

# Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson's 2025 State of the County Address

February 4, 2025

Good evening! And welcome to the 2025 State of the County address, here at the County's Clark Planetarium! Thank you, Sophie [Schwankl, Salt Lake County Youth Government]. Sophie represents the best of the next generation. And, for those of us feeling a bit, let's say...uncertain about the state of things right now, I have complete confidence in our future based on the power of the next generation as exemplified by Sophie.

We now have an annual tradition of taking this show on the road, to showcase the deep array of county facilities and programs that support our community, day in and day out!

As a child, I have such fond memories of visiting the "Hansen Planetarium" on State Street with my family. And then, as a mother, I brought my two boys to the Clark Planetarium here at the Gateway, time and time again. They've loved the large display of the planets, watching IMAX films and running from one level to another to chase the balls down the massive kinetic ball drop machine. One son has a particular love of space exploration, largely fostered by his experiences in this very facility.

A little background on the planetarium and its place in our community. First opened in 1965 as the "Mr. and Mrs. George T. Hansen Planetarium, Space Science Library and Museum," the planetarium name changed a few times, and it was eventually relocated from State Street to here at the Gateway. For decades, residents and tourists have enjoyed visiting the Planetarium to learn about space and to enjoy features such as the massive science on a sphere, our large display of the planets, and our interactive exhibits.

In 2024, six hundred and ten thousand people visited the Planetarium—this number includes more than sixty-seven thousand students on field trips. In addition to hosting field trips, the Planetarium provided a variety of STEM learning opportunities for more

than forty-eight thousand people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. Those are some big numbers that mean big impacts!

Aren't these facts stellar? Well, wait, because, like space missions, there are more.

On top of all the activity inside the Planetarium, team members regularly provide science education outside of the Planetarium. Last year, staff delivered STEM learning to more than twenty-seven thousand Utah students. We also recently opened the Learning Space, and I invite you to check it out. It's within walking distance—very close, like Mars and Venus.


If you haven't already noticed, I'm really hoping to incorporate as many astronomical puns as possible today; however, I will try to "space" them out.

Before I get deep into the address, I want to recognize a few people in the audience. We've got several of our Salt Lake County Council members here today as well as other elected officials from both the state and local levels. If you will all please stand briefly and give everyone an astronaut wave—that's a thumbs up—we want to share our gratitude for your leadership and public service. Thank you!

I also want to recognize our Community Services department and Clark Planetarium for hosting us today. And, my team, whose nimble, creative, and professional ways made today's mission possible. Thanks to all of you in the audience as well!

As we close out the first month of 2025, I feel it's important to acknowledge both the promise and the uncertainty that many residents are facing here in Salt Lake County, due to national events.

First, to the uncertainty. It's being felt by residents, elected officials and staff. And it's real. The irony is that while we are beginning to plan and lean into the "out of this world" opportunity of another Olympics hosted here in our County, the promise of an expanding economy, and the celebration of a great start for our new Utah Hockey team, at this moment, many residents are living in fear, unsure of their future, based on the early days and actions of the administration.



I honor the results of the 2024 election. Yet, as the leader of 1.2 million Salt Lake County residents, the chaos and fear that has resulted from several actions in these early days is deeply concerning to me.


I'll start by addressing the directive to Immigration and Customs Enforcement to roundup a set number of people, daily – as well as “raids” on homes and businesses. This is resulting in instability, fear and chaos. I, and other Democrats, will continue to willingly work with the other side of the aisle to identify additional resources to hold criminals accountable and better manage our border. Yet, we should also create a path to citizenship for taxpaying long-term residents who are supporting our economy and are integrated into churches and community.

Also, the administration’s “failed launch” last week—calling for the pause of trillions of dollars of vital federal dollars, is leading to concern and further uncertainty. The “shock and awe” approach of absolute directives, followed by...“we didn’t mean this or that program,” then a total repeal of the policy, is demoralizing to the civil servants who support government operations. And, of course, ultimately threatens prosperity, safety, and the lives of Americans.

