URBANST 164: Sustainable Cities
Deland Chan
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Final Report
Empowering Residents in Housing Planning in the Alisal
City of Salinas

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Project Purpose

The project is in partnership with the City of Salinas, institutional stakeholders, Visión Salinas, working groups and a steering committee. The Alisal Vibrancy Plan was created in response to the advocacy performed by residents of Alisal, encouraging a more community-driven process in policy decisions. In 2014, the City of Salinas drafted an Economic Development Element (EDE) as a planning document for economic policies and conditions in the city, but for many residents of Alisal, the document did not sufficiently address economic disparities within the community. The City, now working with these advocacy groups, is committed to a strong resident-led planning effort, in hopes for an "equitable and healthy community without gentrification and displacement."

As a team, we were tasked by our community partner to read the Alisal/East Salinas Housing Target Market Analysis (HTMA), summarize the information into concise and clear language, and translate the key findings into Spanish. We then created an infographic that is easily understandable and accessible to the residents of Alisal as the information is concise and in a language known to them. The goal of this project, headed by Visión Salinas and the City, is to empower the community of Alisal by putting their voice and opinions into direct conversation with the current housing recommendations being proposed. We wanted to help the City identify solutions to the housing crisis that are appropriate and effective for the local community and its needs. We hoped to enhance their understanding by taking the key points from the technical HTMA document and condensing it into a format that allows for greater community understanding of the data.   The infographic is bilingual, in Spanish and English. Additionally, we conducted interviews with residents and transcribed bilingual written results of the "raw" data of the dialogues. The purpose of the interviews is to compare the needs of the community with the action plans of the HTMA document, in order to see if the policy comprehensively addresses community needs.

On a larger scale, we as a team sought out to learn about the Alisal community and its needs in order to understand the complexities of policy documents, their implications and the potential impact on the community. For this reason, we attended visioning sessions with the intent to listen to Alisal residents and learn from their experiences since they are the experts on the community's issues. We interviewed Alisal residents about their housing needs and desires for the community, and used these interviews as well as the responses from workgroup meetings as qualitative data to highlight the key issues the Alisal is facing. Moreover, we used our observations and findings to compare the key findings presented in the HTMA document and determine whether the policy recommendations met resident needs. Through presenting the infographic to community members at the second meeting, we found that the policies are vague and the City must clearly express what the policy is and what are its implications and potential impacts. We observed that there is a problem of distrust between the residents and the City, and residents often don't understand their rights as renters.

This is an issue about justice, citizenship, and the Alisal residents' right to the city. When designing policy around low-income communities of color, it is integral to the process to first

understand the context of the community's history, especially if as a policymaker one is an outsider to the community. In order to make most use of the community input, we have to ensure they are informed on the housing recommendations currently in place, so that they can effectively evaluate whether or not they believe these recommendations reflect their own preferences.

<u>Literature Review</u>

Understanding the history of Alisal, both in changing demographics and existing policies, was our first priority in starting our project. As a team, we spent time reading and researching Alisal, as well as talking to faculty such as Dr. Carol McKibben to become aware of the issues the community faces and why these issues came about.

One of the most important facts we learned is that in the 1960s, Alisal was incorporated into the City of Salinas after being an unincorporated community in Monterey County since its founding. Alisal has a long history of issues due to structural inequities, even after its incorporation into the city. Today, the community's most pressing dilemma is resolving the high rates of poverty and insufficient and unaffordable housing. Due to its long unincorporated status, Alisal suffered greatly from a lack in early urban planning and quality infrastructure and services, leading to problems such as overcrowding in homes meant for single families due to lack of available housing and the lack of available land to develop upon. Dr. McKibben helped us understand how the demographic shift from white Dust bowl migrants to Mexican-American farm laborers occurred, and how the white flight was also a key reason why Alisal was never developed to a high standard.

