

# Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson's Proposed 2025 Budget Address



October 22, 2024

Council, elected officials, employees, and members of the public—thank you for joining today as I introduce my 2025 budget proposal.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize the excellent work of our budget team lead by Darrin Casper and Rod Kitchens. I would also like to thank the many employees and independent elected officials who put countless hours in to evaluating programs and submitting their own budgets for my consideration.

Before we jump into the specifics of my 2025 budget proposal, I want to share what an honor it is to serve the residents of Salt Lake County. As I engage with other county elected officials throughout the nation, I beam with pride about our county and the excellent quality of life we enjoy here.

Salt Lake County is a great place to live, raise a family, do business, and visit. Our economy is diversified, our people are welcoming, and we have recreation opportunities that can't be matched anywhere in the nation.

And, here, at Salt Lake County government, we continue to deliver for our residents. Providing essential and much appreciated services all the while doing so as fiscally responsible as possible.

Whether people visit our clerk to tie the knot, learn to swim at a recreation center, access our trails, receive support from Human Services, enjoy a performance at an arts and culture venue, or check out materials at a library, Salt Lake County is here for our residents, always.

When it comes to the 2025 budget, I'm not going to bury the lead. This is a particularly challenging budget year. While our fund balance is strong, our ongoing structural balance has been impacted significantly by inflationary pressures.

We are facing a slowdown in tax revenue and an economy stretched thin by the high cost of goods.

The County's tax revenue growth for the general fund is less than two percent this year; just as the national inflation rate over the past year is averaging three percent.

As shared by Natalie Gochmour of Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute last week, Utah's economy is strong but moderating.

Despite a challenging budget year, this year, as in previous years, I am proposing a balanced budget that maintains our AAA bond rating.

There are a few exciting expansions of projects to share today, made possible from outside donors, strong revenues in our Tourism, Recreation, Culture and Convention (TRCC) fund and opioid settlement funds.

Additionally, I am recommending the continuation of some priority projects that were launched last year.

Among those programs are:

- Continuing progress to implement our human services, homelessness, and criminal justice action plan.
- Using opioid settlement dollars to continue funding our Drug Enforcement Administration officers.
- Continuing the “My County Rec Center Pass” and no library fees for kids’ overdue books
- Continuing our Jail Resource and Re-entry Program (JRRP)

This July, several Council members joined me and others from various county, city, and state agencies to announce the launch of the Salt Lake County Human Services, Homelessness, and Criminal Justice Action Plan. It’s a big title with even bigger intentions of actualizing improved outcomes for individuals, families, communities and businesses—private, nonprofit, and public.

The Action Plan is in alignment with the state’s homelessness strategic plan and the Coordinated Homeless Services Plan that I signed, along with Governor Cox and Mayor Mendenhall last Fall.

Together, we have a shared vision that homelessness is brief, rare, and non-recurring. We recognize that all systems—criminal justice, behavioral health treatment, workforce, and housing—must be coordinated for them to be effective.

Working alongside state, city, private, and non-profit partners, we are embracing the opportunity to implement proven, evidence-based practices that will improve outcomes and reduce costs.

Just yesterday, we joined Volunteers of America Utah to announce the grand opening of a 16-bed residential treatment program for adult males who are homeless or at risk of being homeless and experiencing mental health and substance use disorders.

A program that will save individual lives, restore families, and preserve community.

A heartfelt thank you to the employees and elected officials who contributed to the development and ongoing implementation of our county Action Plan. We are in this together!

This proposed budget provides a funding recommendation to continue the progress we are making as we implement the Action Plan.

Our community service providers have been providing support and treatment for substance use disorder for decades. Treatment alone, however, is not enough.

More recently, it became quite apparent that bolstering law enforcement efforts was necessary to address the fentanyl crisis taking place around the nation and, sadly, here in Salt Lake County.

This fentanyl crisis does not discriminate. People of all ages and backgrounds are being directly and indirectly impacted by this crisis. Many lives are lost, and numerous lives are turned upside down. Fentanyl directly contributes to overdose deaths.

This budget proposal recommends we continue to fund the two positions on the Drug Enforcement Administration's Metro Narcotics Task Force that were funded last year.

Last week, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shared promising news: a decline in overdose deaths since last year. By the end of this year, they estimate a nearly 13 percent drop. Dr. Rahul Gupta, Director of National Drug Control Policy, attributes this decrease to the proven power of collaborative actions. Actions such as those we are taking in Salt Lake County.

The free My County Rec Pass launched in June and more than 66,000 Salt Lake County youth have signed up.

Families now have a place for their kids to be safe, healthy and active, all provided by Salt Lake County at no cost.

My County Rec Pass is doing exactly what we hoped it would do: get kids away from screens and into places and spaces where they can make new friends, learn to swim, try hockey or golf, exercise, and enjoy time with friends and family.

Our data show that youth participation at our rec centers has doubled since last year. Additionally, since launching the pass, we've seen an increase in adult and senior participation.

