



Salinas Valley
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BUSINESS JOURNAL



It's Expensive to Farm in California
page 25



Celebrating Women's History on a Local Level
page 26

CEQA Lawsuits Delay Housing Construction in Salinas

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison





Want to extract something of economic value from people who want to build something in California? Then exploit the state mandate under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for a "lead agency" (a government jurisdiction) to prepare and approve an environmental disclosure and determination document before the project moves forward.

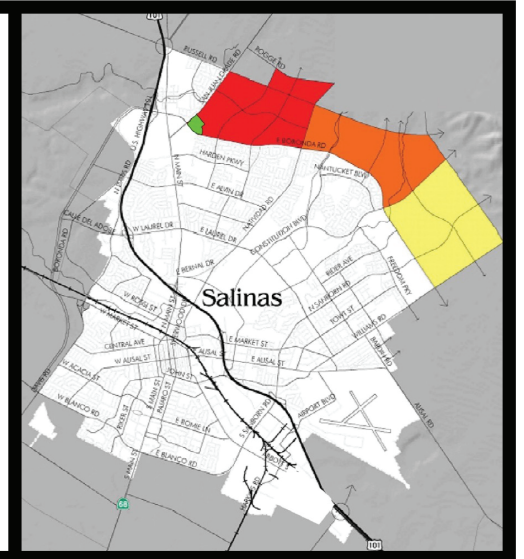
Here's how the racket works:

Identify anything in the environmental review document that may appear to be a weakness or omission. Make sure to exaggerate the magnitude and significance of the weakness or omission. During the public review process, threaten to sue if the government doesn't rectify the weakness or omission. If the local government tries to fix it, identify a new weakness or omission, or insist the original weakness or omission isn't sufficiently fixed yet. If the local government ends up approving the environmental review, file a lawsuit.

It isn't necessarily the substance of the argument that matters, but the amount of time and money the project owner must consume in defending the environmental review document. Just keep on repeating and

CEQA see page 14

-  **West Area Specific Plan**
Approved in 2019
-  **Central Area Specific Plan**
Approved in 2020
-  **East Area Specific Plan**
In Development
-  **Gateway Center Specific Plan**
Approved in 2011



North of Boronda Future Growth Area and its Specific Plans within the City of Salinas.

The Long Grind Toward Actually Building Housing in the City of Salinas Future Growth Area

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce is optimistic about upcoming opportunities in the City of Salinas for new housing development. Much of this optimism is based on the prospect of substantial new construction starting soon on the northeastern edge of the city.

The North of Boronda Future Growth Area consists of 2,388 acres north of East Boronda Road. Within this area, the City of Salinas has enacted formal plans for construction of up to 11,485 residential units over 20-30 years, as well as almost four million square feet of retail, commercial, and public facilities.

While some groups derisively refer to larger-scale residential developments as "sprawl" and highlight negative aspects of such communities, your Chamber believes such projects are necessary. While small incremental housing projects can be esthetically pleasing

GROWTH see page 5



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Cristina Martinez, MD
Emergency Medicine Department Chair

WHEN TO OBTAIN EMERGENCY CARE



Emergency care is treatment for a condition that requires prompt attention and imposes an immediate, serious health threat, such as*:

- Chest pain
- Any loss of consciousness
- Deep cuts, bleeding that will not stop
- Signs of stroke including facial drooping, arm weakness, slurred speech or difficulty forming words.
- Difficulty breathing, severe allergic reactions, choking
- Bone fractures with open wounds
- High fever that doesn't improve with medication
- As directed by your doctor

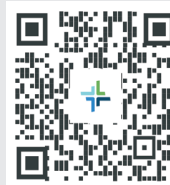
If you are having difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, an injury that threatens your life or limb, or signs of stroke or heart attack, call 911. Do not drive yourself to the Emergency Department.

WHEN TO SEEK URGENT CARE



Urgent care is treatment for a condition that requires prompt attention but does not pose an immediate, serious health threat, such as*:

- Colds, coughs, sore throat, sinus infection, upper respiratory infection, flu, fever
- Minor injuries such as sprain, minor cuts including need for stitches, minor burns
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Minor bone fractures
- Allergies, rashes, ear and eye infections
- Childhood illnesses
- COVID testing and treatment
- As directed by your doctor



Scan the QR code to view a video explanation from Dr. Cristina Martinez.

* To view a more complete list of symptoms for each situation, visit [SalinasValleyHealth.com](https://www.SalinasValleyHealth.com) and search "When to go to the Emergency Department."

Member Value — the Guiding Principle for Your Chamber's Board

By Leonard Batti, SVCC Board Chair

As of this writing, the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors has completed the second of two half-day strategic planning sessions. Board members were asked to break into small groups and identify the key criteria that guide decision-making when evaluating opportunities for the Chamber.

I am pleased to report that each breakout group identified **member value** as the primary guiding principle. If an opportunity does not benefit the membership, it should not be pursued. While member benefits may affect different businesses or business segments in different ways, as long as an opportunity does not negatively impact member businesses, it should be considered and respectfully debated.

In discussing member value, the importance of member involvement was strongly emphasized. It was noted that members who experience the greatest value from their Chamber membership are those who most actively participate in Chamber events and programs.

Gabe Lopez, the Chamber's Membership Development Director, captured this idea perfectly. He compared member value to joining a gym: "You're not going to get jacked (strong) just by having a gym membership. You actually have to go in and lift."

Participants also highlighted the



breadth of business segments and community involvement represented on the Chamber Board. The Board reflects a cross-section of Salinas Valley industries, including healthcare, banking, academia, mortgage services, agriculture, law, media, finance and tax, property management, business services, hospitality, construction, real estate development, county services such as water and sanitation, and nonprofit and community support organizations.

There is also balanced representation of both large and small businesses. In addition, Board members and staff serve on numerous business, nonprofit, and community boards, commissions, and committees. Together, this ensures that the Chamber maintains a strong pulse on the issues affecting businesses and communities throughout Monterey County and across the state.

Beyond member value, the Board identified two additional pillars to guide its work: **strengthening the local business community** and **building strategic partnerships**.

In discussing member value, the importance of member involvement was strongly emphasized . . . members who experience the greatest value from their Chamber membership are those who most actively participate in Chamber events and programs.

Housing and infrastructure are clear examples of issues that can either strengthen or weaken the local business environment. Increasing housing supply, both in designated growth areas and through infill development, benefits businesses and the broader community. Infill housing, built on vacant or underutilized land, brings residents closer to existing businesses and helps support the established local economy.

Infrastructure such as water, power, and sewer systems is equally critical. These systems enable business expansion and new residential development. Many Valley cities are currently operating with infrastructure that has exceeded its useful life and requires reinvestment.

Building strategic partnerships is another priority the Chamber strengthened in 2025 and will continue to expand in 2026. The Chamber has worked hard to

establish strong relationships with city governments, business leaders and associations, community organizations, and other Peninsula and Valley Chambers. Through these partnerships, the Chamber is better positioned to support programs and policies that advance

VALUE see page 29

2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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- **Chair-Elect - Aaron Johnson**
A Johnson Law Group
- **Vice Chair, GRC - Amy Salmina**
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- **Vice Chair, Membership - Mark Kennedy**
Green Rubber Kennedy Ag
- **Vice Chair, Events - Veronica Plascencia**
KION
- **Vice Chair, Finance - Michael Arensdorf**
Scholl & Arensdorf LLP

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- **Brent Fogg** – Granite Construction
- **Regina Gage** – Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley, Inc.
- **Juan Gonzalez** – Hartnell College
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- **Chris Steinbruner** – Steinbruner Hill CPAs
- **Hugh Walker** – Stonebridge Homes

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CHAMBER PRIORITIES

CREATING A STRONG LOCAL ECONOMY • PROMOTING THE COMMUNITY • PROVIDING NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES • POLITICAL ACTION • REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF BUSINESS WITH GOVERNMENT

GROWTH - from page 1

and take advantage of existing infrastructure, reliance alone on vacant, abandoned, or underused infill land parcels for new housing will not provide a sufficient amount for ordinary people at reasonable prices.

The Long, Tortured History of North of Boronda Future Growth Area

Land to the north of East Boronda Road has long been used for agricultural purposes such as strawberries and other row crops. However, the City of Salinas determined 25 years ago that farmland to the north of the city was less productive and had less potential than the existing farmland to the west and south of the city.

By 2000, the city targeted this area as an appropriate place for future housing development. At that time, the North of Boronda Future Growth Area was within the jurisdiction of the County of Monterey and outside of Salinas city limits.

Through what process would this farmland become housing? California law requires all cities and counties to adopt a comprehensive General Plan for future growth that incorporates land use, zoning, infrastructure, and housing policies within a community vision. On Sept. 5, 2002, the Salinas City Council adopted its 2002 General Plan, the master document for future development in the city, along with environmental review of the General Plan required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The North of Boronda Future Growth Area was incorporated into this plan. The 2002 plan replaced the previous 1988 General Plan.