The Alisal experienced a drastic change in demographics since its founding. Today, the Alisal is largely 95 percent Latinx[1]. Nearly half of residents within the Alisal work in low-paying industries like agriculture, and many work as migrant farmworkers. One in three residents live in poverty compared to 21 percent of Salinas residents overall. Many residents are undocumented and face security issues regarding legal status that leave them unprotected from injustices, especially within housing. Existing land use maps show that the majority of the Alisal is made up of residential areas, mainly single-family units. However, one of the prevalent issues in the community is that, although these residences are meant for single families, the reality is that multiple families or extensions of nuclear families occupy single-family homes out of necessity due to financial and social circumstances. As the majority of residents are renters, they face many barriers towards living quality lives as the law often sides with landlords and leaves little protection to tenants. Due to the situation most Alisal residents live in, there is a high level of distrust and even resentment towards city government. Understanding these interrelationships is key to knowing how to interact with the community we are working with so that we can gain trust from the residents we interview

Before meeting with our community partners, we were first informed by reading the resources given to us in class. One article that we found most helpful was "Grounds for Dreaming" by Lori Flores. This article set the foundation for our understanding of the historical

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[1] All demographic statistics about Alisal are provided by Vision Salinas.

context and importance of Salinas, California. Salinas has a rich history in California as not only a major site of agriculture and economy but as a site for migration, becoming home to immigrants from Mexico, the Philippines and Southeast Asia who sought jobs working as laborers in fields and farms or sought refuge from wars in their home countries. We understand that race, ethnicity and culture has a large stake within this project, as 95 percent of residents in Alisal are Latinx, but the city is about 75 percent Latinx and a minority city overall.

Additionally, the readings about Diane Wong's research and grassroots activism in New York Chinatown with business owner Mei Lum deepened our understanding of cultural continuity within community policy, advocacy and organizing. Learning about Wong's research and advocacy in Chinatown was inspiring because she used a lot of effective methods to empower the community and get them directly involved in advocacy and organizing. From what we read, saw in videos, and heard from Wong and Lum directly, we saw the importance of bringing awareness about issues to the communities that are facing it, and giving residents active roles in planning processes and community organizing. As we attended visioning sessions in Alisal, we kept in mind the strategies we observed to be effective in engaging communities, and made comparisons with the ways that the City of Salinas engaged with Alisal residents and the structure of community meetings. One of our key observations from seeing the organization by Wong and Lum was the ways in which they took down language barriers by making meetings bilingual or totally in the language native to their community. They also used a lot of methods to address the shared cultural values of their community so that residents could relate and recognize the information they are learning and working with so they can better understand what is happening and how it affects their community as a whole.

These readings were valuable to our own research because we were able to come to Alisal having already learned key parts of its history and current state of its community. It is integral to have the context of place and time, because the interrelating issues of the past are the foundation of the crises of the present. We used what we learn as background, but still came to Alisal with the intention to listen to the community and learn about what is really happening from them, because after all they are the real experts on the issues that matter most to them.

Methodology

There was existing data on the demographics of the community, but there wasn't data available on their preferences in terms of housing. This would be the beginning of the collection of this insight. We began by learning about the history of the community in order to understand some of the beliefs the residents may have. We went through the readings provided to us by the community partners and met with Professor Carol McKibben, director of the Salinas History Project. We discussed the history and the future of the subdivision of Alisal, especially in the context of race and ethnicity, class, agriculture and housing. The first visioning session was our first introduction to Alisal and residential concerns by the residents themselves. We came in prepared to sit in on the conversations and listen. The conversations at this visioning session along with the readings provided by the community partner and our conversations with Dr. McKibben are what guided the creation of our interview questions. The questions we focused on most were: Can you talk to me about your experience with housing in Alisal? What do you see as the biggest issue in terms of housing? What do you see as most important in housing? (location,

price, safety, quality, etc) What's your preference in terms of residence: single-family house, multifamily unit (apartment)? Why? What do you think would be a solution to the housing crisis in the Alisal?

