
2018 State of the City Address — Salt Lake City Mayor's Office

On Wednesday, January 31, 2018, Mayor Jackie Biskupski delivered her third State of the City Address, prioritizing housing, transit, jobs, infrastructure and clean energy. Below is a transcript of the speech:

Thank you, Jambo Africa, for that beautiful performance. Thank you, Lauryn, Ah Rah, Joshua, Folauihola, and Alex for reminding us of the strength of diversity in our great nation. And reminding us of the importance of those words “with Liberty and Justice for All.”

Thank you to Principal Bell, the staff and the students of Horizonte for opening your school to us. Thank you to everyone here, including City employees for coming this evening. And a special thanks to my wife Betty and my beautiful family.

Tonight, we have the privilege of enjoying this remarkable space in our community. Horizonte is a place of purpose. A place which has embraced hope and opportunity.

Horizonte is more than a school, and those that walk these halls are seen as more than simply students. Horizonte, like Salt Lake City, is a community. And as a community, they succeed by fully investing in their students' lives and by focusing on long-term solutions to the unique challenges they face.

Two days ago, Principal Joshua Bell and I were talking about Horizonte's focus on helping students graduate with a diploma rather than a GED. Because Joshua and his team are focused on the long-term success of their students, they choose to invest more time and funding in education rather than simply a credential.

They understand their responsibility to help students grow and create a life of success in this community. From a Head Start preschool to a culinary arts program, the staff at Horizonte is focused on holistic approaches to ensure every student has the same opportunity to be successful.

In Salt Lake City, we are also taking a holistic approach in addressing the needs of people in this city. A little more than two years ago, my team and I walked into City Hall with a vision to Build a City for Everyone. We certainly knew it wasn't going to be easy—and in many ways, it was going to require fundamental shifts in how Salt Lake City had been operating.

It should not be surprising that change is difficult. And over the last two years, we have encountered our share of difficult times. But, I can stand here today and say to you that we are seeing positive results from the change my team has brought to City Hall and to Salt Lake City.

Much of that change has been to develop strategic plans to comprehensively address the issues we face as the City grows. The impact of that growth is felt in every neighborhood and is a result of the booming population across the region.

Our City has a responsibility to manage this growth in a sustainable way, while seizing opportunities to invest in the future.

When I called for the creation of the Department of Economic Development two years ago, my goal was to align City resources to create jobs for all people, drive investment, and to develop a green economy for the future.

As the Capital City and the Crossroads of the West, Salt Lake City has a responsibility to lead our State's economy. And we take that very seriously.

The City is now a major player in the “Team Utah” approach that the State utilizes to attract companies to the area.

Theresa Foxley, the Executive Director of the Economic Development Corporation of Utah—who is here tonight—put it this way: “Salt Lake City's creation of the Department of Economic Development has been a tremendous change to the City's approach. The department is engaged and its cutting-edge ideas have benefitted the region and the state, as other cities learn from, and adopt its best ideas.”

Thank you, Theresa, I couldn't agree with you more. Our investment has paid off more than anticipated. The dozens of companies our team has attracted or expanded in the City has resulted in nearly a BILLION dollars in capital investment.

And over the last two years, our teams, led by Director Lara Fritts, have created more than 6,000 jobs, many of which are available today. The average salary for these new jobs is nearly \$66,000 dollars per year.

These jobs allow people to live where they work. Even more, these new jobs are making the City and region a competitive place, benefitting people who live here.

Last year, after we announced Amazon would be building a distribution center in the City, I received a note from a woman named Brigitte. She shared with us, that because of the City's effort to bring Amazon to the area, her husband and his colleagues, who work at a nearby business, received a \$2 dollar an hour increase in pay.

An increase that made a difference. To ensure recruitment efforts continue to benefit people like Brigitte and her husband, we will add a workforce development expert to the team.

This expert will focus on raising the average wage in the City, job placement, and making sure our businesses can find the employees they need right here in Salt Lake City.

And as we recruit new business, we will continue to prioritize our City's clean energy goals.

Companies like Packsize, who our team recently helped expand in the City, are some of the strongest partners we can have in the effort to clear the air. Last month they completed the largest installation of EV charging stations in the State—making it easier for their employees and the public to go electric.

For the Economic Development team, this work is also personal. They live in the City and they understand my vision of Building a City for Everyone.

Tonight, we are joined by several people who are part of one their innovative programs. Individuals who were experiencing homelessness that are now learning skills in one of the most booming markets: the construction industry.

