

Hello Salt Lake City and thank you for tuning in to what is sure to be a first for a State of the City address in our city. Being able to deliver these remarks in our neighborhoods and with the community in attendance is an important connection point for us. I look forward to resuming that tradition after the pandemic.

But instead, tonight I'm coming to you live from the Council Chambers at City Hall here in downtown Salt Lake City.

Before we begin this evening, I'd like to have a moment of silence for us to reflect on the lives of those lost to the pandemic in the last year.

It's been quite a year we've had together.

It's fair to say this was not the year I thought was ahead of us when I took the oath of office 12 months ago. None of us did! But, through all of the challenges and trials we faced, we have forged ahead.

Through all of it, you have proven that the collective character of our city is comprised of love, of care for our neighbors, of incredible resilience in the face of unexpected hardship, and of a desire to be a part of making this citywide community stronger and better, for generations of Salt Lakers to come.

As we begin to move beyond and build anew from the hardships of 2020, we cannot be resigned to return to 'the way things were before.'

We are Salt Lakers by choice. The decisions we make to be residents here brings a collective force to the building of our community. We are a people of intention and we are, as we have always been, ever open to changes for the good of our communities. This last year brought more challenges than perhaps any year in our city's history, but as I'll share with you tonight, I believe it also created the space for positive, seismic changes for the good of all our people.

I am so proud of our community and very grateful to be your mayor. After a trying year, I still have the energy, passion and commitment to do this work with you.

I am also incredibly proud of and bolstered by the mighty team at Salt Lake City government — talented, creative, committed public servants who continually adapted through a year of crisis, to do incredible things.

Tonight, I'm asking you to step with me into this new year and into a mindset of purpose, so that together we can work to create our community's future of opportunity, equity, and strength. I know it's possible, more than ever, because of what I have seen you, and our team at Salt Lake City, move and achieve over the last year.

Overnight, COVID-19 changed the way we work for you, and our team worked quickly to ensure that we could continue to meet the regular needs of residents, while going the extra mile in support of our community members and businesses in need.

When the pandemic began, I told you some of our main priorities were: to do everything we can to keep our residents safe, to work consistently with the county and state but always in response to our local data, to keep our public services running, to ensure the work of our first responders, to be there for our local businesses, and to support our employees, avoiding any furloughs or layoffs. We have done everything we can to make good on these goals.

With my first executive order, on March 10, we closed events in the city to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as it entered our state. Over the days and weeks that followed, we mobilized our employees into new efforts, like the parking enforcement team that shifted to promoting safety and social distancing at our city parks.

City practices, from permitting to boards and commissions, and even hearings at the justice court, were all shifted online to give city residents the ability to interact with us safely, and our team went to work building out more access to free public WIFI, which helped our city to bridge the digital divide further than ever before.

With the pandemic triggering an immediate financial hit for so many Salt Lake City residents, we quickly stood up a \$1.1M emergency loan program to help small businesses meet payroll, weeks before federal dollars were approved. We paused utility bills to reduce the financial burden on struggling families, and partnered with Tip Your Server to get more than \$600K in grant money into the pockets of struggling restaurant and bar service workers.

To keep more Salt Lake City residents in their homes, we helped direct more than \$9 million in rental and mortgage assistance into the community.

And, to help families stuck at home recreate safely, many streets throughout the city were closed to traffic and opened to pedestrian use. We found community partners and funded a significant expansion of the Youth City program to help with childcare and create more positive opportunities for learning and recreation, for more of our youth.

We brought the kind of whole-of-government response to the COVID crisis that the situation demanded, and our employees truly rose to the occasion.

When the earth shook us all awake back in March, City employees raced to assess the safety of the City's infrastructure, buildings and residents' homes. They took a record number of 911 calls that day and assisted frightened people throughout our city. Leaving their families and loved ones at home on a day that rattled us all, our team's number one priority was your wellbeing. We kept your public services running and didn't even miss a garbage pick-up that day.

The September ‘inland hurricane’ and its aftermath gave us another example of incredible public servants at work. With over 8,000 tons of debris to clean up, City employees raced to create dedicated communications channels for residents to report issues.