City Annexation and Adoption of Specific Plans for New Development

Landowners within the North of Boronda Future Growth Area



FIGURE 1-9
Zoning Map
Upon Adoption
of Specific Plan

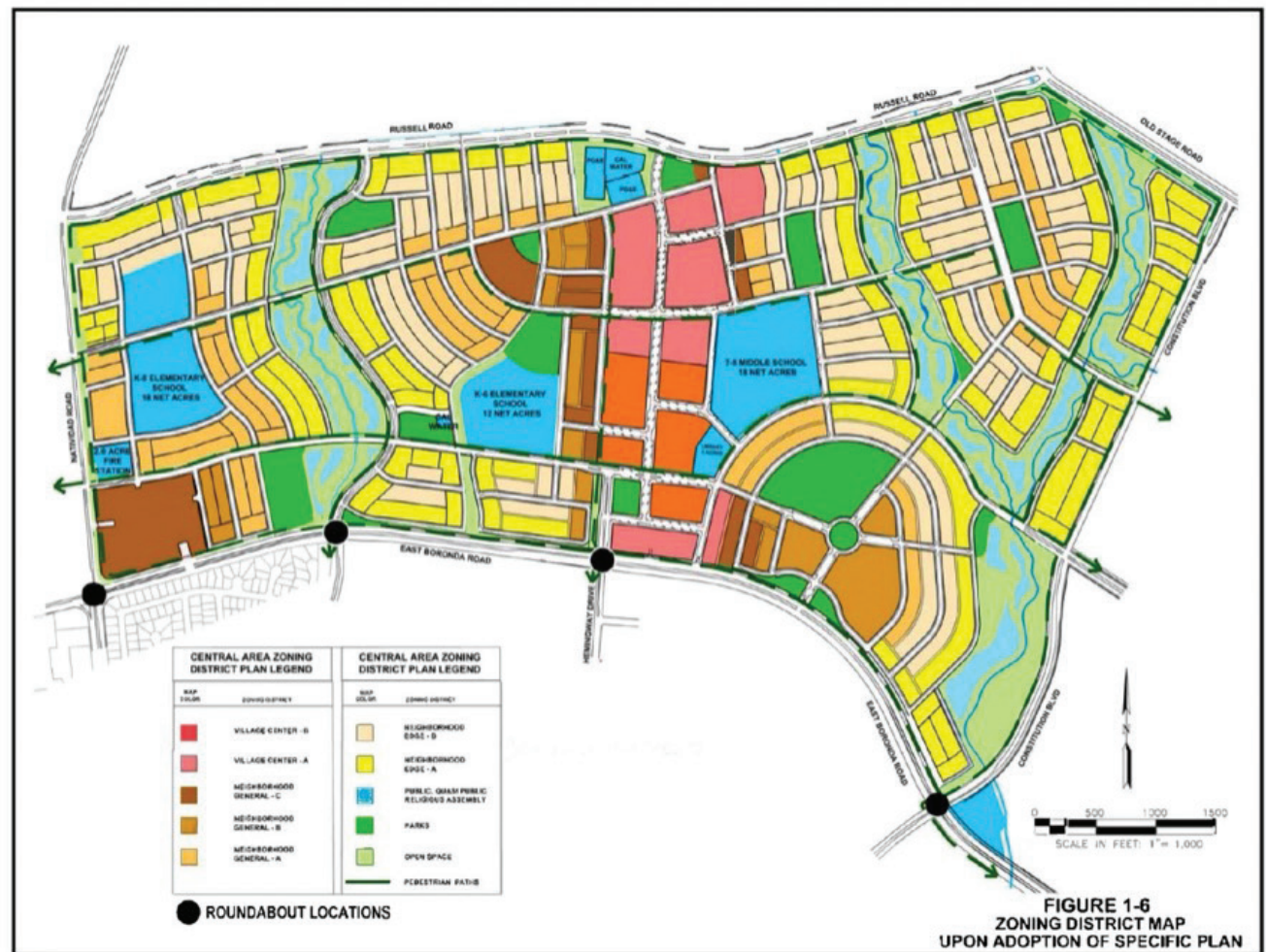
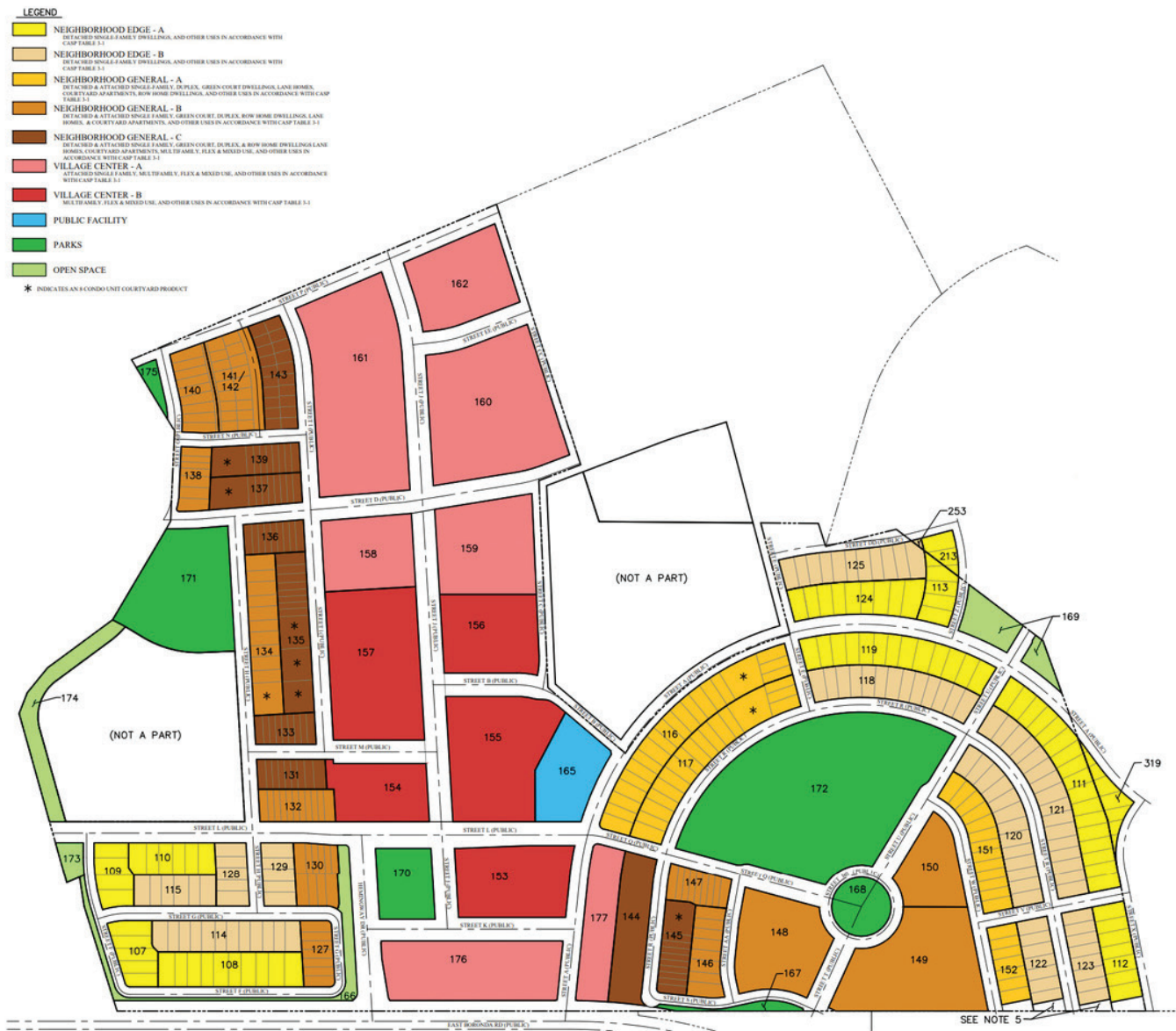


FIGURE 1-6
Zoning District Map
Upon Adoption of Specific Plan

Zoning Maps for West Area Specific Plan and Central Area Specific Plan in the North of Boronda Future Growth Area.



Tentative Map for the first housing development approved for the North of Boronda Future Growth Area. The developer is Stonebridge Homes.

wanted the city to annex their land before it was developed. They also wanted the city to adopt Specific Plans for the area, rather than having the area default to basic city zoning standards under the General Plan. California law authorizes Specific Plans within a larger General Plan.

As of 2002, the City of Salinas had already adopted five Specific Plans under the 1988 General Plan. These were Harden Ranch (1988), Williams Ranch (1993), Westridge Center (1994), Auto Center (1996), and Mountain Valley (1999), which is now known as Monte Bella. Until

2025, Monte Bella was the last approved large-scale residential development where construction has occurred.

For the North of Boronda Future Growth Area, the 2002 General Plan stated that “developers will need to prepare Specific Plans.” Three specific planning areas were identified for future planning: the West Area Specific Plan (797 acres), the Central Area Specific Plan (760 acres), and the East Area Specific Plan (now referred to as 940 acres). In 2011, the city carved out 20 acres from the West Area Specific Plan to create a

separate Gateway Center Specific Plan for retail and commercial development. (A Lowe’s Home Improvement store is located on this land, near the intersection of East Boronda Road and San Juan Grade Road.)

To mitigate some of the traditional negative impacts of large-scale residential development, the 2002 General Plan required new development in the North of Boronda Future Growth Area to abide to the principles of “New Urbanism.” New Urbanism became a trendy planning concept in the 1990s as a reaction to the negative impacts of

suburban sprawl.

Developments built under New Urbanism are distinguishable as a deliberate attempt to recreate a walkable, village-type environment, with central public squares and small parks, multi-story mixed-use buildings with retail amenities on the ground floor and apartments above, narrow tree-lined streets, and a variety of pre-ordained housing types. Critics of New Urbanism contend that such development is ineffective, inflexible, “tasteless pastiche architecture,” and reflects cultural ideals and aspirations that may not be shared by all Americans, particularly disadvantaged classes.

New Urbanism was not the only requirement imposed by the Salinas City Council on landowners and developers in the North of Boronda Future Growth Area. They would be expected to pay the city for all costs of annexation and environmental reviews, including studies and staff time.

While this seems fair—especially for taxpayers who don’t want to pay to develop someone else’s neighborhood—people should recognize that developers will ultimately incorporate these costs into the price of new housing and not necessarily pay for those costs by magnanimously reducing their expected profit margin. In addition, the city requirement created controversies concerning whether some landowners were paying a disproportionate amount of fees.

Nevertheless, from 2004 to 2008, multiple landowners and developers met regularly with government staff to develop the specific plans and prepare for annexation. And on May 19, 2008, the Local Agency Formation Commission of Monterey County (LAFCO) approved the city’s annexation (along with environmental review under CEQA) of the 2,388-acre North of Boronda Future Growth Area from the County of Monterey.

Starting Over: The Great Recession Stops Everything for Years

In 2008, the Great Recession dramatically affected the housing market. Developers withdrew their plans for construction. The City of Salinas laid off employees involved with planning and development. Planned residential development of the North of Boronda Future Growth Area stalled, and the land continued to be used for growing crops or retained as fallow.

When the economy began to recover in 2012 and 2013, landowners and developers needed to start over again. Because data and circumstances related to environmental reviews and plans were now outdated, the city had to conduct new research and surveys and tests. Landowners and developers also had to work with new city planning staff who lacked institutional memory of the mid-2000s process of developing the specific plans.

Once again, landowners had to pay all of the costs for studies and staff time to prepare documents. Some landowners moved on and sold their land parcels. One prominent transaction within the North of Boronda Future Growth Area was the 2017 donation of 215 acres in the Central Area Specific Plan from Teresa Matsui, on behalf of her parents Mary and Andy Matsui, to the Hartnell College Foundation.

In the past few years, there have been public references about the Hartnell College Foundation perhaps selling this land. The Alisal Union School District has discussed purchasing some of this land, which is adjacent to a 12.03-acre parcel that the district bought in 2011 using a state grant.

Other landowners and developers that had endured the recession were ready to try again. After additional years of preparation and expense, the Salinas City Council finally approved the West Area Specific Plan on Dec. 17, 2019. The City Council

then approved the Central Area Specific Plan on Nov. 17, 2020. (The East Area Specific Plan is discussed later in this article.)

Construction Plans Come to Screeching Halt

When the Salinas City Council approved each of these specific plans, the local school districts responded by filing lawsuits against the City of Salinas contending that environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) was inadequate. A law firm suggested these lawsuits as a strategy to try to get landowners and developers to pay additional money to the districts beyond the amount of developer impact fees established under state law, or alternatively to get the developers to build the schools themselves and then transfer the completed projects to the school districts (as has been done in some places in California).

This litigation stopped everything for more than four years, and in the end the school districts failed in their strategy. See the article “CEQA Lawsuits Strike Again” elsewhere in this issue for the details on these lawsuits. In March 2024, legal issues were resolved, and landowners and developers were ready to move forward again with building housing.

Finally, A Clear Path to Construction

On Aug. 6, 2024, the Salinas City Council approved the first tentative map for residential development in the North of Boronda Future Growth Area. The successful applicant was Stonebridge Homes, a Monterey Bay area developer now building houses in Hollister, in San Benito County.

An existing 189.27-acre parcel within the 760-acre Central Area Specific Plan is being divided into 437 individual lots. Most of the lots (427 of the 437) will be used for single-family and multi-family residences. Ten additional lots here will be reserved for parks, open space, and public and semipublic activities.

On those 427 lots will be a total of 1,674 dwelling units. The original application proposed 1,778 residential units on these lots, but greenhouse gas emissions limits forced the developer to eliminate 104 units.

Among the approved 1,674 units will be 487 single-family, townhomes, land homes, and green court dwellings. There will be 615 condominiums, apartments, and courtyard apartments/condominiums. Finally, there will be 572 rental condominiums, apartments, and courtyard apartments.

The developer has committed to offering 335 of the 1,674 units as affordable housing for various income levels below the median. Among those 335 affordable units, 201 of them will be rentals, with 67 of those designated as very low income and 134 as low income. To encourage ownership by households with incomes below the median, 134 units will be offered for sale with a 30-year deed restriction, with 67 of these 134 units designated as moderate income and the other 67 as “workforce income.”

Stonebridge Homes also signed an agreement dated Nov. 27, 2020 with some local housing advocates to facilitate compliance in law and in spirit with the “Inclusionary Housing” ordinance enacted by the Salinas City Council on June

6, 2017. The developer will build affordable housing for ownership and not exercise an alternative option to pay “in-lieu” fees to the city. It will obtain one building permit for affordable housing for every six permits it obtains for market-rate housing, to avoid the possibility that affordable housing is scheduled for a later phase of the development and then never gets built if the economy veers into recession and development comes to a permanent halt. Stonebridge Homes will also distribute the units designated for households below the median income throughout the development, rather than segregating affordable housing away from the rest of the community.

Construction is expected to start in late 2026. Ultimately, Stonebridge Homes expects six or seven additional construction phases within the Central Area Specific Plan after the new approved project is built. This will include two-story condominium units for ownership, courtyard apartments, townhomes, single-family homes, and even five-story apartment buildings with retail on the ground floor.