My team partnered with Salt Lake City Housing Authority, the Department of Workforce Services, Catholic Community Services, Salt Lake Community College, UTA, and construction leaders.

Just a few months ago, twelve individuals were selected by Catholic Community Services to participate in this program. They were provided housing, transit, job training, and most importantly—a guaranteed opportunity to interview with an employer.

Stefan Whitmer and Fabian Yazzie are two of those trainees, and they are here with us tonight. Both have excelled in this program, and hope it helps them break the cycle of homelessness.

Next week, Jennifer, Fabian, and the other trainees will graduate. They'll receive their certificates, a start-up kit of tools and other necessities, and they will get that interview! Congratulations to all of you!

This program is a success because it combines the stabilizing forces of housing, transit, economic development, and education. It is a reality because of the community's unprecedented focus on helping those without a place to call home.

One of the greatest challenges of this project was securing housing for the participants. Thank you to Salt Lake City's Housing Authority for partnering with us to meet this need.

As our City continues to grow, we know the most stabilizing force in communities is housing. Home is the foundation from where we build our lives.

No city can sustainably move forward without taking action on the housing crisis we face here and around the state. And, it is a crisis when one out of every four people pays over half of their income for the roof over their head.

This means your neighbor who is working two jobs and making \$34,000 dollars a year is paying over \$17,000 dollars in rent. And with a historically low 2% vacancy rate, prices continue to rise in neighborhoods across the City.

Over the last few years housing prices have also increased faster than wages, moving home ownership out of the reach of many.

Our housing team—led by director Melissa Jensen—has never lost sight of the humanity behind this crisis, and the opportunities found in a variety of solutions. For Melissa, the reason for affordable and equitable housing is simple: To ensure a single mother in Salt Lake City never has to choose between food and paying the rent.

And for me, right now, it is also about ensuring that those whose lives will be transformed at the new homeless resource centers, can find a home. Because, without housing, there can be no end to homelessness.

For the small business owner—affordable housing means residents will have enough money to spend on their goods and services.

And for many in our community, affordable housing is about finding a place to build a life in Salt Lake City. A place to start a family. A place to invest in their future. And a place to grow old.

It is from this mindset that we created GrowingSLC, a five-year housing plan to address our City's crisis, both in the short- and long-term. Last year I convened the Blue-Ribbon Commission of industry leaders to create opportunities for deeply affordable housing.

I am pleased to say three of the Commission's priority projects received tax credits this past December. This means almost 270 units of deeply affordable housing will be under construction later this year.

We are working with the City Council to utilize \$21 million dollars in RDA funds to bring even more affordable housing to the market. Some of these funds have already been used to acquire run-down motels which have been a blight on neighborhoods.

With a plan to match the crisis and environment we face, we are revamping City policies and ordinances to bring them into alignment with today's reality. In February, I will transmit to the City Council a new ordinance which requires the need for affordable housing to be addressed in every sale of City-owned land.

Where housing is simply not an option, the ordinance will require funds to be set aside to address our affordable housing goals. We will continue to leverage tools, like the Housing Trust Fund, to create and maintain affordable and stable housing.

In the last two years alone, we invested just \$6.2 million dollars of trust funds and turned it into \$154 million dollars in private investment and 796 affordable units. That is an investment worth making. That is an investment worth expanding.

By matching the homes we build with the transit needs of those who live in them, we will increase the value of this investment even more.

The question: "how will I get there?" or, often, "can I even get there?" shouldn't be a deciding factor where someone lives, the job opportunities they can take, or where they will spend their money.

For Salt Lake City in particular, reliable transit is critical to getting people out of their cars and clearing the air. We know more than 50% of the air pollution we breathe is caused by vehicles.

The decision we all make to turn the key, has an impact on whether our kids carry inhalers in their lunchboxes or wear breathing masks on the playground.

Late last year, Salt Lake City approved its first Transit Master Plan.

The fundamental goal of this plan is to build upon the current regional system to make it easier to get in and around the Capital City. As a regional system, UTA is focused first and foremost on the north-south transit corridor connecting cities along the Wasatch Front.

This often leaves gaps in local service. In Salt Lake City, this has left our East and West side communities without enough options to connect to downtown and other parts of the region.

Budget constraints also limit early morning, late-night, and weekend service. So, even if you have access to a bus route, service may not exist when you need it.

