. Boronda Road, Salinas, CA 93906

LandWatch Monterey County

Post Office Box 1876, Salinas, CA 93902

July 8, 2002

Mayor and Council Members, City of Salinas
 Chair and Members, Salinas Planning Commission
 City of Salinas, Salinas City Hall
 200 Lincoln Avenue
 Salinas, CA 93901

RE: Traditional Neighborhood Design Principles For Proposed Future Growth Areas

Dear Mayor Caballero and Council Members, and Members of the Planning Commission:

We are writing to urge the Planning Commission to recommend and the City Council to adopt the attached policies, which are needed to establish Traditional Neighborhood Design principles to be followed within the Future Growth Areas designated in the Salinas General Plan. The proposed additional policies explain how “Traditional Neighborhood Development” (sometimes known as “New Urbanism”) will take place within such Future Growth Areas. LandWatch Monterey County and Creekbridge Homes have jointly developed these policies, and we jointly recommend them to you as the minimum policies needed to guide the City’s future growth in the positive, healthy direction the new General Plan envisions.

The recently-released Public Hearing Draft of the Salinas General Plan states: “New Urbanism principles were used to design a land use plan that is compact and pedestrian-friendly, with a mixture of higher density uses surrounding activity centers/neighborhood focal points.” Both Creekbridge Homes and LandWatch Monterey County applaud this statement and the positive endorsement by the Citizens Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, and the City Council of Traditional Neighborhood Design and New Urbanism principles. We also believe, however, that the best way to translate that endorsement into real change is to augment the current General Plan language, by adding specific policy statements that will clarify how the City expects to achieve the Traditional Neighborhood Development the Draft General Plan envisions. These additional policies will help ensure that Future Growth Areas in fact develop according to the principles of New Urbanism and Traditional Neighborhood Design.

The attached policies, supported by Creekbridge Homes and LandWatch Monterey County, will help achieve all of the following objectives:

- More efficient land use, minimizing agricultural land lost to urban development
- Compact and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods
- A mixture of higher density uses surrounding activity centers
- Higher density residential uses surrounding retail, recreational, and governmental uses
- A physical design that will reduce the number of vehicle trips generated by the new development
- A mixture of housing types that will result in neighborhoods of diverse economic background, rather than segregating different economic groups in isolated neighborhoods

Although, LandWatch and Creekbridge may have additional comments on the most recent draft of the Salinas General Plan, these recommendations on Traditional Neighborhood Design are presented jointly by Creekbridge and LandWatch to highlight the strong diverse support Traditional Neighborhood Development has, and to emphasize how important it is to include such specific policy language within the final General Plan document in order to ensure that the future growth areas achieve the goals of the City.

Absent the proposed specific policy language within the General Plan, it is likely that very little of the development within the Future Growth Areas will result in neighborhoods that truly embody the principles of New Urbanism and Traditional Neighborhood Design.

If we are to move away from the long-established policies and regulations which have imbedded suburban sprawl into our codes and practices, the Council must give the City staff, future developers, and all of the other diverse participants in the growth process, clear guidance on how to achieve a healthier, more livable, more sustainable method of creating new neighborhoods.

All of the residents of our valley owe the participants involved in the drafting of this General Plan a debt of gratitude for guiding the City towards a Traditional Neighborhood Development growth pattern. With the inclusion of the attached policies in the final General Plan document we will have a clear vision of our future incorporated into our General Plan which all of the residents of Salinas can support. Naturally, both Creekbridge Homes and LandWatch Monterey County would be happy to respond to your questions and comments. We will look forward to participating in the public hearing process, and to supporting the adoption of a strong, effective plan for the future growth and development of the City of Salinas.

Very truly yours,

/s/

Hugh Bikle, President
Creekbridge Homes

/s/

Gary A. Patton, Executive Director
LandWatch Monterey County

/s/

Vince DiMaggio, Vice President
Creekbridge Homes

/s/

Chris Fitz, Deputy Director
LandWatch Monterey County

**POLICIES PROPOSED TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SALINAS GENERAL PLAN,
CLARIFYING HOW TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT WILL TAKE
PLACE WITHIN FUTURE GROWTH AREAS**

POLICY 1

The Salinas General Plan Land Use Map indicates future growth areas. Prior to permitting any development within a future growth area, the City shall approve a Specific Plan for that area, which shall identify the most appropriate location for all land uses within the Specific Plan area. The Specific Plan for each future growth area shall be consistent with the principles of traditional neighborhood development set forth in the policies below.

POLICY 2

Charrettes are strongly encouraged in the early part of the process in drafting a Specific Plan to ensure effective public participation in the planning process and to ensure that traditional neighborhood development principles are properly employed.

POLICY 3

New developments within each future growth area shall be made up of one or more “neighborhoods.” Each neighborhood shall follow a transect of land uses from an urban neighborhood center to a parkway edge.

POLICY 4

Each neighborhood center shall be defined by and shall be required to have the following urban characteristics:

- a) A civic or public open space such as a plaza or green shall be located in the neighborhood center.

- b) Retail space, office space, and residential uses shall be located in the neighborhood center, often in multi-use buildings.
- c) Except for schools, Institutional uses should also be located in the neighborhood center.
- d) Streets in the neighborhood center shall be thoroughly interconnected with the surrounding street system to provide easy, multiple accesses for cars, pedestrians, and bicycles.
- e) All buildings in the neighborhood center shall be permitted to satisfy their parking requirements with spaces located both on-and off-street within 1/8 mile of the building. All off-street parking shall be placed behind or under buildings in order to present a continuous building façade to the public street.

