

## **2025 State of the City Address**

*Salt Lake City Mayor Erin Mendenhall*

Good evening! It's wonderful to see you here tonight. Serving as your mayor for the past five years has been a great honor in my life, and there's no one I'd rather share this journey with than all of you.

Thank you Ryen, Craig, and Lavi for the fantastic introduction tonight. Thank you to the Salt Lake City Council, State leaders including Wayne Niederhauser, Salt Lake County District Attorney Sim Gill, other elected officials, members of our Salt Lake City-Utah 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Bid and soon-to-be Organizing Committee, Amy Redford of the Sundance Institute, our amazing city team, my own family, and other esteemed guests—thank you for being here tonight! Thank you to our hosts here at the beautiful downtown library, and thank you to everyone who is tuning in online.

It has been a landmark year for Salt Lakers. Since I last reported on the State of the City, we have celebrated the return of the Olympic & Paralympic Winter Games, a brand-new hockey team, and a new Trader Joe's.

Tonight, we're gathered in a place of belonging, a crossroads of community connection, a forum where knowledge knows no bounds. A place with nearly one million books in its collection.

Yet 25 years ago, this City Library building as we know it—did not exist.

The ground had yet to be broken, and these soaring glass walls were only blueprints of what could be. 100 years before that, the library was little more than a few thousand books on the top floor of the City & County Building.

25 years ago, our City was gearing up for its first-ever Winter Games—but not its last.

In exactly 9 years and 13 days, we will light the fire once again to show the world what we have become. And our city will be ready—not just for the athletes, the spectators, or the cameras, but for the future that comes with it.

Because here in Salt Lake City, ideas don't sit still. They move.

We act.

Here in Salt Lake City, we are doers.

Tonight, my focus is not the Salt Lake City of 25 years ago nor 9 years from now.

My focus is on Salt Lake City's present. Because the Salt Lakers of today need and deserve a city that dares to take action on the challenges we're facing right now.

Right now, we face a reality where some of our neighbors have no roof over their heads. We must address homelessness with both compassion and urgency, ensuring every individual who calls Salt Lake City home—no matter their circumstances—has a path to stability.

Right now, the very people who make Salt Lake City what it is—workers, families, elders, and students—are being priced out by the rising cost of living. Affordable housing is a necessity that must be constantly prioritized.

And right now, many in our community feel fearful about what lies ahead. When the world is unpredictable, Salt Lake City must remain a place of stability. Our core values include a deep belief in the dignity of every individual and value in our diversity.

This will never change, and our strength as a community lies in finding our mutual connections.

We have always been a city that leads with compassion, and that will not change. We will continue to serve every resident with respect and bring our creativity to solving the challenges our communities face. We will stand by our values. And no matter the instability around us, we will keep moving forward—together—just as we have through so many incredible challenges before.

That commitment—to stability, to respect, to moving forward together—guides everything we do as a city. It means keeping our attention not just on the major milestones ahead but the acute realities that shape Salt Lakers' lives.

I know the 2034 Winter Games and the Sports, Entertainment, Culture, and Convention District received a lot of our attention last year, but tonight I want to reassure you that the day-to-day issues that affect our residents are our prime focus.

Make no mistake—the future of Salt Lake City is bright. But its present is urgent. We continue the work we started, with resolve and with clarity, because the Salt Lake City of tomorrow depends on the decisions we make today.

We are driven by purpose to serve our residents at the closest level. No matter the tone of the voices in Washington. No matter the topic du jour on Capitol Hill here in Utah.

We are undeterred. The state of our city is focused—focused on turning vision into action.

As we look to the year ahead, it's clear that public safety remains one of our most urgent areas of focus. The safety of our residents is non-negotiable. Ensuring the security and well-being of all Salt Lakers is central to every aspect of our work.

When Governor Cox, Senate President Adams, and House Speaker Schultz invited us to create a strategic Public Safety Plan to address these pressing concerns, we did not hesitate. We delivered.

You may have seen parts of this plan. You may have even read all 50 pages.

