

POLICY PLAN

# Improve air quality for Salt Lake City families

## Air quality is the single-biggest threat to livability in our city

At her core, Erin Mendenhall is a clean-air advocate. Erin was compelled to get to work cleaning up our air when her first child was born during an inversion and she learned that the cumulative impact of a lifetime of exposure to Salt Lake City's air pollution could take two years off a person's life. No one will work harder as mayor to improve the quality of the air we breathe here in Salt Lake City than Erin Mendenhall. As mayor, improving our air quality will be Erin's top priority.

Air quality and climate change are existential threats to our city, but our carbon-reduction goals are not aggressive enough for the realities of the crisis. Erin will work aggressively to expedite our carbon reductions on multiple fronts, getting collaborative and creative with solutions. There are many steps the city can take to reduce carbon output, but we need more stakeholders invested in this conversation. Salt Lake City isn't in a bubble; our airshed reaches far beyond our city limits and we cannot address this alone.

Erin will work with Salt Lake City residents, business owners, state, county and religious leaders, as well as leaders of other cities in our airshed to identify bold solutions and lead changes that will improve our air quality.

## A CAREER OF RESULTS

Erin has dedicated her life to making this city better for children and for everyone who breathes its air. In 2009, she co-founded the nonprofit, Breathe Utah, which works to improve the air we breathe through education, collaboration, and policy. To date, Breathe Utah has educated over 80,000 students in grades pre-K through 12th in schools throughout the state about air quality science, health impacts, and what we can do to improve our air.

As the policy director for Breathe Utah, Erin worked with Republican and Democrat state lawmakers, including then-State Senator Ben McAdams, to improve state legislation regarding air quality and expanding the state's core curriculum to include air quality science and driving impacts in drivers' education.

She has been appointed to serve on our state's Air Quality Board since 2014 and has been its chair since 2018.

On the City Council:

- Erin expanded our bus routes to give Salt Lake City residents a less expensive option for getting out of their cars and around the city. She worked hard to make the system more geographically equitable and as a result, three new circulator bus routes came online in August 2019;
- Erin has also worked to expand our unique system of bike and pedestrian trails, including the McClelland Trail connecting the 9th and 9th and Sugar House neighborhoods, the 9-Line Trail that will connect from the Surplus Canal to Emigration Canyon, and the Folsom Trail connecting the Jordan River Parkway Trail to Downtown Salt Lake City. These trails will offer residents more access to opportunities, and help be a part of solutions that clean our air, support adjacent businesses, and save on resident's transportation costs;
- Erin has worked through the city budget each year to ensure the Urban Forestry division had sufficient funding to at least replace all dead and dying trees. She increased urban forestry staff by 30 percent in the most recent budget to ensure the department could more fully serve residents' requests.
- Erin successfully helped push the city to reduce its contract with Rocky Mountain Power from 25 years to five years, to create an opportunity for the city to better negotiate for a faster transition to 100 percent renewable sources.

## POLICY COMMITMENTS

As mayor, Erin will:

### **Get 100 percent renewable energy from Rocky Mountain Power ahead of schedule**

This transition must happen faster than the 2030 date currently planned. With aggressive negotiation and strategic planning with Rocky Mountain Power, Erin will fight to expedite this process so that our city is powered by 100 percent renewable energy by 2023.

### **Plant 1,000 trees each year on the West Side to take pollution out of the air**

The West Side of Salt Lake City is disproportionately affected by our poor air quality and with the Inland Port threatening to worsen the situation, Erin has committed to a bold plan to protect residents while fighting a polluting port.

A single large tree is capable of removing 10 pounds of air pollution in a year, absorbing the carbon dioxide of a car driven 500 miles over a year and generating 260 pounds of oxygen in a year. Facing an alarming disparity in the geographic distribution of the city's urban forest, Erin will plant 1,000 trees on the West Side of our city each year as mayor. This, in addition to the normal replacement of 1,200 trees citywide each year.

To pay for the surge in tree-plantings, Erin will pursue local, national and non-profit grants partnering with

local philanthropies, businesses, and others to make the greening of the West Side a true community project. The 4,000 trees planted on the West side in her first four budgets as mayor would grow to:

- Take 40,000 pounds of pollution of the air each year;
- Generate more than 1 million pounds of new oxygen each year;
- Save approximately \$172,000 in combined annual heating and cooling costs; and
- Have the combined cooling effect of 40,000 room-sized air conditioners chilling our neighborhoods.