POLICY 5

Each neighborhood or group of neighborhoods within each future growth area shall provide for a mix of housing, workplaces, retail, and institutional uses including schools, and shall include land designated for public parks/recreation.

POLICY 6

Development within each future growth area shall be consistent with the following policies:

- a) The outer edge of development in each neighborhood shall not be more than 15 minutes walk from the neighborhood center.
- b) The average housing densities within blocks shall decrease from neighborhood center to neighborhood edge (transect).

The neighborhood edge shall be bordered either by a natural corridor, a landscaped buffer adjacent to arterials, or the edge of an adjacent neighborhood across a pedestrian-friendly boulevard or parkway; sound walls should not be allowed.

POLICY 7

In order to preserve prime agricultural land, and to achieve the other benefits of compact urban design, new neighborhoods shall be required to achieve a minimum average density of 9 units per net residential developable acre, exclusive of open space, parks, schools, streets and other non-developable areas.

POLICY 8

New residential developments shall not achieve the required average density of 9 units per net residential developable acre through an exclusive mix of low-density and high-density units. At least 40% of the housing units in new residential developments shall be of housing types that fall within the range of 7-14 units per net residential developable acre.

POLICY 9

Residential developers shall be encouraged to design new residential developments with as many discreet lot sizes and housing types as is feasible, in the interest of offering a greater number of choices across the broad range of housing prices. Several lot sizes and housing types within each block shall be encouraged, to provide variety and texture within the block, as well as throughout each neighborhood. Clustering a large group of any single housing type in several large blocks shall be avoided.

POLICY 10

The street network within each future growth area shall have the following characteristics:

- a) Traffic shall be channeled from major arterials around groups of neighborhoods on boulevards which shall have a maximum of two travel lanes and a bike lane in each direction with a large 20' to 30' landscaped median. The center medians shall allow access to every neighborhood street. Large lot homes with large front setbacks and garage access only from rear alleys shall face onto the boulevards.

- b) Parkways may be used to channel traffic from major arterials and boulevards to, but not through, neighborhood commercial centers. Each parkway shall have one narrow travel lane and a bike lane in each direction, with a large 20' to 30' landscaped median. The center medians shall allow access to every neighborhood street. Homes with garage access only from rear alleys shall face onto the parkways. The front setbacks shall progressively decrease as residential areas approach the neighborhood center.
- c) Each neighborhood shall be connected in as many locations as possible to the parkways and boulevards to disburse and calm the traffic as it leaves and enters the residential neighborhood. Collector street systems shall not be allowed.
- d) Open spaces, schools, parks and other natural amenities shall be fronted by streets or public spaces, and shall not be privatized behind backyards.
- e) "Gated" single-family home communities shall not be permitted.
- f) Individual blocks should generally average less than 600 feet in length and less than 1800 feet in perimeter, measured at the right of way line.
- g) Cul-de-sacs shall be avoided unless natural terrain conditions demand them.
- h) The street network shall be thoroughly interconnected.
- i) Streets in the neighborhood commercial center shall have parking on both sides. Head in and angle parking is preferred in the commercial center with a maximum of two 12-foot travel lanes.
- j) In order to slow traffic, standard residential streets shall be no more than 32 feet wide with parking on both sides in the last block before the street connects to a parkway or boulevard, and shall be reduced in stages to 28 feet or less with parking on both sides once away from the parkways and boulevards. In addition, the corner curb radius shall be no more than 10 feet where the neighborhood streets connect to the parkways and boulevards and shall not exceed 4 feet elsewhere within the neighborhoods.
- k) Rear alleys shall be strongly encouraged. Rear alleys must be paved and landscaped and must be maintained by a landscape and lighting district, or comparable, permanent financing mechanism.

A Community Plan For The City of Salinas

- 1. Housing For The People**
- 2. Density And Design**
- 3. Protecting Agricultural Land**
- 4. Schools For Our Children**
- 5. Parks And Libraries**
- 6. Making Development Pay For Itself**
- 7. Conclusion**
- 8. Endorsements**

Housing For The People^{*}

A great deal of new housing is being constructed in the City of Salinas. Most of that new housing is affordable only to persons who have above average incomes. Very little of the housing currently being constructed in Salinas is affordable to existing city residents. The Salinas General Plan should require residential housing developments to benefit families and individuals who currently reside in Salinas, or who work in Salinas. New housing in Salinas should be offered to Salinas residents and workers first!

The following policies should be made part of the Salinas General Plan. These policies will help ensure that the future growth and development of the City benefits *all* the residents of Salinas:

- 1. Build Housing That Local Residents Can Afford** – When lands are annexed to the City for the construction of residential housing, the City shall ensure that at least 50% of all the new housing units constructed on such lands shall be sold or rented to persons or families with low or very low incomes, and these housing units shall be permanently protected so that the future sale or rental of such housing units will be to persons or families with low or very low incomes.
- 2. First Right To Rent or Purchase** – When residential housing developments are approved within the City of Salinas, and within areas proposed to be annexed to the City, the new residential units constructed shall first be offered for rental or sale to individuals who currently live in or work in Salinas.
- 3. Maintaining A List** – The City of Salinas shall maintain a list of persons who live in or who work in Salinas, and who are interested in renting or purchasing new housing to be constructed in Salinas. The City shall give written notice to everyone on this list whenever a new housing development of five or more units is proposed, and shall insure that persons on this list are notified of and provided with the first right to rent or purchase newly constructed units.
- 4. Build Affordable Housing Concurrently** – When new housing developments are constructed within the City of Salinas, those units within such development to be made available to persons or families with low or very low incomes shall be constructed prior to or concurrently with those units that will be sold at market rates.

