

# 2026 State of the City Address

*Salt Lake City Mayor Erin Mendenhall*

Good evening! It's wonderful to be here with you tonight, in the heart of Salt Lake City's civic center, in this beautiful building that formerly held the Leonardo Museum—and before that, the old Salt Lake City Library.

While the Leonardo Museum closed its doors last year, the spirit of creativity, innovation, and reinvention lives on through new uses like the Winter Farmers Market on Saturdays...with so much more to come.

Thank you to Jack and the Red Spirit Singers, and Shiloh Lopez for beginning our program with your voices. Thank you to the Salt Lake City Council, County leadership, our amazing city team, my own family, and other esteemed guests. And to the Salt Lakers watching online, thank you for tuning in. I also want to thank Brad Wilson for his thoughtful introduction. I'm looking forward to our Olympic and Paralympic planning efforts over the next eight years.

But we don't have to wait eight years to keep building upon our Olympic legacy. Next Friday, this very block will once again be filled with people for The Watch Party—Salt Lake City's free celebration of the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. I hope you, your families, your neighbors, and visitors from across the state will join us.

Because Salt Lake City will forever be a place to celebrate our Olympic and Paralympic legacy—from 2002 to 2034 and beyond. Our civic center will always be a testament to the power shared spaces have to bring us together, even when the world feels divided.

2025 was a year of decisive movement.

We began the year with the release of our Public Safety Plan—detailed directives to act in 27 different ways within our power, and 23 clear recommendations for our partners outside of city control. Since then, we've implemented more than half of those solutions and are actively working on the long-term initiatives.

In the fall, a chapter years in the making came to a close. We completed the voter-approved streets bond—passed in 2018 after more than a decade of deferred maintenance following the Great Recession. Together, we rebuilt 122 miles of worn-out roads, resurfaced 310 lane miles of pavement, and replaced more than 15,000 feet of century-old pipes.

Just last month, we celebrated the opening of Phase One of Glendale Park, a new westside space that exists thanks to more than 1,700 Salt Lakers joining the outreach that guided the project. Later this year, we'll start constructing more amenities, from a skating ribbon and boardwalks, to river access, a skatepark, and a sledding hill.

2026 is a consequential year for our city.

On January 9th, Salt Lake City marked 175 years since its formal incorporation. One hundred and seventy-five years of choosing—again and again—to become more than what we were the year before.

On January 4th, the State of Utah commemorated 130 years of statehood. On that same winter day in 1896, Salt Lake City was officially named Utah's capital. It is a responsibility we have carried with purpose ever since.

And in fewer than six months, on July 4th, our nation will mark 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, when the United States of America committed itself—imperfectly, but persistently—to those self-evident truths.

Each of these anniversaries reminds us that history is not something we inherit quietly. History is something we are responsible for.

Today, that responsibility rests heavily on our City. At a time when divisive politics and dangerous rhetoric dominate headlines, the work of effective and representative local government matters more—not less. And it is no secret we are being asked to do more than ever.

What we see coming out of Washington D.C. is scary to say the least. But I refuse to let fear and cynicism set the limits of our ambition or diminish our values. Because Salt Lake City's story is not written solely in moments of celebration. It is written in how we treat our neighbors; how we care for what we've built; how we make room for more voices.

When Salt Lake City was incorporated in 1851, roughly 10,000 people called this place home. Now, more than 200,000 of you do.

The next chapter of our city's story—and our state's, and our nation's—is not waiting to be written. We're writing it now.

In doing so, we will not stand still. We will not slow our commitments. And we will not govern for comfort when the moment calls for resolve. As was instituted in the Declaration of Independence, resolve for those unalienable rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As was written in the Utah Constitution, resolve for the right to “assemble peaceably, protest against wrongs, and petition for redress of grievances.” As was established when the first pioneer wagon entered this valley, resolve for the right to come here to seek a better life for our families.

