



**GUIDING OUR GROWTH**

A STATEWIDE CONVERSATION ABOUT UTAH'S FUTURE

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A statewide conversation  
about Utah's future



By better understanding how Utahns prefer to address population growth-related concerns, decision-makers can align with constituents' desires, safeguard quality of life, and confidently plan for the future.

*December 1, 2023*

[GuidingOurGrowth.utah.gov](https://GuidingOurGrowth.utah.gov)

# GUIDING OUR GROWTH



Unmatched natural beauty. Countless outdoor recreation options. Strong families. Connected communities. One of the most vibrant economies in the U.S. There's so much that makes Utah special. And what makes Utah great is also what makes Utah grow.

Many families choose to stay here, generation after generation. Others recognize all that Utah has to offer and choose to move here. As long as Utah is a quality place, people will stay and newcomers will arrive. Growth is a part of life when you live in an exceptional state. In fact, Utah was the fastest-growing state in the nation between 2010 and 2020, and nearly two-thirds of Utah's growth came from internal growth rather than migration.

According to the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, Utah's population is projected to increase from 3.4 million today to 5.4 million in 2060. So, it's not a question of **IF** Utah will continue to grow, but **HOW** Utah will continue to grow. Growth can threaten what makes Utah great if we don't plan for it. We must work together to protect or improve Utah's housing costs, water resources, transportation convenience, recreation opportunities, and sense of community.

Growth decisions aren't easy, and opinions about growth vary. Regardless of how individuals feel about growth, it's important to think about what we can do now to safeguard Utah's future quality of life.

Guiding Our Growth is a statewide conversation about how we can keep Utah a great place for our families and communities as we grow. It is a broad effort to explore what actions make sense as our population continues to increase.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through a listening effort with elected officials and policymakers across the state, project partners identified housing, water, transportation, and open space as four pressing issues. This became the foundation of a public survey, allowing Utahns to “Be Heard” and share their perspectives.

Outreach, engagement, and public participation in the Guiding Our Growth “Be Heard” campaign included:

- More than 30 regional workshops
- 1.7 million online engagements
- 68,000 ad campaign clicks
- Input from all 29 of Utah’s counties
- 28,000 survey responses
- 30,000 open-ended comments

**Public input shared through Guiding Our Growth showed that Utahns want to maintain a high quality of life through focused growth in city and town centers alongside thoughtful consideration of the how housing, water, transportation, and open space relate to each other.**



Survey results received between May and August 2023 revealed that the majority of Utahns want to strengthen the center of each community and ensure that Utah is a quality home for future generations. To accomplish these goals, most Utahns:

- **Don't think we should try to stop growth**, but acknowledge that how we grow matters.
- **Think we should focus growth in city and town centers** where we can build on existing infrastructure.
- **Prefer to grow “in and up”** rather than out and like the idea of more compact development.
- **Desire thoughtfully designed new neighborhoods** with convenient access to parks, trails, shopping, transportation, and more.
- **Want a variety of housing products** and price points built in context-sensitive ways.
- **Favor proactive water conservation** and shared responsibility.
- **Value the option to travel in different ways**, including by public transit, bicycle, and car.
- **Would like to preserve open spaces** within and around communities.

# WHAT WE HEARD

Utahns want to allow more housing, with a variety of housing products and price points, built in context-sensitive ways.

Utahns also shared more specific input within each key topic area.

## HOUSING

### Urban Utahns

Want to see more housing offered in a greater variety of types throughout urban areas. Younger Utahns and renters are particularly supportive of this approach.

**60%** want to see underperforming strip malls, big box stores, and parking lots redeveloped into housing.

**60%** want more townhomes, duplexes, and accessory dwelling units, like basement or mother-in-law apartments.

**59%** want more new houses to be built on smaller lots and want to incentivize the construction of smaller homes.

**57%** want the number of housing units with the potential for owner occupancy, including single-family houses, condos, and townhomes, to increase.

**52%** want Utah to be more selective about the types of new businesses or development we seek to attract to our state.

*"We need to utilize the land we have and quit taking over more. We need to preserve the natural environment as much as possible."*

- survey comment, Iron County resident

### Rural Utahns

Want much of the state's growth to focus around existing town centers and main streets, and a majority oppose building new housing on large, spread-out lots.