I have a deep hope that this administration will settle and begin the important work of delivering for the people of the United States.

Despite the national turmoil, Salt Lake County will continue to fight to ensure that our County remains an incredible place to live, work, and play. Due to a bipartisan spirit of cooperation here at home, our neighborly and welcoming way, and residents who thrive to give back, Salt Lake County continues to be the economic engine of our state, the innovation leader, and an amazing place to “launch” a career, a family or, really, any “out of this world” aspiration for the future.

In this decade, we are seeing an exciting roll out of new and home-developed businesses that are thriving. As Mayor, I often have the opportunity to tour businesses committed to providing high paying jobs, clean air and water, and manufacturing high-quality, sustainable products that reflect climate-forward values.



Salt Lake County also continues to provide a broad array of services to our residents. Some of our critical services “fly under the radar” but are vitally important to the well functioning of our society. Tax collection, property line recording and verification, the recording of deeds...the list goes on. Other services are often unknown until you need them. Youth and aging services support, eviction services, access to vaccines. Mental health and substance abuse treatment support. Or perhaps the delivery of meals and a wellness check through our “meals on wheels” program.

And Salt Lake County remains a financially stable, well run and accountable government. Our triple AAA bond rating places us in the top one percent of all counties across the nation. Year after year, we receive the Government Finance Officers Association’s Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting—like our bond rating, only a small percentage of counties receive this annual award. Recently, we received the Dollars and Cents Award from *PaymentWorks* because, when it came to converting electronic payments and deposits, we were their highest achieving client. These recognitions are possible because of the incredibly talented Salt Lake County fiscal team.

With finances in mind, I fully recognize that individuals and families are feeling burdened by high costs of everything from groceries to mortgage payments. I am especially proud that Salt Lake County provides an array of free or low-cost services and programs. The Clark Planetarium being just one of them. We provide meals and connections at senior centers, free microchips for pets, health clinics, fitness classes, outdoor recreation, children’s storytime, adaptive recreation for people with disabilities, licensed childcare, and Zoo Arts and Parks funded events!

There were more than two million visits to a Salt Lake County recreation center in 2024. Four hundred sixty-four thousand rounds of golf were played at our golf courses and hundreds of thousands of people enjoyed our accessible parks, trails, and open spaces. Salt Lake County continues to invest in the expansion of both urban and mountain trails throughout the county. And, launched last June, the MY COUNTY REC PASS for Salt Lake County kids! Since “blast off,” nearly 69,000 youth have become pass holders.

And, to make it easy to access these County free and low-cost activities and services, Salt Lake County has launched a dedicated web page—[saltlakecounty.gov/family](https://saltlakecounty.gov/family). That's [saltlakecounty.gov/family](https://saltlakecounty.gov/family). Check it out!

I salute each elected official and staff member of the County teams who keep our doors open, serve our residents, and provide accountability to our taxpayers, each and every day.

Before I “prepare for a landing” and return to earth today, I want to take a minute to share some priorities for the coming year. In addition to supporting a strong functioning government for our residents, my administration will prioritize the following in 2025:


First, we will continue to modernize our workforce and systems within Salt Lake County government for the benefit of the taxpayers. As always, I and other elected officials seek to provide services as efficiently as possible. Additionally, we recently purchased a new office “home” in Midvale and, this year, we are preparing for the move to a site more centrally located in the county that will better serve our residents.

We continue to work with the state, Salt Lake City, and Smith Entertainment Group to develop a master plan for the three-block area in downtown Salt Lake, spanning from the Delta Center to City Creek Center. Expect to hear more on the development of this Sports, Entertainment, Culture and Convention district in the coming months.

The goals are clear: Revitalize our revenue generating Salt Palace Convention Center, keep the Jazz and Utah Hockey in downtown Salt Lake, rejuvenate a vital downtown area, and create a gathering place that connects our vital arts, cultural, economic and religious assets in the heart of downtown.