The state of our city is determined. Not by what we've completed, but by what we choose to take on next. We are writing this chapter with intention, with care, and with an understanding of what is at stake.

That determination begins with the most fundamental responsibility of local government: safety. Keeping people safe is my top priority. It always has been. It always will be.

Before I talk about Salt Lake City's public safety work, I'd like to address the safety of our community—our country—at large.

Two weeks ago, I learned of a potential Immigration & Customs Enforcement detention facility on our City's west side. Gratefully, we have since learned that the property owners of the site will not sell or lease the property to the federal government.

You may have read about a letter I sent to the property owners explaining why it would not work here. But let me be clear: this isn't just about zoning restrictions. Such a facility has no place in this city. Whether at that site or anywhere else.

Recent tactics used by the federal government—in Minnesota, in Maine, and elsewhere—are completely and utterly deplorable. These tactics are not making communities safer. They are creating chaos. They are eroding trust in law enforcement. They are resulting in the death of Americans exercising their constitutional rights and have no place in the America I call home. Nowhere in the United States is this acceptable and I will not stand for that here in our City.

I want to make it clear that I am prepared to use every tool within my control to protect the values of Salt Lake City and the dignity of every one of our residents.

To this end, we launched the Future Citizens PATH Program to support eligible green card holders in Salt Lake City through the U.S. citizenship process. We work closely with partners at the State and County levels, as well as the Utah Immigration Advocacy Coalition, to support our New American neighbors. We provide resources and funding each year to support immigrant and refugee Salt Lakers. And as I've said again and again: Salt Lake City Police do not participate in federal immigration operations. That will not change.

What our police do is prevent and stop crime. They protect residents and visitors. They work to ensure the freedoms of speech and protest. And how they do that job matters.

They are focused on our City's actual public safety needs. And so am I.

Over the past year, our police have been especially focused on connecting those on our streets with the resources they need to find stability. Often, the conversation around the intersection of homelessness and public safety is reduced to crime. But this is not the whole truth.

The reality is this: on any given day, there are about 5,000 Utahns experiencing homelessness. More than 4,000 of those individuals are in shelters or transitional housing. I'd like to thank our service providers for the difference their work is making every single day.

But a small group of the remaining individuals are in and out of jail due to crimes related to homelessness. Many of them are people who are disabled, sick, suffering from mental health issues, facing addiction, or all of the above. And often, they have tried to get help—whether through medical services, homeless resources, or treatment programs. But due to their acute and complex needs, they have fallen through the cracks. They are stuck in a cycle—of being arrested for trespassing or camping, being put in jail, and then released back out onto the streets without ever effectively connecting with the tailored support and resources they need.

The same circumstances that lead to homelessness also make people targets of violence, drug trafficking, and theft. Nearly all of the police department's most-arrested individuals—96 percent—have experienced homelessness. Adding to the complexity, 84% report physical, mental, or behavioral health conditions. That understanding has shaped our approach.

Tonight, I want to provide a clear, encouraging update on the Public Safety Plan's most meaningful element, called Project CONNECT. It's an initiative leveraging City, County, and State resources to connect Salt Lake City Police Department's 50 most-arrested individuals with individualized solutions. And I want to thank our county, state and judicial partners, because we could not do this work without their leadership and their commitment of resources.

The goal of the project is to reduce police interactions and help each person progress towards greater personal accountability while also shining a light on gaps within the criminal justice and judicial systems. Our social workers partnered closely with the Salt Lake Legal Defender Association's social services team. Together, we have created relationships with those 50 people to better understand what they need.

This approach requires empathy and ensuring accountability. Since the program began, when any individual on the CONNECT list has been involved with the police, our social workers are notified. If they're booked into jail, the social workers are notified. We come to them, wherever they are in the cycle, and we ask them what they need to stabilize.

