

A Thriving Metropolitan Area With A “Small-Town” Feel: My Vision, as Mayor, for Salt Lake County

By Mayor Ben McAdams

Salt Lake County residents have good reasons to prepare for growth and to confront new realities. Today, our children are sometimes kept inside at recess because the air is not healthy to breathe. Our transportation corridors are already congested. Our schools are expected to prepare our children to compete in a global economy with limited financial resources. I want to decide whether our challenges will shape us, or whether we will seize the day and shape our own future. With challenge comes opportunity—if we choose to confront issues collaboratively.

I was sworn in on January 7, 2013, to take the reins of an entity that services more than 1 million people. I am fortunate to have inherited a county government that is stable, well managed, and well regarded by other government officials both inside and outside of Utah. Our employees are among the most dedicated and hard working of any in this state. As I stated in my inaugural State of the County address, I see challenges and opportunities ahead, but Salt Lake County is well positioned to succeed.

My vision for my coming term in office will result in a stable, fiscally sound county framework for a thriving metropolitan area that retains a “small-town” feel with safe, friendly, desirable neighborhoods and communities.

Living in a rapidly changing region is a big challenge. Our county’s population is expected to double in the next 20-30 years. We must prepare for that growth in ways that recognize the realities that accompany it, yet preserve what we all love about living here.

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I know that the 1.1 million people who live, work, worship, and play in this valley—which has been a refuge for hardy pioneers and intrepid immigrants alike—demand and expect a government that supports, not obstructs, their hopes and dreams. I have a three-part vision for Salt Lake County government designed to live up to their expectations.

First, county government will provide strong regional leadership to all residents of our metropolitan area; we will be efficient and coordinated in our efforts, while maintaining appropriate levels of local control and accountability to the communities we serve. Second, our residents can expect

bipartisanship and team play from their county government. Finally, county government will remain small, efficient, and fiscally responsible.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

Over the last several decades, Salt Lake County has been transformed. From a checkerboard of small cities surrounded by farmland, we are now a major metropolitan area with precious pockets of open space. It is a different era, and county operations must reflect this new reality. We will change the existing county government functions that no longer reflect the world we now live in. The future of Salt Lake County government includes consolidated services coupled with coordinated, regional decision making. This evolution in our governance matches the evolution of our community. It means better service at a lower cost for our residents.

I will advance a consolidated public works system for the residents of Salt Lake County who choose to participate in pooled and coordinated services. What will that mean to the average resident? Better service for less. Less confusion for the citizens trying to find the right office to contact. It means staff working across different floors, offices, buildings, and zip codes to achieve a common goal. On my watch, the

customer is king.

I have been receiving valuable input from a number of township meetings with residents in unincorporated Salt Lake County. Together, these 160,000 people comprise what would be the county’s second largest city. Serving as their municipal government is a responsibility that I take seriously. Listening to residents helped to drive my decision on day one to reorganize and rename the new Public Works and Regional Development Department. Over the coming months, I will work to more clearly differentiate when we are functioning as a countywide metropolitan government and when we are acting on behalf of unincorporated areas. This will result in a better, more efficient, and more cost effective county government for all.

I have also established a new role of Township Executive, who will function much like a typical city manager. His undivided loyalty is to serving

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the needs and focusing on opportunities for economic development in a particular area. Why shouldn't a future high-tech firm or other well-paying business locate in these areas, providing local jobs and tax revenues? We must identify and pursue those types of opportunities for the unincorporated county.

BIPARTISANSHIP

The hallmark of my administration will be bipartisanship. People are tired of partisan bickering. A pothole in their street is not a Republican pothole or a Democratic pothole—it is just something that needs to be fixed. I believe New Jersey Governor Chris Christie put it well, in his State of the State address, when he described a governing model that shows that “even with heartfelt beliefs, bipartisan compromise is possible.” There is no need and no place in county government for anything but cooperation, collaboration, and common sense leadership that earns the public's trust.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

I am, and will govern as, a fiscal conservative. As I align county-wide government across a large metropolitan area, my priority is to create greater efficiencies and deliver services at lower cost. The county will be able to fulfill its role in a way that delivers effective, efficient service at the lowest possible expense. My vision is for a county government that is better, not bigger—one that is lean, collaborative, affordable, and accountable to the people who pay the bills.

The struggling economy of the years 2007-2010 forced tough choices on county leaders. An apparent advantage is that the deep and painful recession of the past few years is receding. A growing economy and more private-sector jobs are the best options for balancing our budget and keeping our fiscal house in order. The recent good news that the Outdoor Industry Association will keep its trade show here through at least 2016 cheered local economic forecasters. Thanks to Salt Lake County's leadership and partnership with Governor Gary Herbert, we have secured a four-year, \$160-million economic impact from more than 20,000 manufacturers, retailers, and suppliers who gather here. It's also proof that Salt Lake County is a big-league player in the tourism and convention business.

NEAR-TERM GOALS

Our citizens value parks and trails. I will continue plans to complete major trails and acquire and develop regional parks. We want Salt Lake County residents to be healthy, and outdoor recreation helps people get and stay healthy. Spaces to walk, bike, run, and play help residents stay active and feel better. More than that, they lead to reduced health care costs and add to a vibrant economy. Salt Lake County should be accessible, with a range of outdoor amenities available to county residents of all ages, incomes, and interests. We want families and their friends to enjoy time together, become better acquainted, and just have fun.

The Wasatch Mountains are a regional asset that we must safeguard for their value as watershed, as a jobs-generator, and as a beloved backyard playground. The clean, affordable water supply from that watershed made the development, growth, and prosperity of the Salt Lake Valley possible. Millions of residents and visitors spend time and money on canyon recreation each year. The Wasatch peaks provide the stunning natural backdrop that we use to brand our county as the place to locate a business, hold a convention, or serve as the site of a future Olympic games. Rapid growth, multiple stakeholders, and a patchwork of agencies create both challenges and opportunities for those who would shape the canyons' future. Salt Lake

County's planning staff, in collaboration with the public, private businesses, cities, the state, and the U.S. Forest Service, has invested countless hours in that effort. I am ensuring that our county, in partnership with Summit and Wasatch counties, will lead us forward with a comprehensive environmental impact statement that will address additional resource-protection initiatives and development opportunities, as well as result in a transportation solution for this heavily-used, yet fragile area.

We enter public service knowing that, on our best days, what we do matters. That came into sharp focus for me during my mayoral campaign. I met a woman named Lila Hutchingson during a visit to Alliance House, a non-profit that partners with the county. Alliance House features a comprehensive program organized around the work-ordered-day. It focuses on an individual's strengths in order to give mentally ill people the skills, purpose, confidence, and support to reintegrate into the community and lead productive lives. For much of her life, Lila had struggled with bipolar disorder. Its effect impacted her at her job, which in part led to unemployment. That subsequently resulted in some very difficult family circumstances and unstable housing arrangements. Lila's story could be my story or your story, but through Alliance House and its programs, she rallied. Gradually, she got her life back. She found educational opportunities, housing, and relationships. Today she is a productive member of our community and assists others.

At its best, government is a temporary support on the road to self-reliance. We are there when needed. We answer when duty calls.

I am humbled by the knowledge that we inherited this place from pioneers and immigrants: men and women who took a risk, blazed a trail, put down roots, and left their mark. I am optimistic that, through bipartisan collaboration, we can build on their foundation, and as scholar Hugh Nibley wrote about those early settlements, “prepare a fit habitation, an environment, and an economy stable enough to last a thousand years.”