

State of the City
Tuesday, January 13, 2009
Mayor Ralph Becker

Good evening. Chair Christiansen, Vice-Chair Martin, Council Members, other dignitaries and residents of Salt Lake City. A wonderful pleasure for me has been working with Council Chair Love, and the rest of you this past year. I have appreciated your patience and good will in helping us move Salt Lake City forward together.

Reflecting back over the past year, it's hard to believe that a year ago I was delivering my first State of the City address. We have gone through a lot together; we have so much to do. I am hopeful for a promising year ahead, and draw strength from our community.

In this year's address, I will recap the accomplishments of the past year and offer a look at some of our plans for 2009 and beyond; and I will announce some specific initiatives the residents of Salt Lake City can expect to hear more about in the coming months.

First, I'd like to offer a brief perspective on an issue that's at the top of everyone's minds – the state of the economy – and how I see it impacting our City.

They say that in difficult economic times, people turn inward; they tend to nest and make home improvements. They turn their focus to home and family. Well, that is true of Salt Lake City also. On a larger scale, and with a keen eye toward our role and responsibilities regionally and our ties to the nation, Salt Lake City is looking at how best to take care of our home and family – which is our incredible community.

Our community home is here in this Valley; our community family is large and diverse. It includes all of us: from Glendale to Sugarhouse and Rose Park to Bonneville Hills; refugees, newcomers, and those who are established; it includes the homeless and the struggling; it includes the large corporations and the tiny non-profits; the small business

owners and the neighbors next door; and it includes the nearly 3,000 dedicated and hardworking Salt Lake City employees – police men and women, firefighters, city engineers and administrators, planners and maintenance workers. This is our community – it is our place, and it is all of us.

The current economic climate is uncertain at best, and there's no question that the uncertainty is a weight on all of our shoulders. It is absolutely a time of belt-tightening and conserving, and it is absolutely a time for caution and common sense. As President-Elect Obama stated last week, "We start 2009 in the midst of a crisis unlike any we have seen in our lifetime."

But that does not mean we stop, cancel, or close down. It means that we rally. We rally as a community, we rally because of our community, and we rally with our entire community together.

I appreciate all the acts of kindness I have seen throughout our community to help those facing misfortune, those non-profit organizations who give every day in so many ways to make the lives better of those friends in need, the inspiring arts, and the magnificent environment that blesses our City. I encourage all of us to keep digging deep to find ways to help our community.

There's so much that's right with Salt Lake City. There's so much progress that we have been able to make and that we have yet to make. Salt Lake City will proceed with caution, but we *will* proceed and we *will* succeed.

Let me now walk you through some of the highlights of what we as a City – with the collective efforts of the City Council, City administrators and staff, and countless people in the community – have achieved for Salt Lake City over the past year and how we will proceed in the year ahead.

Economic Development

Our City, over the period of many years, has built a great foundation to weather these turbulent times.

With smart, progressive City projects slated for development, I will continue my efforts in Washington and will approach our State Legislature to secure funding from the economic stimulus packages that are now being proposed. Those governments are focused properly on the national and state picture where the purse strings of the national and state economies reside.

And, while large infrastructure projects and the major federal and state programs are essential, small businesses are the bread and butter of our economic stability. Small businesses anchor our neighborhood business districts, generate jobs and an economic livelihood for thousands of residents, and provide unique and distinctive services and goods for residents *and* visitors to the City.

Under the leadership of our Economic Development Director Bob Farrington, we have launched the Salt Lake City Small Business Initiative, a comprehensive resource, information, and policy initiative to expand and capitalize on small business resources provided by Salt Lake City, and create better small business links to other business, civic, and governmental organizations.

Given the current economic challenges that our small businesses face, it is more important than ever for Salt Lake City to be a resource to existing small businesses, or those wishing to open a business in Salt Lake City.

The Small Business Initiative seeks to:

- Communicate and advocate for current and proposed City policy and ordinance changes to enhance the viability of small businesses.

- Fine tune the existing Revolving Loan Program to fit the current needs of Salt Lake City businesses.
- Explain and facilitate the planning, permitting and inspection process for small businesses.
- Organize small business summits with other public and private organizations to create community-wide actions to foster small business growth and opportunities.
- Provide marketing, promotional, demographic, and organizational assistance for Neighborhood Business Districts.

The City will redouble our economic development outreach, recruitment and retention to make sure we are in the forefront in Utah.

We are more aware than ever of the need to expand our tax base, grow and support our local businesses, and be a leader in the new economy that will emerge from this downturn.