The goal of these interviews was to gain insight into residential needs, especially with how they related to the HTMA recommendations. We wanted to ensure that the recommendations in the HTMA were in line with community needs. The HTMA is a very detailed document so we needed to get detailed answers from residents. We chose to conduct interviews because we were not looking to obtain statistically significant data. We can read all we want about housing policies but perhaps in the readings certain issues will be emphasized that perhaps do not matter as much to the residents, whether it be because of cultural reasons or because they just have more imminent problems they have to worry about. This was our focus in these interviews, gaining this insight. As we expected from our conversation with Dr. McKibben, the residents had distrust towards the city due to a variety of reasons as discussed in our report, so we focused on building trust and maintaining comfort throughout the interviews. We only interviewed residents we had first met personally at the Visioning Sessions. After having a one on one conversation about whether or not they would be interested in being interviewed, we obtained their contact information. At the beginning of each interview, we made clear we were only students trying to ensure the HTMA recommendations were aligned with their needs. We had already presented the HTMA infographic to these residents at the second visioning session so they were aware of recommendations being made. We also emphasized we would maintain confidentiality by not sharing their names. We chose to not ask very personal questions to maximize their comfort during the interview. The disadvantage of doing these interviews is that we could not obtain statistically significant data. The advantage of these interviews is that we got deeper insight into reasoning behind their beliefs and preferences.

Deliverables

After implementing three methods of data collection, we extracted the following key takeaways from resident opinions and our own observations:

Visioning Sessions: Though only a portion of the conversation was dedicated to improving housing conditions, residents contributed a great deal to that discussion. When coming up with solutions, nearly every table listed the construction of more housing units. Nevertheless, residents always qualified it as "affordable" or "accessible" housing, which is in contrast as to how they feel it to be now. There was a large emphasis on affordability, accessibility, and collaboration between the community and the government, that got us interested in exploring whether or not residents would prefer improved living conditions over additional buildings.

HTMA Infographic Feedback: Residents, overall, enjoyed having a visual representation of the summarized HTMA. Infographics are great ways of displaying information, and it was a good decision to represent a document as technical as the HTMA in this manner. However, the content of the infographic trumps how appealing it is. We found that certain phrasings need to be considered more carefully when presenting the information, as there were some negative connotations associated with the wording of some of the recommendations. One of the

recommendations suggested utilizing the "extra land" (Appendix B) that community and faith-based organizations have. This was misinterpreted as removing churches and building houses on that land, and being that so many residents are strongly religious, they were appalled by that idea. Another recommendation was to offer "residential rental inspection programs" to inspect homes and ensure that landlords are maintaining livable conditions. However, using the word "inspection" caught residents off guard, as they believed the inspections would be targeting themselves, and not their landlords. Given the unease and mistrust that already exists between residents and government/authority for a number of reasons, we found it important to be mindful of the phrasings of certain suggestions, as some words have attached connotations, and the message of the recommendations may get misconstrued.

Interviews: After hosting interviews with six Alisal residents (four current and two former members), we encountered a few themes and ideas that were shared among a majority of the members. We found that residents prioritize housing prices and housing conditions when discussing ways to improve the Alisal housing crisis. They want more accountability placed on their landlords in ensuring safe, livable conditions. Residents also had a preference for single-family homes, and low density within that home. Overcrowding is a major issue within the community, and residents desire for that problem to be alleviated. They also had suggestions for improving the city's engagement with the community, because there is an existing lack of trust. This lack of trust is maintained from a number of reasons--residents may be moving from countries with more corrupt governments, and the distrust of authority was already instilled. It may also be maintained because the city has made promises to the residents that they did not end up realizing. A final key finding is that, from these interviews, the residents of Alisal care about their community and see their future there. They are here to stay, and also want their children to grow up here. This goes against the narrative that Alisal is merely a place with "temporary housing."

From these takeaways, we created the following table of recommendations, that detail the theme of the recommendation, its stakeholder, and the recommended implementation length.