Next: The East Area Specific Plan

In February 2024, city staff began preparing the East Area Specific Plan—the third of the three specific plans for the North of Boronda Future Growth Area. This specific plan will abide by the guidelines of the new “Visión Salinas 2040” General Plan to replace the 2002 General Plan. The City of Salinas released a draft of the Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan to the public on Dec. 19, 2025, for an informal comment period ending Feb. 13, 2026.

For the East Side Specific Plan, the City of Salinas is proposing a “place type” found nowhere else in the city: “Hillside Neighborhood (HN).” The draft Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan describes what this means:



The City of Salinas is in the process of developing the East Area Specific Plan of the North of Boronda Future Growth Area, as well the plan's environmental impact report.

The City of Salinas will “allow primarily residential development in a manner that preserves the natural terrain and geography between Old Stage Road and waterways to the south branching from the Natividad Creek Tributary. These neighborhoods include primarily detached single-family homes on large individually owned lots and are intended to preserve the natural topography of the area and provide a transition and urban buffer between residential development and nearby hillside or open space land.

Supporting uses include schools, neighborhood-serving parks, community/senior centers, and places of worship.” In addition, the Visión Salinas 2040 General Plan identifies the need to “incorporate wildfire protections into the East Area Specific Plan to mitigate risk along its Old Stage Road boundary and

adjacent fire hazard zones to the northeast.”

The Salinas Planning Commission received a comprehensive report at its April 16, 2025 meeting on the status of the East Area Specific Plan. This report also referenced a separate planning process within the East Area Specific Plan for a proposed development of 852 housing units called Bardin Ranch.

Why Build This Housing on the Outskirts? What About Infill Development?

The City of Salinas and the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce regard large-scale residential development and smaller infill development as pieces of a balanced choice of housing options. Density development on scattered parcels throughout the city is not enough to increase the supply of housing to the point

that ordinary households will experience some relief from the cost of renting and buying housing.

It would be wrong to claim that the City of Salinas is neglecting the potential of infill development to fulfill its state-mandated Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) goals. Infill projects are emphasized in the City of Salinas 6th Cycle Housing Element (2023-2031). These include Alisal Marketplace, Edge of Downtown/Front and John Streets, Foods Co Shopping Center, Laurel West Shopping Center, and Sears (Northridge Mall).

Completion in 2023 of The Alameda apartment complex on Abbott Street introduced 110 new units, including 50 units for Salinas Union High School District workforce housing. Your Chamber encourages other large employers in Salinas and in Monterey County to consider workforce housing on infill parcels.

City policies enacted to advance infill development in the revitalized urban core of Downtown Salinas have shown measurable success. Examples of recent adaptive reuse of underused and vacant commercial buildings to residential uses include 301 Main St. with 50 new units and 300 Main St. with 19 new units. On Nov. 18, 2025, the Salinas City Council voted 5-1 for a Land Disposition and Development Agreement for private construction of a new three-story mixed-use building with 66 residential units on the site of the city's Parking Lot 12.

These projects pursue the vision of the 2015 Salinas Downtown Vibrancy Plan for

people to live, work, and recreate in Downtown Salinas. This is a central location with walkability, historic and aesthetic character, and accessibility to public transit.

Overall, opportunities for this kind of housing construction is limited. In fact, a dominant source of new housing in Salinas during the past few years is individual accessory dwelling units (ADUs) built by single-family property owners.

The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Role in the Housing Vision

City leaders often cite the North of Boronda Future Growth Area as an essential component of the city's economic and social future. Your Chamber agrees. But the

path to get to the start of construction has been long and costly.

Consider the many millions of dollars that landowners and developers have spent over the past 25 years on the North of Boronda Future Growth Area, without one

residential unit ever being built or sold. This gives the public an idea of why housing isn't built and why housing is so expensive. The System wears everyone down who tries to do something, to the advantage of people who already have homes and don't see any personal benefit of more housing built near where they live.

Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce will continue to monitor the progress of these proposed developments, the experience of developers in the city's permit process, and the activities and statements of the always-present critics who want to stop housing of various kinds — and sometimes, all kinds. 🌿

City leaders often cite the North of Boronda Future Growth Area as an essential component of the city's economic and social future. Your Chamber agrees. But the path to get to the start of construction has been long and costly.

See Monterey Launches ‘Monterey 1000,’ Inviting Visitors to Experience More Than a Thousand Years of Monterey County History

As the nation marks its 250th year, Monterey County turns the lens inward — sharing the moments and people that have shaped the iconic destination for more than a millennium.

See Monterey announced the launch of Monterey 1000, a year-long storytelling experience that brings more than a thousand years of Monterey County history to life. As the United States looks ahead to its 250th anniversary, Monterey 1000 (M1000) invites visitors to explore a broader timeline — one rooted in the people, places and ideas that have shaped the region and continue to define it today.

Spanning Indigenous stewardship, exploration and settlement, agriculture, literature, music, conservation and innovation, Monterey 1000 connects pivotal moments from the past with the landscapes, communities and traditions visitors experience today.

“Monterey 1000 is storytelling at its core — a journey through history that ultimately invites travelers and residents to experience Monterey County today through the moments, places and cultures that shaped it,” said Rob O’Keefe, president & CEO of See Monterey. “As the country reflects on 250 years of American history, Monterey 1000 reveals a deeper timeline — one that still shapes how California thinks about land, culture, creativity and stewardship.”

M1000 is a curated, editorial approach guided by lead curator Brian Edwards, library & museums director for the city of Monterey. Working with See Monterey and a network of local writers, historians, artists and subject-matter experts, Edwards is leading the development of original written, visual and video storytelling throughout 2026.

“Monterey County has long been a place where influential ideas take shape,” said Edwards. “Monterey 1000 gives us the opportunity to explore those ideas across time and show how history continues to live through the landscapes, industries and communities’ visitors experience today.”

Throughout 2026, new content will roll out across SeeMonterey.com and See Monterey’s social channels, spotlighting defining moments in the County’s history and pairing them with ways travelers can experience those stories



D.M. Troutman

firsthand — from walking through historic districts, visiting museums and landmarks, attending marquee events and spending time in the County’s extraordinary natural spaces to supporting local farms and wineries.

“More than ever, travelers are seeking authentic, life-enriching experiences and the meaning behind them,” said O’Keefe. “Monterey 1000 connects the historical dots, creating a clear through-line from the past to the present through visitor experiences.”

The breadth of historical experiences throughout the County include kayaking across the Monterey Bay through waters stewarded by Indigenous communities for generations — now protected as a global model for marine conservation, catching the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, a modern evolution of Bing Crosby’s legendary Clambake that introduced Monterey County to a worldwide audience, and retracing John Steinbeck’s immortalized world of Cannery Row, including the Monterey Bay Aquarium — housed in a former sardine cannery — to see

how a place once rooted in extraction became a leader in ocean science, education and conservation.

Additional stories and historic touchpoints will be released each month throughout 2026 and will explore:

Monterey County’s many “firsts,” from early exploration and governance to milestones in preservation, culture and innovation. The rise of agriculture in the Salinas Valley, where fertile land and railroad connections helped earn the region its title as the “Salad Bowl of the World” — a legacy visitors can still taste today. Music, art and cultural movements that put Monterey County on the world stage and continue to draw audiences year after year. Monterey County’s wine country roots shaped by terroir, climate and craft, evolving today into a distinctive, experience-driven wine region that travelers can encounter firsthand.

The series also reflects See Monterey’s The Right Path initiative, highlighting a long-standing commitment to preservation, community and responsible travel — encouraging travelers to slow down, respect the land and sea, explore with intention and engage in ways that honor both the County’s history and its future.

To explore Monterey 1000 and follow the journey through a thousand years of history, visit SeeMonterey.com/Monterey1000.

About See Monterey

See Monterey is a 501(c)(6) non-profit organization that drives tourism for Monterey County. Tourism is the largest industry on the Monterey Peninsula and the second largest in the county. See Monterey is a partnership of the hospitality community and local governments that aims to generate community prosperity and enrich economic vitality for Monterey County through the responsible growth of the tourism economy. In 2024, travel spending in Monterey County was \$3.1 billion, supporting nearly 28,000 jobs and generating \$310 million in state and local tax revenue that directly benefited the community. For more information, visit SeeMonterey.com. 🌿



Kaiser Permanente Employees Volunteer at Kammann Elementary for MLK Day of Service

Kammann Elementary School in Salinas received a fresh weekend makeover thanks to Kaiser Permanente employees taking part in the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service. Kaiser Permanente leaders, staff and their family members — many from the nearby Salinas Medical Offices — volunteered. They prepared the school garden for planting, painted a new running track for the student running club and freshened up the teachers' lounge. It marked the first time a Monterey County site was selected for the organization's week of service, which is in its 22nd year. The work

was part of a week of service in communities throughout Kaiser Permanente Northern California where more than 1,900 volunteers worked across 40 project sites. "We chose Kammann Elementary because it's truly our neighbor," said Dr. Meena Pai, Physician in Chief for the Greater San Jose Area. "Being a good neighbor means showing up, supporting local schools, and investing in the well-being of families."



Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority Board of Directors Select General Manager/Chief Administrative Officer Candidate to Lead Next Phase

The Board of Directors of the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority has selected Cesar Zuniga as its candidate for General Manager/Chief Administrative Officer position, subject to the successful completion of contract negotiations. Zuniga was chosen following a comprehensive recruitment and evaluation process led by the Board. With more than 30 years of experience in the solid waste industry and over 24 years of dedicated service to the SVSWA, he brings unmatched institutional knowledge, proven leadership, and a deep commitment to public

service. With a career that began in frontline operations and progressed to executive leadership, Zuniga represents a success story built on hands-on experience, dedication, and a deep understanding of every level of the organization. Throughout his tenure, Zuniga has held progressively responsible leadership roles, including nine years as Assistant General Manager, more than 13 years as Operations Manager, and over three years as Solid Waste Technician/Landfill Inspector. In these roles, he has successfully led diverse teams, managed multimillion-dollar budgets, and guided the development of new programs to meet evolving state and federal mandates. Zuniga has played a key role in advancing sustainable waste diversion strategies, strengthening regulatory compliance, and improving operational efficiency across the organization. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Human Resources, earned while working full-time for the SVSWA, and is certified as a Safety Officer. His expertise spans operational leadership, budget development, contract negotiation, and regulatory compliance, supported by a deep understanding of the SVSWA'S history dating back to 1995.



HARTNELL COLLEGE

Hartnell College Recognizes 1,989 Students on President's Honor Roll and Dean's List for Fall 2025

Hartnell College recognized the academic excellence of 1,989 students who earned placement on the President's Honor Roll or Dean's List for the Fall 2025 semester. To qualify for either distinction, students must be enrolled in a minimum of 12 units and demonstrate outstanding academic performance. A total of 798 students were named to the Dean's List, earning a grade point average between 3.0 and 3.49. An additional 1,191 students earned placement on the President's Honor Roll by achieving a grade point average between 3.5 and 4.0. These honors reflect the dedication, perseverance and academic excellence demonstrated by Hartnell College students across all areas of study. Students recognized for this achievement will receive an official letter from the Hartnell Community College District

acknowledging their academic success. Hartnell College congratulates all students who earned this distinction and commends them for their hard work and commitment to academic achievement during the Fall 2025 semester.



Chick-fil-A North Salinas Supported Local Nonprofit Through the 2026 True Inspiration Awards Program

Chick-fil-A North Salinas recently supported a local nonprofit through the 2026 True Inspiration Awards program. The restaurant helped facilitate the local award process, which resulted in the Elkhorn Slough Foundation being selected as a Care for the Planet recipient and awarded a \$60,000 grant. Founded in 1982, the Elkhorn Slough Foundation is a nonprofit land trust dedicated to conserving and restoring the Elkhorn Slough and its watershed. The organization focuses on habitat restoration, protection of native species, improved water quality, and community stewardship. This recognition highlights the impact of local partnerships and the importance of environmental conservation within the Salinas Valley community.