For one gentleman in his 30s with 43 prior bookings, that stability looked like coming into custody long enough to receive treatment and become stable on his mental health medication. Once he was released from jail, he was connected to services by social workers and soon asked an officer for help getting his medication refilled when his supply from jail was about to run out. The officer and social workers connected him with Fourth Street Clinic, where he is still engaging in services.

For another gentleman in his 50s, that stability came in the form of housing at the Switchpoint Microshelter—after more than 100 jail bookings and many unsuccessful attempts at treating his substance abuse and mental health issues. Since being housed, he has not been arrested. Not once. And today, he is still engaged in services, on his medication, and working to get his legal issues resolved.

For an older gentleman in his 60s, that stability looked like extensive collaboration between the Salt Lake Legal Defenders Association, the City Prosecutors, Salt Lake City Police Department, and his family to end his pattern of moving in and out of jail due to mounting citations and arrests. This team worked together to get him home to California where he now has the support of his sister and his home community. He, too, has not been booked into jail since.

We are making real progress. Already, 60% of Project CONNECT individuals have been arrested less often since the beginning of the program. Tonight, I commit to you that we will double down on our efforts on Project CONNECT in 2026.

We will expand beyond the first 50 individuals, refining the metrics for long-term success. We will continue working with our partners to bridge gaps between our agencies, creating more efficiency throughout the system.

We will do this even though it is hard, because it is critical to reduce the demand on our officers so they can do their jobs. Because our police officers deserve to see their work be helpful and effective, rather than spending a majority of their time arresting the same people over and over. And because these improvements don't just improve efficiency—they help people who are in desperate need.

Safety is a physical reality—response times, lighting, and patrols. Safety is also a feeling. It extends into our parks, our streets, and the public places where city life unfolds.

As Salt Lake City grows, so does demand, and our responsibility to ensure those shared spaces are safe, welcoming, and worthy of the people who use them.

When our families grow, we don't just keep squeezing in the same seats around the dining room table. We make room. We add highchairs, we pull up a couple stools. Maybe we score a bigger table off of KSL Classifieds! I actually did that. Here's the table...and it was only 100 bucks!

The point is, we adapt the space so everyone can gather with dignity. Growth creates opportunity—but only if everyone has a seat.

That philosophy guides our investments across the city.

In the foothills, it means opening dozens of new trailheads so more people can enjoy our beautiful mountains. On the streets, it means rebuilding with safer crossings, more frequent transit service, and clearer signage—making space for more people to move through our city safely and efficiently. And downtown, it means rethinking how our civic spaces serve a larger, more diverse city.

You may have heard me talk about the Green Loop before. Chances are, you won't hear me use that phrase much going forward. But what you will hear is what we're actually doing—and what we want to see in our streets and our neighborhoods.

The reality of the Green Loop is that it isn't just one project. It's four distinct corridors, already deeply connected to our daily life in this city. It is a vision that has already begun on 900 South. We will soon begin engagement and design work on 500 West. And, I'm incredibly excited to tell you tonight that, following the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' Salt Lake Temple open house next year, we'll move forward with discussions about sections of South Temple, in partnership with the Church.

At its core, this is about beautifying downtown and embedding interconnectedness into our very streets and sidewalks. Adding trees and shade to our downtown core so you can go shopping and walk your dog in the



heat of summer. Driving more people to shop at our local businesses. Drawing residents and visitors farther into this downtown community.

This won't happen all at once. It will move block by block, shaped by the character of each place and the people who live and work there.

We've already seen success in this vision. The 9 Line has shown what's possible when streets become places. We can carry that same energy across downtown—transforming barren sidewalks and asphalt to create shaded, green corridors that invite people in and bring us together. And tonight, I commit to you that every business and every family along these corridors will be invited to help us shape this vision. Block by block, we will do this together.

I want to say that again: We will not do this without you. We will invite EVERY SINGLE business and family along these corridors to ensure it will benefit YOU. We will use your input and your needs to shape a future that will improve your neighborhoods.