It is unfortunate Proposition 1 failed in Salt Lake County in 2015. However, Salt Lake City residents supported the proposal which would have provided funding to fill our gaps in local service. We supported Prop 1 because we cannot solve our air quality problem, without investing in public transit.

In the coming year, my Administration will work with the City Council to implement the top priorities of the Transit Master Plan. This includes improving the experience for transit users and increasing ridership by funding high-frequency bus networks throughout the City.

By taking advantage of our City's grid system, these networks can fill-in those east-west gaps that limit options for residents and businesses. These gaps currently keep many from giving transit a second thought—because no one wants to be forced to make multiple transfers to simply go a few miles.

Thanks in part to my Council colleagues, we already have a great example of what can happen when barriers to public transit are removed. People take it.

The result of last December's Free Fare Day was a 23% percent increase in ridership. But, it shouldn't be surprising that almost all of this increase was seen on the north-south rail network.

Worthy efforts like a Free Fare Day can't enhance something that doesn't exist. However, they do show us people want to get out of their cars. They want to be a part of the solution.

It is time for us to invest in this willingness and take the biggest steps we can to clear our air.

As the City continues to grow with daily commuters and residents—our greatest responsibility is to maintain the safety and security of our neighborhoods. Chief

Mike Brown and the women and men of the Salt Lake City Police Department deserve great credit for their efforts in keeping crime down over the last two years.

We ended 2017 with a 5.8% drop in overall crime. When compared to 2015—a high-water mark for crime in the City—crime is down nearly 12%. Thank you, Chief Brown.

This downward trend holds true in every District in Salt Lake City. Right here in District 5, we have seen a 13.8% drop in crime when compared to 2015.

But, I know crime is personal. That the only statistic which matters is the one which impacts you, your neighborhood, your home, or your business.

And we know in order to keep this trend moving down, and to be prepared to respond to shifts in crime, we must continue to invest in our public safety officers.

While Operation Rio Grande has created a transformational shift Downtown, it has also stretched our police department's resources. Both the City Council and I are committed to easing this strain by providing more funding for additional police officers.

This will allow Chief Brown and his team to resume and enhance the Neighborhood Beat policing model, which has proven successful over the last two years.

Last week, the police department announced the hiring of 40 new officers to keep us moving in the right direction. We will get our bike patrol officers back into the neighborhoods, so they can once again become part of the fabric of the communities they serve.

This neighborhood beat model is important, not only in reducing crime, but in empowering residents to be a part of the solution.

Our efforts to improve quality of life in our City don't end with simply more police. My Administration is also working to ensure safety through design principles are included early in the design review process of new construction.

These principles, known as CEPTED, are also integrated into the design of the new homeless resource centers—to ensure these spaces truly become places of hope and neighborhood assets.

Designing our streets and buildings properly is often the first line of defense against crime. And maintaining our streets and buildings is also an indicator of our future success.

Over the summer, you may have seen a strange van driving up and down Salt Lake City's streets. With an antenna, cameras, and flashing lights on top of it—some people called it the Ghostbusters wagon.

Close, but not quite.

This van collected street-level data on the condition of every road in Salt Lake City. The data from that survey was compiled in a report issued earlier this month.

And what it shows will probably surprise no one: nearly 64% of Salt Lake City's roads are rated as poor, very poor, serious, or failed.

This report has also paved the way for our engineering and streets teams to develop comprehensive plans for how we can move our roads from failing to improving. Guided by this information, the City Council and I will begin looking at potential funding options to address this concern.

We know residents and businesses care about the state of the City's roads and sidewalks.

In fact, last year, one resident left a pile of asphalt with a note on my driveway to express frustration. I won't read what was in the note but suffice it to say: the resident's road needs fixing.

Significantly shifting the condition of our roads, sidewalks, gutters, parks, and critical facilities is no easy task.

A ten-year plan to begin shifting our roads from failing to good, could cost nearly \$200 million dollars. It would require a commitment of future ongoing funding so we don't end up where we are today.

But, improving our infrastructure will have an incredible impact on our economy and quality of life. Upgraded infrastructure will not only help us get around easier, it has the power to help clear the air.

Last year, the City completed solar installations on seven facilities, and brought 28 new EV charging stations online. Our investment in infrastructure must continue to include efforts like these, to move the City away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy.

Addressing the issue now, also allows us to coordinate road work with many once-

in-a-generation projects our Public Utilities Department is preparing to begin.

These projects include replacing century old sewer and water lines which run along 13th East—pipes which provide clean drinking water to more than half of our residents. Over the next two summers, residents and commuters will see a major investment along 13th East.