Table 1: Recommendations for Moving Forward in the Alisal Vibrancy Plan

Theme	Description	Stakeholder	Length
Building Trust	**Community-building.** Take more measured steps to introduce and familiarize oneself with the Alisal community. This could take on the form of hosting coffee chats with members of the community, or showing support at community events. This is meant to break the "barrier" between the City and the community.	Alisal Vibrancy Plan Team	On-going
Building Trust	**Teach-ins.** **Hosting:** Host teach-ins on policy-making and other governmental proceedings work. Adults may not have the same opportunities to learn about how local governments function, as their kids may have in school. **Attending:** Encourage members of the community to host their own teach-in on what it is like to live in Alisal. Both city officials and residents are the experts of their own community, so encouraging an environment where you all learn from *each other* fosters a more united and collaborative force for the Alisal housing crisis.	City of Salinas, Alisal Vibrancy Plan Team	Planning and marketing: 1-2 months Implementation: Early spring, have two city-sponsored teach-ins, 2 weeks apart
Building Trust	Create a detailed timeline of events for the AVP to present to residents, so they feel included in the planning process	Alisal Vibrancy Plan Team	Planning and compiling: 1 month Distributing out timelines during the visioning sessions in the January and February, and making them available on website
HTMA	Create a revised document that details all 10 recommendations from the HTMA, to allow for residents to offer their opinions on both the content of the recommendations and the phrasing.	Alisal Vibrancy Plan Team	Summarizing and visualizing HTMA recommendations: 1 month Distribution (bilingual): Mid- to late-January

HTMA Recommendations

Uncovered Questions:
1. How involved have residents from Alisal been in both the planning processes and in making these policies decisions?
2. How successful has the City of Salinas been in engaging residents from Alisal?
3. How do we encourage participation to get viewpoints of all different Alisal residents (age, language ability, race, income level)?
4. In what ways is the City making information accessible to monolingual Spanish speakers from Alisal?

Our Findings:
1. Residents prioritize housing prices and housing conditions
   a. Accountability of landlords
2. Preference for single-family homes and low density
3. Residents care about Alisal and see their future there
4. Suggestions for improving city's engagement with community

Praises
1. Hosting Visioning Sessions with residents to give them say in the Vibrancy Plan
2. Contributing to nonprofits dedicated to affordable housing (Chispa)
3. Making technical documents accessible by visualizing and translating them

Recommendations
1. Understand certain connotations with phrasing, and make clear the implications of policies implemented
   a. "Residential rental inspection program"
2. Allow residents to have a role in the planning process and decision making
3. Continue efforts to build trust between the City and residents
   a. Familiarizing oneself with the community
   b. Leave more time to learn about what residents prioritize and care about

Conclusion

In summary, through this partnership, we strive to effect meaningful impact on the Alisal Vibrancy Plan in the coming weeks. We expect to leave this project with a number of accomplishments and deliverables to our partner. Our biggest task is to develop a bilingual (English and Spanish) version of the HTMA document, complete with comprehensive infographics and visualizations. This document should highlight key insights and recommendations offered through the HTMA, and more generally, make this technical document, used predominantly in city planning, more palatable and relatable to residents of the Alisal community. We also are interested in interviewing residents, as mentioned above. After conducting these interviews, we will provide the Alisal Vibrancy Plan committee with the 'raw data' of our interviews with Alisal residents in the form of writing. The interviews themselves give Alisal residents a chance to be heard, and the transcription of these interviews allows for their thoughts and opinions to be easily accessible by members of the Alisal Vibrancy Plan.

While simultaneously interviewing residents and developing a digestible HTMA document, we will develop a final report, in which we summarize our findings about how well the HTMA document overlaps with the community needs, and offers recommendations if there's any misalignment in ideals or values. We will present our findings to our community partners and a few select residents on Dec. 6th, at the d.school.