I want you to hear this directly from me: This Public Safety Plan is what staying at the table looks like. This plan is what collaboration looks like.

The plan also recognizes a hard truth: 47% of the Salt Lake City Police Department's jail bookings over the past year involved individuals who self-reported as being unhoused.

The intersection of homelessness and criminality demands nuance, not oversimplification. Too often, the two are conflated, and in doing so, we only deepen the divide and fail to address the real issues at hand.

We are fed up with the system today that neither stymies the flow of drugs into our city nor remedies the needs of those on our streets with complex mental health, substance use, and misdemeanor criminal patterns that result from so many unmet needs.

A reporter who regularly covers the city observed on social media last week that the Salt Lake City Police are either making more arrests or sending out more press releases about arrests. I'll tell you tonight, it is both.

We will no longer tolerate a system that is broken and perpetuates harm upon our community. We will arrest those who are breaking the law. We will hold ourselves accountable for our parts of the system, and we will be up front about the systemic gaps that fail to hold people accountable and provide the assistance to stability that many need.

Since the launch of the Public Safety Plan 12 days ago, the Salt Lake City Police Department has already conducted two undercover operations, leading to seven arrests, the seizure of thousands of fentanyl pills, stolen guns, and \$1.5 million dollars in concentrated THC. I want to thank our hard-working officers and police leadership for their diligence in the development and execution of this plan and their hard work every single day to protect this city.

Addressing the needs of those living on our streets requires empathy, precision, and a relentless focus on solutions that prioritize their humanity while ensuring the safety and well-being of the entire community.

Our Public Safety Plan underscores the critical need to address homelessness not solely as a criminal matter, but as a humanitarian crisis. Emergency shelters are overburdened, while treatment facilities, mental health services, and transitional housing are stretched thin. These gaps—every gap in the system—leads back to our streets.

These shortages disrupt lives, weaken communities, and limit the ability of our systems to deliver safety and stability.

When I took office five years ago, Salt Lake City stood alone on this issue. We opened that first emergency winter overflow shelter in Sugar House because the homeless resource centers in Salt Lake County were at capacity, and we asked partners to help us. I'm grateful we've gone from working in isolation to readiness and collaboration. Today, we have faced the audacious opportunity state leaders gave us with sure partners by our side.

We're taking ownership of our part in the broken systems we've inherited, and we're building something that works.

Staying at the table means seeing these challenges not as roadblocks but as opportunities to map a better route forward that all can follow because it benefits all. We will stay in the fight—persistent and unwavering. Along with our partners at the State and Salt Lake County, we will create a path forward that respects every individual's dignity, strengthens the safety of our city, and fosters a more just and compassionate future for all.

Part of building a stronger Salt Lake City is ensuring that every resident has access to safe, attainable housing. Safety and opportunity are impossible without a place to call home.

For many in need on our streets today, that path forward looks like The Other Side Village. I was thrilled to welcome the first formerly unhoused Salt Lakers into beautiful, tiny homes that allow these residents the stability to maintain employment and hope.

Every Village resident has been unsheltered for an average of 9 years. But now, they're accessing the tools they need to rebuild their lives—a roof over their heads, health services, employment opportunities, and importantly, being part of a stable community focused on each other's well-being. And over the next year, we will help The Village expedite the creation of at least 200 more homes.

Salt Lake City faces a shortage of more than 18,000 affordable housing units. Our population has grown rapidly, but affordable housing has not kept pace.

More than half of our residents are renters, and nearly half of them are cost-burdened. Families with children, especially low-income families, are finding it harder than ever to secure affordable homes that have enough space to meet their needs.

I am proud to say that since the beginning of my administration in 2020, we've seen the completion or funding of 524 deeply affordable units. 684 family-sized affordable units. 119 for sale or shared equity affordable units. In total, we have built or funded 6,567 affordable units since 2020. These units received over \$122 million of city funding. And that, to me, is money well spent.

