

# Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson's 2026 Budget Proposal Speech

October 21, 2025

Good morning. Thank you for being here as I share my proposed Salt Lake County 2026 budget.

I want to begin by recognizing the many people who make this work possible. Today's budget presentation represents hundreds of hours of effort by county staff and elected officials across the county.

I also want to offer special thanks to Darrin Casper, Arlyn Bradshaw, Rod Kitchens, and the entire budget team. Their expertise and tireless work—meeting with departments, balancing competing needs, and aligning resources—has once again made it possible to present a responsible, forward-looking balanced budget. Additionally, the civil arm of the District Attorney's Office, the Treasurer's Office, and others stepped up for us to ensure compliance with new state regulations that go into effect this year. Thank you!

The budget I am presenting today reflects who we are as a community. It is balanced, responsible, and built on our commitment to provide residents with the essential services they depend on—while keeping taxes as low as possible.

It is designed to stabilize our structural balance, address increased public safety risks, and invest in vital programs at Salt Lake County that make our communities safer and stronger.

The character of Salt Lake County is defined by its quality of life. Public safety, health services, recreation, green space, and cultural opportunities all shape

our community and make it a place people choose to live, visit, and build their lives.

We are home to extraordinary amenities: award-winning libraries and recreation centers, world-class ski resorts, a vibrant arts scene, the Bonneville Shoreline Trail, and Dimple Dell Regional Park—one of the largest natural areas in an urban environment.

Our canyons offer both solitude and spaces for families to come together. Our libraries and planetarium inspire curiosity and learning. From Alta’s alpine village to the thriving urban core of Salt Lake City to growing cities in the southwest region, the County supports a truly diverse range of communities.

But none of this happens by accident. It happens because we work together as a community.

And here at Salt Lake County, we put residents first. We avoid partisan squabbles. We collaborate to get things done.

And it works. This fall, Salt Lake County’s AAA bond rating was reaffirmed. We remain among the top-rated counties in the nation. The top two percent! That elite status translates directly into lower borrowing costs— which means more services for residents at a lower cost.

Salt Lake County has long had a culture of efficiency and innovation. We continually modernize systems, streamline operations, and focus on long-term savings.

Take the Daybreak Library branch—a building I love to highlight because it perfectly represents that spirit. It is Utah’s first Net Zero Energy building. Using geothermal energy and more than 500 solar panels, it produces more energy than it consumes. It saves taxpayer dollars and reduces emissions while providing a beloved community amenity.



We approach all of our physical assets with that same philosophy: build smart, modernize thoughtfully, and maintain responsibly. Our libraries, parks, senior centers, trails, recreation facilities, and public buildings are essential to the health and vitality of our communities. Keeping them modern and safe ensures they'll serve residents for generations to come.

We also seek efficiency and modernization with the programs we offer. Always improving and changing to meet the community need is a mandate

We have several significant projects ahead that position Salt Lake County for the future:

1. **A New County Headquarters** – We've acquired a building in Midvale to create a modern, centralized, and more accessible public service center. This investment actually costs less than repairing our aging existing Government Center. It's fiscally smart and service-focused—a win on every front.
2. **Larry H. & Gail Miller Arts Center** – This new regional center in South Jordan will include an 800-seat theater, rehearsal space, and a visual arts gallery. It will bring arts and culture opportunities to the southwest region and is made possible through a historic \$25 million gift from the Miller Family Foundation. We are deeply grateful for their partnership and commitment to the arts and community.
3. **A Reimagined Downtown District** – We're deep into planning a modernized Salt Palace Convention Center as part of a Sports, Entertainment, Culture, and Convention District. This public-private collaboration will transform the area between City Creek Center and the Delta Center, making it more walkable and vibrant. It will be ready in time to welcome the world again for the Olympic Winter Games of 2034.

These projects build on our strengths, expand opportunity, and prepare us for the future.



I want to turn now to the area that will define much of our work in the next few years: public safety and criminal justice reform.

My Human Services team, along with the Salt Lake County Sheriff and District Attorney, are united in the belief that **we need better options than a jail cell for many people who end up there.**

A staggering 74 percent of our general fund goes to criminal justice-related costs. If we get this right, we can do better for taxpayers **and** for those caught in the system.

We know that accountability matters. Some individuals must face jail time to ensure public safety and accountability. But we also know—through evidence, not theory—that we can improve outcomes and cut costs. We will do this by creating alternatives for those whose challenges are better addressed through treatment, housing, and support services.

For years, Salt Lake County has invested in jail diversion programs, treatment, and reentry efforts. And, we have broken down internal silos so we can move faster. These efforts resulted in our own five-year action plan. But we're now at the cusp of a much more comprehensive transformation.

We've engaged Judge Steven Leifman of Miami-Dade County—a national leader in justice reform—to help guide us. His team is helping us design a model that will transform our broader system, resulting in being smarter with taxpayer dollars **and** doing right by the people who need a different path.

The intersection of the criminal justice system, homelessness, mental health, trauma and substance use is the most complex public policy challenge that government and our communities are facing right now. But I learned a long time ago that if you believe in something, you don't back down. And I'm not backing down from this challenge. None of us should.