Bay Federal Credit Union Raises Nearly \$66,000 for Local Food Banks

Bay Federal Credit Union raised an astounding \$65,945.83 for local food banks across Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties through a holiday giving campaign focused on member donations, local shopping, and employee support. The campaign included a \$10,000 donation match, allowing Bay Federal to match member contributions to partnering food banks dollar-for-dollar. Additional funds were raised through a Black Friday weekend promotion, during which Bay Federal donated one dollar for every eligible local purchase made by credit card holders between Nov. 28 and Dec. 2, 2025. "It's truly remarkable what we can accomplish when our community comes together," said Carrie Birkhofer, President and CEO of Bay Federal Credit Union. "Through generosity, local support, and a commitment to our food banks, our members and employees helped ensure families in our community had access to essential resources during the holiday season." The funds raised benefited Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County, the Food Bank for Monterey County, and the Community FoodBank of San Benito. Bay Federal's volunteer Community Support Committee also organized collections in Credit Union branches, ensuring direct local impact and member participation in each county. "We were deeply grateful for Team Bay Federal's recent participation in our Holiday Food & Fund Drive," said Michelle Bassi, Chief Development Officer at Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County. "Bay Federal's community-first approach and generous support will help thousands of local neighbors access nutritious food in 2026 — together, we are ensuring no one in our community goes hungry." With food banks continuing to see increased demand, the campaign provided essential support to help address food insecurity for families throughout the Central Coast.

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TICKETS & EVENT DETAILS

- Tickets went on sale Feb. 12 at carodeo.com.
- Ticket prices are \$60 for grandstand seats (ages 2+), \$90 for standing floor tickets (ages 2+), and \$100 for box seats (all ages).
- Venue: Salinas Sports Complex (1034 N. Main St., Salinas).

This electrifying concert will kick off the rodeo festivities in style, setting the stage for an unforgettable week of celebrating Western culture and community with the California Rodeo Salinas taking place July 16-19.

Country Superstar Miranda Lambert to Headline Big Week Kick Off Concert July 11th

The countdown to Big Week begins in a big way as the California Rodeo Salinas announces that country music powerhouse Miranda Lambert will headline the 2026 Big Week Kick Off Concert on Saturday, July 11, at the Salinas Sports Complex. One of the most celebrated artists in modern country music, Lambert brings her signature grit, storytelling, and chart-topping hits to the Central Coast for a high-energy night that launches the rodeo festivities in unforgettable style. As the most-awarded artist in Academy of Country Music history — including their top honor for Entertainer of the Year — Lambert has earned three Grammys, 14 Country Music Association Awards, seven No. 1 solo albums and 10 No. 1 radio singles, cementing her status as one of the genre's most influential voices. Rising country star Dylan Scott will perform just before Lambert, plus future announcements of additional openers will be coming soon. The concert is presented by Taylor Farms and produced by California Rodeo Salinas and David Drew Productions, with media support from KSBW TV 8, Central Coast ABC, and KTOM 92.7FM.





RIBBON CUTTINGS & CHAMBER EVENTS

by Chamber Staff



Member Orientation Kicks Off Strong

Our first Member Orientation of the year kicked off in late January with a full house ready and eager to learn more about Chamber benefits, programs, and opportunities to get involved. Attendees had the chance to connect with one another, ask questions, and gain insight into how to maximize their membership. A special thank you to Valley Restaurant and Catering for providing a delicious lunch.



Partnership for Children Marks 10 Years of Impact and New Office Opening

Partnership for Children celebrated a decade of service alongside the opening of their new office, marking an exciting milestone for the organization. Guests enjoyed a charcuterie spread, wine bar, and the opportunity to reflect on the nonprofit's impact over the past 10 years. Founded in 2016 by Executive Director Jennifer Ramirez, Partnership for Children continues to expand its reach across the Central Coast, providing transportation and family support services that ensure children receive consistent, compassionate care.



Lunch Connect at The Pizza Factory

Members gathered for a Lunch Connect at The Pizza Factory, enjoying an informal, relaxed networking opportunity over a lunch buffet featuring pizza, salad, soup, and breadsticks. The casual setting allowed attendees to introduce themselves, share about their businesses, and build new connections. Events like Lunch Connect offer members a simple and effective way to strengthen relationships while supporting local restaurants.



Lunch & Learn with Read to Me Project

Members joined a Lunch & Learn to hear from the Read to Me Project about its mission to empower children and communities through literacy. Attendees learned about the organization's vision, programs, and growing impact, including its presence in more than 100 classrooms and reaching over 3,700 students during the 2024–2025 school year. The session highlighted the critical role literacy plays in education and long-term community success.

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perpetuating the accusations until the project owner finally surrenders and gives you what you demand.

It's a tried-and-true strategy! It happens all the time, all over the state. There are lawyers and law firms that make a lot of money operating in this legal arena.

Because so many parties have figured out how to misuse CEQA to pursue self-interested objectives unrelated to environmental protection, your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce supports the "Building an Affordable California Act." This is a statewide ballot measure proposed by the California Chamber of Commerce that would streamline the environmental review process and limit the ability of parties to manipulate CEQA for their personal financial gain.

Even in Monterey County, CEQA Unnecessarily Wastes Money and Delays Projects

A recent example in our region of this kind of CEQA objection is two lawsuits filed in 2020 by three local school districts against the City of Salinas. In their lawsuits, the school districts alleged that comprehensive environmental impact reports prepared by city staff with consultants and then approved by the city council for the West Area Specific Plan and for the Central Area Specific Plan of the North of Boronda Future Growth Area were inadequate. They did not comply with state law.

The lawsuits delayed housing construction for four years. It's likely you weren't aware of these environmental lawsuits, or know little about them. Someone might ask why this alleged threat to the environment wasn't addressed and resolved in public. Surely people wanted to find a solution, right?

You probably wonder why your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce never brought together all of the interested parties to

negotiate a plan to protect the environmental habitats that might be harmed by development in these areas. Wouldn't everyone benefit from a solution, rather than wasting years in court proceedings and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on lawyers?

You may also be perplexed that no environmental groups held a press conference or organized a rally to support the school districts in their quest to save the environment from threats that the City of Salinas allegedly ignored. And where were the housing advocacy groups with their creative ideas for environmental mitigation? And why didn't government and community leaders take leadership in calling for a solution to protect the environment while allowing housing to be built?

[Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce supports the 'Building an Affordable California Act,' a statewide ballot measure that would streamline the environmental review process and limit the ability of parties to manipulate CEQA for their personal financial gain.](#)

None of this happened because the lawsuits weren't really about the environment. They were about money!

Building the Case for Inevitable Lawsuits

During the 2019 public review of drafts of the West Area Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report, representatives of the Salinas Union High School District, Alisal Union School District, and Santa Rita Union School District submitted similar comment letters stating that their districts might not have enough money to accommodate students from housing built under the West Area Specific Plan. Therefore, these students would have to go to existing schools, which would have reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts on traffic, noise, air quality, and other categories that require evaluation under CEQA.

The city responded that these

concerns were addressed in the document: five school sites were reserved in the Specific Plan, with one school already built, another under construction, and three more planned. In addition, it was noted that school districts (not cities) set developer impact fees for schools, and the state (not cities) determines the amount that can be charged in fees.

The Santa Rita Union School District sent two subsequent letters to the City of Salinas on Dec. 4 and Dec. 10, 2019, claiming that the city's CEQA review process violated the Ralph M. Brown Act, a state law meant to ensure that government business is conducted transparently and openly. This is a typical legal tactic used to try to delay the legislative process of approving environmental review documents.

Nevertheless, the Salinas City Council approved the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the West Area Specific Plan on Dec. 17, 2019.

Sue Me, Sue You

School district boards held closed session meetings (not open to the public) about legal strategies and recommendations. On Jan. 16, 2020, the Santa Rita Union School District and the Salinas Union High School District filed a lawsuit in Monterey County Superior Court (Case Number 20CV000242) against the City of Salinas.

Landowners and developers responded. On Sept. 10, 2020, a consortium countersued the Santa Rita Union School District in Monterey County Superior Court (Case Number 20CV002455), contending that the school districts did not have the authority to set their

own developer school impact fees.

Meanwhile, the school districts were setting up their second lawsuit challenging the Central Area Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report. During the 2020 review of the draft document, representatives of the Salinas Union High School District, Alisal Union School District, and Santa Rita Union School District again submitted similar comment letters with the same arguments made against the West Area Specific Plan documents.

The Salinas City Council approved the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Central Area Specific Plan on Nov. 17, 2020. On Dec. 17, 2020, the Alisal Union School District and the Salinas Union High School District filed a lawsuit in Monterey County Superior Court (Case Number 20CV003402) against the City of Salinas. Now there were two CEQA lawsuits involving the North of Boronda Future Growth Area.

It took a couple of years for the Monterey County Superior Court to issue decisions in these cases. On Jan. 19, 2022, a judge ruled that the Santa Rita School District and the Salinas Union High School District had enough valid arguments to require the City of Salinas to make some minor changes to the Final Environmental Impact Report for the West Area Specific Plan.

Following this decision, city officials had to deliberate on how to prepare a supplemental environmental impact report to address changes indicated by the judge. How would the city properly inform the public about the speculative assertion that there may be inadequate funding to construct new schools? And what would comprise a complete list of potential environmental impacts near existing schools if the school districts had insufficient funding to build new schools?

While the City of Salinas considered these questions, the West Area Specific Plan landowners

decided to fight the Monterey County Superior Court decision on their own, under their status as Real Parties in Interest. On Feb. 8, 2022, a consortium of landowners and developers appealed the Monterey County Superior Court decision in Case Number 20CV000242 to the California Sixth District Court of Appeal (where it became Case Number H049854).

Then, another decision dropped against the City of Salinas. On March 13, 2023, a different Monterey County Superior Court judge ruled that the Alisal Union School District and the Salinas Union High School District had enough valid arguments to require the City of Salinas to make some minor changes to the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Central Area Specific Plan.

In response to this second Monterey County Superior Court ruling in Case Number 20CV003402, the City of Salinas chose to appeal on May 11, 2023, to the California Sixth District Court of Appeal (where it became Case Number H051077).

Momentum turned in favor of the City of Salinas on Aug. 10, 2023, when the appeals court reversed the lower court decision in the West Area Specific Plan lawsuit. The ruling concluded that the city's environmental impact report properly assumed that new schools would be built and also adequately addressed potential impacts. In addition, the court ruled that the city properly addressed the developer school impact fees.

At some point in 2023 before this appellate court decision, the Salinas Union High School District settled its issues and ceased to be a participant in the lawsuits.

On March 24, 2024, the Monterey County Superior Court judge vacated the March 13, 2023 decision concerning the Central Area Specific Plan and ruled in favor of the city, based on the appellate court decision for the West Area

Specific Plan. The CEQA fight was over, and landowners and developers could resume plans for construction of housing.

The Subtext of CEQA Lawsuits

We members of the public do not get access to negotiations and settlements. Behind closed doors, the people in suits make the decisions for the public.

It's quite possible that the school districts would have withheld or withdrawn their objections to environmental review if the North of Boronda Future Growth Area landowners and developers had agreed to pay them a large and immediate sum of money. Or, the school districts may have been satisfied if the landowners and developers had agreed to build the schools themselves and then transfer ownership of the completed buildings to the school districts.

The real motives and issues behind objections to environmental review under the California

Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) are rarely revealed to the public. Threats, offers, leverage—and ultimately, deals—determine the public business behind closed doors.

But the average person not involved in these negotiations and decisions continues to believe that the controversy is about protecting the environment and quality of life from developers.

Postscript: The North of Boronda Future Growth Area May Not Cause Overcrowding. It May Prevent Schools from Closing!

Among the three school districts involved in the lawsuits, enrollment has only increased over the past 10 years in the Salinas Union High School District, where enrollment was 14,437 in the 2014-2015 school year and 15,813 in the 2024-2025 school year—an increase of 10%. But even there, enrollment has declined from a recent peak of 16,525 in the 2021-2022 school year

to 15,813 in the 2024-2025 school year—a 4% decline in three years.