Tonight I acknowledge a business owner who has weathered economic downturns and downtown renovation; someone who has confidence in the future of our City — Bill Bennion of Bennion Jewelers, a store with a long presence on Main Street. Bill is a downtown merchant. His father opened Bennion Jewelers 56 years ago, buying a jewelry store on Main Street that had begun in 1862. With the City Creek project and other projects going up, Bill is thrilled to be on Main Street. He knows the prospects are bright for downtown Salt Lake City.

Neighborhoods/CED

Over the last 12 months, I've had the opportunity to take what we've called "road trips" to each of the City's 21 community council areas. I've come to appreciate even more the diverse, rich neighborhoods we have here in Salt Lake City. In those neighborhoods I've seen firsthand the attributes and treasures of our neighborhoods as well as the challenges. I walked inside the historic homes of Liberty Wells, along the route of the historic Jordan

River Canal in the East Central district, and saw beautification and growth from strong community efforts in Fair Park and Poplar Grove.

Our neighborhoods are the foundation of our City. Their energy and vitality come from the residents; their ability to operate effectively is dependent upon the services our City government can provide.

Our City is fortunate to have Frank Gray serve as our Director of Community and Economic Development. He has brought his expertise and knowledge of neighborhoods and communities to Salt Lake City and is moving us all forward as he has restructured and revitalized the Department with his know-how and vision.

In Planning, we took the recommendations of an audit to improve and increase the capabilities of services. We've engaged the strong leadership of Wilf Sommerkorn and Pat Comarell who have taken the helm of our Planning Division to lead and support a staff of skilled, professional planners. Our Planning Division has focused on improving customer service, ensuring consistency, and, as an example of improvement, has now reduced the average turnaround time for permit approval from 8 – 12 weeks down to 4 – 6 weeks.

Planning has also focused on the prioritization of zoning ordinance amendments and long-range planning projects, reactivation of small area plans and the downtown plan, and enhancement of planning services in the BUZZ Center, a one-stop, customer-oriented destination to handle basic permitting and building needs.

CULTURAL DISTRICT/PERFORMANCE CENTER

In our great city, culture is part of our infrastructure. This past year, our Capital welcomed three new cultural leaders into the community:

Heather Ferrell, director of the Salt Lake Art Center; Melia Tourangeau,

director of the Utah Symphony/Utah Opera; and Beth Elder, director of the Salt Lake City Public Library. Beth is here tonight. Will you please stand?

Downtown Salt Lake City has been the center for art and culture since the City's beginnings. Our collective vision of a viable, vibrant Downtown depends on our continued stewardship and development of Salt Lake City's cultural offerings and opportunities. This past year, I pursued a dream envisioned by community leaders years ago – and prioritized in the recent Downtown Rising project – to designate and encourage a Cultural Arts District in downtown Salt Lake City, with a grand theater – or performing arts center – as a key component of that district.

I formed The Downtown Theater Action Group and gave the charge to evaluate the feasibility of a large performance center. The group completed its work and identified six potential sites. In mid-October, we announced the selected site for the Utah Performance Center at 135 South Main Street. We are in the final stages of acquiring the site and are now exploring different funding scenarios, which include means to fund our other arts organizations. We are asking the Legislature for authorization to allow our cultural and arts to continue to flourish in Salt Lake City and the State.

This Utah Performance Center is strategic. It is not a stand-alone project; it is a piece of a bigger Downtown picture. It is part of our city's infrastructure and will serve as a major draw in the heart of our state's cultural center.

Transportation

In Transportation, we obtained City Council adoption of the Downtown Transportation Master Plan, *Downtown in Motion*.

This last year we broke ground for the Airport Light Rail project. This new TRAX project came about after we navigated some legislative challenges, obtained City Council approval, negotiated an interlocal agreement with UTA, completed environmental work,

and pursued necessary engineering. With great help and direction from our Airport Director, Maureen Riley, we also addressed delicate Federal Aviation Administration issues in Washington. We will continue to work with UTA and city departments to design a Grand Boulevard on North Temple as part of the Airport Light Rail Line.

We appointed Dan Berganthal to fill a newly created Bikeway and Trails Coordinator position. We have added a significant number of new bike lanes with the ultimate goal of doubling the City's on-street total bike lane mileage. We have installed experimental shared-lane bicycle markings on 200 South and are examining the feasibility of a City bike share program and construction of a Bike Transit Center at the Intermodal Hub/Central Station in partnership with UTA and UDOT.

