

State of the City 2025

Written and presented by Tooele City Mayor Debbie Winn

Tooele City Council, department heads, staff, and residents of Tooele City: It is an honor to stand before you tonight and share the State of Our City. This is a special moment for me—not only because it marks the close of another year, but because it comes just over 100 days before my second term as your mayor comes to an end.

Eight years ago, Tooele faced a difficult crossroads. Our finances were strained, our future uncertain, and we had to make tough choices. Today, I can stand here with confidence and tell you: Tooele City is strong, stable, and prepared for the future.

Financial Stability & Transparency

When I took office, our finances were on an unsustainable path. We were spending more than we brought in, and even outside consultants raised concerns. After more than 30 years without one, we made the difficult decision to approve a tax increase. It wasn't easy, but it was necessary.

Because of that decision, Tooele no longer relies on savings to cover basic expenses. We now fund our operations responsibly, set aside money for emergencies, and invest in the future. Since then, economic growth has allowed our property tax rate to drop nearly 26%.

In early 2018, during my first year in office, I learned that the Tooele City Redevelopment Agency was also facing a serious financial crisis. The RDA owed millions of dollars in bond debt, and with the project area nearing its end, there was no clear way to pay it off.

At the same time, I discovered the City was spending a significant amount of money on lobbying services. After working with our finance department to investigate further, I brought my concerns to the City council and requested an audit of the funds spent on lobbying and economic development to ensure compliance. Unfortunately, I did not receive majority support from the council.

Determined to pursue accountability, I took my concerns to the State Auditor. Although he initially agreed to review the matter, I never heard back. Several months later, I brought the issue to the Lieutenant Governor's office. After meeting with his attorney, I was informed that the payments to the lobbyist were indeed illegal—but that weaknesses in state law made it nearly impossible to hold a City accountable. He recommended pushing for legislative reform.

Our representatives introduced changes twice, but the proposals did not pass. In January 2019, I made the decision to terminate our lobbyist's contract and instead hire a new economic development director at a fair and reasonable salary. Since then, our economic development efforts have thrived.

I'm proud to report that our Redevelopment Agency has paid off all debt, including the bonding for the 1000 North and Tooele Boulevard roadway projects, the Tooele Applied Technology College, and other debt.

Tooele City is committed to full transparency. We live-stream council meetings, publish an easy-to-read budget book, and provide regular updates through newsletters and social media. I've always believed taxpayers deserve honesty and accountability, and that should always be the standard for Tooele City.

There were more challenges to come as we experienced COVID-19 and its far-reaching consequences. On top of that, our community endured an earthquake, a tragic semi-truck incident, a break-in at a storage tank that threatened water contamination, repeated acts of vandalism at our parks and facilities, and several devastating fires where residents lost their homes and belongings.

Through it all, Tooele proved its resilience. We learned that hardships are not just to be endured, but embraced as opportunities to grow in patience and steadfastness.

It is my duty to be transparent and responsible with taxpayer funds. Over the past eight years, I believe we've shown that honest leadership can achieve great things and deliver real improvements for our community. I am proud of all that we have accomplished together as a team.

Community Investment and Revitalization

We continue our efforts to see the completion of the Mid Valley Highway. While progress has been slow, I'm pleased to share that Tooele City has signed an agreement with UDOT allowing us to build a temporary roadway that will connect to the Tooele Boulevard extension while we wait for full state funding.

We support youth recreation programs across the county, providing access to parks at no charge. Each year, thousands of youth participate in activities supported by the Mayor's Tournament, and we are grateful to the many volunteers who make this possible. We also sponsor the Tooele Youth Court, which provides valuable guidance for young people in our community.

Tooele City has joined the Main Street America and Utah Main Street programs to revitalize our downtown. With grants and community partnerships, we've improved façades, added summer flowers, honored local heroes with the Veteran Banner program, and beautified the area through the Buffalo Art program.

