

Salinas Valley Chamber Journal
Goal Setting and Keeping Our City Solvent
By: Steve McShane, Salinas City Councilmember
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Every three years, the Salinas City Council looks at short and long-term goal setting. In January we met to review and revise our goals and city progress. Our Mayor did a remarkable job keeping the Council on task to review where we've been and plot a course for the immediate future.

The first two hours of our retreat were dedicated to a thorough report on where the City has been in the last year or so. During 2018, we balanced our budget and allocated more capital improvement funding than we have in the history of Salinas. Thanks to the passage of Measure X, we have been able to leverage funds from other sources to start addressing sidewalks, roads and street trees. We have also broken ground on both our Police Services Building and a brand new El Gabilan Library.

This good news does not come without the burden of paying for heavy costs associated with the California Public Employee Retirement System (CalPers). As reported in the Salinas Valley Business Journal and elsewhere, the City is responsible for funding an additional \$70.9 million in employee retirement costs over the next 7 years. This results in a projected budget gap of \$10.6 million a year. Under the leadership of Mayor Joe Gunter, we have made funding the gap our number one priority. We are actively engaged in cost cutting measures. We have also benefitted from rising property and sales tax revenues that we continue to apply toward paying down liabilities. The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce has been a valuable partner in working with us to address the issue.

CalPERS was not the only major subject discussed at the retreat and goal setting. Your City Council has put a high priority on increasing opportunities for housing and addressing homelessness. We have considerable support with one-time state funding to address homelessness. We have also prioritized incentives for the private sector to start building. We are partners with the County of Monterey on a shelter that will engage a wide array of services to address our homeless population.

I am pleased to report that the City Council's retreat included high priorities for jobs and economic development in the City. There was ongoing discussion about ways to continue to improve the planning and building department as well. In the near future it is expected the City will look at a package of recommended improvements. I think everyone is especially proud of small businesses popping up downtown along with more downtown housing development. The City's Ag Tech programs have yielded more than (50) start-ups since inception. Some of them are located right in downtown Salinas.

The close of the retreat included a robust discussion regarding the Salinas Plan. The Salinas Plan is a report that includes dozens of recommendations for more focused

delivery of services and cost cutting measures. It is expected that the recommendations will be implemented over the next year or more.

Local government cannot exist without a strong business community and I'm convinced we need to do more. Will you help us? We need community ideas and solutions! I invite you to reach out to me with ideas and feedback at steve@mcsshaneslandscape.com or (831) 970-4141. Thank you for supporting your City and your local Chamber of Commerce.