We look forward to the completion of the Jordan River Trail with a trail connection between I-80 and North Temple, and the development of the Sugarhouse Draw, a vital piece of the Parley's Trail, which is an east-west bike/pedestrian trail to connect the Jordan River Trail to the Bonneville Shoreline Trail at Parleys Crossing at the mouth of Parleys Canyon.

Public Safety

After experiencing the tragic loss of a young, innocent life in July, our Police Department responded – quickly identifying gang suspects, then pulling from other forces to saturate the neighborhood with police presence in the following weeks. The saturation resulted in a large number of arrests.

In response to the gang-related tragedy, I called together a group consisting of leaders from law enforcement, the courts, youth organizations, public education, and the community to discuss ideas for addressing gang violence in our City. This meeting resulted in the formation of the Gang Reduction Forum – a larger group similar in scope and function to the initial group I assembled. The Forum meets regularly and recently submitted recommendations to my office for City adoption of specific gang prevention

and intervention programs. We have reviewed those recommendations and will be going back to the Forum at the end of next week with plans for adoption of a Comprehensive Salt Lake City Gang Reduction Program.

Our community will need to work together to find solutions to the challenges of gang activity in our City. No one entity can fight this alone. I know through the concerted efforts of law enforcement, community organizations and each of us in each of our neighborhoods, we can make great progress in our efforts to reduce gang activity in Salt Lake City.

One organization here in our City recently received recognition from the FBI for its success in gang prevention and intervention. I'd like to recognize my good friend Duane Bordeaux, executive director of Colors of Success.

I am proud of our Salt Lake City Police Department and its positive interaction with members of our community. Despite the noted tragic deaths of last year, I am pleased to report that violent crime is down in Salt Lake City by four percent. I commend Chief Chris Burbank and his officers for the exceptional work they perform every day.

After a national search for a fire chief, we hired Tom Shannon from the Glendale, Arizona Fire Department. As our new fire chief, Chief Shannon was immediately put to the test in his first few weeks with the loss of a firefighter and a four-alarm fire. We are pleased with the leadership and professional experience Chief Shannon brings to the SLCFD.

Education

Early last year we took the unprecedented step in Salt Lake City of hiring an Education Partnership Coordinator – a new position within the Mayor's office. Working with the Salt Lake City School District, Joanne Milner has focused on finding ways for the City to

support our students; helping to ensure that every student in Salt Lake City has the opportunity to succeed.

The Service in the City Scholarship was recently established in partnership with the School District, the Salt Lake Chamber and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center for Community of Caring to provide \$2500 scholarship stipends to first generation ethnic minority students who render community service.

I was fortunate to meet with educators as they came back to school in late August, and then host the Engaging Community in Public Education School Summit in November. I am looking forward to our next education summit, scheduled for March of this year, which will focus on Pre-Kindergarten and early childhood education.

I appreciate the partnership Salt Lake City has with the school district and acknowledge McKell Withers, who was recently named Utah Superintendent of the Year. Superintendent Withers is a great advocate for all students and for education.

Sustainability

Last year Salt Lake City created the Division of Sustainability – with Vicki Bennett as director – integrating the existing functions of environmental management, recycling, open space and public outreach into one division. This move has allowed Salt Lake City to introduce and complete a large number of sustainability projects.

No issue of our era is more pressing than the climate change crisis. I use the term “crisis” intentionally because if we don’t respond to changing climate conditions with the pressing urgency of a crisis, our children and future generations will pay a price we can only begin to imagine today.

In Salt Lake City government, we have completed a carbon footprint for our municipal operations, allowing each department and division to know exactly how they use energy,

and what they can do to reduce its use. We are supporting each department with energy audits of buildings, and an audit to determine how we can reduce the total amount of fuel used in our fleet. This data is allowing us to determine the best ways to reduce the use of energy, change our energy sources, and save money for our taxpayers and help improve our air quality.

We are also well underway in our review of City ordinances, with the goal of updating and improving them to support and be consistent with our sustainability goals. With these improvements, Salt Lake City may soon have the first set of comprehensive sustainability ordinances in the nation.

We have also reached out to our businesses and residents to assist them in finding ways to be more sustainable in their own lives, and save money as a result. In August, I signed an executive order to promote the development of “Green Buildings.” The order provides an incentive for private developers to design and build high-performance, sustainable buildings by prioritizing permitting for private projects designed to Silver Leadership in Environment and Energy Design (LEED) standards. And, our e2 Business program continues to expand; and our next goal will be to complete a Community Carbon Footprint, so that we can use that data to help our residents reduce their energy use.

