MEMORANDUM

DATE August 2026

TO Jonathan Moore
City of Salinas, Community Development Department

ADDRESS 200 Lincoln Avenue
Salinas, CA 93901

FROM Alexis Mena, Associate Principal
PlaceWorks

SUBJECT **Phase 1 Salinas Zoning Code Updates**
California Environmental Quality Act Exemption Memorandum

Introduction

PURPOSE

This Exemption Memorandum serves as an evaluation of the City of Salinas (City) Phase 1 Zoning Code update (proposed project) for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance. This Exemption Memorandum was prepared to present the findings resulting from the CEQA compliance review.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY AND REQUIREMENTS

Once a lead agency determines that an activity is a project subject to CEQA, the lead agency must then determine whether the project is exempt from CEQA. State CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15061(b) outlines the ways in which a project may be exempt. A project is exempt from CEQA if at least one of five criteria is met:

1) The project is exempt by statute (see, e.g., Article 18 of the CEQA Guidelines, commencing with Section 15260).
2) The project is exempt pursuant to a categorical exemption (see Article 19, commencing with Section 15300) and the application of that categorical exemption is not barred by one of the exceptions set forth in Section 15300.2.
3) The activity is covered by the common-sense exemption that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA.
4) The project will be rejected or disapproved by a public agency (see Section 15270(b)).
5) The project is exempt pursuant to the provisions of Article 12.5 of Chapter 3.

The proposed project would be exempt as a common-sense exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) because implementation of the proposed project would not have the potential to cause a significant effect on the environment, as further discussed under the heading *Findings Concerning CEQA Exemption*.

Project Description

REGIONAL LOCATION

The City of Salinas is approximately 105 miles south of San Francisco in Monterey County and at the north end of the Salinas Valley. Salinas is surrounded by unincorporated rural and agricultural land. Nearby unincorporated communities include Bolsa Knolls and Natividad to the north, Speckles to the south, and Boronda to the west. United States Highway 101 (Highway 101), State Route (SR) 183, and SR 68 run through the City. Highway 101 is the north to south route connecting the Salinas Valley and Monterey County to the south to the San Francisco Bay Area to the north. SR 183 runs in an east to west direction, connecting Castroville and Highway 1 to the Salinas Valley. SR 68 runs in a north to south direction and connects the areas of Monterey and Carmel to Salinas.

PROPOSED PROJECT

Zoning codes are regulations set by local governments to mandate land use and development, including building requirements and density limits. The purpose of a zoning code is to ensure organized and harmonious community development. The Salinas Zoning Code can be found in Chapter 37 of the Salinas Municipal Code, with housing regulations related to reasonable accommodations found in Chapter 17.

Updating the City's Zoning Code will be a long-term process broken into three phases. The proposed project covers Phase 1, Short-Term Priority Amendments. In Phase 1, the City proposes amendments related to compliance with State housing law and the City's Housing Element, and other City priorities and legal compliance requirements. The proposed project consists of amending the City's Zoning Code to:

- Update definitions and add terms in Article I Division 2.
- Amend the purpose statement, use classifications table, additional use regulations, design standards, and/or footnotes in the Agricultural, Residential, Commercial, Mixed Use, Industrial, Public/Semipublic, New Urbanism, and Central City Overlay Districts (Article III Divisions 1-5, 7-8 and Article IV Division 5).
- Amend the supplemental regulations in Article V Division 1 regarding density bonus, employee housing, two-unit development, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), emergency shelters home occupations for food businesses, and temporary uses of land for seasonal sales.
- Modify parking requirements and driveway design requirements for residential uses in Article V Division 2.
- Amend the required findings for conditional use permits and remove the conditional use permit for driveway width increase in Article VI Division 8.
- Amend Chapter 17 Article IV Reasonable Accommodation to align with State law.
- Incorporate additional editorial and non-substantive wording updates.

Findings Concerning CEQA Exemption

SECTION 15061(B)(3): COMMON-SENSE EXEMPTION

The proposed project is exempt as a common-sense exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3). This exemption applies because the proposed project does not have the potential to cause a significant effect on the environment.

ANALYSIS IN SUPPORT OF FINDINGS

The proposed project consists of revisions to the Salinas Zoning Code, a program-level regulatory document that establishes standards to guide land use and development. The proposed revisions include amendments to ensure consistency with the State housing law and implementation of the City's Housing Element, as well as updates addressing local priorities and other legal requirements. The proposed project does not include any site-specific designs or proposals to develop specific projects, nor does it grant any entitlements for any individual development projects.

The proposed revisions are regulatory and administrative in nature. As such, the proposed project would not, in and of itself, result in direct physical changes to the environment. The proposed project does not modify General Plan land use designation or increase base zoning densities. While certain proposed revisions address State housing law requirements (e.g., density bonuses, ADUs, and similar housing), these are established under State law and would apply regardless of implementation of the proposed project. The proposed project codifies and implements these requirements within the Salinas Zoning Code and does not itself establish new development entitlements beyond those permitted under existing zoning and State law. Any future development that may occur pursuant to the updated regulations would be subject to separate review and approval processes, including environmental review under CEQA, as applicable.

Accordingly, the proposed project can be considered exempt from environmental review pursuant to the common-sense exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3), as it can be seen with reasonable certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed project would have a significant effect on the environment.