Though our scope of work for this quarter may remain in the preliminary planning stages of the Alisal Vibrancy Plan, our project still embodies the 4 Pillars of Sustainability. Specifically, Cultural Continuity and Social Equity. In Alisal, around 95% of the population is Hispanic/Latino. Through involving the Alisal residents in the planning of housing reform, this project would hopefully maintain (as opposed to disrupting) the culture that already exists amongst the community. This project is also heavily rooted in social equity. Through involving residents early on relieves the City, the EPS consulting firm, and the Alisal community of dealing with the consequences of 'behind closed doors' decision making. This project is framed with information gathering through interviews and focus groups so that the decisions being made about housing development, are equitable not only in theory, but from the lens of the Alisal residents.

This project embodies sustainability as a whole because it looks for ways to incorporate the voices of those often silenced either directly or through their lack of information on the policies affecting them. Policies implemented in low income, minority-majority communities would be most effective and long lasting if they were actually framed after needs and preferences of the residents, for they are the experts on the challenges faced in the community. The City did its part in creating a platform to listen to the residents through the Steering Committee but this project creates the potential to hold them accountable to actually incorporate their ideas in city policies by highlighting inconsistencies between community needs and recommendations made and generating strategies that could be used to close that gap. It's a good starting point.

The community partnership will hopefully not only be beneficial to our partners and their residents, but also to us as a team. This project allows the three of us to practice service learning in a context different than what some of us are used to. It is important to have the ability to take technical and oftentimes indigestible material and, through employing effective communication strategies, make it understandable to a wider audience. As students who want to incorporate service into their profession, this experience will not only give us exposure the various challenges and successes faced when serving a community different than our own, but also allow us to take this knowledge back to our own communities.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Images from Visioning Session

Figure 1. Workgroup response to the question "What makes a community safe and healthy?"

Figure 2. One workgroup identifies "*gente de afuera (inversionistas) encarece la vivienda*" as a challenge to housing in the community. Some residents noticed gentrification is a threat.

Figure 3. One team of residents identify high density and overcrowding as challenges and offer rent regulations and improving zoning laws as solutions to overcoming housing challenges.
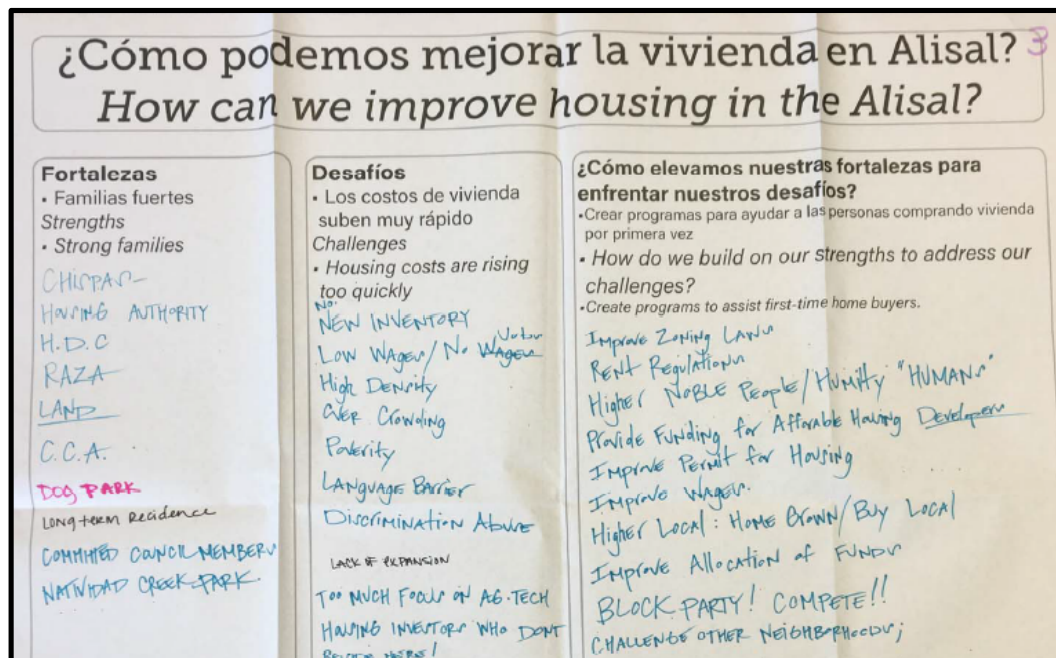