As soon as it was safe to do so, sanitation was out collecting along trash routes, and by Saturday of that week everyone’s garbage and recycling had been picked up, despite many street blockages by downed trees. 5,400 tons of green waste was diverted for composting, and 13 tons of wood debris went to artists and assisting community organizations.

And, with the help of Tree Utah, we launched ReTree SLC – an effort to replace the thousands of trees lost throughout the city during the storm. We’ve received more than \$15,000 from individual donors, and \$80,000 from the collective donation efforts of Rocky Mountain Power, Ivory Homes, Swire Coca-Cola and Bank of America. Thank you, all!

Now, if this room were filled with people, this is where we would give our phenomenal City employees an enthusiastic and heartfelt round of applause, but since me clapping alone would be weird, instead, I’m going to ask you — the next time you see or talk to a City employee — please say thank you. Please, express your gratitude and let them know they are appreciated.

I’d also like to thank the Salt Lake City Council for your hard work and shared commitment to doing what is best for all the people we serve. I’m proud of the strong partnership we have built between the legislative and executive branches and I know our city is better served because of it.

It may feel far away now, but it won’t be long before our team is able to welcome you back to City Hall. We’re taking our cues from state and county health experts and following their recommendations for safe re-entry, and will begin to consider welcoming the public back on a limited basis when transmission levels are in the “Low” category. Doing this in a safe manner will take time, and some of the ways we do business will never be the same, but there is no substitute for engaging in-person with those we serve and work with.

Now, as much as the crises have dominated our lives this past year, they were not the only important challenges our city has faced. The pandemic didn’t mean our housing problems went away, just as the earthquakes didn’t mean our air-quality problems disappeared.

During my first State of the City address, I laid out an aggressive work plan for the year that centered on three overarching objectives:

First, prioritizing growth that equitably benefits all city residents.

Second, making our city more environmentally resilient and sustainable.

And third, bolstering our communities with inclusive and equitable opportunities for all.

Even though the crises certainly made it harder to move forward on a number of initiatives, I believe it's important to be accountable for our progress, regardless. So, yesterday we published the first-ever Salt Lake City Annual Progress Report Card. It's part of our commitment to transparency. I believe that if you don't measure it, you can't manage it. So, no matter what happens any given year of my administration, we're going to measure it and share that with you.

It's a candid look at what we accomplished — and what we didn't — and the work that's ongoing, now, on your behalf. Each goal was given a red, yellow, or green assessment and a written update is provided on each to explain why.

You can see it for yourself at [slcgov.com/reportcard](http://slcgov.com/reportcard). I hope you'll take a look.

And, just as we used a plan centered around objectives to guide our work in 2020, we will move forward in 2021 with a new annual plan with goals that I will tell you about tonight. You can find the complete list of 2021 goals at [slcgov.com/2021Plan](http://slcgov.com/2021Plan)

How many times throughout this pandemic have you thought to yourself, "I can't wait for things to get back to normal."

I certainly have... many, many times, but here's the thing: we can do better than the old "normal."

The pre-COVID status quo was not good for everyone. It wasn't just for everyone. It wasn't safe for everyone and it wasn't fair for everyone.

Instead of Salt Lake City getting back to normal and re-creating what once was, we are seizing this opportunity and striving to make our city better through positive, cooperative change; to come out of this pandemic stronger, more resilient, more equitable, and more just than before.

To help, tonight I'm excited to announce I will form the city's first Innovation Department, which will drive projects that aim to make the way City government serves you more nimble, efficient and cohesive.

This team will take the lead in creating a culture of innovation in city government, helping Salt Lake City to modernize business processes, standardize our approach to project management, improve public transparency, streamline inefficiencies, and promote the use of data to drive decisions.

In the short term, the team's primary objective is to oversee the successful implementation of an integrated software system that will be a game-changer for how basic city functions like payroll and accounting operate cohesively and efficiently. The team will also focus on continuing to build out digital equity infrastructure and policy citywide.

The Innovation Department should come online by the end of February.

