
Addressing Homelessness in Salt Lake City

Homelessness in Salt Lake City, as in the rest of the country, is a persistent challenge. For many years, I have been a tireless advocate for improving the lives of our homeless friends and making our community safer and more livable for everyone.

The homeless situation has changed dramatically in the 30 years since facilities were sited away from the downtown core, prior to development of the Gateway. Today, homeless services must address challenges involving far more diverse populations and social dynamics – including pervasive drug dealing and panhandling by people who are not homeless but circulate among and prey on our neediest and most vulnerable residents.

City, county and community resources for the homeless have increased every year. In 2014, Salt Lake City established a Metro Police Unit focused specifically on the homeless areas. Yet conditions continued to deteriorate in and around the Depot area.

Working in partnership with a range of stakeholders, my staff and I are focusing on both short-term impacts on the community and services, and on long-term solutions for facilities and services.

Short-Term Actions

In July 2015, Salt Lake City and our partners dramatically increased resources for addressing the homeless situation.

- Interim Chief Brown has re-deployed police throughout the City and is working with prosecutors, jailers, judges, regional police departments, and social service

agencies to identify and attack drug dealing;

- Space has been provided for people to store their belongings when they leave the shelter during the day;
- The streets are cleaned on a daily basis;
- More social workers are now on site, conducting community outreach and support;
- Police are now permitted to provide additional security at the shelter;
- A direct call-in number has been established for anyone seeking assistance.

There is still much work to do, but after only a couple of months of the police re-deployment initiative, crime is down by 20%, cueing at the shelter has been reduced, and businesses and residents are reporting improved conditions.

Long-Term Actions

In January 2014, Salt Lake City and Salt Lake County undertook a parallel community-consensus effort to address facilities and services.

- Salt Lake County has adopted a collective impact model to achieve results-driven changes to the way services are delivered.
- In Salt Lake City, I convened a Commission, chaired by Gail Miller and Palmer DePaulis, involving all parties who are involved in facilities.

Both the county and the City are on track to complete our work by the end of the year, and establish an approach that meets the goals and interests of the larger community.

Chronic and Veteran's Homelessness

- Last year, Salt Lake City became a national model for addressing chronic homelessness. This is important because the segment of our population that is homeless for many years is a disproportionately large user of services and facilities.
- By freeing up more beds for the chronically homeless, demand for emergency services decreases, and space in the shelters increases. Better and more stable living conditions for this population helps service providers and residents themselves better address their underlying problems.
- We estimate that Salt Lake City is 90% of the way toward reaching our 10-year goal of totally eliminating chronic homelessness.
- In August 2015, I announced a development that will house another 50 homeless individuals, moving us closer to that goal.
- Salt Lake City and Phoenix were first in the nation to effectively eliminate homelessness for veterans, thanks in large part to increased federal resources targeted to our City under a White House initiative. This accomplishment underscores the effectiveness of our "Housing First" model, which we know can be successful with other residents who are badly in need of housing.

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