## **Expand public transit options for city residents**

Great cities provide multiple convenient and safe options for residents or commuters to move in and about the city.

To help curb greenhouse gas emissions and to deal with increasing population density, we need to make it more convenient and affordable for residents and commuters to make the decision to leave their cars at home whenever possible and take public transportation, use our sidewalks, and ride bicycles. Erin will continue expanding our city's bus routes, upgrading bus stops, and start moving Salt Lake City toward an all-electric bus fleet.

Salt Lake City can further reduce traffic on our roads by investing in bike and pedestrian infrastructure citywide, including greater investment in our urban trails that connect our urban neighborhoods and business districts. We must create opportunities for every resident, no matter what part of the city they live in or how much money they make, to be part of cleaning our air, reducing city traffic, and creating a culture of active and cost-effective transportation.

Scooters can be an effective micro-transportation option, but the protection of the public's safety demands stronger enforcement of laws against operating scooters and bicycles on sidewalks, especially downtown. As mayor, Erin will work with scooter and bike-rental companies to ensure our sidewalks are safe for pedestrians and our streets are safer for people on wheels.

## **Increase UTA ridership**

The Utah Transit Authority estimates that two out of five riders use a discounted pass that was provided by their employer or college, saving these riders about \$1,000 a year in transportation costs. As our population grows and businesses move into Salt Lake City, our roads will only become more congested with traffic. Erin will work to expand discount transit pass opportunities to startup and mid-sized businesses to increase accessibility to the entire Salt Lake City workforce. Currently, only very large employers, like Zions Bank, Goldman Sachs, and the Church of the Latter Day Saints, are able to purchase discounted transit passes at bulk-discount rates for their employees.

To further incentivize UTA ridership, Erin will build partnerships with the county and others who host sporting, entertainment, religious and cultural events to allow event tickets to double as UTA tickets. University of Utah athletics have proven it to be a viable concept and Erin will apply it more widely to make it more convenient for people to leave their cars at home while taking advantage of our city's rich culture.

## **Reduce carbon emissions from buildings**

Buildings will outpace cars as the primary cause of pollution in the coming decade. The burning of fossil fuels to generate electricity for buildings is what accounts for 39 percent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the United States. Greener buildings will mean cleaner air. In order to build cleaner buildings, the city must work to restore residential solar incentives with deeper subsidies for low-income residents and create and update incentive programs for existing commercial property and building owners to make upgrades, including for solar energy adoption. Erin will strengthen our environmental standards for earning low-interest Redevelopment Agency loans, ensuring that future buildings will be more efficient, environmentally clean, and sustainable.

## **Expand snow blower and lawn mower exchange**

The most vulnerable time for our airshed is in the winter months, which is also the time when we fire up snow blowers to clear our driveways, sidewalks, and parking areas just after a storm system clears out an inversion. Operating a typical gas-powered snow blower for one hour emits as much pollution as driving a car about 280 miles. Similarly, gas-powered lawn mowers contribute to summer ozone levels, using a gas-powered mower for one hour is equivalent to driving eleven new cars for the same time. Recognizing this problem, the state created an exchange program for residents to trade-in their polluting, gas-powered blowers and mowers for clean, electric blowers and mowers at a discounted price.

Both programs are so popular that most interested residents cannot participate. As mayor, Erin will work with the Department of Environmental Quality to expand these programs and/or create off-shoot programs for residents of Salt Lake City. With a relatively small investment, we can take big steps to cleaning our air precisely when our airshed most needs a break.

## **Expand electric vehicle ports**

Salt Lake City currently has 300 electric vehicle ports which offer free charging for electric vehicles. These charging ports make it possible for those with electric cars to commute to Salt Lake City without worrying about needed to charge their vehicles. Salt Lake City needs to be proactive in supporting this type of green investment through grants, as we become more tech-based and see more electric cars available on the market. As mayor, Erin will find creative ways and financing to increase the number of electric vehicle charging stations around our city.