**50%** want sweat equity home-building programs to expand.

**46%** want more new houses to be built on smaller lots.

**46%** want more proactive investment in, or frameworks for, financing new infrastructure, like roads and utilities, to support the construction of new housing.

**39%** want more townhomes, duplexes, and accessory dwelling units like basement or mother-in-law apartments.

**37%** want short-term rentals to be limited through regulation.

*"Many of us have lived in Utah for a long time and hate the growth. I choose to live rural so that my kids have more opportunities and don't get lost in the crowds. Low crime rates, knowing our neighbors, walking distance to so many things (schools, stores, work). Growth changes all of this. Our quality of life suffers with too much growth too fast."*

- survey comment, Sevier County resident

# WATER

## Urban Utahns

Support proactive water conservation efforts.

- 80%** want rebates or incentives provided to encourage low water-use landscape conversions.
- 73%** want natural stormwater drainage systems implemented in all new developments to improve water quality.
- 71%** want low-water-use landscaping required in all new residential and commercial areas.
- 71%** want more investment in municipal-scale water recycling and reuse systems.
- 67%** want more efficient irrigation practices, like irrigating only on odd days, to be incentivized or required.

*"We've given up our privilege to waste water. If we want to continue to live and thrive here in Utah, we need to do our part to conserve."*

- survey comment, Davis County resident

*"I like the idea of restricting housing when we don't have enough water but fear that it will harm low-income people the most."*

- survey comment, Salt Lake County resident

## Rural Utahns

Support residential and commercial water conservation efforts as well as agricultural irrigation optimization.

- 70%** want rebates or incentives to encourage low water-use landscape conversions.
- 64%** want more investment in new water infrastructure projects (reservoirs, wells, pipelines, aquifer storage).
- 57%** want increased investments in agricultural water optimization projects.
- 55%** want more investment in municipal-scale water recycling and reuse systems.
- 55%** want to require low-water-use landscaping in all new residential and commercial areas.

*"We need to be smart about how we think about and how we use water in a prioritized fashion. We should learn from and use all the techniques successfully used by other arid / desert countries."*

- survey comment, Carbon County resident

*"The water challenge has to be addressed not only by agriculture and communities, but industries with big water needs."*

- survey comment, Juab County resident

**Utahns favor proactive water conservation and shared responsibility.**

# TRANSPORTATION

## Urban Utahns

Want significant investments in public transportation and trails and more compact development in downtowns and near public transit to support transportation choices.

**67%** want more investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

**66%** want zero-fare public transportation to be provided.

**66%** want more apartments, condos, and townhomes near transit stations and downtowns.

**65%** want increased funding for public transportation to serve urban areas.

**64%** want more investment in public transportation for peak usage of tourism areas.

*"New business growth and housing in the center. Concentrate people, jobs, and essential shopping (food) in the city center. Build in blighted city centers."*

- survey comment, Tooele County resident

*"Public transportation needs to be more convenient than driving and parking. We've prioritized freeways for long enough. Now we need to prioritize public transportation."*

- survey comment, Salt Lake County resident

## Rural Utahns

Want better transportation connections.

**58%** want public transportation services implemented to connect smaller towns to larger cities.

**53%** want investment in statewide passenger rail.

**53%** want improvement or expansion of high-use state highways and main streets, like Highways 6, 189, and 191.

**51%** want a statewide trail network implemented to connect communities across Utah.

**51%** want more investment in public transit for peak usage of tourism areas.

*"Require ergonomic or bike/walk paths for ALL new developments and require that the path hooks up with other paths. So [people] can actually get from one end of town to another."*

- survey response, Millard County resident

*"Encourage affordable housing to counter high housing costs. Enact conservation requirements to fend off the day we run out of water. And don't build too many roads. I favor mixed, in-town, and out-of-town solutions, so people have choices based on personal preference and what they can afford."*

- survey comment, Wayne County resident

**Utahns value the option to travel in different ways, including by public transit, walking, biking, and driving.**

# OPEN SPACE

## Urban Utahns

Want development to fill “in” rather than grow “out” to conserve open space, and for new development on “the edge” to focus on master planned communities with extensive open space and a variety of housing types.