Ensuring that our city's growth equitably benefits all city residents will be central to our progress again this year.

Every Salt Lake family deserves access to safe and affordable housing, and the assurance that their neighborhood will retain the character and sense of community that people have come to know and love through the years. We need to help more of our neighbors get into homes and — especially given the economic disruption being caused by the pandemic — stay in them.

First, I am committed to continuing our support of the rental assistance fund. This year we were proud to have applied for and received an additional \$6 million in January that is going toward helping keep people in their homes, and this year I will continue to press our federal partners to support the city with additional funding for the pandemic that would lift our communities.

This year my administration will bring to the City Council a Renter's Choice ordinance. Citywide legislation like this will aim to lower the barrier that security deposits create for some renters, and improve the ability of Salt Lakers from all income brackets to access housing in our city.

We will also begin work on revising the housing loss mitigation fund ordinance. The intent of the fund has always been to operate as a safety net that replaces affordable housing units that are lost to redevelopment, but it hasn't succeeded in this. This year, I'll propose necessary revisions aimed at closing loopholes to maintain the affordable housing that 'naturally' exists today and that we so need in our city.

Last year my administration conducted a top-to-bottom review of the city's zoning laws, fulfilling a pledge I made during my campaign to find areas where changes would allow new housing units and confront geographic inequity.

The rush for new development to solve every growing city's housing shortage comes at a cost: gentrification. Sometimes the conversation is about the changing style or character of a neighborhood, but my chief concern is the impact on our existing residents and the cost of living in these neighborhoods — on people being priced out of their houses, apartments, and neighborhoods they've called 'home' for decades.

As we work to address the city's housing crisis, we're also going to take a deep dive into this issue by bringing an organization with expertise mitigating gentrification to guide our path as a city. The project will inform our work to protect our historic communities and neighborhoods, and preserve affordable housing and active commercial spaces.

And in the 9-Line area on our city's westside, we'll also support the RDA's strategic use of financial tools and coordination with other taxing entities--the Salt Lake City School district and Salt Lake County-- to reduce the impacts of gentrification in that area.

Citywide, there are exciting growth opportunities ahead of us, from the implementation of the Parleys Way Corridor Plan, which will bring buffered bike lanes and enhanced crosswalks to this busy street, to the Folsom Trail, which will connect the Jordan River Parkway to Downtown with walking and biking paths.

We'll begin our public engagement work to shape the future of Allen Park, and we'll begin construction on 300 West – a project which will bring the street a two-way bike lane, continuous sidewalks, new crosswalks, and landscaped park strips with more trees.

And in the Ballpark neighborhood, we've been working on the utilization of City-owned property to help generate revenue streams that could fund stadium maintenance and improvements, with a focus on activating and improving safety in the neighborhood year-round. Our Transportation department will also embark on the creation of the Ballpark Station Area Plan which will eventually improve transportation choices in the neighborhood. The planning for this will involve an extensive community engagement process, with a focus on gaining feedback from a broad range of voices and stakeholders from the neighborhood.

I am determined to reshape the growth of our city in a way that benefits everyone — from every neighborhood. It's not going to be easy, or quick, but it's important we make every effort to grow equitably.

Part of our commitment includes tapping into Salt Lake City's growth to help make it a hub for innovative high-tech business — bringing more of these high-paying, fast-growing jobs to our city and connecting our residents to them.

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the need for our city to be a major player at the forefront of life-science innovation, bringing with it incredible long-term employment opportunities for our city, as well as office environments that utilize lab space and more permanent investment.

Working in partnership with local biotech and life sciences companies, last year we collaborated with community partners and launched the BioHive. BioHive will strategically develop life sciences as the first pillar of a broader initiative aimed at creating more high-paying jobs and capitalizing on the great innovation happening in our community.

Tech Lake City, as we've come to call it, will continue to be a driving force for my administration, and this year, we will continue work on a collaborative roadmap that harnesses the growth and economic potential that exists here. It's not just about attracting companies to take root here, or even about helping innovative entrepreneurs build their businesses here.