^{*} These policies should be placed in the “Housing Element” portion of the General Plan. The appropriate location for these policies would be on pages H-16 and H-17 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

Density And Design

Low-density housing developments do not provide housing that can be either purchased or rented by most of the individuals and families who live in or work in Salinas. It is neither fair nor appropriate to reserve most of the land set aside for new growth for such low-density residential development.

To provide for the housing needs of current city residents, the Salinas General Plan needs to require that at least half of the area set aside for new residential development be reserved for medium and higher density development projects, and that these development projects be well designed, so as to maximize housing opportunities for those with low, very low, and moderate incomes. To accomplish this result, the Draft Salinas General Plan should be modified to do all of these things:

- Establish minimum density requirements
- Increase the amount of land to be made available for medium and higher density development, thus helping to ensure that new housing constructed is more affordable
- Ensure that larger developments include a range of housing types
- Promote “mixed use” developments to increase housing opportunities
- Establish design standards that will insure that the new medium and higher-density housing constructed fully meets the needs of the community

The following policies should be made part of the Salinas General Plan. These policies will help ensure that the future growth and development of the City benefits *all* the residents of Salinas:

- 1. Establish Minimum Density Requirements** – The Land Use Classification System established in Table LU-2 of the Land Use Element of the Salinas General Plan shall provide for *minimum* as well as maximum densities within each of the Residential Land Use Designations. The minimum density for the Residential Low Density Land Use Designation shall be 6.5 DU/Net Acre. The minimum density for the Residential Medium Density Land Use Designation shall be 11.75 DU/Net Acre. The minimum density for the Residential High Density Land Use Designation shall be 16.75 DU/Net Acre.¹
- 2. More Land For Medium and Higher Density Development** – The Land Use and Circulation Policy Map included in the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan² shall be modified by increasing the amount of land designated for medium and high density residential development, and decreasing the amount of land designated for low-density residential development. To accomplish this result, the map will be

¹ Table LU-2 is found on page LU-27 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

² This map is Figure LU-3, found on page LU-26 of the June 200 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

modified to reflect the following changes to the table of Development Capacity, as included in the Salinas General Plan as Table LU-3³:

- The acres set aside in Future Growth Areas for Residential Low Density development shall be reduced from 1,042 acres to 785 acres.
- The acres set aside in Future Growth Areas for Residential Medium Density development shall be increased from 515 acres to 600 acres.
- The acres set aside in Future Growth Areas for Residential High Density development shall be increased from 160 acres to 258 acres.
- The reallocations indicated above will provide for the same number of new residential units, and the same population increase specified in the Public Hearing Draft.

- 3. Ensure That Larger Developments Include A Range of Housing Types** – New residential developments of over 1000 units, when located in Future Growth Areas, shall include a mix of low-density, medium density, and high-density units. At least 20% of the housing units in such developments shall fall within the density range of 16-24 units per net residential developable acre, and 40% of the housing units shall fall within the density range of 7-14 units per net residential developable acre.⁴
- 4. Promote “Mixed Use” Developments To Increase Housing Opportunities** – New commercial and professional office developments within the City shall incorporate residential housing opportunities on site. Existing commercial and professional office developments shall be encouraged to redevelop and reconfigure uses to incorporate new residential housing opportunities. Notwithstanding this general rule, the City Council may make a finding that it would be inappropriate to require on site residential housing in a proposed new commercial or professional office development, and in that case shall require equivalent residential housing to be constructed at an offsite location.⁵
- 5. Design Medium And High Density Housing To Meet Community Needs** – Within all Future Growth Areas, every new residential development constructed at either Medium or High Density shall incorporate all of the following design features:
 - On site recreational facilities, appropriately sized to serve the needs of the residents of the development.
 - On site childcare facilities, or the provision within the development of one or more units specifically designed to accommodate family day care, including

³ Table LU-3 is found on page LU-37 of the June 200 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

⁴ The appropriate location for this policy would probably be on pages H-16 and H-17 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document, within the “Housing Element” portion of the General Plan.

⁵ The appropriate location for this policy would probably be on pages H-16 and H-17 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document, within the “Housing Element” portion of the General Plan.

necessary outdoor space, and appropriately sized to serve the needs of the residents of the development.

- Indoor space, including simple kitchen and restroom facilities, to accommodate educational, social service, and similar programs, and appropriately sized to serve the needs of the residents of the development.⁶

⁶ The appropriate location for this policy would probably be on pages H-16 and H-17 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document, within the “Housing Element” portion of the General Plan.

Protecting Agricultural Land

The agricultural land of the Salinas Valley has incredible economic value—and not only for the individuals who own that land, but also for the community as a whole. This agricultural land is the foundation of Monterey County’s largest industry, and provides jobs for many city residents. As growth and development occur in Salinas, some loss of agricultural land is probably inevitable—but those losses should be *minimized*. Land that is commercially productive when used for agriculture should be protected and preserved for agricultural use, to the maximum extent possible.

The following policies should be made part of the Salinas General Plan. These policies will help ensure that the future growth and development of the City benefits *all* the residents of Salinas⁷:

- 1.** Land designated as “Agriculture” on the Land Use and Circulation Policy Map (Figure LU-3) shall be protected and preserved for agricultural use.
- 2.** The City shall not extend sewer or water services into or across any lands designated as “Agriculture” on the Land Use and Circulation Policy Map (Figure LU-3).
- 3.** An Agricultural Land Protection Boundary is hereby established. All of the areas located within the Agricultural Land Protection Boundary may be developed, consistent with the provisions of this General Plan. The following lands designated on the Land Use and Circulation Policy Map (Figure LU-3) are hereby determined to be within the Agricultural Land Protection Boundary, and are therefore potentially developable according to this policy: Residential, Retail, Arterial Frontage, Office, Business Park, Mixed Use, General Commercial/Light Industrial, General Industrial, Parks, Public/Semipublic, and Open Space. All areas designated for Agriculture on Figure LU-3 are hereby determined to be outside the Agricultural Land Protection Boundary. Until December 31, 2025, no new development other than public parks and open space uses (including agricultural uses) shall be permitted outside the Agricultural Land Protection Boundary. For the purpose of this policy, open space uses are those uses defined in Government Code Section 65560, as that section of law exists on July 1, 2002.