- 73%** want more natural-area recreational amenities (trailheads, campgrounds, mountain bike/hiking/equestrian/OHV trails, parking, restrooms) on state or county lands.
- 72%** want more urban trails and trailheads, like the Jordan River Parkway, Virgin River Trail, and Murdock Canal Trail.
- 64%** want new libraries, recreation centers, or senior centers to be designed in a way that also provides multipurpose outdoor recreation space.
- 63%** want schools and churches to partner with communities to provide recreation space and allow community access.
- 63%** want more public park spaces, plazas, and community-gathering places as communities grow.

*“Let’s be good stewards of our land by taking up less of it.”*

- survey comment, Davis County resident

*“I strongly prefer infill, and if new areas must be developed I’d prefer planned walkable communities.”*

- survey comment, Cache County resident

## Rural Utahns

Want to preserve open space by focusing growth in master-planned communities or growing on smaller lots close to town.

- 67%** want more natural-area recreational amenities (trailheads, campgrounds, mountain bike/hiking/equestrian/OHV trails, parking, restrooms) on state or county lands.
- 58%** want ongoing agricultural uses encouraged by prioritizing prime farmlands in long-range planning efforts.
- 54%** want agricultural zoning to be utilized in areas desired for agricultural preservation.
- 53%** want the preservation of open space through conservation easements or purchases.
- 45%** want to allow clustering homes on smaller lots in order to set aside areas for open space.

*“Spread-out lots are a waste of space. Small clusters are better and leave open spaces.”*

- survey comment, Uintah County resident

*“Green spaces and parks/community garden spaces can also be built on small lots next to smaller lots for new housing so people can have community space not so spread out. Trails can connect multiple smaller open spaces close to town.”*

- survey comment, Carbon County resident

**Utahns would like to preserve open spaces within and around communities.**



# WHAT POLICYMAKERS CAN DO

Utahns said they would support policymakers further exploring some specific growth-related strategic investments and policy considerations.

## STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

- Public Transit
- Walking and Biking Trails
- Roads and Highways
- Open Space Preservation
- Landscape Retrofit Rebates
- Water Infrastructure
- Agricultural Water Conservation
- Recreational Amenities



## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

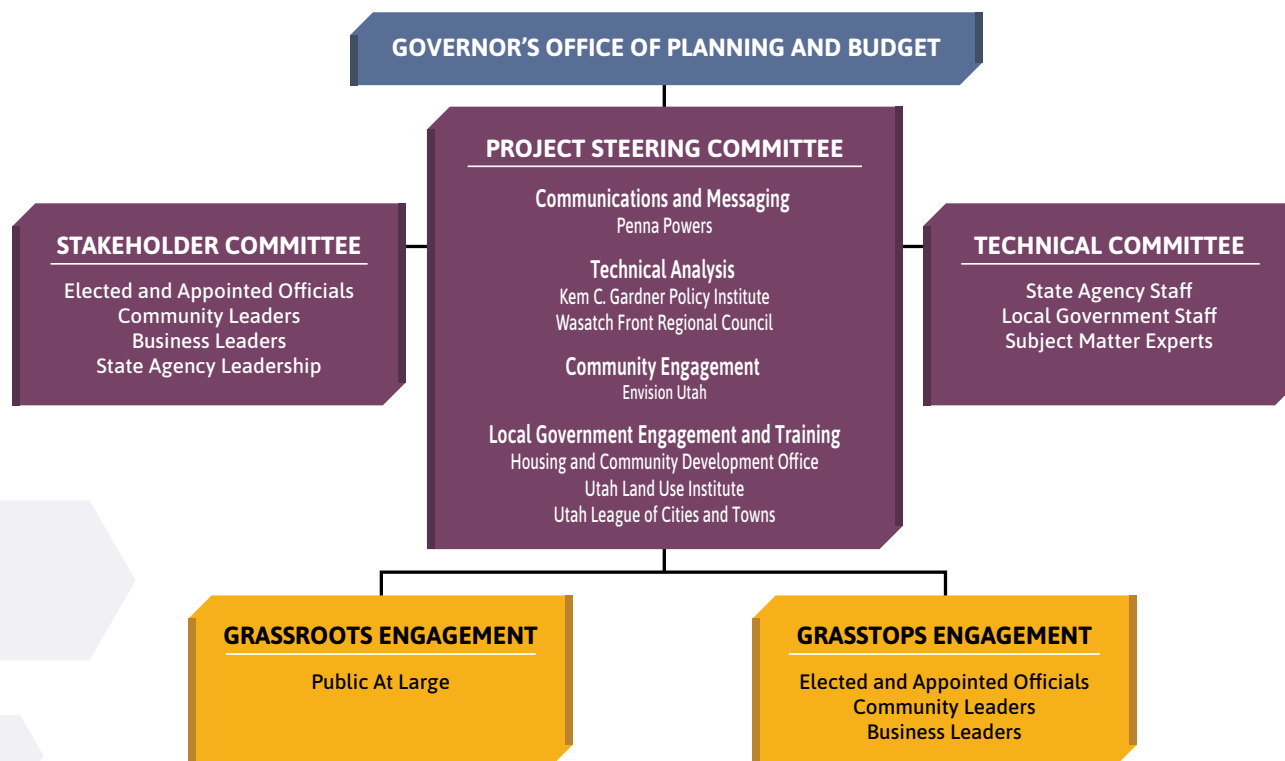
- Enable More Homes to be Built
- Plan for Smaller Homes on Smaller Lots
- Encourage More Multi-Unit, Owner-Occupied Housing, Like Townhomes and Condos
- Promote Redevelopment and Infill
- Plan for Housing and Growth in Strong Community Centers and Near Public Transit
- Encourage Master Planned Communities
- Support Waterwise Landscaping
- Recruit Businesses Selectively, Prioritizing Quality Jobs Over Quantity



