

**TO:** James L. App, City Manager  
**FROM:** Ronald Whisenand, Community Development Director  
**SUBJECT:** Salinas River Corridor Vision  
**DATE:** October 26, 2010

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**Needs:** Consider recommendations contained in the draft Uptown/Town Centre Specific Plan regarding the Salinas River Corridor and provide direction

**Facts:**

1. Salinas River planning efforts began in earnest in 2003 following the receipt of a National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance grant. The grant enabled the City to conduct a public outreach and community visioning effort for the Salinas River Corridor Master Plan (*Follow the River – Follow the Dream*).
2. The River Vision has created a set of “place holder” concepts, including: community and regional trail connections; watershed protection and enhancement; public art and education opportunities; and, improved entry to and connections to the downtown.
3. The draft Uptown/Town Centre (UT/TC) Specific Plan was the next step in the City’s river planning efforts which took the “Follow the River” concepts and incorporated feasible access, design, and land use features into the draft specific plan.
4. One of the goals of the UT/TC Specific Plan is to increase the “value” of the river in terms of access, recreation/entertainment, and habitat/water quality. It is hoped that over time, the visual quality of the area will improve and the river becomes a destination or amenity rather than a forgotten feature of our community.
5. Following adoption of the UT/TC Specific Plan, the City’s river corridor vision will be carried out in a variety of private and public actions including:
  - a. River Trails Master Plan with design, environmental, and cost details;
  - b. Destination recreation to aid/enhance tourism opportunities;
  - c. Future public trail construction with possible grants and other outside funding opportunities;
  - d. Expanded land use options for private development taking advantage of river trail proximity (restaurants, coffee shops, bike shops/rentals, etc.);
  - e. Improved site design and architecture to improve character of this unique gateway area (i.e. four sided architecture, screened storage, access dedication, etc.)

**Analysis &  
Conclusion:**

The draft Specific Plan takes concepts and ideas generated by earlier river corridor planning efforts and establish a mechanism to accomplish them. Key river corridor goals of the UT/TC Plan include:

- **Change the City’s Orientation to the River** – Several ideas to accomplish this goal grew out of the charrette process. One concept that has received much discussion is to introduce streets or trails along the river’s bank and require buildings to front these streets or trails. A paseo has been shown at the western bank of the Salinas River from the approximate projection of 4<sup>th</sup> Street north to 12<sup>th</sup> Street. This feature would give those properties the ability (but not require) for buildings to address both Paso Robles St. and the new vehicular paseo. It would also be possible to bring the proposed river trails up to the river bank and make them more formal with added amenities that would allow private development to take advantage of river orientation and capture business at key jumping on/off points from the trail system as it links downtown connections.
- **Provide Increased Opportunities for Citizens to Engage the River** – One of the key components of the “Follow the River – Follow the Dream” visioning exercise was to create multi-use access trails and “destinations” along the river. The UT/TC plan has refined possible locations for trails that connect downtown, link the east and west sides of the Salinas, and provide north/south access along the river thereby linking future trail connections to neighboring communities. Destinations could include active or passive opportunities including but not limited to the above described paseo/river commercial center, equestrian center/trail head, hot springs interpretive center, and amphitheater.
- **Preserve and Enhance Riparian Habitats** – In an era of State and Federal mandates for handling the discharge of stormwater and the need for protection of stream channel and riparian habitats, a number of proposals contained in the plan call for restoration of river habitat. Development of areas out of the floodway will still be possible, and the City will be able to construct access features near the river. It will be important that the City begin to carefully manage the river corridor and mandate best management practices for stormwater generated by private and public development as well as other features to improve the overall quality of water entering the Salinas River.

It is important to remember that the Specific Plan contains principles that are both regulatory (what must occur) and visionary (what may occur). One common fear expressed during review of the draft specific plan was that the river vision concepts might change the character of Paso Robles St. from its “service commercial” role to a retail/visitor serving area, thereby displacing existing service commercial uses (i.e. auto repair, light manufacturing, etc.) to outlying areas. It is important to note that the Riverside Avenue Corridor, as it is referred to in the plan, **will continue to allow commercial and industrial uses**. The form and character however will be improved consistent with the City’s adopted Gateway Design Standards.

While historic land uses will remain, the introduction of the form based code will allow other commercial uses in the area that might be able to take advantage of the river, key

access/entry points to the future trail network, and destination features described above. The specific plan envisions uses such as coffee shops, restaurants with outdoor dining, retail services, etc. Again, property owners will have full control over land uses provided they are consistent with the specific plan.

**Options:**

- a. Direct staff to make any desired changes to the draft Uptown/Town Centre Specific.
- b. Amend, modify or reject the foregoing option.