⁷ These policies should be placed within the “Land Use Element” portion of the General Plan. The appropriate location for these policies would probably be on page LU-31 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

Schools For Our Children

Growth and development place new demands on our schools. Because nothing is more important than the education of our children, our community needs to do everything it can to provide adequate school facilities as growth and development occur. Although the State Legislature has made it difficult for either the City of Salinas or our local school districts to address growth and development problems directly, the Salinas City General Plan should contain strong policies to support and defend our schools.

The following policies should be made part of the Salinas General Plan. These policies will help ensure that the future growth and development of the City benefits *all* the residents of Salinas.⁸

- 1.** When any person submits an application to the City for the development of fifty or more residential units on property either in the City, or proposed for annexation into the City, a full copy of that application will promptly be furnished to each school district in which such property is located. Each affected school district will be formally invited to submit a report to the City, documenting any impacts that the school district believes might be caused by approval of the application. Upon request, City staff will consult with and assist each affected school district in submitting such a report. A full copy of the report submitted by a school district, pursuant to this policy, will be furnished to the Planning Commission and the City Council, at the time that the Planning Commission and the City Council considers the project application.
- 2.** Prior to the approval of any application for the development of fifty or more residential units, the City shall consult with each school district in which the property proposed to be developed is located. If a school district submits a report documenting that the proposed development, if approved, could have negative impacts upon existing school facilities, and requests that some or all of the property proposed for development be reserved as a schoolsite, the City Council shall take action to amend the City General Plan to designate an appropriate and adequate portion of the property as a schoolsite, pursuant to the authority provided by Government Code Section 65998.
- 3.** If, pursuant to Government Code Section 65971, the governing body of a school district which operates an elementary or high school has notified the City Council that conditions of overcrowding exist in one or more attendance areas within the district, and that these conditions of overcrowding will impair the normal functioning of educational programs, and if the City Council has concurred in the findings submitted by the district, then the City Council, basing its authority on Government Code Sections 65996(a)(2) and 65997(a)(7), and Government Code

⁸ These policies should be placed within the “Land Use Element” portion of the General Plan. The appropriate location for these policies would be on pages LU-58 and LU-59 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

Section 65972, shall not approve an ordinance rezoning property to a residential use, grant a discretionary permit for residential use, or approve a tentative subdivision map for residential purposes within such areas, unless the City Council makes a finding that there are specific overriding fiscal, economic, social, or environmental factors which justify the approval of a residential development.

Parks and Libraries

Parks and libraries play a vital role in the life of the community. The Salinas General Plan should help ensure that adequate parks and libraries are provided as new development occurs.

The following policies should be made part of the Salinas General Plan. These policies will help ensure that the future growth and development of the City benefits *all* the residents of Salinas:

- 1.** Developments within Future Growth Areas shall be conditioned to provide all the land and improvements required to achieve the parkland standard of three acres of developed public parkland per 1,000 residents, and to construct and provide the facilities necessary to meet existing and future park acreage needs, as referenced in Table COS-5. All new parks constructed within the City shall meet, at a minimum, the park standards established in Table COS-2.
- 2.** Residential developments not located within Future Growth Areas shall be conditioned to provide the funding necessary to carry out infrastructure repairs and to make the improvements needed to eliminate the deficiencies in the City's current facilities, as identified in Table COS-3.⁹
- 3.** New developments shall be conditioned to provide the funding necessary for the City to achieve the recommended standard of 0.5 square feet of library space per capita.¹⁰

⁹ Policies #1 and #2 should be included in the "Conservation/Open Space Element" of the General Plan, in the section covering Parks and Recreation Facilities, found on pages COS-34 to COS-41 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

¹⁰ Policy #3 should be included in the "Land Use Element" of the General Plan. Libraries are mentioned on page LU-60 of the June 2002 Draft Salinas General Plan Document.

Making Development Pay For Itself

When new developments are approved, existing city residents must provide various kinds of services for the new development. Sewer, water, fire protection, and police services are examples. Unless the city is careful, new development can actually make things *worse*, not better, for current residents of the city. The following policies should be made part of the Salinas General Plan.

The following policies should be made part of the Salinas General Plan. These policies will help ensure that the future growth and development of the City benefits *all* the residents of Salinas:

- 1. Cost-Benefit Analysis** – A cost-benefit analysis shall be prepared prior to the consideration or approval of new residential subdivision projects (of six or more housing units), to determine the impacts that additional residential units will have on existing Salinas neighborhoods and on the community as a whole. Such fiscal impact report shall identify any impact fees necessary to offset the public costs that would be caused by the proposed project.
- 2. Content of Cost-Benefit Analysis** – The cost-benefit analysis shall include an examination of the fiscal consequences of the loss of acreage in agricultural land (both in terms of lost revenue potential and loss of industry employment) and the fiscal and service impacts of the proposed project on roads, water, sewer, storm water runoff, fire, police, schools, libraries and other community facilities.
- 3. Adequate Infrastructure** – Before approving any new residential development, the City Council shall require that adequate water and wastewater facilities, parks, libraries, public safety services, and all necessary infrastructure improvements will be provided prior to or concurrent with actual construction of the new development. Impact fees shall be imposed, or other arrangements shall be made as a condition of any project approval, to insure that required infrastructure, public facilities, and public services will be provided in accordance with this policy.