The Sorenson Unity Center, the first city-owned Silver LEED building, officially opened last May. The Mark Miller Toyota dealership on West Temple was one of the first businesses in Salt Lake City to open a Gold LEED-certified building.

Whether it's by purchasing hybrids and alternative fuel and electric vehicles, modifying our buildings for efficiency and use of renewable energy sources, or investing with the good efforts our Salt Lake County and the State of Utah partners in new energy resources and technologies, I commit Salt Lake City to be at the forefront in Utah and the nation in wise energy use, transportation, and a better environment.

Expect new projects to be announced throughout this year.

Good Government/Regional Leadership

Good government and good policies create great communities and also make a positive impact on surrounding municipalities and the region. Salt Lake City has led by example.

Last week we unveiled the Greater Transparency for Collaborative Government Initiative. We all know that government functions best when it is open, inclusive, responsive and accountable for its actions. With this new initiative, the City will reach out to our residents by making policies and procedures more understandable and proactively posting all relevant documents online. As we develop this Transparency Initiative, we are establishing a new interactive, open policy development technique in Utah government by inviting the public from the earliest stages to help us shape that policy through a blog and an on-line Wiki. I invite you all to go to the Salt Lake City website and participate with us in shaping the process for Salt Lake City government decisions.

Last year in my State of the City address, I announced the start of Salt Lake Solutions, to engage our residents, businesses and civic leaders more directly in finding solutions for community challenges. These efforts have included:

Fisher Mansion, co-convened with Council member Turner; Pioneer Park, co-convened with Council member Garrett, and Air Quality Improvement, co-convened with Salt Lake County Mayor Corroon and Governor Huntsman.

Internally, we are training and involving SLC employees to create an atmosphere of partnering within the City. Through these efforts – under the wonderful direction and guidance of Michele Straube – we are finding solutions through community activism and participation.

More quietly, the work internally by Lyn Creswell as director of Management Services, and Ralph Chamness, to prepare the new labor resolution before you tonight, will keep Salt Lake City government humming.

In our first Council-Mayor action together, last year we created Utah's and the City's first Mutual Commitment Registry. Under the able leadership of Yolanda Francisco-Nez, the Mayor's Office of Diversity and Human Rights blossomed, including the implementation of a five-part Dialogue on Discrimination Series to encourage community involvement and to help inform the development of our anti-discrimination public policies.

As our City works to ensure that all of our residents feel welcome and part of the community, we will watch closely the actions of the upcoming Legislature.

I am very concerned that pending state law will force our police to be at odds with our residents if last year's immigration legislation is not repealed or amended. I am deeply concerned about steps that would make our police federal immigration officers. This is contrary to welcoming and protecting the residents of our City and undermines their partnership with our police.

We will continue to be a progressive, forward-moving City, not only serving as the capital of our state, but also as a capital for our region, providing regional leadership as we tackle economic, transportation, environmental and social challenges.

We have partnered with local governments in Salt Lake and neighboring counties, the State of Utah, local universities, businesses, and non-profit organizations to improve every realm of life in our community. Partnerships will continue to optimize the ability of Salt Lake City to succeed.

Announcements

Some forthcoming initiatives that I would like to announce tonight are representative of how Salt Lake City can and will proceed with plans that enhance the day-to-day lives of our residents and businesses.

Public Safety Complex

While the 2007 bond campaign was unsuccessful, the need for an efficient, modern public safety facility has only increased. In the first month of my administration I assembled a team to focus on developing a range of options moving forward. With an emphasis on defining essential services, using resources efficiently, and taking advantage of the synergies of co-locating the buildings near other city services such as the justice court and city hall, the team substantially streamlined the project and reduced its estimated price tag. I will work closely with the Council to submit a proposal to the voters for a Salt Lake City Public Safety Complex for their approval this coming November.

As part of the overall project, I will foster federal, state, and local partnerships to help us build a state-of-the-art emergency operations center for disaster management and an intelligence-gathering fusion center. There are many opportunities to be more efficient through mutually beneficial relationships with other jurisdictions, and we will realize significant savings from them.

Sports Complex

In response to a significant need for recreational facilities, City residents voted in 2003 for a \$15 million general obligation bond to pay for the construction of a sports complex. The proposed facility boasts 15-20 soccer fields and 4-6 baseball or softball diamonds, along with parking, concession, and restrooms to be located near I-215 and 2200 North.

