

Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson's Proposed 2023 Budget Address

OCTOBER 25, 2022

It's 10 am on a typical Tuesday in Salt Lake County. At this moment, 74 Meals on Wheels Drivers are out – providing healthy meals to 1,440 of our most vulnerable seniors. 62 of the drivers volunteer their time, and in case you are wondering, today's meal is Salisbury Steak! 22 recreation centers and more than 100 parks are full of swimmers, gym rats, and pickleball players. And after school today, a middle-schooler will shoot their first three-pointer or score their first goal. At the Herriman library, toddler story time with Miss Victoria is just about to start. Across the county, our District Attorneys are in court or screening cases, assuring that victims receive justice while staff at our jail is holding offenders accountable and preparing inmates to depart so they will never return. Our clerk's office is humming, effectively processing the thousands of ballots that have already been cast.

And in this building, a variety of critical services are being provided to residents and businesses. Today alone, Salt Lake County's dedicated staff will serve thousands of residents and businesses in countless ways. I cannot possibly highlight every vital county service.... but each office, division, and program is key in supporting a productive and functioning community. Salt Lake County continues to be an efficient and high-performing government, supporting our community's health, safety, and quality of life, all through a lens of access and inclusion.

And, by habit, I just checked our COVID dashboard and Salt Lake County remains in low transmission. While the decline in new cases is promising, health risks will continue to be monitored and managed. All the while, our residents are facing rising costs, a housing crisis, and looming environmental risks, all of which threaten our quality of life. During these uncertain times, Salt Lake County's commitment to maintaining its Triple-A bond rating and providing services efficiently and at the lowest possible cost is all the more important.

The 2023 proposed budget is a complex one. It is a tale of two budgets. Our base budget is unusually limited this year. Due to a rise in the cost of goods, health care, and employee compensation, I have not recommended ANY new ongoing programs and was forced to deny 22 valid staffing requests because of the pressure new hires or programs would have on the budget's long-term structural balance.

The good news is that once-in-a-generation federal investments allow for transformational change in our community — especially for those most often left behind. And we have an unprecedented opportunity to address long overdue deferred maintenance projects in the county.

Salt Lake County cannot serve our community without thousands of dedicated employees and we know they are feeling the impacts of rising costs. Today, I am proposing a salary increase of 4 percent for all employees across the board. As we work to retain our talented staff in a hyper-competitive job market, I am also recommending an additional one-time retention compensation boost. Employees in the lowest pay grades will get an additional 4 percent, middle grades will receive 3 percent, and the highest-paid employees will receive 2 percent.

Health care expenses are dramatically rising, but for the vast majority of employees – those on the high deductible plan – Salt Lake County will continue to cover 100 percent of employee premiums. Bottom line: The lowest-paid employees will receive an 8 percent increase in 2023. 4 percent ongoing and 4 percent one-time, with no health care cost increase for those on the high deductible plan. This budget also includes a 7 percent adjustment to our public safety and corrections teams so we can recruit and retain those who protect us, day in and day out. Finally, there is a set-aside for 2023 adjustments to address employee classifications that lag behind the market. HR will work to determine the highest priorities for that fund.

I am honored that the 2023 compensation package received unanimous support from all independent elected officials.

While there are no new ongoing programs in this budget, I AM recommending transformational investments in homelessness, housing, the environment, key community projects, and deferred maintenance, using one-time funding made available through federal funds passed to our County.

In 2022, we made unprecedented investments in housing and homelessness– including:

- \$20 million in the housing trust fund,
- An expansion of the Green and Healthy Homes program,
- tens of millions in rent subsidies,
- paying off the Shelter the Homeless debt,
- and housing for medically vulnerable homeless individuals.

And in the 2023 budget, I am recommending further investment to address our housing crisis. This budget proposes joining Salt Lake City and philanthropists by providing a \$2 million dollar investment in the Other Side Academy Tiny Home Village – a place where 400 members of the homeless community will eventually be provided a safe, secure, and warm place to live while in recovery.

Pollution....Water Shortages....Growth Pressures...Shrinking Green Space... Time is not our friend as climate change and growth pressures are transforming our weather, water, and

landscape. We need to act now. My 2023 budget proposal includes transformational investments to address critical environmental needs.

Salt Lake County has already stepped up by voicing opposition to the Parley's Mine and the Little Cottonwood Canyon Gondola. We have moved County cars, trucks and machines to using only Tier-3 gas, as well as replacing as many vehicles as possible to hybrid or electric. We expanded trails and open spaces, provided active transportation options, and invested in systems to improve our air.

The budget proposal today supercharges those investments in many ways, including:

- expanded Jordan River Trail maintenance,
- sidewalk improvements to make it safer for kids to walk to school in cities like Herriman and Taylorsville,
- and additional investments in trails and bike lanes so that people have transportation choices that benefit them and our air quality.