Conclusion

The policies that are included in a city General Plan are more than “mere words.” These policies have a legal effect. Under state law, *every* significant land use decision made by the City Planning Commission or the City Council must be “consistent” with the adopted General Plan. If the General Plan is clear, and definite, and establishes a specific requirement or rule, then the City *must* follow that requirement or rule as it makes future decisions. Developers and builders must follow General Plan policies, too.

Because the policies placed in the General Plan establish requirements that will determine future land use decisions, *these policies have great power to shape the future of our community.*

The policies presented in this “Community Plan For The City of Salinas” are strong and clear. They establish definite requirements. They are legally enforceable. We urge the City Council to adopt these policies as we present them, and not to “water them down.”

If the Salinas City Council adopts these policies, builders and developers will have to build more housing that current city residents can afford, and more farmland will be protected. Developers will have to pay their own way, and parks, schools, libraries, and other community necessities will not be forgotten, as new developments occur.

This is the kind of future our community deserves. By placing these policies into the new Salinas General Plan, the Salinas City Council will help ensure that the future growth and development of Salinas benefits *all* of its residents.

August 17, 1999

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

cc: David Mora, City Manager
Charmaine Geiger, Community Development Director



Post Office Box 1876, Salinas, CA 93902

Email: LandWatch@mclw.org

Website: www.landwatch.org

Telephone: 831-422-9390

FAX: 831-422-9391

September 14, 2001

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

RE: September 18, 2001 "Study Session" On The General Plan Update

Dear Mayor Caballero and City Council Members:

LandWatch wrote you on August 28, 2001, to express our grave concern about the "preferred" land use and circulation alternative being proposed for the Draft General Plan. The staff and consultants have recommended a radical increase in population growth for the City of Salinas. What they propose is planning for the addition of 90,624 new residents from the year 2000 to the year 2020. This goes far beyond the population growth forecasts made by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, which predicts a total growth over that period of only 39,863.

"Natural growth" in Salinas (births over deaths) is projected to be only 29,000 during the twenty-year period from 2000 to 2020. If Salinas is really planning to accommodate more than 90,000 new residents, that means the City is planning for over 61,000 people to move into Salinas from other places. Given the geographical location of the City of Salinas, the only possible conclusion is that the staff wants the City to become an ever-bigger bedroom community for the Silicon Valley.

The staff and consultants also recommend the conversion of 4,400 acres of agricultural land, to accommodate the massive population growth they want Salinas to accept. Our question is this: Is this really what the City Council "*prefers*" in terms of future planning for Salinas?

Frankly, we hope not. We have other ideas we'd like to propose, and we also don't think that this is what the *people* want. This brings us to our major concern with your meeting scheduled for September 18th.

It is our understanding, from your September 18th meeting notice, from previous comments of your staff as reported in the newspaper, and from remarks made by your consultants at the last study session, that the City Council intends to give "feedback and guidance" to its staff and consultants at the September 18th meeting, but that no public hearing will ever be held, and that no formal vote is anticipated before the Draft General Plan and Draft EIR are written.

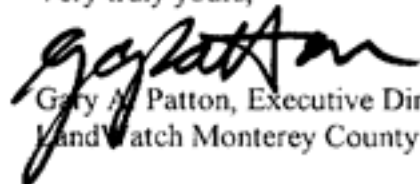
You apparently contemplate a process by which the staff and consultants will proceed to develop a Draft General Plan and Draft EIR based on informal "feedback and guidance" from the City Council, as expressed at the September 18th study session and previous study sessions, without the benefit of any public hearing—and even without a formal vote by the City Council.

We believe this may well be illegal. If the preparation of a General Plan Update is a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (which we think it is) it qualifies as a “project” because it is a “discretionary” activity, proposed to be carried out by a public agency. In our view, the nature and scope of the proposed project must be decided upon by the City Council itself, acting formally. That is how the Council is empowered to exercise its discretion—not by giving informal “feedback and guidance” to consultants and staff, who then, as a practical matter, define the “project” the way they want to.

Whether this legal perspective is accurate or not, it is certainly inappropriate for the City Council to make such a decision (about what the General Plan and General Plan EIR will be based on) without hearing from the public, and without officially exercising their discretion through a vote. Deciding the “preferred alternative” on which the Draft General Plan and Draft EIR will be based is the second most important decision that the Council will make during the entirety of the General Plan Update process. The *most* important decision, of course, will be the final vote, at the end of the process—but determining the “preferred alternative” for the Draft General Plan is almost as important as that.

The City will spend between \$100,000 and \$200,000 (and maybe more) developing a Draft General Plan and Draft EIR. When the City embarks on the preparation of these documents, it ought to be very clear that the “preferred alternative” on which the Draft General Plan and the Draft EIR will be based is truly “preferred” by the City. **How can you legitimately say that the staff-recommended program for massive growth, accompanied by wholesale conversion of agricultural land, is the “preferred alternative” for the future of Salinas, without ever asking for official public input at public hearing? How can you proceed to develop an entire, costly plan based on these kinds of assumptions without ever taking a formal vote?**

LandWatch urges the Salinas City Council to conclude its “Study Session” not with informal “feedback and guidance,” but by directing the Planning Commission to hold at least one public hearing, and then to make a formal recommendation to the City Council on what the “preferred alternative” for the Draft General Plan and the Draft EIR should be. Thereafter, the City Council should itself hold at least one public hearing, and then formally vote to direct the preparation of the Draft General Plan and Draft EIR based on the alternative that the Council decides is truly “preferred”—after hearing officially from the Planning Commission, and directly from the public.

