

Agriculture drives city of Salinas

Growth, land use, affordable housing among challenges

Staff report

A moderate climate and rich farmland, which both helped foster Salinas' agricultural roots, have defined the city from its 1874 incorporation through today.

Sandwiched by the Gabilan Mountains to the east and the Sierra de Salinas to the west, the city that was founded as a grain town and nicknamed "The Salad Bowl of the World," remains an agricultural powerhouse.

Today, the multibillion-dollar ag industry — which harvests crops such as leaf lettuce, cut flowers and strawberries — is still the biggest moneymaker in Salinas and in all of Monterey County.

The region's temperate weather, a component of successful agriculture, also is a draw for many people moving to the area and adding to the city's fast-growing population of about 145,000. Located 12 miles from

Monterey Bay in California's Central Coast region, the city of Salinas, like much of the rest of the state, is growing quickly.

The growth, more from new births than from people moving in, presents a number of challenges for local policy makers.

Some of the main issues include land-use policies, affordable housing and general congestion.

Salinas' ag economy plays a big role in all of these issues. The preservation of farmland is a major priority for urban planners looking for room to develop new housing.

Housing advocates are searching for ways to help the city's poorest residents, many of whom are farm workers.

Policymakers also wrestle with providing adequate infrastructure — for libraries, parks and emergency services — to accommodate the city's growth.

Salinas made national headlines last year when the city nearly shut down its public library system because of budget constraints.

A fundraising campaign called Rally Salinas!, however, raised nearly \$800,000 to keep the libraries open on a minimal schedule. In November, vot-

AT A GLANCE

n **INCORPORATED:** 1874

n **POPULATION:** 143,920

n **MEDIAN HOME PRICES:** East Salinas \$460,000; north Salinas \$555,000; south Salinas \$540,000 (approximate as of February).

n **VISITOR INFORMATION:** Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, 424-7611, www.salinaschamber.com.

n **MAYOR/COUNCIL:** Mayor Anna Caballero, District 1 Councilman Sergio Sanchez, District 2 Councilman Roberto Ocampo, District 3 Councilwoman Janet Barnes, District 4 Councilwoman Gloria De La Rosa, District 5 Councilwoman Maria Giuriato, District 6 Councilwoman Jyl Lutes.

n **REGULAR MEETINGS:** City Council meets the first three Tuesdays of the month at 4 p.m. in the City Council rotunda, 200 Lincoln Ave. The Planning Commission meets every first and third Wednesday of the month at 3:30 p.m. in the rotunda.

n **IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS:** City Hall: 758-7201; city clerk: 758-7381; city attorney: 758-7256; Community Development department: 758-7206; Development and Permit Services: 758-7351; Finance Department: 758-7212 for business licenses or 758-7211 for garage sale permits; Recreation and Parks Department: 758-7217; police department: 758-7321; public works: 758-7241; Redevelopment Agency: 758-7387.

n **ONLINE:** www.ci.salinas.ca.us.

n **ISSUES:** Growth, affordable housing and crime.

ers passed a half-cent sales tax that's expected to return library hours to normal. The city hosts several major yearly

events, including the California Rodeo Salinas and the California International Airshow Salinas.