We want Tech Lake City to become a tangible connection point of opportunity for Salt Lakers, whether it's our youth looking to shape their career path or adults seeking a new professional direction.

I look forward to announcing the next steps soon on how we'll work together on that roadmap.

Before COVID, many of us would say that the biggest health concern facing our city was the quality of our air.

We can and must take aggressive actions to end the epidemic of emissions in the Salt Lake Valley, not only to improve the quality of the air here, but to try to slow and lessen the impacts of climate change worldwide.

Ironically, the pandemic proved that not only are there steps to lower emissions we can take right away, but that they can make a meaningful difference.

With fewer City employees commuting to their office, we avoided CO2 emissions of 1,072 mT. That accounts for eight-tenths of a percent of our total municipal energy use from electricity, natural gas, and fleet. To put that into perspective, having the actions of individuals make an overall 1% difference is incredibly rare.

That net benefit and the thoughtful input of city employees were enough to make us re-evaluate the way we work at City Hall, and I intend to introduce a hybrid work-from-home model throughout city departments. I am confident we will be able to reduce our impact on the valley's air quality, protect our employees' wellbeing, and continue to provide exceptional customer service to city residents.

We'll also look at the impacts of our City Fleet emissions, energy, and efficiency goals. We want to see if we've moved the needle, if we're being effective, and re-tool where we need to.

Despite the pandemic, despite the earthquakes, even despite the windstorm, last year we were able to fulfill our goal of planting over 1,000 trees in our west side neighborhoods. That's 1,000 more trees in public spaces that will grow to pull pollution out of the air, generate fresh oxygen, provide shade, and improve the quality of life on city streets.

Those 1,000 trees will grow to remove a combined 5 tons of pollution from the air and generate another 13 tons of oxygen on the west side every year.

That's not legislation, not a study, not a meeting — that's real action that will make a real difference. And it wouldn't have happened without the incredible team in our Urban Forestry department or without the help of the community coming together to do the work. This is environmental justice at work and we're grateful for all who helped to make it happen.

Thank you to everyone who played a role in this achievement, including the teams who invested their time and money from Ivory Homes, Dominion Energy, and Rocky Mountain Power.

Thank you.

And by the way, those 1,000 new trees on the west side are in addition to the usual planting of 1,274 trees throughout the city to replace dead or hazardous trees. That's just incredible.

And we're going to do it again this year. I can't wait to get back out there to get started.

Our urban forest is just one part of our City's comprehensive strategy to be stewards of our environment, and to build the city we want to leave for the generations to come.

Our 2021 efforts will start in city hall as we revise our comprehensive sustainability policy and build a framework for how each City department will prioritize sustainability in its planning and decision making.

As a growing city with new development continually in the pipeline, we will also take steps to make sure new projects are green.

First, I will propose to the City Council an ordinance requiring all new buildings funded with city money to be emission-free by 2023. A housing development, hotel, or mixed-use project that receives even a dime of RDA money will have to be emission-free.

Second, we will convene a cross-departmental Sustainable Infrastructure Steering Committee charged with proposing changes to the city code to remove the barriers to green infrastructure and capitalizing on new opportunities for sustainable progress.

And third, I will back the RDA's completion and implementation of its sustainability loan interest rate reduction criteria, which would further incentivize development that is better for our environment.

Our communities and our people are the heartbeat of this city. We are so fortunate in Salt Lake City to be a crossroads of culture, thought and belief. Our communities are the reason so many of us love this city — they define us as a place where everyone belongs, and they push to grow together for the collective good.

Although addressing the geographic, racial, and economic inequities in our city has been a top priority of this government since day one of my administration, the crises of 2020 laid bare some of the stunning gaps that have always been there, and added new urgency to the work of closing them.

I want the work we do in Salt Lake City's government to be framed by a clear intention to expand equity in our city.

President Biden often says, "Don't tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."



That's why I will instruct the leadership of every City department to intentionally consider equity when writing their annual budgets. We're going to put our money where our mouth is, and I challenge the City Council to do the same.

Viewing budgets through the lens of equity will be a starting point for building and executing plans that push our city and its residents forward fairly.