Very truly yours,

 Gary A. Patton, Executive Director
 LandWatch Monterey County

cc: Members, Salinas City Council
 Members, Salinas Planning Commission
 David Mora, City Manager
 Charmaine Geiger, Community Development Director

October 24, 2001

Mayor and Council Members
City Council, City of Salinas
Salinas City Hall
200 Lincoln Avenue
Salinas, CA 93901

RE: "Preferred Alternative" For Salinas General Plan Update

Dear Mayor Caballero and Council Members:

On October 25th, your Council is expected to establish a "preferred alternative" for the Land Use and Circulation elements of the Salinas General Plan. This "preferred alternative" will guide preparation of the draft General Plan Update for the City of Salinas.

We think the "preferred alternative" for the General Plan Update should outline a future that the City Council truly "prefers." While there will certainly be future environmental review and public comment, and an opportunity to make changes in response to that review and comment, the designation of a "preferred alternative" by the Council on October 25th will establish the Council's basic vision for the future of Salinas. Deciding upon a "preferred alternative" is the second most important decision you will make in the entire General Plan Update process. The *most important decision*, of course, will be your final decision, sometime next year.

LandWatch deeply appreciates your willingness to hold a public hearing before deciding how to frame the "preferred alternative." In this letter, we attempt to outline a positive approach, and to highlight a number of key issues. We summarize our specific recommendations at the end of this letter. Thank you very much for taking our views into consideration.

1. **The Power of Policy:** State law requires virtually every planning and zoning decision made by the City to be "consistent" with the City's General Plan. That is why the General Plan is called the "Constitution" for land use in the city. If the General Plan contains a strong, clear, and unambiguous statement of policy, then that policy will have to be followed in subsequent City Council decisions. We hope that the City Council will direct its staff to include a number of strong and specific policies in the "preferred alternative," so that future growth will conform to the real preferences of the Council and the community.
2. **Rancho San Juan:** In the past, members of the City Council have stated their individual opposition to the proposed Rancho San Juan development, and the City of Salinas has officially opposed this development. If the City believes that the Rancho San Juan development is not the kind of development that would benefit Salinas, then the City of Salinas should not adopt a plan that would permit it to go forward.

Presumably, the only reason for the City to plan for a development that it doesn't want is because the Council believes that the development is "inevitable," and the City's efforts might, in some way, result in a "better" development than the County of Monterey would otherwise approve. However, Rancho San Juan is far from "inevitable." If Salinas indicates in its new General Plan that it is proposing development on Rancho San Juan, then this will tell the County that development is "alright" from the City's point of view. If the City of Salinas doesn't want development on Rancho San Juan, it needs to state that clearly—and to let the County know its position. Taking the position that the development is "ok" if done by the City will be an argument in favor of the Rancho San Juan development.

As City Council Members know, the County is redoing its own General Plan. While the County's current General Plan would permit the development of Rancho San Juan, the official General Plan objectives for the new General Plan actively discourage developments like Rancho San Juan. A specific designation of Rancho San Juan as an "Area of Development Concentration" was removed from the statement of objectives adopted by the County Board of Supervisors—and the Board's decision was unanimous.

There is no reason to believe that the Board of Supervisors is committed to building Rancho San Juan. It is true that the Board of Supervisors is under a court order to consider a Specific Plan that would allow the Rancho San Juan development, but while the Board has to "consider" that plan, it doesn't have to approve it. If Salinas indicates that the development of Rancho San Juan is "ok"—by planning for the development within the City's General Plan—then that will be an argument used at the Board of Supervisors in support of the Rancho San Juan development.

LandWatch supports the Planning Commission's recommendation to the City Council, with respect to Rancho San Juan. If the City of Salinas doesn't think that the development of Rancho San Juan is a good idea, then that development should be removed from the City's "preferred alternative."

3. **Housing For The Essential Workers of Salinas:** LandWatch believes that new housing should serve local working families. Tying new housing developments to new jobs created in Salinas is one way to make that happen. Two other policy requirements can also help. We urge the City Council to direct its staff to include a "Housing For Salinas" policy in its "preferred alternative," to include affirmative provisions to ensure that new housing developed in the City will be directed to the needs of local working families. Both of the following provisions should be considered for inclusion in this "Housing For Salinas" policy:
 - Any annexation of land to the City of Salinas for residential development will only be pursued by the City if an enforceable agreement has first been entered into between the City and the land owner, committing the land owner (or any successor in interest) to develop housing on the land that is enforceably restricted and permanently protected for sale or rental to persons who have

incomes that reflect the range of incomes of the residents of Salinas at the time the annexation is proposed.

- Any residential housing development constructed in the City of Salinas shall provide that at least 25% of the new housing built shall be enforceably restricted and permanently protected for sale or rental to families who have family incomes equal to or lower than the median family income in Salinas at the time that the housing development is approved. No “in lieu” payments should be permitted, and actual construction of the housing, included within the new development, shall be required.

Policy requirements contained in a General Plan do have “power.” They are requirements that must be followed. The two suggested policies, above, have been implemented by other jurisdictions—and they do work! If the City of Salinas “prefers” that new housing in Salinas actually meet the needs of local working families, then the General Plan should reflect that preference as a policy requirement. Otherwise, the City will continually confront proposals for housing developments that will provide the greatest profit to developers and landowners—instead of meeting the community’s urgent housing needs.