The next chapter of this work begins here—at Salt Lake City's Civic Center. Connecting Library Square across 200 East to Washington Square. Our front yard. The heart of our civic life. Tonight, I'm proud to share the vision for the Salt Lake City Civic Center.

## [VIDEO](#)

The vision study is [live online](#) now. I hope each of you look through it.

Just take a moment with me and imagine a future with this vision in place, say in, I don't know, eight years.

Picture riding your bike along the 9 Line, stopping for coffee or a quick bite. Making your way up 2nd East to Library Square to borrow a book and read outside in the shade. Then heading to an early dinner or drinks at a rebuilt White Horse before heading to a Utah Mammoth game—or, in February of that year, watching Big Air athletes fly across the skyline in the middle of downtown Salt Lake City.

And imagine—when you travel over to the Delta Center, you don't have to go all the way around the Salt Palace Convention Center, because we reconnected the downtown core.

9th South. This block of 2nd East. South Temple. 5th West. These are very different areas, but they are part of the same vision.

The 9 Line. The Civic Center. The Sports, Entertainment, Culture, and Convention District. These, also, are not separate projects—they are informed by each other. They are a deliberate, concerted effort by Salt Lake City to create the most beautiful, walkable, connected downtown we can possibly have. They create a better ecosystem.

Why?

Because yes, in 8 years, we will welcome the world for the 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Downtown will be the focal point. And my hope—my vision—is that Civic Center will someday serve as our City’s Olympic legacy park, where residents and visitors can gather and play every day, while also celebrating our state’s Olympic and Paralympic legacy.

But the beauty of this vision is that these assets are for residents’ use. Every. Single. Day.

As this area takes root as our Civic Center, Salt Lake City will strengthen it by breathing new life into this building—formerly the Leonardo—by reutilizing it for three distinct purposes.

On the first floor, Salt Lake City’s Youth and Family division will join Ken Sanders Rare Books, using this central location for after-school programming that helps families stay downtown. We also hope to lease a section of the space to local arts and cultural groups.

On the second floor, in partnership with the City’s Arts Council, the Utah Division of Arts & Museums will display its Visual and Folk Art programs—highlighting emerging Utah artists, closer to the downtown core than ever before. They’ll offer lectures, classes, and gallery stroll nights.

And finally, the top floor will be used as additional city office space, housing 70 existing staff members from three departments and ensuring Salt Lake City avoids the cost of constructing another administrative building for years to come.

We know residents are feeling the strain of increased taxes on the County level. And as I have said for years, we most likely cannot avoid a City property tax increase for the upcoming fiscal year. But we will not raise them to build a new administrative building. We will use what we already have, keeping it activated and functional on all three floors.

If you’d like, you can call this building “City Hall East.” But, if you’re a philanthropist and have millions of dollars sitting around ready to invest in the Civic Center, you can call it whatever you want.

Now that the vision study is complete, this year, I will ask the City Council for \$2.2 million dollars in Capital Asset Program funding to create the construction documents for the first phase of the Civic Center. After that, the construction process can officially begin.

I want to be clear that the \$2.2 million will come from our capital improvement funds, which are legally dedicated to City-owned construction projects, especially for the maintenance of the assets we already have.

As you walk around this plaza, you can see the pavers are cracked and failing, the concrete worn and unstable. We can repair it while also transforming this space to better serve our City.

This building will continue to serve the purpose it always has: A place to learn. A place to play. A place to gather.

Because living in a city means sharing. Sidewalks, parks, transit, libraries. These spaces help us encounter one another, understand different experiences, and build trust across differences. In today's world, the role of public spaces has never been more important.

Over the past year, that stewardship has taken tangible form. Along the Jordan River, a multi-department maintenance effort cleared eight blocks of overgrown riverbank. That work will expand across the full Salt Lake City stretch of the river in 2026. We are determined to improve the lives of our westside residents and all trail users.