Parks and Recreation recently heard from a community member who shared, "We love the county pass for the kids. It has made this summer so much fun and we are glad to see it goes through the winter as well." A grandmother also shared her experience, "I take my granddaughter to Dimple Dell weekly, sometimes twice a week, for swimming. We have been very happy."

An equally great program that supports education and entertainment at no cost for our residents is our County Library.

Removing library late fees for children and teens, was another successful, family-forward recommendation that was proposed in my 2024 budget and approved by Council last year.

I'm grateful for the advocacy of the County Library employees, their Board, and Library Board member and County Councilwoman Harrison, our library board representative. They passionately researched and articulately proposed this cost and education benefit for youth and families.

This decision removes barriers that may have been preventing children, teens, and families from using the library and its wide collection of resources.

This decision is yet another example of the mindset embodied here at Salt Lake County...service to our community

Earlier this year, Councilwoman Stringham shared that as a young mother the late fees prevented her, and subsequently her children, from using library resources. Thanks to the removal of late fees for children and teens, situations like this are now a concern of the past.

Access to and use of the public library matters. I recently learned about a young man who spent the formative years of this life at the County Library's Holladay branch where he would study, almost daily. His dedication paid off because he is now heading to Johns Hopkins University on a scholarship. That's a proud parent and a proud County moment.

Working together, as Mayor and Council, we have made library access and life-long learning easier for families around the county.


As a side note, a few long-overdue items found their way back to the branches once the late fees were removed. That's progress—this bipartisan decision brought children, families, and materials back to our beloved County Library branches.

Launched in 2022, the Jail Resource and Re-entry Program provides individualized resources, information, and referrals for those leaving the jail.

Service referrals include mental health and substance use, Medicaid, supervision and legal services, and referrals for other community services. There are even cell phone chargers on site!

Over the last three years, we have provided service referrals to nearly 17,000 individuals exiting jail.

This collaborative program between Salt Lake County Criminal Justice Services, Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office, Legal Defenders Association, and Valley Behavioral Health helps people leaving jail successfully reenter the community with resources so they never return. Our Salt Lake County jail is the one program that we don't want our residents to utilize over and over.



One of our Jail Resource and Re-entry Program participants, Donald, has struggled with homelessness and substance use. On top of that, he has several medical conditions that have caused severe short-term memory loss.

When exiting the jail, the Jail Resource and Re-entry Program employees helped him coordinate with the onsite pharmacy to obtain much needed medication. They also ensured he had a shelter bed in the community. Donald was provided transportation to the Weigand Center where he benefited from a shelter bed and additional case management services.

By assisting individuals like Donald, this program promotes public safety and connects individuals to the resources they need to get their lives back on track.

I believe in the Jail Resource and Re-entry Program and the 2025 budget includes funds for their time-limited employees. This program is not about handouts; rather, it is about giving people a hand up toward self-sufficiency.

And, speaking of the jail, the men and women working in our jail must remain safe. For that reason, I've recommended \$225,000 to purchase bulletproof/stab vests for sworn officers. If an individual chooses a public service career that puts them in harm's way, we need to cover costs to keep them safe.

Housing that's affordable for all Salt Lake County residents has been a priority for me throughout my public service career. Housing is not just a basic need—it is the foundation of strong, thriving communities.

Salt Lake County remains committed to exploring innovative, collaborative approaches to increasing inventory and filling gaps where we can.


Our Human Services, Homelessness, and Criminal Justice Action Plan has a goal of adding more than 1,000 deeply affordable and supportive housing units within the next five years.

We all know that prices and values of homes in our neighborhoods have skyrocketed over the last few years. Many who are seeking a starter home or need a larger home have been priced out of the market. Additionally, we have residents who regularly fear being unable to afford staying in their current home.

Rental units, which have historically been a less expensive alternative to home ownership, have also increased in price.

Short- and long-term solutions are needed and are in the works.

Salt Lake County's Housing Trust Fund supports the health, safety, and welfare of Salt Lake County residents by providing financial assistance to preserve and increase affordable and special needs housing within the county.



Making housing more affordable makes living more affordable. I'm recommending a seven-hundred-eleven-thousand-dollar one-time investment in the Housing Trust Fund program.

This fund provides grants and loans to community housing organizations, non-profit housing providers, and private developers to push projects over the finish line and make units available faster.

With the health and wellbeing of our community in mind, an emphasis is placed on housing projects that are near food, jobs, high-speed internet, transportation, schools, and childcare resources.

As leaders, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to ensure people of all income levels can affordably and safely call Salt Lake County home.

Our county regional arts plan calls for the building of a regional and performing arts center in each of the four quadrants of the county. We are half-way there and moving forward with our third!

Last week, we announced a partnership with the Larry H. & Gail Miller Family Foundation. The Foundation made an incredibly generous 25-million-dollar donation to build a center in South Jordan. The financial donation is on today's Council agenda for final approval, following a public hearing about naming rights.

This is one of the most significant arts and culture investments that the Larry H. & Gail Miller Family Foundation has made and is the largest gift provided in Salt Lake County's history from a private donor.

Funds from our Tourism, Recreation, Culture, and Convention (TRCC) are planned to cover the remaining building costs of this facility.