Housing sold to the “market” is housing sold in a market that includes the entirety of the Silicon Valley. Absent some action by the City, persons with incomes generated outside of Monterey County will be able to “outbid” local working families for new housing constructed here. Unless the City of Salinas “prefers” to build bedrooms for out of county workers, the new General Plan should contain a set of “Housing For Salinas” policies, like those outlined above.

4. **Schools and Infrastructure:** Past residential growth has overwhelmed local schools, and has overtaxed other aspects of the infrastructure needed to service new growth. The City’s “Land Use Plan” is not only a “map.” It’s a statement of policies, too—and depending on how those policies are written, the Land Use Element of the City’s General Plan can provide great protection to current and future residents, making certain that new growth doesn’t overwhelm the services that such new growth requires.

LandWatch urges the City Council to direct its staff to include a “Schools and Infrastructure Policy” in the “preferred alternative” for the General Plan Update. This “Schools and Infrastructure Policy” would consist of a clear and unambiguous requirement that new development provide necessary school capacity, and other necessary infrastructure and services, *before* development can proceed.

5. **New Lands To Be Annexed, Population Growth, and Density:** The consultants and city staff recommend that the “preferred alternative” for the General Plan Update include a proposal to annex and develop over 4,000 acres of land now located outside the City of Salinas. Most of the land proposed for annexation and development is commercially productive agricultural land.

LandWatch believes that the acreage currently proposed for annexation and development is excessive. The correct planning figure should be based on all of the following: (1) a commitment to minimize the conversion of commercially productive agricultural land; (2) population projections that are consistent with the official population projections for the region; and (3) a commitment to require development densities that use land efficiently. Our thoughts are more fully outlined below, and we provide a specific recommendation for Council adoption at the end of our letter.

6. Minimize the Conversion of Commercially Productive Agricultural Land:

If someone proposed converting existing factory and manufacturing facilities in the Silicon Valley to shopping centers and residential subdivisions, people would think they were “crazy.” Those facilities are both “job-producing” and “wealth-producing.” Exactly the same thing is true with respect to the agricultural lands surrounding the City of Salinas. These fields are both “job producing” and “wealth producing” for the local economy. Each acre of agricultural land brings an average of \$10,000 into the local economy each year—and with very few public costs. Converting these lands to other uses eliminates this income, and increases public costs.

LandWatch believes that the City Council should state as a matter of basic General Plan policy that the annexation and conversion of commercially productive agricultural land should be minimized.

7. Make Sure Annexations Benefit the Community: As Council Members know, residential developments—even “upscale” developments—usually don’t pay for themselves. They end up costing the community, not benefiting it. That is one reason that new residential housing developments should be tied to new job growth. It is also a reason to approach annexations with great caution. To ensure that the annexation and development of areas outside the current city limits don’t end up imposing new burdens upon city residents and taxpayers, the City should insist that new annexations demonstrate, through a cost benefit study, that they will advance the interests of the community.

8. Responsible Population Projections: The amount of land needed for annexation and development will depend, in significant part, on how much new growth is accommodated in Salinas. We urge the City Council to direct its consultants and staff to develop a new General Plan Update that will accommodate the population growth that the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) has projected for Salinas over the next twenty years. AMBAG is the regional agency officially charged with the responsibility for making population projections for this region, and AMBAG says that Salinas should expect 39,863 new residents between the year 2000 and 2020 (not 90,000, as the consultants and city staff are currently recommending).

“Natural growth” in Salinas (births over deaths) is projected at 29,000 from 2000 to 2020. If the City of Salinas adopts a land use plan that will accommodate 90,000 new residents (when only 29,000 new residents will be added by “natural growth”), then Salinas is saying that it wants to bring 61,000 new residents into Salinas from other places. This

means that Salinas will be planning to be a “bedroom community” serving the Silicon Valley.

Again, the City of Salinas should plan for what it wants. If the City wants to become a bedroom community for people who move in from elsewhere, then the 90,000 figure suggested by the consultants and staff makes sense. But if that is not what Salinas wants, it needs to plan accordingly.

Typically, residential growth does not pay for itself. It brings major community impacts, and lots of community costs. That is why jurisdictions in the Silicon Valley try to “spin off” their residential growth to outlying areas (like Salinas). For every seven new jobs created in the Silicon Valley, only one new house is built. People attracted by Silicon Valley jobs are coming to Salinas, looking for the homes that cities in the Silicon Valley aren’t providing. If Salinas adopts a land use plan that provides the houses to accommodate the workers whose jobs are in the Silicon Valley, then Salinas will be agreeing to take the costs of residential growth, without the benefits of the jobs. Is this really your “preferred” alternative?

Another way to approach this issue is to designate land for residential development only for the AMBAG projections (39,863 instead of 90,000), but to incorporate policies in the General Plan that directly tie the approval of new housing to the creation of new jobs in Salinas. If the jobs come, then that would justify going beyond the 39,863 figure. New housing would be allowed *only* if the jobs came at the same time. The Council should plan only for the housing needed to go along with jobs actually created in Salinas.

9. **Require Appropriate Densities For Annexed Lands:** The consultants and staff are recommending that the expansion of the City take place at very low densities. Their version of the “preferred alternative” recommends that out of a total of 21,933 new housing units to be built on lands outside the current city limits (in Future Growth Areas 9-15), 12,163 units would be build on “residential low density” lands. That’s 55%. Only 2,759 units are proposed for “residential high density” lands. That’s 13%. Only 6,626 are being proposed on “residential medium density” lands—or 30%.

Naturally, building at lower densities uses more land. It also makes the housing constructed less affordable, because it raises housing costs.