Figure 4. Residents say that Alisal is a "vulnerable community" that lacks support and resources, while the cost of living is one of the greatest challenges to the community.
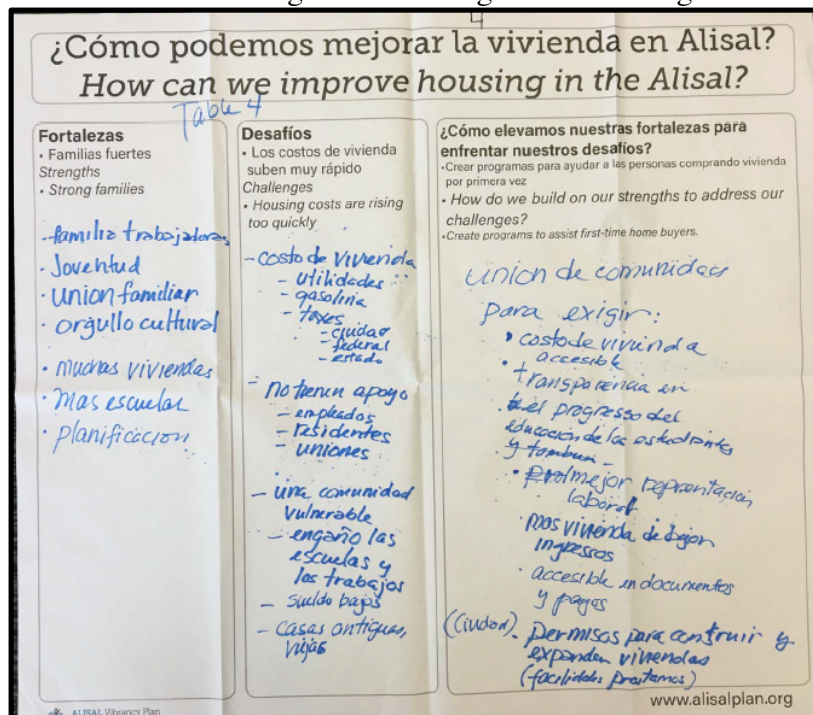

Appendix B: HTMA Infographic

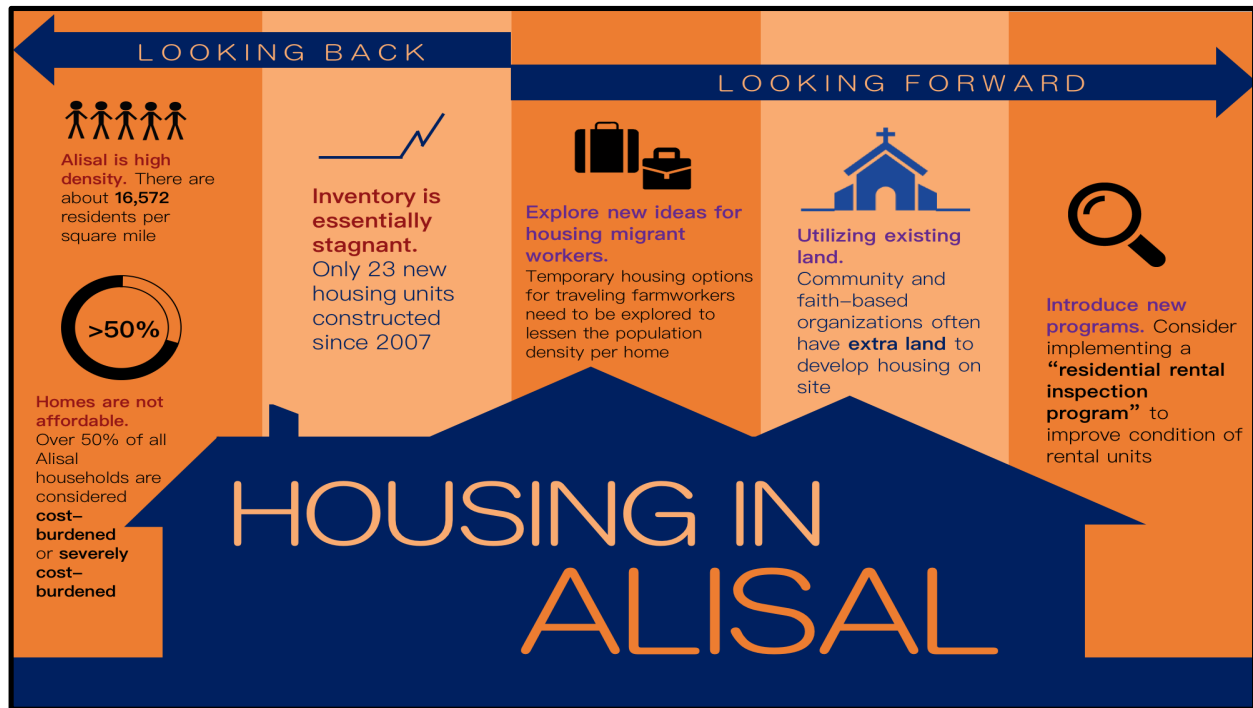Figure 3: English version of the HTMA Infographic