The elementary schools in Salinas have experienced steady enrollment decline for years. From the 2014-2015 school year to the 2024-2025 school year, enrollment at Alisal Union School District dropped from 9,153 to 7,303—a 20% decline. Enrollment at Santa Rita Union School District dropped from 3,292 to 3,088—a 6% decline.

Meanwhile, enrollment at the neighboring Salinas City Elementary School District (outside of the North of Boronda Future Growth Area and not involved in the lawsuits) dropped from 9,125 to 8,236—a 10% decline.

Perhaps the costly and time-wasting demands of school districts for speculative assessment of the environmental impacts of overcrowded schools should have instead been strong support for new housing development that may keep schools open and maintain employment for teachers and classified staff. 🌱

Enrollment Change in Ten Years for Salinas Union High School District and Its Seven Feeder Elementary School Districts

	Salinas Union High School District	Alisal Union School District	Santa Rita Union School District	Salinas City Elementary School District	Spreckels Union Elementary	Washington Union Elementary School District	Lagunitas School District	Graves Elementary School	Total
2014-15	14,437	9,153	3,292	9,125	974	974	286	36	38,277
2015-16	14,691	9,282	3,425	9,105	970	970	276	39	38,758
2016-17	15,040	9,235	3,519	9,023	973	973	262	46	39,071
2017-18	15,631	9,162	3,568	8,844	987	987	249	40	39,468
2018-19	15,818	8,835	3,646	8,689	981	981	231	42	39,223
2019-20	16,257	8,750	3,588	8,566	996	996	238	42	39,433
2020-21	16,423	8,372	3,470	8,271	955	955	229	40	38,715
2021-22	16,525	7,851	3,306	8,287	921	921	180	35	38,026
2022-23	16,337	7,509	3,231	8,273	918	918	160	31	37,377
2023-24	16,225	7,339	3,186	8,206	888	888	162	36	36,930
2024-25	15,813	7,303	3,088	8,236	850	850	161	32	36,333
Enrollment Change 2014-2015 to 2024-2025	1,376	-1,850	-204	-889	-124	-124	-125	-4	-1,944
	9.53%	-20.21%	-6.20%	-9.74%	-12.73%	-12.73%	-43.71%	-11.11%	-5.08%

Source: California Department of Education DataQuest website at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dataquest.asp>

Local Bank CEO Named to Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco Board

Appointment Underscores West Coast Community Bank's Roots, Reach and Strength

West Coast Community Bank (WCCB) announced that Krista Snelling, chairman and chief executive officer, has been elected to the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco's (FRBSF) Head Office Board of Directors, elevating community banking's voice in regional and national banking policy.

Snelling previously served on the FRBSF's Community Depository Institutions Advisory Council for one year before joining the board, where she represented community banks and the economic needs of California's Central Coast. She is also immediate past chair of the California Bankers Association.

Snelling's latest appointment comes at a time when West Coast Community Bank — the largest community bank headquartered on California's Central Coast¹ — continues to strengthen its presence and economic role in Monterey County. An economist at heart, Snelling also currently holds the position of president of the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership, reinforcing the Bank's commitment to regional economic vitality. Plus, the Bank has 58 bankers based in King City, Monterey and Salinas at its three full-service branches and core operations center that houses Branch Operations, Central Operations and eBanking.

"I am honored to represent our 200+ shareholders, thousands of loyal clients and the one-third of our Board of Directors based in Monterey County on the FRBSF board," said Snelling. "At a time when many community banks are struggling, it is encouraging to see the strong performance of WCCB be recognized² and its leaders asked to serve as advocates for



Krista Snelling, chairman and chief executive officer of West Coast Community Bank, has been elected to the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco's (FRBSF) Head Office Board of Directors.

community banking on the Central Coast and beyond."

"Our mission has not changed," added Snelling. "We are here to serve Monterey County with deeper resources, stronger relationships and more powerful voices in regional and national banking conversations than ever before. We look forward to continuing to grow from a position of strength, supported by internally generated capital."

West Coast Community Bank and its predecessors have served Monterey County for more than 20 years, establishing deep local roots and steadily growing its

team. Monterey County is a core market and one of the Bank's most significant:

- Nearly 40 percent of total deposits, \$967 million, originate in Monterey County.
- A quarter of all loans, totaling \$517 million, support Monterey County businesses; so, nearly every dollar deposited locally recirculates through lending.
- More than 41% of WCCB shareholders reside in Monterey County, which reinforces local ownership and community alignment.
- A team of 58 local bankers is

FACT SHEET

Snelling is part of a broader leadership team supporting Monterey County communities and shaping community banking policy:

- **One third of the Bank's board of directors is Monterey County natives** who currently reside in Carmel Valley, Salinas and Soledad.
- **Monterey County-based bankers at West Coast Community Bank hold 26 leadership positions** in civic and charitable organizations, further strengthening community ties.
- **John Sisk, executive vice president chief banking officer, serves as chair of the American Bankers Association Community Bankers Council for 2025-2026**, where he helps set the national policy agenda for community banks.
- **Maxwell Sinclair, executive vice president chief risk officer, serves as chair of the California Bankers Association Federal Government Relations Committee** and provides policy and compliance expertise on issues affecting community banks statewide and federally.

based in three branches in King City, Monterey, and Salinas as well as the Bank's operations center in Salinas.

- The Bank holds a strong and expanding market share in Monterey County³.

The Monterey County banking team is led by Regional President Richard Aiello, a lifelong resident. The local lending and deposit teams include bankers based in King City, Monterey and Salinas with 402 years of combined banking experience specifically serving the needs of businesses and neighbors in this county.

The Bank's approach reflects its belief that banking is strongest when decisions are made locally by people who understand the community. Understanding this community requires personal investment by bankers as well as financial investment by WCCB.

Over the past five years, their Monterey County bankers have donated nearly 1,300 service hours and participated in 274 community events while the

Bank has invested \$1.9 million in organizations supporting health, human services or community development as well as wellness and stability for low-to-moderate income individuals, seniors and minorities.

Through two successful community bank mergers in the past seven years, Lighthouse Bank (2019) and 1st Capital Bank (2024), West Coast Community Bank has retained its local identity while increasing its capacity to lend as well as its ability to invest funds in Monterey County community

initiatives.

In late 2025, the Bank extended a \$30 million asset-based line of credit — the largest credit facility

in its 22-year history — to a national grower on one of the oldest farms in Monterey County. Winning business at a level commensurate with regional and national banks in the current

banking climate is possible when community banks join together.

WCCB remains well capitalized and continues to expand through disciplined, internally funded growth. Plus, more than 200 local

shareholders own more than 41% of the Bank. The Bank also now holds the largest market share in Monterey County of any community bank headquartered in the county or region³.

About West Coast Community Bank

Founded in 2004, West Coast Community Bank is the wholly owned subsidiary of West Coast Community Bancorp, a bank holding company. The Bank is a top-rated, locally operated and full-service community bank headquartered in Santa Cruz, Calif. with branches in Aptos, Capitola, Cupertino, King City, Monterey, Salinas, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Watsonville. Visit wccb.com for more information. 🌱

At a time when many community banks are struggling, it is encouraging to see the strong performance of WCCB be recognized and its leaders asked to serve as advocates for community banking on the Central Coast and beyond.

¹ S&P Capital IQ Pro, California Banks by Asset Size (as of December 31, 2024).

² Ranked no. 4 overall among top U.S. publicly traded banks (Bank Director 2025 RankingBanking Report); America's Best Regional Banks 2026 (Newsweek); America's Growth Leaders for 2026 (TIME); 2025 Top-performing U.S. Banks (American Banker); 2025 Top 100 Community Banks (S&P Global Market Intelligence); "Superior" rating for each quarter of 2025 (BauerFinancial, Inc.)

³ Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Deposit Market Share Report as of June 30, 2025.

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Member Name	Member Since	Member Name	Member Since
California Water Service	1962	Express Employment of Monterey County	2019
Valley Trophies	1967	Balance Physical Therapy & Human Performance Centers	2021
Monterey One Water	1985	Bank of America Financial Center	2021
Cushman & Wakefield	1987	Bank of America Financial Center	2021
Seneca Family of Agencies	1997	Central Coast Cooling, LLC	2021
IPG International Produce Group LLC	2002	Christensen & Giannini, LLC	2021
Monterey Credit Union - Salinas	2002	Growers Custom Equipment	2021
Salinas Public Library, Steinbeck	2005	ITNMontereyCounty (Independent Transportation Network)	2021
Maureen Wruck Planning Consultants	2006	Monterey Bay FC	
<i>*20 Years*</i>		SAGE, Sustainable Ag & Energy	2021
Monterey County Bank	2008	Adobe	2022
Alta Vista Mortuary	2010	Core6.Marketing	2022
First 5 Monterey County	2011	Alisal Long Term Care Pharmacy	2023
Arts Council for Monterey County	2014	BLANCO CONSTRUCTION SERVICES INC	2024
Maya Cinemas	2014	Gowans & Co.	2024
Monterey County Housing Authority	2014	Hijos Del Sol Arts Productions Monterey	2024
Development Corporation		County BAR Association Smith Medical	2024
Disaster Kleenup Specialists	2015	Pedicures	2024
East Bay Tire Co. (Salinas Service Center)	2016	Floor & Decor	2025
<i>*10 Years*</i>		RVS Technology Group	2025
InterContinental - The Clement Monterey	2016	Salinas Home Town Heroes	2025
<i>*10 Years*</i>			
ARCpoint Labs of Monterey Bay	2018		
Central Coast Community Energy (CCCE)	2018		
Kevin C. McWilliams	2018		

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR VISIONARY AND STAKEHOLDER MEMBERS





Jose Arreola Brings a Service-First Vision to the City of King as New City Manager

By Colleen Bailey, SVCC President & CEO

By any measure, Jose Arreola's move from Salinas to King City is a professional milestone. But when he talks about it, what comes through most clearly isn't ambition — it's affection. For the people, for the work, and for a place he is only just beginning to know, step by deliberate step.

"I keep hearing everyone call it King City," he said with a smile during a recent conversation, but it was officially incorporated in Monterey County as the "City of King" in 1911. That distinction matters. It's emblematic of the care he brings to public service — the belief that history and community pride are not small things, but foundational ones.

And Jose is doing a deep dive into everything related to King City; its foundational documents, its budget and its impressive legacy of large-scale community events such as the Salinas Valley Fair, which demonstrates the city's potential to punch beyond its weight.

Jose will soon take the helm as King City's new city manager, a role he approaches with equal parts excitement and humility. One of his first plans is a walking tour with a local historian, an opportunity to



Jose Arreola will soon take the helm as King City's new city manager.

learn how the city got its name and, more importantly, how it became what it is today. "You can't lead a place," he said, "without understanding its story."

A Career Built on Community

Jose's path to King City has been non-traditional but shaped by a consistent theme: service rooted in relationships. His professional journey

includes leadership roles in San Jose and Salinas, where he built a reputation as a thoughtful administrator and collaborative problem-solver. His move to Salinas, he joked, was initially inspired by a personal relationship with his wife, Brenda, who was from Salinas — but it quickly became a formative chapter in his career.

In Salinas, Jose worked closely with multiple city managers and other leaders, gaining firsthand experience in municipal leadership, organizational development, and community engagement. In recent years he was the person tasked with following up with people who spoke during public comments to understand how the city can help solve their expressed problems. He credits those years with sharpening his ability to step into complex

environments and to demonstrate respect for existing leadership and for community members who represent diverse perspectives.

"You don't walk into a city thinking you're there to 'fix' it," he said. "You walk in ready to listen. You need to understand why they think what they think. People will then be less skeptical and see you as an ally" and the resulting solutions will be more collaborative.

That philosophy has shaped his view of King City, where he expressed admiration for the progress made under City Manager Steve Adams. Jose pointed specifically to advances in violence prevention, something he cares deeply about because of his work with the Community Alliance for Safety & Peace (CASP) and the difficult but necessary work of rebuilding trust after past controversies. He also noted the strong working relationships among the city council, mayor, and staff — a foundation he's eager to build upon rather than disrupt.