The “preferred alternative” presented to the City Council is an alternative that will result in 55% of the new growth in Salinas over the next 20 years being comprised of single-family subdivisions much like Harden Ranch, Williams Ranch, and Creekbridge. This is a sure fire way to provide “bedrooms” for those whose jobs are elsewhere. It is exactly the opposite of what the City should do if it would like to use prime farmland efficiently, and provide housing for the essential workers of Salinas.

Instead of using up more than 4,000 acres of land trying to accommodate 90,000 people at low densities, the City Council could—and should—demand that the new General Plan use land efficiently, at higher but still moderate densities. If they did so, the Council

could easily accommodate the 40,000 new people projected by AMBAG on 1,000 acres, instead of 4,000—and substantially fewer than 1,000 acres would be needed, if an effective infill strategy were pursued.

Density Range	Du/Acre	Acres	Number of Dwelling Units	People Per Dwelling Unit	Population	Percent Distribution
Residential Low Density	6.5	503	3270	3.67	12,000	30%
Residential Medium Density	11.7	419	4905	3.67	18,000	45%
Residential High Density	16.8	162	2725	3.67	10,000	25%
Totals		1,084	10,900		40,000	

The table above, for illustrative purposes only, overstates the need for new land. No infill is shown, and the densities are very moderate. Also, the percentage of land allocated to “residential high density” is relatively small—25%. This chart shows that there is no need for the City of Salinas to develop a General Plan that calls for the annexation and development of over 4,000 acres of agricultural and open space land.

- 10. Urban Growth Boundary:** Based on an analysis of where the best farmland is, most people agree that new growth in Salinas should generally be directed to the East and North, away from the most productive agricultural lands. LandWatch urges the City Council to establish a strong “boundary” to protect those agricultural lands that should not be converted for development.

Conclusion:

The “preferred alternative” for the General Plan Update should actually be something that the City of Salinas “prefers.” The ability of the City to shape its future through strong and focused General Plan policies is real—but the kind of future the City prefers won’t happen automatically:

- If the City wants infill, and compact, city-centered growth (which LandWatch strongly supports) then the policies of the General Plan need to insist that the future growth of Salinas conform to these standards.

- If the City wants to preserve the commercially productive agricultural lands that surround the City, then the City needs to provide long-term protection for those agricultural lands that are not specifically designated for development.
- If the City wants to make sure that new growth doesn't overwhelm our infrastructure, and result in continued and further school overcrowding, then the City needs to put policies in place that will prevent that result.
- If the City wants new housing to serve the working families of Salinas, and wants that housing to relate to job growth here—not somewhere else—then the City needs to specify that this is the type of housing it will approve—and not housing does not meet these critical community needs.

Specific Recommendation:

LandWatch recommends that the Salinas City Council adopt a motion that directs City staff and consultants to develop a draft General Plan Update based on the staff proposal, with the following changes and additions:

1. Staff and consultants should be directed to remove Rancho San Juan from the planning area, and the Salinas General Plan Update should not project the development of Rancho San Juan during the next twenty years.
2. The staff and consultants should be further directed to analyze the proposed development of Rancho San Juan within the EIR, to provide information and analysis that can be used by the City in connection with any proposals considered by the County of Monterey.
3. The staff and consultants should be directed to include “Housing For Salinas” policies within the draft General Plan Update, and specifically including the following policies:
 - New housing development within the City of Salinas should be directly related to local job growth.
 - Any annexation of land to the City of Salinas for residential development will only be pursued by the City if an enforceable agreement has first been entered into between the City and the land owner, committing the land owner (or any successor in interest) to develop housing on the land that is enforceably restricted and permanently protected for sale or rental to persons who have incomes that reflect the range of incomes of the residents of Salinas at the time the annexation is proposed.
 - Any residential housing development constructed in the City of Salinas shall provide that at least 25% of the new housing built shall be enforceably restricted and permanently protected for sale or rental to

families who have family incomes equal to or lower than the median family income in Salinas at the time that the housing development is approved. No “in lieu” payments should be permitted, and actual construction of the housing, included within the new development, shall be required.

4. The staff and consultants should be directed to include a set of “Schools and Infrastructure” policies within the draft General Plan Update that will ensure that new developments provide necessary school capacity, and other necessary infrastructure and services, before the development can proceed.
5. The staff and consultants should be directed to include a specific statement within the draft General Plan Update, committing the City of Salinas to a policy of minimizing the conversion of commercially productive agricultural land, as growth and development proceed.
6. The staff and consultants should be directed to include a policy within the draft General Plan Update that will require that proposals for the annexation and development of areas outside the current city limits demonstrate, through a cost benefit analysis, that it will provide significant benefits to the community.
7. The staff and consultants should be directed to base proposals in the draft General Plan Update that would allow for the annexation of lands outside the current city limits on the population projections published by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), coupled with density calculations that will require any lands annexed to be developed within the following broad density ranges: (1) Residential Low Density—30% of the area annexed, and (2) Residential Medium or High Density –70% of the area annexed. The staff and consultants should be further directed to include policies that tie any residential development intended to serve growth beyond those projections to the population growth demonstrably associated with jobs created within the local area.
8. The staff and consultants should be directed to incorporate policies within the draft General Plan Update that establish a “growth boundary” for those areas on the edge of Salinas where agricultural lands should be preserved, where future annexations are not projected, and where development is not desired.

Very truly yours,

Gary A. Patton, Executive Director
LandWatch Monterey County

cc: Members, Planning Commission
Planning Director
City Manager

Attachments Not Included

This version of our letter does not include various diagrams relating to the Salinas Airport, which are not available in electronic form.