

The Boomtown Chronicles: Reflections On a Changing California

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**Transcript: Interview with Anna Caballero, Mayor of
Salinas, California
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~Anna Caballero Interview~

ANNA CABALLERO: My name is Anna Caballero, and I've been mayor for the past six years in the city of Salinas, and I've been on the council for the past 12 years. I am the first woman mayor of Salinas, and I'm also the first Latina mayor of Salinas.

RACHEL GOODMAN: What does that mean?

ANNA CABALLERO: It took a long time getting here, I wish it didn't. In many ways, it's been a quiet revolution, if you will. The first Latino elected from east Salinas came in 1989, in 1993 we had the first Latino majority and have had a majority since then. We have five Latinos on the council. It has been a transition that has been pretty rapid in terms of the city's history, but it's been one where the voters have accepted Latino leadership. I was elected as mayor of a non-Latino majority district. The majority of voters are still non-Latino, even though we have a majority population. I think we've been able to prove that we can be leaders not just for Latinos but also for Latinos, and I think that's important for the state.

RACHEL GOODMAN: Has the power of big ag industry types shifted since you've been here?

ANNA CABALLERO: What's interesting is that the economics is the same. It's still in the hands of Anglo growers. Ag is a 3.4 billion dollar industry. The ag industry has been incredible innovative. They have brought us the value added industry, which brings Latinos out of the fields into the packinghouses. There are more benefits, it's cleaner, that's economic engine that has stabilized the economy and allowed people to buy homes. That's changed the community. The interesting political dynamic that has developed here over the last ten years is that the ag industry has started to reach out to the Latino elected officials around development interests in the community. I think it's changed the way that political alliances have formed. I think you will see partnerships around innovation that will be the model for how California will look at. I'm specifically talking about not only the ag industry, but also housing any way land is used and how money is invested in the the community. That's new. What has happened is that the more conservative powers that be have recognized the leadership of Latinos and have begun to welcome us at the table, to discuss solving the social issues, and that's terrific.

RACHEL GOODMAN: Let's talk about housing. First since that's the focus of this story. How is what Salinas is doing around housing. How do you see Salinas' piece of the housing puzzle?

ANNA CABALLERO: I would like to think that we're the template. I wouldn't say that publicly, because nobody wants to think they're going out and copying anybody else. I think that we've been able to do some really innovative things here. If we could fix the fiscal problems of the state and get them to invest, we could really encourage other communities to get on board and follow our lead. It's my opinion that once we create Salinas' inclusionary housing ordinance, it's going to be a model, and I intend to take it

to cities in the region. If we can do it, you can do it. What I can tell you is that at the statewide level, I participated in the league of cities. There is huge opposition from the builders from the private interests in the state, but they've come on board. We recognize. This is a crisis in our community, we recognize that our work force is effected by this, we recognize your city is in difficulty because of the fact that you're building affordable housing and other communities are not, so we're willing to help you in this issue. So, we're going to be creating a template, and other communities can follow it.

RACHEL GOODMAN: What are its cornerstones?

ANNA CABALLERO: Well, one of the projects we started in 1991, we adopted an inclusionary housing ordinance, and we refinanced some bonds, and put directly into affordable housing issues. And we went to the city and county and said we are going to build. The template is the increase in affordable housing, and it will provide a range of options for builders between 20 and 40 percent, and some of it will be subsidized to get the higher numbers. We also using principals that involve mixed use and at higher densities, to encourage them to build in a number of ways that is non traditional. Right now California is building tract homes, they all look the same, and it's a cookie cutter type of approach, it uses land incredibly fast, cities spread out very quickly. This model will not do that. It's denser, it creates walkable communities, we really we're trying to encourage people doing that, smaller roadways, people walking, trails and bicycles paths, and a higher use of the land so we can create lofts and Higher density.

RACHEL GOODMAN: When I drove across town east of Salinas, it looked like sprawl, it took a long time to get there? Would you annex more land? Make it denser?

ANNA CABALLERO: Salinas has the same footprint that it has had for twenty years. We're 19 square miles and we have been since then. The roads are not made for a city of 150,000. Downtown was built in the 1800's. The other social factor is that everyone has a third car. Our approach is to grow up; we've rezoned the upper stories as redevelopment projects. The land has to be valuable enough to let you tear down and rebuild. The new development will be on annexed land. It will be like the downtown, where you have an upper story with housing and retail downstairs. There's some changes, and we expect with the high cost of land, *ag* land is very valuable. We also know we're surrounded 360 degrees by *ag* land. We've been conservative about growing on *ag* land, but we try to do it in a way that is responsible. Our ratio right now is about 8,000 residents per square mile, and San Jose is 4,000. Some neighborhoods in L.A. aren't even as dense as ours.

RACHEL GOODMAN: Can you give me a couple of general quotes about Salinas as the future of California?

ANNA CABALLERO: In many ways Salinas is the face of California for the future. 65% of our residents are Latino, a large percentage are young families, we have a very large illiteracy rate, we have a high teen drop out rate, which then causes all the social issues like teen pregnancy, and gang violence and drugs. California is moving to a Latino

majority state, we expect there to be more children. We need to be careful. Because those are the families that are going to support us in our old age. They are going to be the economy. California needs to be educating its workforce, that's it's investing in its children, that its infrastructure is improved. That's the challenge that Salinas faces, and I think it's the challenge for California's future as well.

RACHEL GOODMAN: One of the themes we've been talking about in this story is the desire on the part of lots of parents to see their children be second generation Californians. Part of that is the dream of owning a home. Seems like a big leap, can you mention anything about that?

ANNA CABALLERO: This is the big struggle with affordable housing is to keep it affordable. But building apartments keeps people renters for life. We developed a first time homebuyers program. It's a sleeping second, and if they stay long enough the second goes away. We required so many homes had to be affordable. We had a lot of families that have bought their first homes, and that allows poor people to create wealth, for themselves and their kids, because it's really about the kids. That is an opportunity that is recognized in this state, we all get a tax break, and so the government subsidizes home ownership for middle class families, well, this is a way for the government to subsidize housing for poor families. I think there ought to be a way for them, if they stay long enough, the house is theirs, it no longer has to be affordable. I am committed to the idea that poor people don't need to stay poor forever. They get to know the responsibilities of home ownership, and to have their money invested in a wealth creating opportunity.

RACHEL GOODMAN: Anything else you'd like to say?