A Leap — and a Confident One

Jose is candid about the fact that this role represents a significant career leap. His time as the assistant to the city manager in

Salinas was relatively brief, about 18 months, but his whole career in Salinas was in the city manager's office where he had great proximity to city leaders.

He admitted that he learned a lot from his time working with Rene Mendez, Salinas' current city manager, whom he holds in very high regard. He recognizes that he could learn more by staying where he has been, but these promotional opportunities to apply to the city manager role come around rarely, so you have to leap when given the opportunity.

Jose is unapologetic about the transition and admits that he loves the leaps. While he did not take the traditional path to city manager through municipal leadership roles, he believes leadership skills are transferable. For Jose, those skills were forged long before city hall, beginning in his first career as an educator and school administrator.

Just out of college, Jose spent time as a founding staff member of a charter school in San Jose called Downtown College Prep. As the school expanded, he spent a year community-organizing and writing the charter for the organization's first middle school that opened in

Jose appreciates the opportunity to dive in and learn everything he can and to see what value he can bring to the community of King City. He believes that fresh eyes can help to see the richness that is often taken for granted by people who see it every day.

the Fall of 2008 called Downtown College Preparatory Alviso with Jose serving as the founding principal— experiences that required organizational development, educating stakeholders, and managing growth.

He sees clear parallels between those roles and the demands of city management. And he appreciates the opportunity to dive in and learn everything he can and to see what value he can bring to the community of King City. He believes that fresh eyes can help to see the richness that is often taken for granted by people who see it every day.

Educating, Not Selling

One of Jose's early responsibilities will be educating the community about a proposed sales tax measure expected to appear on the November ballot. "People deserve to understand what city government does, what it costs, and what the tradeoffs are," he said.

King City's current two-year budget cycle, which provides stability through the next fiscal year, has allowed the city to operate leanly while maintaining core services, including an effective police department. Jose views transparency around these realities as essential to maintaining public trust. That trust, he believes, is the currency of local government.

Cities as Service Organizations

Jose often describes cities as customer-service organizations — a phrase he uses deliberately. Residents, he notes, pay for services with their hard-earned tax dollars. The responsibility to deliver quality, responsive service should be taken just as seriously as in any private-sector enterprise.

Family-First Leadership Style

He traces his positive and collaborative leadership style back to his mother, whose calm, compassionate approach to adversity left

a lasting impression. "She would always try to turn a challenge into something fun and interesting." From her, he learned that empathy and accountability are not opposites — they are partners.

In practice, that means setting high expectations for staff while also creating a supportive, family-informed work environment. "You can care deeply about people," he said, "and still expect excellence."

Looking Beyond City Limits

While Jose is focused on King City, his vision is unmistakably regional. He plans to engage actively in collaborations around shared challenges such as water and sewer infrastructure, and to ensure King City has a strong voice in regional efforts when it has benefit to King City.

His experience in Salinas — particularly in coordinating violence prevention work at local, county, and regional levels — has reinforced the importance of an outward-facing approach to governance. "Cities don't exist in isolation," he said. "Our challenges and opportunities are connected."

As he prepares to move, Jose speaks often about the support he's received from his family, his colleagues and community members across Monterey County. It's a reminder that while his title is changing, his network — and his values — remain firmly intact.

King City may be a new chapter, but for Jose, it feels less like a departure and more like a continuation: of service, of listening, and of leading with purpose. Anyone who has interacted with Jose in his time in Salinas feels the loss of his departure but celebrates this new opportunity for a well-loved and appreciated community leader. The Salinas Valley Chamber looks forward to our continued work with Jose as we work to advance economic development opportunities throughout the valley. 🌱



Getty Images

The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Foundation Announces Inaugural Class of Emerging Leaders

By Colleen Bailey, SVCC CEO/President

The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Foundation is proud to announce the inaugural class of young professionals selected to participate in the Salinas Valley Junior Chamber Program (SVJCP). Following a competitive application and interview process, these outstanding individuals were chosen by the Foundation's Board of Directors to represent the next generation of business and community leadership in Monterey County.

- **Amanda Gamban**, *Community Engagement Manager*, Bay Federal Credit Union
- **Hanna Hitchcock**, *Associate Attorney*, Ottone & Leach, LLP
- **Jonathan De Anda**, *General Manager*, Salinas Regional Sports Authority*
- **Savannah LaShomb**, *Marketing Manager*, Chick-fil-A North Salinas
- **Sam Eastman**, *Vice President*, Brent Eastman Insurance

Designed for professionals ages 22–42, the Salinas Valley Junior Chamber Program empowers participants through meaningful networking opportunities, leadership development, and hands-on community involvement.

Services, Inc.

- **Athena Morris**, *Project Manager*, TMD Creative
- **Jorge Alejos**, *Community Engagement Coordinator*, Monterey Bay Football Club
- **Karla Rivas**, *Finance & Operations Director*, Arts Council for Monterey County
- **Natalie Angulo-Cruz**, *Galaxy Party Supply*
- **Jason Avalos**, *Business Development*, Disaster Cleanup Specialists
- **Francisco Arevalo**, *Financial Advisor*, Antone Mercurio, LLC

- **Jack Gillott**, *Law Clerk*, A Johnson Law Group, PC
 - **Celia Garcia**, *Marketing Manager*, Mersshops Northridge Mall
 - **Kendall Costa**, *Educator*, Salinas High School
- *2025 Salinas Valley Chamber's Young Professional of the Year*

The members of this inaugural class showcase the diverse businesses that strengthen the Salinas Valley's economy and embody the leadership and community commitment that the Chamber proudly represents. Their selection marks an exciting milestone for the Foundation as it launches a program dedicated to cultivating leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement among emerging professionals.

Designed for professionals ages 22–42, the Salinas Valley Junior Chamber Program empowers participants through meaningful networking opportunities, leadership development, and

hands-on community involvement. As a program of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Foundation, SVJCP connects rising leaders with experienced Chamber mentors and provides opportunities to plan and execute impactful initiatives that strengthen the local business community—most notably the annual Children's Shopping Tour.

Program members meet monthly, serve on at least one committee, and participate in quarterly events focused on professional growth and community impact. Through this immersive experience, participants build lasting relationships, develop essential leadership skills, and gain a deeper understanding of the Chamber's role in shaping the region's economic vitality.

The Foundation is excited to welcome this inaugural class and looks forward to the lasting contributions they will make to Salinas Valley's business community and beyond. 🌱

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CHAMBER NEW MEMBER PROFILES

The YWCA of Monterey County

YWCA Monterey County is a leader in ensuring a safe, healthy, and dignified community, empowering women to live to their fullest potential. Sustained by its values and commitment to diversity, equity, and justice, YWCA-MC provides education, advocacy, and services that prevent and address all forms of violence against vulnerable members of our community. Its programs, conferences, and wrap-around services work to empower the community as a safe place for girls and women every step of the way. YWCA recognizes the inequalities that preface so much of the violence plaguing our communities and work to stamp out those root inequalities. YWCA's involvement in education, local government, police departments, with healthcare professionals, trauma and addiction specialists, legal advocates, business owners, and a diverse public who support our mission prepare us to provide violence prevention and intervention services for our entire community. Through our growing coalitions across classes, cultures, and neighborhoods we are becoming a stronger force to end the oppression of women in Monterey County and empower all girls and women.

Ywcamc.org info@ywcamc.org, (831) 422-8602.



Central Valley Vein and Wound Center

Central Valley Vein and Wound Centers is a premier network of wound, vein, and vascular clinics serving Fresno County, Kings County, Tulare County, San Joaquin County, and Monterey County. Dedicated to delivering the highest standard of care, they specialize in comprehensive vascular, vein, and wound treatments tailored to meet the unique needs of each patient. Their experienced team of providers is specially trained to address a wide range of conditions, including venous insufficiency, varicose veins, and chronic wounds. The center prides itself on offering state-of-the-art care, featuring advanced minimally invasive procedures such as phlebectomy, sclerotherapy, and vascular interventions. Their in-house diagnostic services include vascular ultrasound and Doppler examinations, ensuring accurate assessments for conditions like peripheral arterial disease (PAD) and venous insufficiency—all conveniently provided under one roof. At Central Valley Vein and Wound Centers, personalized care is their priority. They strive to create a welcoming and compassionate environment where patients feel heard and supported every step of the way. Whether you're seeking treatment for a chronic wound or looking to improve vascular health, their clinics are equipped to provide the expert care you deserve.

cvveinandwound.com, jr@medscalemanagement.com, (559) 269-8867



Loaves, Fishes & Computers

Loaves, Fishes & Computers enables individuals to reach their full potential by providing low-cost computers and computer literacy classes to local low-income families, while providing volunteers the opportunity to learn and explore technology through their service to the community. LFC is dedicated to closing the digital divide by providing services that support digital equity and thereby a person's ability to achieve economic self-reliance. Proper connectivity, access to quality devices, digital skills and workforce development opportunities are all critical services that LFC focuses and aims to provide to our communities. LFC's three programs — Computer Distribution and Repair, Digital Literacy, and Volunteer & Tech Development, work to address the digital tech gap and create a more inclusive digital community. They provide the tools, resources, and experiential opportunities to support our underserved community members to navigate the ever-increasing digital landscape and access the tools they need.

lfctech.org, info@lfctech.org.



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Monterey Electric Systems

"Running my own business has always been a goal. After 15 years in the electrical industry, the right opportunities and relationships helped make that happen," says Irlesis Rodriguez, owner of Monterey Electric Systems. "Starting Monterey Electric Systems gave me the chance to approach the work the way I wanted—focusing on good service, clear communication, and building something that lasts. Customer service is a priority. Professionalism, clear communication, and staying engaged with every customer make a big difference. Tools and equipment are always well-maintained, and every job is handled with care from start to finish. Meeting people and solving problems are the best parts of this work. Troubleshooting electrical issues and getting things working again is always satisfying, but knowing it helps someone in a real way makes it even better. Outside of work, family comes first. My wife is a dedicated stay-at-home mom, and we have two wonderful kids—a 12-year-old and a 4-year-old. Community involvement is also important, from volunteering with youth organizations to participating in the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Alisal Rotary Club. Staying active in church and making time for exercise help keep life balanced. Monterey Electric Systems is built on trust, reliability, and quality. Serving the Salinas Valley with honest, professional electrical work is something I take seriously, and I appreciate every customer who puts their trust in us."

montereyelectricsystems.com, support@montereyelectricsystems.com



Wealth is Rising in the Salinas–Monterey Region

Monterey Bay and the Salinas Valley are known for their rich history in agriculture, hospitality, and innovation. Many come to work, start businesses, live, and retire in this area with beautiful landscapes, proximity to the beach, golf courses, and entertainment.

The region encompassed by Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties is experiencing a growth in wealth, separate and independent from the traditional enclaves of Pebble Beach, Pacific Grove, and Carmel Valley.

According to a Beacon Economics presentation to the Monterey County Business Council last fall, this new wealth is being sourced from greater household income and wage growth, rising real estate values, and the ancillary economic gains from the region's tourism and agriculture sectors.

Adding to this exciting economic momentum, Bank of America Private Bank's Tony Gonzalez also notes, "We're seeing more first-generation wealth creators — especially mid-size to large business owners — than ever before. This entrepreneurial energy is reshaping the financial landscape of the entire region."

Today, BofA's Private Bank manages nearly \$1 billion in assets across the Monterey Bay region, working closely with ultra-high net worth individuals and families.

Business Owners Fueling New Wealth

As demographic changes mean baby boomers are retiring, more business owners are considering their options as to passing not just their businesses to a family member, colleague or to a third party, but also legacy planning for their



Bank of America Private Bank's Tony Gonzalez

hard-earned income and assets.

This is where business owners working with advisors can really pay off.

BofA Private Bank reports that it's been working with more Monterey-Salinas business owners than ever before, advising owners on wealth planning strategies, tax considerations, lending services, as well as succession planning and exit strategies.

"We can even help get a business client the best valuation for a third-party business sale, and then help manage the liquidity following the sale," Gonzalez says. "We're far more than just a wealth advisory — we provide liquidity and cash flow needs, short and long-term strategies, estate and endowment guidance, liquidity for people with illiquid assets or who otherwise need capital, and tax strategies, among many other specialty services."