Let's make it easier and more enjoyable to linger when you come downtown for a hockey game, to enjoy the Utah Symphony, attend FanX, or visit Temple Square. At the same time, let's modernize the Salt Palace convention center so that it attracts even more events and visitors.

The Salt Palace Convention Center is, hands down, the economic cornerstone of Salt Lake's out-of-state visitor economy.



Our visitors spend five point eight billion dollars in Salt Lake County annually. This amount accounts for forty six percent of Utah’s total visitor economy. The out-of-state visitor economy generates fifty-eight million in local taxes annually. These taxes support forty-seven thousand jobs and reduce the property tax burden by seventeen-hundred dollars per county household.

Funds generated by taxes paid by visitors are reinvested in arts, culture, tourism, conventions, and recreation in our County.

The County’s commitment to expand its trail, parks, recreation, and arts footprint remains strong. I am excited to share that we are in the design phase of a new performance and visual arts center in South Jordan opening in 2028. We were able to expedite the timeline for this center, thanks to a 25-million-dollar donation from the Larry H. and Gail Miller Family Foundation—which is, by the way, the largest donation ever received by Salt Lake County. The addition of this center will support the enjoyment and advancement of the arts in the southwest portion of the valley!

2025 and beyond, we will continue to plan for and build more County library branches, similar to the Daybreak branch in South Jordan—a county facility that serves as a model for sustainable building and management. This is the first government building in Utah with net-zero certification; meaning, the building produces all its own energy.

This outstanding achievement was possible because of a committed design and library team who saw an opportunity to build and operate with sustainability in mind. The result is less energy used and fewer taxpayer dollars to operate. If that’s not an astronomical success, then I don’t know what is.

Attainable, affordable housing is on our radar and has been for years. We recognize that rents and home prices are too high. And home ownership, a key component of the American dream, is becoming less and less attainable for young home buyers.

Through the County's Housing Trust Fund, Salt Lake County is actively identifying solutions and providing funding to build more attainable housing for people of varying income levels around the valley.

More than twenty-five million dollars were awarded for affordable housing projects—an investment that created nearly sixteen-hundred units across the county; fifty percent of those units will provide a home to individuals making less than forty thousand four hundred fifty dollars per year.

We continue to grant loans and seek solutions for development of deeply affordable housing, which includes units for people with mental illness and substance use disorder.

These types of contributions launch affordable housing projects, and we look forward to similar projects in the years to come.


A great accomplishment in 2024, that will guide our actions in 2025 and beyond, was the unveiling of the *Salt Lake County Human Services, Homelessness, and Criminal Justice Action Plan*. This plan outlines the steps that Salt Lake County, in collaboration with partners, is taking to tackle homelessness, behavioral health challenges, and criminal justice reform.

Working together, we mapped the gaps in the system, identified barriers, analyzed the costs, and identified measurable, evidence-based best practices and solutions.

A primary priority in 2025, will be addressing the needs at the Salt Lake County Jail. While Salt Lake County recognizes the need to expand our jail capacity, we also understand that success means human services and re-entry support to inmates. Improving public safety, reducing repeat offenses, efficiently using tax dollars, and reforming our criminal justice system remain priorities for Salt Lake County.

As former President John F. Kennedy once said, "The United States was not built by those who waited and rested and wished to look behind them. This country was conquered by those who moved forward, and so will space."

And so will we at Salt Lake County.



We will continue to move forward with efforts and initiatives that promote the health and well-being of all residents, visitors, and our planet for years and generations to come.

Whether focusing on economic stability, affordable housing, conservation of open space, improving air quality, arts and culture, or basic human needs, we will continue to identify and support common-sense solutions that are proven to benefit everyone in Salt Lake County.

I'm excited for the possibilities that another year of collaboration will bring to the residents and businesses of Salt Lake County as we reach for the stars.

Together, no mission is impossible!