By this time next year, we will have doubled the number of units under affordability protections in this City compared to 10 years ago. There are 1,500 more under construction as we speak. We are not stopping there. In my upcoming budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2026, I will ask the City Council for an additional \$5 million toward deeply affordable housing construction; housing for those who need it the most.

And yet, I know it still isn't enough. But I can promise we will not stop working toward a future where it finally is. A future where more families like the Tuutaus can live in a neighborhood they love. Let me show you what that looks like.

Our housing affordability efforts over the past five years made this possible—not just for John's family but for hundreds more like them. And we are far from finished.

Tonight, I'm proud to introduce a new tool that ensures we stay accountable to our promises of affordable housing. The residents of Salt Lake City deserve a way to keep track of our progress and help us continue building.

This is our brand-new Affordable Housing Construction and Preservation Dashboard.

It provides a transparent view of the City's affordable housing progress—tracking units under construction, completed projects, and the funds we've committed to closing our housing gap. This tool empowers everyone in our community to stay informed and engaged in our shared efforts. Every unit we build, every dollar we invest, and every policy we implement moves us closer to a future where affordability isn't out of reach.

Again: a future defined by the decisions we make today.

I can't talk about the future without talking about families. Our children and our grandchildren. The generations to whom we will pass down this city.

As the old saying goes: it takes a village to raise a child. But do you know what it takes to raise a family? It takes a safe community to live in. It takes outdoor spaces to play in. It takes after-school and summer child care programs to learn in.

Families are central to decision-making in our city. As I said last year, if we don't intentionally build this city for families, they will be pushed out, and that is not a future I accept.

That's why we've dug deep to listen to families and residents in the Ballpark neighborhood since the Bees announced their departure. It might be the first time I've ever heard a government being accused of asking too many questions.

But that feedback led us to a decision for the future of the Smith's Ballpark site that I know neighbors overwhelmingly approve of. I'll ask you to only temporarily hold off on breaking into "the wave," because I'm excited to announce Salt Lake City is moving forward with the partial

adaptive reuse option. Design Scenario 2 will simultaneously create something new while honoring our history.

Picture this: the western wing of the Ballpark, repurposed to house an entertainment venue, creative spaces, and retail. The adjacent ballfield transformed into a mixed-use urban space and a safe community park where kids can play under the trees while their parents listen to a concert or stroll through a pop-up event.

A festival street outside, alive with music and markets, and green spaces hosting everything from quiet mornings to neighborhood celebrations and local businesses. Housing, community gathering spaces, and human-centered investments to create a new pulse in the heart of this great neighborhood.

The Ballpark will be a place where families grow, where businesses thrive, and where the community's pulse beats strong, drawing us all back to one of the most historic neighborhoods in Salt Lake City. Stay tuned, as we will present a more detailed version of the design this spring.

Across our city, we're investing in the places that bring people together.

Our parks are where we celebrate, play, connect with each other, and find solace in nature. Yet, for too long, access to these spaces has not been shared equally across our city. But that is changing.

We're making tangible progress in correcting those imbalances. At the start of 2024, every City pickleball court was on the east side. By the end of 2025, the west side will have twice as many courts as the east—bringing recreation opportunities closer to more families in our city.

Acres of more park space for the west side will open this summer when the first phase of Glendale Regional Park is finally complete. It's the largest park project we've taken on in many decades, and we're grateful for your input and patience.

As part of our new Public Safety Plan, we are developing an integrated park security camera program at our high-volume parks this year. We're also adding security services at parks at closing hours to ensure people comply with park curfews. In addition, we plan to expand our Rapid Intervention Team so the City responds more quickly to your reports of trash, camping, and other livability issues made on our 'mySLC' app. So if you don't have the app yet, please download it!

You've asked us to do better, and we will because public spaces aren't just about infrastructure. They're about community. And they need to be safe, clean, and welcoming to all.

Nowhere is that clearer than right here—in the 15th most popular library in the world. This space reimagines the role of a library in a downtown setting. That means doing things a little differently.