When the Broadway Hotel burned in 2020, Tooele City worked with the EPA to fund cleanup, purchase the property and has since cleared the site and nearby parcels. We are now working with property owners on a plan for revitalization. We also purchased land at the base of Little Mountain for future open space and trails.

To celebrate our 170th anniversary, we commissioned artist Eric Dowdle for a Tooele folk art painting, with puzzles produced to bring families and neighbors together.

Public Safety

Tooele City has made giant strides in improving our public safety. Back in 2018, our officers were working out of an old repurposed auto parts store on Main Street—a space they had occupied for more than 30 years. It was clear this facility no longer met the needs of a modern police force. I worked closely with the City Council to secure approval for a new public safety building, funded by the 2018 tax increase. This was a significant capital investment, but one that ensured our police department could operate in a professional environment worthy of its mission and its service to the community. With the expertise of City engineer Paul Hansen serving as the project manager, this project came in significantly under budget.

We also made major investments in staffing and retention. The department's budget was increased by \$800,000, which allowed us to hire new officers and raise pay for existing staff—addressing a long-standing retention challenge. When I first took office, Tooele's population was around 34,600, with 36 sworn officers. Today, with our population approaching 41,000, the department has grown to 45 sworn officers, keeping pace with the demands of a growing City.

We've also enhanced specialized staffing to meet evolving community needs. New positions include:

- A semi-truck inspection officer to respond to increased commercial vehicle traffic on Main Street, improving roadway safety.
- A drug task force officer to strengthen efforts against major drug operations—resulting in more arrests and removing dangerous substances from our streets.
- Additional supervisory positions, including a new lieutenant and sergeant, to improve oversight and support.

Investments in technology have further modernized our department. We purchased a FARO 3D laser scanner, which allows officers to capture major crime and crash scenes with unmatched accuracy and speed—an invaluable tool as investigations into homicides and serious collisions increase. We also funded license plate recognition cameras to help track stolen vehicles and criminal suspects.

Officer safety has been a top priority. In 2023, the department acquired a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle—a \$1 million piece of equipment secured from the federal government at a fraction of the cost. This vehicle provides the protection our officers need during dangerous, high-risk operations. We also replaced outdated tasers, ensuring officers have reliable non-lethal options when force is required.

Our Tooele City Police Department has taken the initiative to unite local leaders and law enforcement departments to promote safe driving and save lives through the Zero Fatalities Program.

Our Fire Department has also experienced important growth and modernization. Today it is led by our first full-time Fire Chief, Matt McCoy, along with Deputy Chief and Emergency Management Director Jed Colovich, Fire Marshal Nick Wall, and two volunteer Assistant Chiefs,

Nate Remington and Chuck Meyer. They are supported by four certified part-time inspectors and 55 dedicated volunteers.

As Tooele has grown, so too has the demand for fire protection. A comprehensive fire study guided us in planning for the future, including the decision to hire full-time administrative staff to ensure we can continue to protect lives and property effectively.

We also worked to establish a 501(c)(3) fire association to support civic, charitable, and humanitarian efforts, promote morale within the department, and receive community donations.

Equipment and infrastructure investments have been critical. We purchased new compliant SCBAs and oxygen bottles, replaced radios to meet new state standards, and acquired updated hydraulic rescue tools and firefighter bunker gear. Additional apparatus has been added, including Engine 26, a new brush truck, and several command vehicles.

Station improvements have also been a priority. Both Station #1 and #2 received needed upgrades, and in March of this year, we proudly dedicated our new state-of-the-art Station #3 on 1000 North. This facility was delivered within budget and will serve the City well for decades to come.

And tonight, the council will consider a new truck replacement plan—an essential step to ensure our Fire Department continues to grow alongside our City.

Together, these investments in police and fire services ensure Tooele remains a safe, well-prepared City as we grow into the future.

Public Works & Community Development

The separation of the Public Works Department from Community Development has proven to be a significant benefit to improvements in our infrastructure.