We will continue to expand trail access in Rose, Yellow Fork, and Butterfield Canyons. I'm also proposing an unprecedented \$5 million dollar investment in open space funding. Vacant land is being developed by the minute and we need to act now to preserve the open spaces that make Salt Lake County unique.

This year we joined the state in raising public awareness around our shrinking Great Salt Lake and declining levels in the reservoirs that provide our water. Salt Lake County led out on water conservation in 2021: We decreased County internal water use by an impressive 13 percent. This year, we asked county agencies to cut another 5 percent. We are also in the process of:

- Flipping 142 parking strips to save five million gallons of water every year,
- Converting several multi-purpose fields to synthetic turf—saving almost six million gallons per year,
- Upgrading key irrigation infrastructure in parks and facilities, and
- Providing grants to local governments to help them do the same.

Another critical deferred maintenance project I am recommending is the overhaul of the air conditioning and cooling system at the Salt Palace. It's time to move away from freon—which contributes to the thinning of the ozone—and to a more environmentally friendly system that will have the added benefit of decreasing operating costs.

By investing to develop Salt Lake County's broader workforce, we will help guarantee that high-paying jobs for residents are available in the years to come and that our economy remains strong. This budget proposal builds on last year's workforce development initiative by offering

pre-apprenticeship opportunities to prepare workers for high-paying jobs in clean energy, broadband, transportation, manufacturing, and cybersecurity.

This budget also includes several game-changing programs that address needs in the community. This budget proposes a \$2 million dollar grant to support the capital costs of the Utah AIDS Foundation's new community health center. There is currently no LGBTQ+ community health center in Utah. The Utah AIDS Foundation will use this funding to renovate their building, transforming it into a space where comprehensive mental and physical healthcare will be provided.

Salt Lake County Animal Services is one of the most recognized no-kill shelters in the nation, yet it operates out of an aging and insufficient building. This limits our ability to support the needs of our county's puppies, kittens, and other pets. We have a unique opportunity to modernize by building a new pet-friendly center, as envisioned by the Animal Services team. Animal Services does not have a dedicated fund to address its capital needs, which makes the current window of opportunity created by federal funding the right time to invest in a new center. My budget proposal includes \$500,000 for capital and operational planning as a first phase of a new facility and animal park.

Salt Lake County's growing Latino and Hispanic population does not have a gathering place worthy of their history and excellence. Centro Civico has served Salt Lake County for more than 90 years as a cultural and resource center, providing medical care, food distribution, and other vital services. A new community center is a worthy investment to carry on this work. This budget proposes a matched grant to Centro Civico Mexicano to support planning for a new center to replace the aging facility.

This fall, we worked together to honor past commitments and plan for the future of Salt Lake County's Library system. This budget proposal, which includes the proposed tax increase this Council supported, implements our strategy.

And ... for the "*address the deferred maintenance*" crowd ... this budget, FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, funds every high-priority deferred maintenance project identified by the facilities team — a whopping \$85 million investment.

This is the largest investment in deferred capital maintenance ever.

Some of these projects have been put off for more than a decade, and it is time that we upgrade critical public assets. I am proposing:

- The replacement of the roof of the SLC Sports Complex
- ADA accessibility projects at recreation centers
- Critical repairs and improvements at the jail
- Deep investments in needed renovations in parks and recreation centers

- Additional trail maintenance and expansion
- And (drum roll please) critical improvements to the Salt Lake County sewage canal – perhaps the most exciting project announced today. This budget will allow us to replace pumps, stabilize the channel, and remove vegetation that is impeding flow in the canal. Vegetation-eating carp, intentionally planted by our wise flood control team, simply cannot keep up with the nutrient-rich growth that clogs the waterway. We have an entire briefing paper on this fascinating topic if you are interested!

So, in closing, I'd like to thank so many dedicated county employees and elected officials. Also, thanks to my mayor's office team for your work and support as we prepared this year's budget. And a heartfelt thanks to the budget staff in agencies throughout the county who prepared program budgets. Also, deep thanks to Darrin Casper, Rod Kitchens, and their budget team given the complexity of this task and the long hours spent.

Salt Lake County remains a beacon of ethical, responsible, and frugal governance. The people who choose to serve this County and guide this system are world-class and it takes all of us working together, independent elected offices, Council Members, and dedicated employees to provide such valuable and crucial services to our residents. We all take pride in this mission!

I'd like to thank everyone, and especially the public, for attending or logging in to this morning's address.

Council, I look forward to working with you over the coming weeks as you deliberate the budget. And now, I would like to turn the time over to CFO Darrin Casper and his team to walk you through the details.

Thank you.