This library has an entire creative lab full of equipment that's free to use, allowing patrons to explore digital media, photography, and even 3D modeling projects. It has a Teen Lounge, with its own curated collections and technology access. This library has an artist co-op. It has a hair salon. It has passport services. It even has a flower shop—in fact, all of our flowers tonight were created by them. By the end of this spring, this library will have a renovated rooftop terrace that I hope our guests this evening had a chance to preview.

Doing things differently is an opportunity. Just like how the main library reimagined its role in this downtown setting, we are reimagining downtown for families and visitors.

The Green Loop takes our car-centric wide streets and, instead, centers people and families by expanding downtown green space. After a bit of work and preparation, and with much thanks to the Salt Lake City Council, just last week construction design funding for the first phase of the Green Loop was approved.

This year, we are embarking on an exciting new piece of this concept. We will develop a full design for the Civic Campus portion of the Green Loop, just outside these doors behind me from Library Square across to Washington Square Park, integrating people-first design with green space and trees, lanes for walking, biking and yes—even some cars—and new recreation opportunities.

In my upcoming budget proposal, I will ask the City Council for \$3 million towards constructing our Civic Campus. And then, we're going to kick off a capital campaign to leverage those dollars with private sector support. To our philanthropic partners listening, you'll be hearing from me very soon.

Our favorite events already call this space home. A civic campus will benefit Salt Lakers year-round, improving the festivals we know and love, while adding a new, daily front-yard experience for our downtown community. A community that has doubled in population to 20,000 since 2020, and will add 7,000 more residents by 2030.

Downtown is the beating heart of Salt Lake City and our state.

12 months ago, some doubted if the Utah Jazz would still play downtown, and the National Hockey League coming to Salt Lake City was just a fever dream. Last January, I stood before you and committed to keeping the Jazz downtown. Three months later, we welcomed another professional sports franchise, the Utah Hockey Club, to Delta Center and Salt Lake City. By the end of the year, the partnership agreement we executed with SEG means we have done our part to keep both teams right here, where they belong, for the next 30 years.

With the creation of the Sports, Entertainment, Culture, and Convention District, the future of downtown is being reimagined. It will continue to be the economic center of our state—and the center of culture, faith, entertainment, transportation, finance, and community in the Mountain West.

I want you to know that the City fought tooth and nail during the process to ensure we got every public benefit we possibly could out of the revitalization. We fought for Japantown. We fought for affordable, family-sized housing. We fought for the arts. We fought for a seat at the table, and trust me when I say we're doing more than just keeping that seat warm. We're getting results—because my job is to get the best damn deal for our city.

When it comes to our commitments to residents, we deliver. And here's the truth about these accomplishments: Every success I've shared tonight is thanks to the nearly 4,000 amazing Salt Lake City employees who show up every day with the same commitment I do. They are the public servants leading our housing and sustainability efforts, ensuring public safety, and rebuilding our roads. They are the boots on the ground, making all of this possible.

And as much as I wish I could recognize each of them by name, tonight, I think that might take up a little too much of your time.

So, let me start by highlighting four incredible Salt Lake City employees.

Could those employees, Ruedi, Kathryn, Salvador, and Lisa, please stand? I want to thank you for your service and heart.

Our city employees are the reason I'm able to stand up here each year and talk about how amazing Salt Lake City is. Their efforts are how we keep this city running.

And because the Utah House of Representatives passed a bill yesterday threatening their rights, allow me to say this: Over 60% of the Salt Lake City team is represented by a union. While that bill may strip collective bargaining rights of our public employee unions, it will not strip away my commitment to treating our workers fairly, to competitive compensation, or to equitable benefits.

I have always been proud to stand with and for Salt Lake City's working families and that has not changed—it will never change. Collective bargaining or not, we are a team and we cannot do the work this city needs without our incredible employees.

They make Salt Lake City the best place to travel, work, and build a future. They're the reason Salt Lake City has the #1 airport in North America, the nation's hottest job market, and a reputation as one of the best-performing large cities in the country. When it comes to our commitments to residents, our city team delivers.