Last March the City Council approved my request for half a million dollars to create a citywide Equity Master Plan. With that funding in place, a cross-departmental City team developed a draft request for proposal, which underwent a robust public process to ensure that our Equity Plan will inform and influence the way we operate as a City, from zoning and investment, to hiring, public outreach, and budgeting. I'm so excited to announce that a consultant will be on board this week to begin this important work and I can't wait for you all to weigh in.

Economic opportunity will undoubtedly be one of the biggest focus areas of that work. As a City government, we must be committed to fostering a community where everybody has the opportunity to thrive.

The City Council last year approved funding for an apprenticeship program to provide on-the-job training and create a pipeline to permanent employment opportunities for individuals who need an alternative pathway into the job force. I'm excited that this program has officially launched, and people will be able to apply for positions as they become available.

We'll also continue focusing on representation in the government's workforce as we further our work on equitable recruitment and hiring practices and provide more access to training opportunities with the implementation of a Workforce Evolution Plan.

Economic hardship quickly manifests in another area I expect to see progress this year: food insecurity.

Last year we launched the Resident Food Equity Advisors Project, recruiting residents who have experienced food hardship to engage with program advisors in a dialogue about their interactions with our city's food systems. We will receive recommendations from the advisors of this program this spring and get to work on implementation immediately.

With so many students learning from home last year, 2020 put a major spotlight on Salt Lake City's digital divide.

Even after the pandemic wanes, access to high-speed internet will continue to play a substantial and growing role in the people's ability to fully participate in our society, in our schools, in our economy, and — indeed — in our democracy.

Last year as our City brought engagement online, our teams also worked tirelessly to decrease the digital divide so that more city residents had the ability to participate in City meetings, and City decision making.

I was proud to support the City's rollout of technology to expand internet access through pop-up transmission sites and expansion of our City Connect WI-FI at some of our city buildings.

In a time when digital connection became critical, our teams partnered to get surplus city computers into the hands of Salt Lake City school students. We held pop-ups to sign people up for essential services and to complete the census. And we partnered with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to open Rose Park Connect, a free community computer lab.

We also approved and adopted a citywide Digital Equity Plan to guide our work moving forward and ensure it remains an ongoing priority for every department in this city.

The final aspect of equity I want to address tonight is criminal justice.

One of the biggest challenges we faced last year was the honest confrontation of generations of racial inequity in our country. The days and weeks following the death of George Floyd were extremely tough for our city, but they were nothing compared to the centuries of injustice that people of color in Utah and across the country experience every day of their lives and have experienced for generations.

The demands for justice by those who marched in our streets prompted the most aggressive set of police reforms in our City's history. I'm proud of the reforms we've put in place. I believe they will make our city more safe for everyone, including the brave officers who step out onto the street each day to keep us safe.

But they are just the beginning.

Working in partnership with the City Council, last year we created a Commission on Racial Equity in Policing, and if you've been watching their work over these past months, you know that they are already making headway on reviewing every aspect of the Salt Lake City Police Department's policies, budget, and culture.

These 18 commission members and 10 youth subcommittee members are extraordinary representatives for their communities, and I look forward to working with them and Chief Brown this year to bring their recommendations to life.

Our efforts to build a more just police department do not conflict with our efforts to address rising crime rates. That is a false choice, and I will not let our work toward either be derailed by simplistic political rhetoric.

Being a good police department — being the best — means never resting on our laurels, and it means being eager to evolve for the good of our public and our officers.

I know that our police officers are committed to serving and protecting everyone in this city humanely and equitably under the law. They believe, just as I do, that every city's fundamental job is to ensure that residents, businesses, and visitors are safe, and that those goals are not incompatible with our core values of equity and access to opportunity for every resident.

I promise that the work toward a more just Salt Lake City will continue this year and for as long as I have the honor of serving as your mayor.

And finally, tonight, I want to address homelessness, for which solutions continue to challenge both our city and state — as it has for as long as I can remember.