Specialized Ag and Farm Advisement

One of those specialty services is wealth advisement for farm owners and the agriculture sector. BofA's Private Bank has a specialty group that specifically helps farmers

manage what are often more-complex assets, helping them manage their property and operations efficiently while planning for future generations.

This boutique-style service gives clients the white-glove concierge-level of service with a trusted professional.

And it's not just for business owners.

Preparing the Next Generation

A big part of what private banks like BofA do is educating the next generation of family members who will inherit that wealth, so they're prepared to manage the estate.

As those demographic changes of an aging population continue, experts say a great wealth transfer of hundreds of trillions of dollars will be passed to the next generation over the next decade.

This means estate planning for assets and trust services for efficient tax strategies and transferring wealth to the next generation are more important than ever. And it's a core element of ultra-high net wealth advisory firms like BofA's Private Bank.

But families aren't the only beneficiaries of this growing wealth in the Monterey Bay region.

Philanthropic Opportunity

Charities, foundations, and nonprofits are a strong element of the community, and many wealthy individuals and families value philanthropy as a way to give back and help influence positive, lasting impact locally.

According to the 2025 Study of Philanthropy by Bank of America, the vast majority of wealthy Americans donate to charity.

During a presentation at National Philanthropy Day held by the Monterey Bay Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals in November, BofA Private Bank philanthropic strategist Misti Sangani noted that total charitable giving among wealthy households has surged more than 30% over the past decade, donating roughly 10 times more than the general population, on average.

BofA Private Bank's philanthropic strategists advise wealthy clients on donor strategies, directing donations to endowments, foundations and nonprofits, even establishing formal giving vehicles such as donor-advised funds.

The region's business owners have been more charitably minded as well, says Gonzalez. It's a topic he is personally passionate about, as a nonprofit board member himself, to help entrepreneurs give back and make a positive difference in

their communities.

"The Monterey-Salinas business community is incredibly generous," he says. "We help our business and wealth clients channel that passion into strategic philanthropy that creates lasting impact — not just for families, but for the broader region."

In a market that is growing as quickly as Monterey and Salinas, having more dollars directed to local causes is good news to all. 🌱

BofA Private Bank reports that it's been working with more Monterey-Salinas business owners than ever before, advising owners on wealth planning strategies, tax considerations, lending services, as well as succession planning and exit strategies.

Why is the Farm Bureau Worried About Amazon?

By Norm Groot, Executive Director, Monterey County Farm Bureau

Just about everyone has seen the enormous Amazon facility rising in the South Salinas area. To say this is the largest building construction project in Monterey County would be an understatement. Sitting on farmland that used to produce leafy greens and vegetables, the facility will bring new jobs and opportunities to our community.

So why is Farm Bureau worried about Amazon? The answer is primarily centered on the logistical operations of the facility once it starts operations — the additional trucks and employee car trips that will impact the South Salinas roadways, particularly Abbott Street and Harkins Road.

The configuration of street access to Highway 101 will be critical to Amazon as they commence operations in late 2026 or early 2027. Their northbound trucks, either coming or going, will need to wind their way through a maze of streets to access the Airport Boulevard interchange with the highway, or alternatively, on Sanborn Road. Trucks heading south will have easy access using the existing on-ramp to Highway 101 near the Firestone Industrial facilities.

What this means is more trucks and cars in South Salinas on a daily basis, adding to the existing congestion in the area, particularly in the late afternoon hours. Many times, both Abbott and Harkins are gridlocked at that intersection simply because there are too many vehicles and capacity is exceeded. Poor traffic flow has plagued this area for many years, including poor traffic engineering at some of the intersections and poorly timed lights.

What is concerning to the Farm Bureau is the traffic impacts that will slow travel times to the food processing facilities in the South Salinas area; the transportation of freshly harvested



leafy greens and vegetables are time sensitive and needs to arrive in reasonable time frames from the fields.

Delaying harvested crops in transport to these facilities harms their freshness as well as the overall shelf-life of the product once placed in a bag or tray. Also, the dispatch of these value-added products, once processed and loaded for transport to supermarkets and restaurants, could be delayed by additional traffic congestion in the area.

The issues of traffic in South Salinas have existed prior to Amazon coming to town. Pavement conditions have deteriorated in the area over the past decade or more. Adding more trucks and employee travel trips to and from the Amazon facility will lead to additional congestion, and the Airport Boulevard overcrossing at Highway 101 is, at best, sub-optimal.

But there are plans for improvements! Caltrans is planning a new interchange on Highway 101 for Abbott Street near Harris Road. This will provide a more-direct access

route to the Amazon facility and relieve congestion at the Airport Boulevard interchange. This project is currently scheduled for construction starting in 2031, if all goes to plan.

There will be a six-year gap, or more, between Amazon commencing operations and the new interchange being available for traffic. This gap is what concerns Farm Bureau as the local businesses and processing facilities will need to adapt to additional congestion in the South Salinas area.



Configuring traffic flow for the additional vehicles to ensure that minimal impacts to our food processing facilities will be critical to ensuring continued operation of all businesses in the South Salinas area.

We can all speculate on how Amazon will operate and how the culture of our community will change due to those operations. Configuring traffic flow for the additional vehicles to ensure that minimal

impacts to our food processing facilities will be critical to ensuring continued operation of all businesses in the South Salinas area.

While we all want Amazon to be a good partner in our community, ensuring that those impacts don't hinder other businesses from continued success is something Farm Bureau is rallying for. 🌱

It's Expensive to Farm in California

By Norm Groot, Executive Director, Monterey County Farm Bureau

There is a lot of talk surrounding the narrative that California is an expensive place to live. Housing is relatively unaffordable for most California residents in the “working class” and prices of utilities and gasoline continue to be higher than other states. The affordability index seems to have no limit on how high it might go.

Not as much attention is focusing on the cost of doing business in California. True, California has one of the most heavily regulated environments in the nation, but we also enjoy the benefits of maintaining that environment for all to enjoy. But let's look at how expensive California's regulatory structure is impacting the production of food in Monterey County.

Back in 2006, a study was commissioned to gain an understand the costs of regulatory compliance for lettuce growers in the Salinas Valley. With new programs to manage water and air quality, high workers compensation rates, along with workplace rules and pesticide use reporting, the total regulatory compliance costs for California came to \$109.16 per acre of lettuce produced.

While this was not eye-popping at the time, this regulatory compliance cost did amount to about 1.26% of the total cost of producing a lettuce crop.

Ten years later, the study was repeated using the same parameters of lettuce growers in the Salinas Valley. This time the numbers were much more eye-popping, showing an increase of 795% to \$977.34 per acre of lettuce produced. There were big changes in that decade since the first study, including new requirements for health care benefits and food safety protocols. This compared to a modest 24% increase in the costs of inputs into growing the lettuce crop.

In 2017, regulatory compliance



D.M. Troutman for SeeMonterey.com

California maintains the strictest regulatory structures for the application of agricultural chemicals in our nation, along with increasing regulatory requirements for water quality and now groundwater sustainability.

costs amounted to 8.9% of the cost of producing a lettuce crop, a significant increase from just a decade prior.

Last year, Monterey County Farm Bureau commissioned an update of the study, once again using the same parameters of lettuce growers in the Salinas Valley, to remain consistent with what was commissioned in 2006. There were new regulatory programs for water quality, groundwater sustainability, and significant changes in workplace wage rules that precipitated the data review.

Not surprisingly, the costs of regulatory compliance in California had, once again, increased dramatically, coming in at \$1,600 per acre of lettuce produced and 12.6% of the total cost of production.

The study now indicates that costs of regulatory compliance in California have risen 1366% since 2006 while costs of production have risen 44%



comparatively. During the same timeframe, the wholesale price of lettuce rose only 43% indicating that the production costs are outpacing the price that growers receive for producing the crop.

While this study reflects the regulatory compliance costs for a single crop type, it can be applied to all fresh food crops produced in the Salinas Valley as the regulatory constraints are the same.

California maintains the strictest regulatory structures for the application of agricultural chemicals in our nation, along with increasing regulatory requirements for water quality

and now groundwater sustainability. Growers of all crops in California are challenged by complex regulatory oversight and reporting requirements that continually add to the costs of production. Overall, this is placing growers in the Salinas Valley at a disadvantage compared to other states and countries.

All of these regulatory compliance costs add to the cost of living and working in California. We can all talk about the affordability index when it comes to housing, but the true affordability index is in how regulatory compliance becomes a significant cost of the food produced in our state. 🌱

Celebrating Women's History on a Local Level: Honoring the Trailblazers of the Salinas Valley

By Colleen Bailey, SVCC CEO/President

Each March, the nation celebrates Women's History Month with a unifying theme. This year's theme, "Leading the Change: Women Shaping a Sustainable Future," honors women who are driving long-term, equitable progress in environmental, economic, and social justice. It recognizes that women have often been at the forefront of lasting solutions—and that is certainly true here in the Salinas Valley.

When I look around our community, I am surrounded by remarkable women leaders: superintendents, city council members, healthcare professionals, attorneys, nonprofit executives, and countless others answering the call to confront serious challenges, from climate change and economic insecurity to healthcare disparities and threats to democratic participation. What is truly extraordinary is not simply that women have stepped into leadership roles, but that they consistently lift other women up—offering mentorship, encouragement, and guidance that makes the path to leadership just a little easier for the next generation.

There are women in our community without whom I would not have emerged as a leader myself. Anne Leach, a respected local attorney and former Chamber Business Woman of the Year, served as Board Chair at the National Steinbeck Center during my first year as Executive Director. I credit her mentorship with helping me learn the ropes in my first nonprofit leadership role.

Similarly, Laura Zehm, former Chief Administrative Officer and



Salinas Public library from 1909-1960 before being demolished in 1961.

Chief Financial Officer of Montage Health, was my Board Chair at the Monterey Jazz Festival as I navigated leading a large performing arts organization through the pandemic. Her positive attitude and thoughtful advice played a critical role in ensuring the organization emerged from that difficult period stronger than it entered.

Jennifer Williams, CEO of the Natividad Foundation, was the Board Chair who hired me into my current role. She deserves immense credit for holding the Chamber steady during a period without staff leadership and for setting the stage for a smooth and successful transition. These women are just a few examples of the powerful culture of women supporting women that defines our community.

What is truly extraordinary is not simply that women have stepped into leadership roles, but that they consistently lift other women up—offering mentorship, encouragement, and guidance.

Today, the Salinas Valley benefits from a robust network of professional organizations supporting women across industries including healthcare, law, real estate, technology, and agriculture. Organizations such as Alliance on Aging, YWCA, Mujeres en Acción, and Impower—an initiative that grew out of the Salinas Valley Chamber and continues to thrive—

advance women in meaningful ways. Grant programs like the Community Foundation for Monterey County's Women's Fund and leadership development opportunities such as the Women's Leadership Institute at CSU Monterey Bay further strengthen the pipeline of women leaders.

But long before this ecosystem of support existed, there was the Salinas Woman's Club.

Founded on August 25, 1906, and incorporated in June of 1919, the Salinas Woman's Club emerged in the aftermath of the devastating 1906 earthquake. As the community rebuilt, the Club advocated for sanitation improvements, wooden sidewalks, and gaslights along Main Street. Its members were deeply engaged in civic life, championing city improvements and volunteering on community projects—often partnering with local businesses to secure essential resources.

For more than a century, the Women's Club of Salinas has made extraordinary contributions to our community. Members helped raise funds to build the Carnegie Library on Main Street, supported the World War I and World War II war efforts, and provided room and board for soldiers' wives visiting their husbands at Fort Ord Military Hospital.

In recent years, members have continued this legacy of service by contributing countless volunteer hours to organizations such as the National Steinbeck Center, First Mayor's House, the Steinbeck House, AFT Intercultural Programs, Meals on Wheels, Monterey County Reads/Panetta Institute, Monterey County Historical Society, and Alliance on Aging.

It also played a central role in organizing Salinas Founders' Day celebrations alongside the Salinas City Council from 2014 to 2019, ensuring that our City's history is preserved in the hearts and minds of those who live and work in Salinas.

