

A Neighborhood's Plans for a Vibrant Transformation

The Alisal neighborhood of Salinas, California, is separated both culturally and physically from the rest of the city by Highway 101. Although the neighborhood's predominantly low-income Latino residents work primarily in the agriculture industry, Alisal has historically had limited options for healthy food. Issues like dangerous traffic patterns that discourage walking and biking and expensive, overcrowded housing further reduce the health and well-being of Alisal's residents.

As Salinas began to update the housing element of its general plan and started preparing a new economic development element, Alisal residents created a steering committee to ensure their needs — and voices — were included. Community-based organizations supported residents in advocating for a Vibrancy Plan to address decades-long lack of investment in this part of Salinas.

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Responding to the call for inclusiveness were planners like Lisa Brinton, planning manager for the city of Salinas, and Monica Guerra, senior planner for the consulting firm Raimi + Associates.

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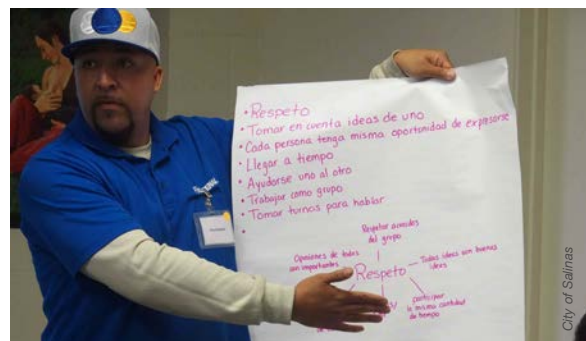
- Lisa Brinton, City of Salinas

Brinton says that the engagement among planners, Alisal residents and ultimately other city agencies was critical for the successful implementation of the Vibrancy Plan. “Without dialogue, we can't expect progress,” she says. Working with a steering committee of residents, community-based organizations and other city departments, such as Recreation & Community Services and Public Works, spotlighted residents' desires for greater access to parks and services to meet their physical and mental

health needs. Discussions between residents and traffic engineers focused on reducing vehicle speeds and including space on Alisal's streets for walking and biking. There are plans to increase the number of community gardens and expand access to stores selling healthier food options.

Guerra, part of the consultant team, says, “For our firm, health and health equity are central to every project we take on. That goes far beyond the absence of disease. We work with a community to examine contributing factors like quality of housing, education, jobs, income — all the interconnected social determinants of health.”

“The primary genesis of the Vibrancy Plan, and what the community has achieved so far, was conversations among Alisal residents and a broad range of partners working with the community and one another,” Brinton says. “The whole foundation of this plan was equity and opportunity for all — focused on public safety and health, the built environment and opportunity.”



City of Salinas





Conversation guide

Projects and initiatives related to health and health equity in the built environment often start with a conversation between individuals or among small groups. It may be a formal convening led by a foundation or city agency, a workshop at a convention or even coffee between colleagues.

The Joint Call to Action to Promote Healthy Communities is engaged in a year-long effort to spur these conversations among our members and beyond. We've compiled stories about discussions that have led to healthy solutions at the community, regional and state levels.

Here are the questions they asked in Salinas →



WHO'S COME TO THE TABLE SO FAR

- Alisal Residents and Community-Based Organizations
- City Council, City of Salinas
- Planning Commission, City of Salinas
- Public Works Department, City of Salinas
- Recreation & Community Services Department, City of Salinas

1. STARTING THE CONVERSATION

The preparation of the Alisal Vision Plan was a community-driven action that arose from meetings about a new citywide housing and economic development plan. City staff and the community worked together to understand:

- What are the most pressing drivers of health-related issues in Alisal that need to be addressed?
- How do we build community trust in an underserved neighborhood?
- How do we ensure that we're adequately incorporating Alisal residents' own plans for their neighborhood into the Salinas planning processes?

2. BUILDING OUT THE CONVERSATION

As the project evolved, planners and residents worked together to form a steering committee to determine:

- What are the specific needs of the Alisal community, and what issues are most salient from residents' perspective?
- What factors — such as lack of, or limited access to, affordable housing, safety, recreation, food access, education, jobs, and income — are negatively impacting residents' long-term health outcomes?
- How do we leverage the expertise of Alisal residents to ensure we arrive at the outcomes we're collectively seeking to achieve?

3. CLOSING THE LOOP

The next steps were to ensure the work of the steering committee was represented within the Alisal Vibrancy Plan. This would mean continued dialogue and answering questions like:

- How do we ensure we're engaging and empowering residents in plan development and implementation?
- What other governmental, educational and community-based agencies need to be involved to make the plan a success?
- How do we institutionalize this process so that voices from all communities in Salinas are empowered and actively engaged in driving future planning processes from the beginning?