Salt Lake City's priority is and will always be connecting individuals with the unique resources they need and helping make sure people have access to a safe and warm place to sleep at night. Housed or unhoused, they are our neighbors, and we are called to help those in need.

There has never been an easy solution to the challenge we face, and COVID only made it harder. Criminally citing every camper is no more the solution than allowing people to camp freely in neighborhood parks. We cannot force people into available beds in the homeless resource centers, any more than we can allow criminals to take cover in homeless encampments.

Back in October we rolled out our Community Commitment Program, a two-phased, outreach-focused effort with more than a dozen partnering service agencies, to provide safe and accessible public spaces, while helping our unsheltered neighbors access resources. By the end of the year, outreach efforts in this initiative, and through our other partnerships, were successful in connecting 40 people with housing and resources, and over 120 people with temporary shelter.

This year we will move to make the Community Commitment Program a permanent, multi-agency approach to connecting people with services and shelter.

Last month, Salt Lake City once again volunteered to host an overflow shelter to house the state's unsheltered community through the winter after other cities and towns refused to step up.

Just as we did the previous winter.

It is time for the state government to step up.

It is time for other cities and towns in Utah to step up.

The crisis of unsheltered residents here in Salt Lake City is, and has always been, a statewide humanitarian crisis and it is long-past time for our partners to come together and shift from short-term crisis management of space, into planning for long-term, sustainable solutions for homelessness.

We need to break this unending cycle. We need the state to heed the recommendations of the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute and empower a statewide Homeless Services Officer to partner with cities throughout the state in earnest, fully funded.

We need better access to healthcare, mental health treatment, and substance abuse services.

We need more affordable housing in our city and beyond, and we need to think outside the box on the form that housing takes — including, perhaps, a tiny home community like has proven successful in other states.

We also need to come back together as a community and reset the rhetoric that has grown more and more extreme as the pandemic has worsened.

People feel strongly — I get it. So do I. Housing needs have been a problem for a long time and there are no easy solutions. If there were an easy solution, we'd have done it years ago. Decades ago.

The public servants from the city, the county, and the nonprofits who try to help the unsheltered do so because we care deeply. The assumption that we are indifferent or worse, ill-intentioned toward people who don't have a home is the furthest thing from the truth and it divides us in working toward the result we're all trying to achieve.

People's emotions are frayed right now. We're frustrated. We're sad. We're isolated.

I get it.

We've been doom scrolling for four years and it's gotten easier to assume the worst.

We have grown more divided as a nation and even as a city, but this reflex to demonize is toxic.

I've said it before, and I'll continue saying it - anger is not a strategy for progress or a viable path forward.

We are on the same team.

And I get that it's easy to see an 8-second clip on Tik-Tok or a photo on Instagram and come to the worst possible conclusion.

After this last year — after this last presidency — it's exhausting and it's so much easier to react than to investigate. I get it.

But assumption is corrosive and oversimplifying the most complex issue in our city is not constructive.

So we need to recenter our focus to action. We have to recommit to working together, opening our minds, and reserving our judgments about one another.

The pandemic will end and so must our isolation. So must our anger.

We cannot — we must not — surrender to the cynicism that surrounds us.

We cannot succumb to the grief.

For as much that tested us in 2020, I'd argue there was more that showed us our character as a city. Day by day there was always a will in our community to help. There was creativity, there were incredible ideas. We accomplished things even in the hardest moments. That is who we are, and who we'll continue to be.

Today it is our responsibility to move forward — to honor the memories of those we've lost by building a city that would make them proud.

By being of service to one another.

By leading lives with grace and humility.

We all yearn to shed the weight of 2020's hardships and I'm here to tell you: we're going to get there. Not to where we were, but to where we are going as a city. Together.

I invite you to embrace this new year in our dear capital city with the earned confidence that we can get through anything, together. We have. And the future we're building, now, is informed by what we've learned and are still learning from each other, every day. More equity, more opportunity, more accountability and more well-being, for all.

Until we can gather together again, please, take care of yourselves, your families and your neighbors. Stay healthy, stay safe, and know that Salt Lake City is hard at work, for you.

Thank you, and good night.