I am so deeply grateful to Gail Miller, her family, and the Miller organization for this extremely generous gift—one that will benefit so many residents in the southwest quadrant of our valley.

This new venue is scoped to include an 800-seat theater, which is both impressive and reflective of the community's desire to be entertained, enlightened, and enriched.

If everything goes as planned, construction of the new arts center should be completed sometime in 2026 or 2027.

As the saying goes, time is money. The more time we wait to address infrastructure concerns and needs, the greater the cost to taxpayers.

The 2025 budget has a \$100 million set aside to address deferred maintenance at our Salt Lake County jail. We haven't built a single new jail bed since 2001. Meanwhile, Salt Lake County's population has grown by 300,000.



The Public Safety Bond, if approved by voters, will fund facilities—specifically, an expanded County Jail and a new Justice and Accountability Center—anticipated to improve public safety, reduce repeat offenses, and save tax dollars. Our intention is to close the aging Oxbow jail and rebuild and add capacity at the main County Jail.

The new and improved facilities are anticipated to enhance public safety by expanding capacity in our system and providing law enforcement with new tools to address the needs of low-level offenders—many of whom are repeat offenders experiencing homelessness, mental health, and substance use issues.

The total bond amount is \$507 million—the average property tax impact per resident is \$4.91/month. Salt Lake County has set aside \$100 million, \$25 million more than originally requested by Councilmember Winder Newton and the Council, to offset the total amount needed to address public safety and infrastructure needs.

Additionally, the 2025 budget includes an investment in aging infrastructure on projects throughout the County.

So, to matters here within the walls of our County Team...

This year, with revenues so limited, my senior team and I we were challenged to find a balance between continuing programs and fairly compensating our amazing employees.

In difficult financial years, our reliance on employees is even greater.

Salt Lake County employees are dedicated, kind, compassionate, innovative, talented, patient, and understanding. They regularly provide amazing and essential services to our residents.

Our employees are essential to service delivery countywide—whether they're a long-term merit employee with institutional knowledge and role model skills or they're a new employee who is gaining experience and demonstrating a passion for public service.

When we invest in our employees, their investment in public service deepens.


Like many in our community, our employees are directly impacted by the consistently increasing cost of living and inflation.

This year, I'm recommending a 3.5 percent increase for employees. For sworn officers, to remain competitive and ensure necessary staffing, I am recommending a 4.75 percent increase.

Equally important to compensation is ensuring employees continue to have access to affordable healthcare.

Like many costs, healthcare costs are rising. Our human services director, Sharon Roux and her team, collaborating with CFO Darrin Casper and his team, worked with our healthcare providers to keep healthcare costs as low as possible for employees in the upcoming year.





Employees with a high deductible plan will continue to have a \$0 premium; however, will experience an increase in their deductible—an extra \$500 for individual and an extra \$1,000 for families.

For those on the preferred provider organization plan, the cost to the county and the employee will increase by eight percent. Additionally, the deductibles will go up \$500 an individual and \$1,000 for families.

We continue to contribute annually to the Health Savings Account program—\$600 for individual or \$1200 for families. And we encourage employees to take advantage of the pre-tax HSA contribution opportunity to maximize their health care spending options.

I am incredibly grateful for every Salt Lake County employee. While healthcare costs rose rapidly this year, the county took every possible measure to make the cost increase as minimal as possible on the individuals who deliver our services day in and day out.

We also know that employees care deeply about the services they provide. Last year, in an incredibly tight budget year, employees were willing to accept contra-negative budget line items and continued to provide quality services with limited resources. My sincere gratitude goes to all employees.

I am happy to report that this budget proposal lifts those contra accounts, which I know will be welcome news to all our employees who have been feeling the impact of those cuts.

The 2025 budget proposal reflects that we are disciplined, we are fiscally conservative, and that we care both about protecting programs and prioritizing employees.

We continue to be a driving, relevant asset to our community with everything we're funding, continue to fund, and continue to deliver.

I'm going to close with quotes from two greats. First, a quote from Theodore Roosevelt, "Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."


Our work is not easy work. It is, however, work worth doing. Prioritization decisions, especially in tight budgetary times, are difficult, to say the least.

Yet, the work is made easier when we collaborate, focus on opportunities and solutions, acknowledge and celebrate successes, and, perhaps most importantly, when we listen to and acknowledge each other's concerns and the concerns and interests of our community members. This is even more true in trying times and when we know the work might be hardest.

Which leads me to my second quote, this time from Leslie Knope of "Parks and Recreation" – a comedy series that often seems far too real....

"Sometimes you have to make the hardest climb to see the most beautiful sunrise."





As an open space preservationist and someone who has made a climb or two in my day, some in our Wasatch range, I have to express an amazing kindred-ship with Leslie Knope.

We have a hard climb ahead of us and, but thanks to the collaborative bipartisan approach we embrace here at Salt Lake County, I believe a beautiful sunrise is on the horizon for our County—just as our logo suggests.

Thank you for taking the time today and for continuing to care about everyone in Salt Lake County—today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.