While we pursue transformation, we must also meet today’s needs. Salt Lake County is the most populous county in one of the fastest growing states of the past decade.

Cases are up, pressure on the jail and courts is real, and the demand for resources is growing. This budget provides those resources—to keep our community safe while building a smarter system for the future.

Now, shifting to elections: This budget also ensures that Salt Lake County continues to lead the state in secure, transparent, and accessible elections. In an era when elections are under increased scrutiny, we are investing in the staff, equipment, and systems needed to guarantee that every eligible voter can cast their ballot safely and with confidence.

From stormwater systems to playgrounds, cybersecurity to building safety, keeping up on maintenance isn’t glamorous—but it’s essential.

This budget invests in long-delayed infrastructure needs.

For example, at Big Cottonwood Regional Park, we replaced an aging, unsafe playground with a new structure that meets modern safety standards. It’s just one example of many improvements rolling out across the county.

Our Flood Control teams work tirelessly to protect lives and property in our county. Day in and day out, they clear flood control streams, ditches, canals, and basins, often with limited staff and resources. This budget provides much-needed support for their efforts. Recent unpredictable weather — including significant storms over the past few weekends — has underscored their critical role. Our teams were on the ground, protecting our community and their property when it mattered most.

This work isn’t optional—it protects residents, ensures access, and safeguards critical infrastructure. And in the cybersecurity arena, these investments protect not just our systems but also our residents’ data and trust.



Housing affordability remains one of the biggest barriers facing young families, seniors, and workers in our community.

We will continue to invest in solutions through strong partnerships with community-focused developers, non-profit providers, and cities. The County plays a critical role in aligning resources, funding, and strategy to expand access to affordable housing and stabilize neighborhoods.

Salt Lake County employees are the backbone of every service we deliver. They officiate weddings, run recreation programs, prosecute crimes, deliver meals, manage our financial and vital county systems, maintain our facilities, and support our most vulnerable residents.

Health insurance costs for the county are up nine percent. This budget proposes the county absorb most of that increase, minimizing the impacts on employees. I am proposing an increase of three percent for those on the preferred provider plan. For those enrolled in the high-deductible plan, there is no increase proposed.

In addition, my proposed salary increase for non-sworn staff is 3.25 percent.

I want to personally acknowledge the great work of each county employee and offer my gratitude to each of you.

It's no secret that state, city, and county governments — along with residents — are facing rising costs. It's been six years since Salt Lake County last increased property taxes. During that time, county leaders have worked hard to absorb growing expenses and rising demand for services within their operations. However, after exhausting every other option, a property tax increase of 19.63% is necessary this year.

This equates to about \$7.28 per household per month, on average, generating \$48.9 million annually in a \$1.6 billion dollar budget. This increase remains below the rate of inflation that we've experienced since 2010. It enables us to



meet critical public safety needs, invest in infrastructure, and maintain essential services — all while protecting our AAA bond rating.

I fully acknowledge that the proposed increase places an additional burden on individuals and families already working hard to make ends meet. But the County is at a point where we have no responsible alternative. For years, Salt Lake County has absorbed rising costs — including health care, utilities, technology, staff compensation, and infrastructure — without raising taxes. Those costs have now outpaced revenue growth for too long, creating a structural gap we can no longer ignore.

At the same time, demand for services continues to grow. Federal pandemic recovery funds are ending. Inflation has eroded our buying power. Unfunded state mandates are adding even more pressure.

To maintain the county services that our residents value and depend on, we must make this investment.

Salt Lake County is a place that welcomes the world. From hosting the Olympics to swearing in new citizens, we are a community defined by openness and shared purpose.

And our government is one both our residents and those who work here should be proud of. We are fiscally responsible. We are collaborative. We reject dysfunction. We go the extra mile at every turn for our residents.

I want to close with a few stories that show what Salt Lake County's work really means in people's lives.

A couple years ago, we launched the My County Rec Pass—funded through tourism dollars—to give every youth in Salt Lake County free access to our recreation centers. It's one thing to pass a budget or approve a program, but it's another to see what that means in our communities.



We heard from a mom in Taylorsville whose son, Micha, was struggling after a difficult divorce and a move to a new home, neighborhood, and school. She signed him up for the Rec Pass. Soon, he started showing up for open gym basketball, made new friends, and found a sense of belonging. Two years later, Micha is still a regular at the Taylorsville Rec Center, a place he considers a second home.

Another mom—a working parent of six—told us her family couldn't afford recreation passes before this program. She called the My County Rec Pass a lifesaver. Before, her kids spent hours each day on screens. Now, they spend those hours each day on volleyball and basketball courts.

Today, more than 100,000 youth across Salt Lake County have a My County Rec Pass. And, since we launched, adult memberships have increased by an average of 22% monthly.

That's the kind of impact we make when we, as bipartisan policy makers, work together to invest in people. When county government works for everyone, it truly changes lives for the better.

And we are united by a clear mission: to deliver the best possible services at the lowest possible cost to the people who call this county home.

This budget continues that mission. It invests in our future, modernizes our systems, strengthens public safety, protects critical infrastructure, and supports the dedicated people who make it all happen.

This is how we build on our success and plan for an even stronger, safer, and more resilient Salt Lake County — and we'll do it together!

Thank you.