The actual price tag exceeded the original estimates, but the need for the recreational space also continues to grow. Rick Graham, Director of Public Services, and one of the finest employees in the City, led an effort to re-evaluate the costs and scope of the

athletic complex along with options for supplementing the original funding source. In addition to the contribution from Real Salt Lake of \$7.2 million in 2006, another partnership, which we plan to soon announce, will allow us to fully fund this project. I am hopeful construction can begin in late fall of this year.

The sports complex will not only serve the City and the region's residents with a world-class facility, but will also attract national tournaments. This complex will be a major economic engine for South Davis County and Salt Lake City and our Rose Park and West Pointe neighborhoods in particular. I intend to build the complex as originally envisioned by Salt Lake City's voters in 2003.

Streetcar Proposal

In September, RDA director DJ Baxter arranged for several members of the City Council and me to travel to Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver, B.C. to learn from the successful approaches to urban development in those cities. Each of those cities has been successful in creating thriving, active, urban neighborhoods, where the sidewalks are continually filled with people and activity; where a sense of neighborhood identity has been created in the heart of the urban core through smart, well-designed public improvements; and where residents can walk, bike, or ride convenient transit to most or all of their daily destinations.

With careful planning, a modern streetcar could greatly assist our efforts in Salt Lake City as well. As a city that once was home to 145 miles of streetcar tracks, our forebears were no strangers to the convenience and benefits of streetcars. A modern system, even of much more modest scale, could help reinvigorate many areas of our city, creating – and connecting – vibrant, attractive urban neighborhoods, where residents of all ages, incomes and interests can enjoy the benefits of a high quality, pedestrian- and transit-oriented, urban lifestyle.

To bring this about, our Redevelopment Agency and Community and Economic Development Department are working hand-in-hand to identify the best place for our first

modern streetcar line. Later this year, I will present to the public and to the City Council a proposal for a short initial segment that will help us accelerate the pace of downtown development.

Accolades

Finally, let me acknowledge the terrific work in Salt Lake City government and highlight a few award-winning employees:

- Margaret Plane within Ed Rutan's superb City Attorney's Office was awarded Utah Young Lawyer of the Year.
- Florence Reynolds in Public Utilities – working under the wonderful leadership of Jeff Niermeyer – was recognized by the US Environmental Protection Agency with an Environmental Achievement Award for her implementation of the pharmaceutical drug collection program.
- Bill Haight and his co-workers at Information Management Services for their recognition as presenting one of the best city websites in the country.

Salt Lake City has been recognized nationally for a number of noteworthy honors this year:

- For the third year in a row, Salt Lake City was recognized as a “Top 25 Arts Destination” in the mid-sized city category by American Style magazine.
- Our Water Reclamation Facility earned its 14th consecutive National Association of Clean Water Agencies Platinum Award, one of only 15 facilities nation-wide to receive this prestigious award. This award exemplifies a commitment to environmental protection and the diligence and hard work of our employees.
- Salt Lake City was honored by the Our Green Cities Initiative as one of the top 20 cities for leadership in sustainability.
- Men's Health Magazine recently released a new study which named Salt Lake City as the healthiest city for women in the country.
- Finally, I am pleased to be the first to publicly announce a new award for Salt Lake City that will be officially announced tomorrow nationwide. Men's Fitness Magazine has named Salt Lake City this year's fittest city in America.

I look forward to a new year with its challenges and opportunities.

I also look forward to our parade on Friday as we honor our Ute football team that has shown us the way to #1.

I congratulate and offer my best wishes and support to our newly elected and re-elected leaders – both local and national. To our new Council Chair Carlton Christiansen and Vice Chair JT Martin; to Mayor Peter Corroon and new County Council Chair Joe Hatch; to State House Speaker Dave Clark and Senate President Mike Waddoups; to Governor Huntsman; and of course to President-Elect Obama: I hope for wisdom, patience, diligence, common sense *and* sensitivity in these trying times as we embark on the difficult task of maintaining necessary services for our residents and providing the quality of life for which all of us hope.

To my friends and colleagues on the City Council, let me tell you again what a pleasure and honor it has been to work with you in this first year of my term as Mayor. I thank you for your efforts in 2008 and look forward to all that we will accomplish together in 2009.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve those who live and work in this City surrounded by the beauty and majesty of our mountains. I pledge my dedication to the residents of Salt Lake City, knowing that as we work together in this great City, we can, as Wallace Stegner, whose hundredth birthday we celebrate this year, wrote, “create a society to match its scenery.”