# THE PROCESS

Guiding Our Growth started in Fall 2021 when the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB) was asked to work with community partners to develop a proposal for a statewide growth conversation. GOPB teamed with organizations from all over the state, representing a variety of perspectives and expertise areas, to complete this task. These groups include the state’s seven associations of government, Utah League of Cities and Towns, Envision Utah, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, Utah Land Use Institute, and the Department of Workforce Services. Many additional community stakeholders contributed to the effort through stakeholder and technical committees.

The effort was funded by the generous support of the Utah State Legislature.



The project included three phases.



The project kicked off with interactive presentations and a series of information-gathering workshops throughout the state. Project partners also administered a preliminary survey to help identify Utahns' key values and the most pressing issues facing our state. Four primary growth-related areas of concern emerged: housing, water, transportation, and open space.

This input drove the development of a broad public survey to solicit Utahns' opinions and perspectives on growth issues. Utahns were invited to "Be Heard" during the survey period between May 11 and August 31, 2023. In addition to the primary survey, which invited everyone to participate, a random-sample version was also administered, with similar results. Three distinct versions of the survey were created to tailor input gathering to the actual experiences of Utah communities: Urban, Growing Rural, and Slow/No Growth.

Respondents explored challenges and options in each of the key topic areas (housing, water, transportation, and open space), considered the pros and cons of each approach, and then selected their preferred options to guide our growth. The survey included a "Stop Growth" option for each topic area, along with a description of the realistic impacts of trying to stop growth.

Utahns were invited to take the survey primarily through a social media advertising campaign.



Among the survey respondents:

- 61% were between the ages of 25 and 54 (compared to 48% of all Utahns)
- 72% were homeowners (compared to 70% of all Utahns)
- 44% reported an annual income below \$99,999 (compared to 62% of all Utahns)

A focused effort was used to gather input from minority Utahns, including:

- In-person outreach at community and cultural events
- Spanish language promotional and educational videos
- Spanish language paid advertising
- Interview with Telemundo
- Stipends to community-oriented nonprofits for survey promotion
- Alternative news outlets: SLUG, Utah Stories, Catalyst





Utah State Legislature  
Governor's Office of Planning  
& Budget  
Wasatch Front Regional  
Council  
Envision Utah  
The Utah Land Use Institute  
Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute  
Utah League of Cities  
and Towns

Mountainland Association  
of Governments (MAG)  
Workforce Services Housing  
& Community Development  
The Office of the Property  
Rights Ombudsman  
Uintah Basin Association  
of Governments  
Southeastern Utah Association  
of Local Governments

Five County Association  
of Governments  
Bear River Association  
of Governments  
Six County Association  
of Governments  
...and many additional  
partners and contributors.



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Full survey results, the random sample results, and the survey questions can be found at: [GuidingOurGrowth.utah.gov](https://GuidingOurGrowth.utah.gov)