Last year, I promised you that we would launch a Tenant Resource Center to assist the more than 50% of Salt Lakers who don't own their own homes. I promised that we would financially assist residents displaced due to demolition, redevelopment, or substantial renovations and help them relocate within the City.

As Ruedi explained in the video, our Tenant Resource Center, along with our Rental Assistance Fund for Tenants, launched in October. I'm pleased to report that every weekday since, our "navigators" have assisted renters—320 just since it opened—in applying for funding, finding housing, and even reporting unsafe living conditions.

Last year, I promised you that we would follow through on street reconstruction projects from the 2018 Funding our Future bond—critical infrastructure projects that were passed over for decades and are finally being executed in a small window of time thanks to city engineers like Kathryn.

Today, we have completed nearly all of those projects, including key sections of 1st South, 2nd South, 3rd West, 9th South, 11th East, West Temple, Virginia, and many more. And we're in the middle of improving 3rd North, Pierpont Avenue, and of course, 21st South. All of which will finish this year.

These promises matter, because they reflect the trust you've placed in me to lead this City. Going through long periods of construction is so hard. It is painful, but our City will be more resilient when they're finished. And I'm grateful for our employees who have navigated these complex infrastructure projects and the dozens of small businesses they've worked to assist along the way.

Last year, we could not foresee how the Sandhurst Fire would ignite 200 acres north of the Utah State Capitol Building, coming within a half-mile of nearby homes and evacuating dozens of families. Our dispatch and emergency response team members, like Lisa, were instrumental in containing this fire and protecting neighborhoods.

I'd be remiss not to thank our firefighters who just returned from California after helping other communities to protect their homes amid multiple devastating fires. They reflect the best of us.

Like Lisa from our 911 Dispatch team shared in the video we just watched: We care about you.

We care about YOU.

Every decision we make stems from that care—for our city, our residents, and our workers. We care about the future our children will inherit, so we doubled down on sustainability. We care about the air we breathe, so we launched Clean Air SLC—putting real tools in residents' hands. That included a brand-new landscaping equipment exchange. The demand was overwhelming, so we're bringing it back this year.

We also launched Salt Lake City's first-ever e-bike incentive program, and boy, was it popular. We awarded more than 300 residents with e-bike vouchers, half going to low-income residents.

Thanks to our partnership to put free UTA passes in the hands of our students, parents, and their teachers, those Salt Lakers took over 593,000 trips on transit last school year.

This is what real climate action looks like. Not just policy but tangible change. Small actions, multiplied across our entire city, creating a lasting impact on the air we breathe.

This is grassroots advocacy. This is why I ran for office. And still, that is not all we're doing.

In 2024, we supplied about 80% of the City government's municipal electricity from the new Elektron solar project—cutting our emissions by 100,000 metric tons a year.

We've also made our city more water-wise. Through proactive maintenance, our Public Utilities team brought water mainline breaks to their lowest level in five years. And despite a 12% increase in population since the year 2000, we've reduced water use by 36%.

We are not done. This year, I will present the City Council with the results of our electrified fleet study—laying the groundwork for even bigger reductions in our reliance on fossil fuels. We will achieve 100% renewable electricity, citywide, by 2030. Ambitious? Yes. Necessary? Absolutely.

Salt Lake City is a city of doers—changemakers. Risk-takers. Innovators.

In Salt Lake City, we know building is not enough. We know progress isn't passive. We turn vision into action. And then action into reality.

We've created parks and public spaces. A thriving economy. A city of neighbors who lift each other up—not by standing still, but by stepping up.

Salt Lake City moves because its people do.

As my dear friend Ted Wilson once said, "I'm hopeful that each and every citizen has a feeling of playing some role in Utah's future." That belief—that each of us has a role to play—defines this City. Our City.

The work we do today matters. We are focused. Because what we commit to now will shape the future for generations. And in Salt Lake City, we don't wait for change. We make it.

Thank you all for being here tonight. Let's get to work.