On a personal note, as I reviewed the list of past Club presidents, one name stood out to me: Dorothy



Old Salinas Woman's Club building, 215 Lincoln St. Salinas.

Lacey, who served as president from 1940 to 1941. Dorothy was my neighbor when I was born and became like a grandmother to me. With no extended family in the area, she became my adopted grandmother, leaving an indelible mark on my life and shaping my understanding of community, generosity, and leadership.

The women of the Salinas Valley truly stand on the shoulders of giants. It is now our responsibility to carry their legacy forward and pass the torch to the next generation. Fortunately, we live in a community rich with opportunities to lead, serve, and uplift one another—and that is something well worth celebrating. 🌿

AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT KIMBERLY RIOS



A California native, Kimberly Rios was born and raised in Salinas and continues to reside in the area. She enjoys supporting and working with small businesses as well as volunteering for community events since she has lived here her whole life and enjoys giving back to her community. She takes pride in being part of the journey for individuals and helping businesses grow in any way. She currently holds a position at Wells Fargo as a Personal Banker assisting consumers and businesses with their financial needs and goals. She has prior management experience and over 10 years of customer service experience. In her free time, she enjoys exploring the nature around Salinas Valley and finds herself naturally drawn to beach walks and hiking trails with beautiful views.

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Demystifying Options

By **Bill Hastie**, Hastie Financial Group

One of the challenges facing investors today is the amount of financial instruments available to implement in their investment portfolios. Some of the more common include mutual funds, exchange traded funds, and separately managed accounts that are pooled investment instruments, most typically of stocks or bonds. With this type of instrument, if the price of the underlying assets increases, the investor makes money, and vice versa.



What if there was a financial instrument that has the potential to make money whether the price of the underlying asset rises or falls? One such instrument are options. Options are financial contracts that give the buyer of the option the right, but not the obligation, to purchase or sell an underlying asset at a specific price for a certain period of time. Options are available for many different assets, such as stocks, bonds, commodities, and market indexes.

The buyer of the option pays a premium to the seller for the right to buy (in the case of a call option) or sell (in the case of a put option) an underlying asset at a certain price, known as the strike price, until the expiration date of the option. Conversely, the seller of the option has the obligation to buy or sell the underlying asset in the event the buyer exercises the option prior to or at the expiration date.

Options are typically used to



Getty Images

generate income, asset protection or for speculation. In the case of being used to generate income, an investor can sell call or put options that are not likely to be exercised (referred to as “out of the money”) and receive a premium as payment for the option. The risk to the seller is that the price of the underlying asset moves more than believed and is obligated to buy or sell the asset at potentially an unfavorable price.

Put options are commonly used for asset protection in a few

Options are financial contracts that give the buyer of the option the right, but not the obligation, to purchase or sell an underlying asset at a specific price for a certain period of time. Options are available for many different assets, such as stocks, bonds, commodities, and market indexes.

different ways. One example is if an investor owns a large amount of a stock and wants to protect against a sharp decline in price. The investor would buy a put option at the price below its current market price. This is referred to as a protective put. Should the stock price rapidly decline, the seller of the put option is obligated to purchase the stock at the strike price of the option.

Options can also be used for speculation. Speculation is a bet on the direction of future prices. Here, the investor can either purchase a

particular stock, for example \$100 per share, or purchase a call option on the stock for just a few dollars. If the stock price rapidly rises, the owner of the option can exercise the option and purchase the stock at potentially a favorable price. If the stock price does not increase, all that is lost is the premium of the option.

The information above merely scratches the surface of the use of options as an investment tool. The uses and techniques of options investing are quite complicated, but once understood, can be attractive. An investment professional would be able to assist in the proper use of options and may be a good resource for benefiting from options investing. 🌱

Bill Hastie, MBA, CFP®, CIMA®, AIFA®, is a Financial Advisor and Managing Partner with locally owned Hastie Financial Group and can be contacted at william.hastie@hastiefg.com.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Ribbon Cutting with CHISPA Housing**

Friday, March 6, 2026, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m., 295 Main St., Salinas

You're invited to join CHISPA (Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association, Inc.), the largest private nonprofit housing developer based in Monterey County, as we celebrate the acquisition of a historic downtown Salinas property with a ribbon cutting ceremony. Located at 295 Main St., Salinas, the century-old building—originally constructed in 1926—is part of Salinas' early 20th-century commercial history and has been documented through the City of Salinas historic resources survey. Located in the heart of downtown, the property has long contributed to the civic and economic life of Main Street. Today, the building hosts CHISPA's main administrative offices, serving as the operational hub for the organization's affordable housing development, property management, and resident services that support more than 1,500 housing units and community developments across the Central Coast, reinforcing its long-term commitment to downtown Salinas and the communities it serves. Guests are invited to enjoy light refreshments, hear remarks about the acquisition, and learn more about the key partners who helped make this milestone possible.

- **Golden State Paint Expands with New Watsonville Location**

Thursday, March 12, 2026, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m., 1405 Freedom Blvd., Watsonville

We're excited to announce the grand opening of the new Golden State Paint Co. location in Watsonville. As a locally owned Benjamin Moore retailer, they bring years of experience serving the Central Coast with high-quality products and unmatched customer service. Come celebrate their Watsonville Storefront opening with a ribbon-cutting event, and enjoy complimentary tacos.

- **Lunch & Learn with RVS Technology Group**

Tuesday, March 17, 2026, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m., 119, E. Alisal, Salinas

Feeling lucky? Join us for a Lunch and Learn as RVS Technology Group hosts an exclusive Lunch & Learn at the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce. This one is not your average midday meeting. Join us to meet the Women of IT from RVS Technology Group, enjoy lunch on us, and walk away with real, practical insights that help protect your business, reduce downtime, and strengthen your technology foundation. And because it *is* St. Patrick's Day there will be RVS swag giveaways, Lucky shamrock cookies, and a few fun surprises you'll want to be there for. This is a limited-space, in-person session designed for local business leaders who want clarity—not jargon—around IT, cybersecurity, and proactive systems.

- **Monterey County STEM Talent Expo**

Wednesday, March 18, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m., Hartnell College, 411 Central Ave., Salinas

The Monterey County STEM Talent Expo brings together students, job seekers, educators, and employers for a free, one-day event focused on career readiness and workforce connections. Attendees will have access to free professional headshots, mock interviews with industry professionals, and opportunities to network with more than 25 employers and education partners across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields. The event also features a keynote address, industry panel discussion, and student spotlight speakers sharing firsthand experiences navigating STEM education and career pathways. Advance registration is required to attend and to participate in mock interviews and professional headshots. Register for free on Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/welcome-to-the-monterey-county-stem-talent-expo-2026-tickets-1906561961149?aff=oddtcreator>.

- **Milla Legal Document Services 10-Year Anniversary Mixer**

Thursday, March 19, 2026, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m., 90 W. Alisal St. Salinas

Join us for a 10-Year Anniversary Chamber Mixer with Milla Legal Document Services, co-hosted with TMD Creative. Enjoy refreshments, drink, and connect with chamber members in a relaxed and welcoming environment. Milla Legal Document Services specializes in providing self-help services to the public, offering expert assistance in various legal matters. Their services include: Living Wills and Trusts, Trust Amendments, Deed Preparation, Name Changes, Divorce, Family Law Cases, and more. To learn more about the event, visit salinaschamber.com.

- **105th Annual Awards Luncheon**

Thursday, April 9, 2026, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Sherwood Hall, Salinas

The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce is thrilled to host the 105th Annual Awards Luncheon. This premier event is a vibrant celebration of achievement, business excellence, member milestones, and community spirit, drawing over 400 influential business leaders and community members from across the Salinas Valley. As the largest networking event in Monterey County, it's an unparalleled opportunity to connect, collaborate, and celebrate local success stories. To learn more about the event, visit salinaschamber.com.

- **Lunch and Learn with Hastie Financial Group**

Tuesday, April 14, 2026, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m., 119 E. Alisal St., Salinas

Join us for an informative Lunch and Learn with Hastie Financial Group. Topics include financial literacy and investing. Tune in via Zoom or in person. Lunch will be provided. For more information, visit SalinasChamber.com.

RSVP at salinaschamber.com

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both economic development and community prosperity.

The Board and staff view these partnerships as essential to fulfilling the Chamber's mission: "A thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where People, Families, and Businesses

succeed via economic opportunity and growth."

Finally, the Board recognized the importance of transparency. In some corners of the community, there has been talk of "back-room deals" and "power brokers," occasionally with accusations directed at the Chamber. The Chamber has

heard clearly from its members that you want your organization involved in the decision-making processes that affect your businesses. For many, that is exactly why you joined.

Having a seat at the table does not mean deals are being made in secret. The Chamber Business

Journal outlines the work of the Government Relations Committee each month and includes multiple articles explaining the Chamber's positions on key issues. The Chamber will continue to focus on being a trusted source of information on matters that affect both your business and our community. 🌱



NON-PROFIT EVENTS

'Keywords Confidence: From Huh? to Heck Yeah! in 60 Minutes' – Women's Business Center

March 3, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m., Zoom

This workshop will teach you the magic of keywords and how using them correctly can raise your visibility online. Join presenter Jackie Clendenen as she walks through: What the term keywords really means Where to use them in your content Why keywords drive traffic to specific places How to find the best keywords for your industry. Register here: <https://mcscorp.ecenterdirect.com/events/3043>

Monterey County STEM Talent Expo – Hartnell College

March 18, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m., 411 Central Ave., Salinas, Hartnell College

The Monterey County STEM Talent Expo brings together students, job seekers, educators, and employers for a free, one-day event focused on career readiness and workforce connections. Attendees will have access to free professional headshots, mock interviews with industry professionals, and opportunities to network with more than 25 employers and education partners across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields. The event also features a keynote address, industry panel discussion, and student spotlight speakers sharing firsthand experiences navigating STEM education and career pathways. Advance registration is required to attend and to participate in mock interviews and professional headshots. Advance registration is required to attend and to participate in mock interviews and professional headshots. Register for free on Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/welcome-to-the-monterey-county-stem-talent-expo-2026-tickets-1906561961149?aff=oddttdtcreator>.

Introduction for the Caltrans Small Business Program — Women's Business Center

March 25, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m., Zoom

Join us for an enlightening session presented by Richard Myerscough and Traci Adams, District Small Business Liaisons for Districts 5 & 10, respectively. Richard and Traci will offer invaluable insights into the Caltrans Small Business Program, guiding you through: Program Overview. What is the Caltrans Small Business Program, and how can it benefit your business? Certification Know-How: Learn about the range of business certifications that Caltrans recognizes, making your firm more competitive for state contracts. Community resources: Find out about the resources available to both emerging and established businesses to optimize your relationship with Caltrans. Don't miss this opportunity to get your questions answered in a live Q&A. Equip your business with the knowledge and tools needed to pave your own road to success with Caltrans! REGISTER HERE: <https://mcscorp.ecenterdirect.com/events/3054>

The Sea Otter Classic

April 16-19, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., 1025 Monterey – Salinas Highway, Salinas – WeatherTech Raceway

The Life Time Sea Otter Classic is a "celebration of cycling." It's a festival for anyone who enjoys or appreciates the bicycle and outdoor adventures. Whether a cyclist or a spectator, folks of all ages can share in the excitement and camaraderie of the Sea Otter Classic. If you love the idea of being part of a cool scene with active people who all share a passion for bicycles and the outdoors—come! Sea Otter is for road, gravel and mountain bikers. It's for kids, commuters and recreational cyclists, and, yes, the Sea Otter Classic draws the very best racers—both amateurs and pros. No other event gives you such up-close access to your cycling heroes. The Sea Otter Classic mostly takes place at Weathertech Laguna Seca Raceway, 1021 Monterey Salinas Highway, Salinas. Festival hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Thursday through Saturday, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sunday. Please note: the schedule is subject to change — check back often for any daily schedule updates/changes.

BE SURE TO VISIT THE CHAMBER WEBSITE FOR UP-TO-DATE LISTINGS



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- Grow brand awareness
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