In the last year, we planted more than 2,100 new trees, increased pruning by over fifty percent, launched long-term disease treatment studies, restored native plants, and removed more than a literal ton of invasive species. We are determined to nurture and strengthen our urban forest.

And our Regional Athletic Complex marked its tenth year with a record \$25.7 million in economic impact—hosting 19 out-of-state tournaments, welcoming 1.7 million visitors, and proving that public spaces can fuel both community life and economic vitality. Because we are determined to provide our youth and families the space they need to play, compete, and grow.

In the year ahead, we will begin or advance more than 20 public lands projects across the city. Because access to safe, welcoming public space should never depend on your zip code.

All of this work reflects a simple truth: the way we care for shared spaces is a reflection of how we care for one another.

That care is incomplete without housing that allows people to remain rooted here in our community. In Salt Lake City, belonging cannot be temporary. When teachers, service workers, caregivers, elders, and young families are pushed out, we all lose stability.

Tonight, I'm proud to report that every one of the actions we committed to in our Thriving in Place Plan are complete or actively underway. Our Tenant Resource Center has helped more than 1,700 renters. New wealth-building programs that will help renters become owners will soon deliver nearly 200 units focused on long-term opportunity. And we've taken a hard look at our own rules.

I know that for many people, zoning and ordinance updates are about as exciting as watching paint dry. But bear with me, because it's important. It's another way we're pulling up more seats to the kitchen table, and putting the leaf in to make some room.

Just last month, our City Council adopted new residential zoning to make it easier to create attainable housing in neighborhoods across the city. In the months ahead, we'll present a plan to expand housing options to the City Council. These changes give residents even more flexibility to add housing that fits their neighborhood. We've also simplified our zoning rules across the board, trimming down our zoning code by nearly 50 pages. Clearer rules mean housing can be built faster, and more affordably.



A recent Pew Charitable Trusts report found that Salt Lake City added housing faster than most major metros between 2017 and 2023. As more homes came online, rents declined—dropping by as much as 5.5% in older buildings.

And this spring, we will launch a program that invests in repairs and improvements for existing affordable housing while locking in long-term affordability through deed restrictions. It's a way to maintain buildings, protect residents, and give owners a reason to reinvest rather than sell or tear them down.

At last year's State of the City address, I unveiled the Affordable Housing Construction and Preservation Dashboard. Today, I'd like to share the latest data, including information from all of 2025. Now I know that you all are reloading this dashboard every morning, but for those who didn't see it today, you'll see that this administration has invested \$135 million into affordable housing.

You'll see that we've supported the creation or preservation of more than 7,600 affordable and deeply affordable units since 2020. Those investments saved renters an estimated \$13 million in 2025 alone and \$28 million since I took office.

You'll notice a consistent theme in our work: preservation. Preserving homes. Preserving neighborhoods. Preserving affordability.

And increasingly, preserving our future.

There is no Salt Lake City without the Great Salt Lake.

That's why, in 2025, we contributed more than 12 billion gallons of high-quality, treated wastewater to the lake. That's 18,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

We also marked a milestone few cities ever reach: thirty years of perfect compliance with the Clean Water Act at our Water Reclamation Facility.

We achieved that while both operating the facility—and while building its replacement. Mind you, that replacement is the largest public works project in Salt Lake City history. Construction began in 2019, and we are on track to complete it this fall. When finished, it will serve this city for decades.

We're also looking beyond our borders. Because like it or not, air and water don't stop at city limits.

Salt Lake City is one of 19 communities participating in the Utah Renewable Communities program to bring 100% net-renewable energy into our communities. We're actually expecting a regulatory decision from the state commission any day now. If it's approved, this program will give residents and communities real choice in how their electricity is generated. It will support reliability today, and cleaner air tomorrow.

Capital projects. Livability. Resiliency. Efficiency.

For six years, these have been our priorities. This year will be no different. But none of this work is possible without our City team—working 365 days a year.

Tonight, I recognize our Salt Lake City public servants. The people who keep our city running, our neighbors safe, and our community strong.