This work will improve the infrastructure below ground and include a reconstruction of the street—providing for better bus service, walkability, and biking.

I want to take a moment to recognize the incredible efforts of the City's Department of Public Utilities. This work is done by dedicated individuals like Dale Christensen, who is here tonight.

Dale has been the manager and brains behind operating the City's sewer treatment plant for decades and he is retiring this March. Thank you, Dale, for all your years of service.

The Public Utilities team ensures we have clean water flowing from our faucets, that waste streams are working, and our streets are safe and well-lit at night. Their work also protects the long-term health of our most important piece of infrastructure: the Wasatch Canyon Watershed.

This year, we have a renewed resolve to vigorously protect this watershed. A comprehensive update to the Watershed Management Plan, with support from diverse stakeholders, will be completed this year.

This vital document will guide us in addressing risks to our water resources including climate change, wildfire, and increased recreational use. It will help us not only build a more resilient City but allow us to continue to provide safe drinking water to the growing population of the valley.

Strong infrastructure has allowed cities to thrive for thousands of years. From the Roman aqueducts, which provided water to an Empire, to the transcontinental railroad, which linked a growing nation, and made this region the Crossroads of the West.

When I was at the U.S. Conference of Mayors last week, the top concerns were how to strategically address the issues of affordable housing, transit, public safety, and infrastructure, amidst the lack of meaningful Federal action.

But, through this concern was optimism in the ability of cities to lead the charge to keep this nation moving forward. This optimism is because of the residents who live in urban areas.

Residents who recognize the need to address these critical issues, not only to build more resilient cities, but to create equity for all who live in them. In Salt Lake City we have a rare opportunity to create a transformational shift in how we address growth.

In 2015, the legislature approved a bill to allow Salt Lake City to increase the local sales tax by a half percent, or five cents for every \$10 dollars spent. By exercising this option now, Salt Lake City can create an ongoing fund to specifically address the growth issues we are facing in housing, transit, public safety, infrastructure, and air quality.

This funding would come, not only from local residents, but from those who visit and work in the Capital City—ensuring all who use of our infrastructure help pay for it. Estimated to generate approximately \$35 million dollars annually, this opportunity has the power to quickly change people's lives.

By investing in our housing programs, we can incentivize future developments to include housing for all income levels. We can launch innovative programs to encourage home ownership, bringing stability to neighborhoods across the City.

We can strategically and responsibly invest in local transit. We can get more buses in neighborhoods, so employment and economic opportunities are not lost to the question: "Can I get there?"

We can provide options, so people can do what they have told us they want to do, get out of their cars and help clear the air.

And by investing in our public safety agencies, we can ensure the Capital City's streets and neighborhoods are always safe.

In the coming weeks my Administration, working with the City Council, will begin an outreach campaign to gauge the public's interest in activating this sales-tax option to invest in the Capital City.

This engagement will build on the significant outreach we have already done to complete the affordable housing and transit master plans, as well as the feedback residents have provided the City throughout the years. This will include a larger conversation about the City's streets, sidewalks, parks, and other critical infrastructure.

While the ongoing funding created from the sales tax option, could be used in part to maintain our aging infrastructure, it is not the only opportunity we have.

This year, we have a rare opportunity to take to the voters, a bond for up to \$87 million dollars. The bond would generate one-time revenue to replace our aging infrastructure, for around five dollars per household, per year.

If approved by voters, the bond, combined with some possible funding from the sales-tax increase, will finally allow us to implement a ten-year plan to make our streets better for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians.

For the first time, Salt Lake City has a robust transit master plan, a housing plan, and an in-depth understanding of our infrastructure needs. We have a clean energy plan, with goals focused on helping us preserve the water, land, and air.

These funding options, create a unique opportunity to fully implement these plans giving Salt Lake City the ability to control its own destiny. With all of this in place, now is the time for us to fully invest in the future of Salt Lake City.

Last week, I had the privilege of hearing a panel discussion on building strong cities, led by Senator Cory Booker. He shared a story about a woman who took him into her neighborhood, a neighborhood in distress.

She said: "If you can see hope, opportunity, and the face of God, you can rejuvenate a neighborhood. If all you see are problems, that is all you will ever see."

For the past two years, I have seen the opportunities lying beyond our problems. With that vision, we have forged a path to truly build a City for everyone.

To create the change which will allow future Mayors to say, as I can tonight: the State of the City is strong.