March 19, 2019

Mayor Joe Gunter  
City of Salinas  
200 Lincoln Ave.  
Salinas, CA 93901  

Subject: Review of Salinas Downtown Vibrancy Plan Implementation

Dear Mayor Gunter and City Council Members:

LandWatch Monterey County applauds the implementation of the Salinas Downtown Vibrancy Plan. This multi-year initiative is intended to foster economic renewal for Salinas’s downtown. We strongly support the Plan’s focus on encouraging mixed-use development with an emphasis on apartments as well as creating a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly downtown. The City’s adaptive reuse ordinance, which the City Council approved unanimously at its July 3, 2018 meeting, allows underutilized buildings to be used for housing – a policy LandWatch supports. The Planning Commission’s efforts to streamline the permitting process for conversion of empty and underused commercial building in the downtown for residential purpose are also noteworthy.

Downtown Salinas is within a new “Federal Opportunity zone” for development. Many properties in downtown Salinas are likely eligible for the City’s Mills Act tax break for historic property improvement and maintenance. It makes sense that demand for new housing and office or retail development occur in the downtown where there is density and easy access to diverse transit options, including walking, biking and mass transit.

We hope the proposed West Area Specific Plan, which would add over 700,000 square feet of commercial space to the City’s already excessive inventory, will not undermine the City’s excellent efforts to-date. We are currently reviewing the DEIR for the Specific Plan to determine if it adequately addresses potential impacts to the revitalization of Salinas’s Downtown.

Sincerely,

Michael DeLapa  
Executive Director