Figure 4: Spanish version of the HTMA Infographic

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Can you talk to me about your experience with housing in Alisal? Me puedes hablar sobre sus experiencias con las viviendas en Alisal?
2. Can you talk to me about the housing crisis in Alisal? Me puedes hablar sobre la crisis de viviendas en Alisal?
3. What do you see as the biggest issue in terms of housing? Para ti, que es el problema más grande en las viviendas?
4. What is your perception of Alisal and how the community is the way it is why it is this way? Que es lo que piensas de la comunidad de Alisal? Como crees que llego a ser asi?
5. What do you think would be a solution to the housing crisis in the Alisal? Que crees que seria la solucion para la crisis de viviendas en Alisal?
6. As a solution, would you prefer more housing available in Alisal or improved conditions to existing housing? Como una solución, preferirias más casas en Alisal o mejor calidad en las casas que existen ahorita?
7. In your opinion, do you see a shift in demographics in the Alisal (more white and Asian, higher income people moving in) Please describe. Has visto un cambio en la población de Alisal? Por ejemplo, has visto que mas gente de otras razas o diferente clases sociales? Por favor describe los cambios.
8. Would you want to live in a community that is composed of solely one race-ethnicity (all Mexican Americans or all Asian American) or one that is composed of many different races? Te gustaria vivir en una comunidad con solo una raza o una con diferentes razas.
9. Would you want to live in a community that is composed of all one class type (all low income or all high income) or many class types? Prefieres vivir en una comunidad con personas de la misma clase social o diferentes clases sociales?
10. Do you see Alisal as the community you want your children to grow up and live in? Ves a Alisal como un lugar en donde quieres que crezcan y vivan sus hijos?
11. Do you want to move to another part of Salinas (West Salinas) or another city in California? Hay algotro lugar en Salinas al cual te gustaria mudar? O otra ciudad en California?
12. Do you think the Alisal needs more housing availability, housing options, and housing affordability? Crees que Alisal necesita mas casas, mas opciones de tipos de casas, o casas con precios más económicos?
13. What's your preference in terms of residence? Like single-family house, multifamily unit (apartment)? Why? What do you see as the pros or cons of each? Which do you see as most needed in the community and why? Que es su preferencia de tipo de residencia? Viviendas independientes, viviendas o multifamiliar (como departamentos). Por que? Puedes explicar los pros y los contras de cada uno?
14. What do you see as most important in housing? (location, price, safety, quality, etc) Que es lo que se te hace mas importante en su vivienda? Ubicacion, precio, seguridad, calidad, proximidad al trabajo)
15. What do you see as the best way to address these issues? Que es la mejor forma de resolver estas problemas?
16. Anything else? Algo mas?