## VIDEO

If you are a Salt Lake City team member, will you please stand so we can recognize you? Thank you for all you do.

As you can see, the determination to make our community better is not new to us. It has defined Salt Lake City for 175 years...and this nation for 250.

I've said it once tonight, but it bears repeating now: History is something we are responsible for. It is also a debt we owe to those who came before us.

In 1834, a man named Delos Robinson was born in Tompkins County, New York. His father fought in the war of 1812, and his grandfather in the Revolutionary War. His mother, a niece of Brigham Young. He and his family settled in Illinois during a time of national division—not unlike the moment many feel we are living in today. A nation, struggling.

When the Civil War divided the country, at the age of 28 Delos's focus shifted from the family farm to service. He enlisted in the Union Army, believing not only in the survival of the nation, but in a deeper, more complicated promise. That all people are created equal—and that rights must be defended, not assumed.

As a sergeant, Delos stood on the front lines with General Sherman for the Battle of Atlanta during the 'March to the Sea' campaign. He fought in Raleigh as well, his dutiful presence often seen in the heat of battle or in the cold of night, silently watching over camp. He survived. He returned home.

In 1909, five years before his death, he visited Salt Lake City, reconnecting with his mother's family who had moved from Illinois to Utah. During that visit, those relatives—those descendants of the Young family—gave him a ceremonial cane.

A few decades later, on the other side of the globe, World War II was raging. In northeastern Europe, the Soviets invaded country after country, leaving destruction in their wake and displacing families at every turn.

Thousands of refugees fled, surviving in deportation camps while searching for safety. Among them were Jonas Morkunas and Janina Racyte, Lithuanians who met and married in such a camp in Germany.

Through persistence and some luck, this young couple eventually secured an immigration sponsor in Philadelphia. They crossed the Atlantic, arriving at Ellis Island beneath the words etched into the Statue of Liberty—words that promised refuge and possibility.

They lived in the back of a Catholic convent until they could afford an apartment. They learned a new language. They adjusted to a new culture. They started over with nothing. But they did it. They built a family

here in the United States, and raised their children and grandchildren to believe in the great possibilities of this country.

Today, Jonas and Janina's granddaughter—and Delos Robinson's great-great-granddaughter—now stands before you as Mayor of Salt Lake City.

I carry their values with me every day.

I share these stories not to center myself, but to underscore something larger: that none of us made it here alone. Every one of us is here because of courage, sacrifice, migration, and belief in a future that did not yet exist, but was possible here. That is the inheritance of this nation. And of this city. That is our debt.

We owe it to those who came before us to protect those seeking a better life—to ensure those who arrive are not persecuted for their beliefs, like so many of Utah's first pioneers, but that they are embraced. That they are welcomed. That they may become a part of our strong community.

I—like all of you—am a product of our country's history and immigrants. And I will do everything in my power to protect individuals who want nothing more than what those who came before us wanted: Safety. Opportunity. Dignity. And you and I know that achieving these goals becomes heartachingly more critical by the day. We must stay committed to our values and our humanity.

Over the past year, I've been focused on the work behind achieving these goals, rather than seeking headlines about it. Success will not be achieved with words alone.

Because this is about action. Every. Day. Doing the work, even when the future of our nation is so unclear. Salt Lake City will never stop working to keep our communities safe and growing, our people connected and supported, no matter what comes.

Hear me, that I will use every lawful tool available to protect Salt Lakers, to defend dignity, and to keep our City a place where the doors of opportunity remain open.

And this city is determined. Determined to support our residents whether they've been here for decades, or just days. Determined to govern with humanity and accountability.

We will do the work. Otherwise, what have we fought and died for these last 250 years? How did America become great in the first place?

History brings us to this moment. But it does not carry us forward. That work, belongs to this generation, in this city, right now.

Thank you for doing it alongside us.

I wish you and your families a safe, healthy, and hopeful year ahead. Good night.