Water Division

- Drilled and completed two new culinary wells, and have just begun to drill our next well.
- Replaced several aging water lines to strengthen reliability.
- Completed inspections on all fire hydrants and began systematic inspections of PRVs.

Reclamation Facility

- Completed an \$8 million headworks building — paid for in cash, with no bonding required.
- Upgraded clarifiers, screens, and solar drying beds.
- Design work in progress for future expansion of the facility.

Streets & Transportation

- Implemented a tree-trimming schedule for park strips to keep roadways safe and attractive.
- Completed several major roadway projects including:
 - 7th Street from 500 to 600 North and extending through to 1000 North.
 - Droubay Road widened along the golf course with an added trail, funded by grants.
 - Improvements on 700 South west of Coleman and 200 West between 500 and 600 North.
- Secured \$1.8 million in grant funding for Aaron Drive and 2400 North to support the opening of Deseret Peak High School.
- Installed four new traffic signals and added all-way stops at eight intersections.
- Partnered with UDOT to install a temporary signal at 1000 North and 600 West.

Sidewalks & Pedestrian Access

- Built new sidewalks on Smelter, 7th Street, and Vine Street — all grant funded.
- Structured sidewalk replacement and 50/50 partnership with resident programs to improve walkability across the City.

Technology & Efficiency

- Installed GPS tracking units on all City vehicles to reduce fuel costs, increase productivity, improve safety, and cut maintenance expenses.
- Expanded GIS mapping to better manage City infrastructure and future planning.
- Invested in critical equipment to serve residents more efficiently, including a new street sweeper, camera van, vac truck, and four large snow plows.
- Added boom trucks, backhoes, lifts, skid steers, mini excavators, and UTVs for year-round parks and sidewalk maintenance.
- Expanded our fleet of vehicles to meet growing department needs.

Parks & Recreation

Over the past several years, we have made significant investments in our parks, recreation facilities and community spaces – ensuring that families, athletes, and residents of all ages have safe and enjoyable places to gather.

- Completed the total renovation of the Parks & Recreation and Cemetery Building and added two new community rooms for public use.
- Our Parks Department earned the Healthy Utah Designation and launched the Take Pride Tooele initiative, encouraging residents to clean up properties and help their neighbors. Council members and I rolled up our sleeves alongside volunteers—painting over graffiti, pulling weeds, and picking up garbage. We also recognized residents who embraced this vision and worked to make Tooele more beautiful.

- We celebrated our Tree USA designation by planting over 500 new trees across the City.
- Opened new play spaces including Gaga Ball pits at England Acres, the Youth Center, and Wigwam Park.

City & Community Parks

- At Pratt Aquatic Park, we added a restroom facility, a new fence around the softball fields and upgraded irrigation.
- At Red Del Papa Field, we built a new score booth and concessions building, installed new fencing and irrigation, repaved the parking lot, and we have the lights back on at the field thanks to a generous grant from Chartway Federal Credit Union.
- At Veterans Park, we are currently constructing restroom facilities and replaced the inoperable digital sign.
- At Settlers Park, we replaced the playground, added a new restroom and improved the parking lot.
- We completely rebuilt the Wigwam Park after removing the old building, replaced the amphitheater concrete, completed the pavilion and new restroom facilities and resurfaced the entrance road.
- At Skyline and Rancho Parks, trails and fields were improved and new playgrounds installed. Elton Park has become a recreation hub with new pickleball courts, a playground, disc and foot golf, and a completed walking path.
- Glen Eagles Park received a new playground, a revitalized lawn watering system, tree replacements, and a new restroom, which will be finished soon. Parker's Park also received a new playground and upgraded ballfield lighting.
- At the Oquirrh Hills Golf Course, we added a new pavilion and overflow parking, improved signage and landscaping, replaced wood decking with durable Trex and metal materials, upgraded restrooms on both the front and back nine, and provided new tables, chairs, and a sound system for the pavilion. Safety was also improved with new poles and netting to keep golf balls from entering nearby neighborhoods.
- At the Pratt Aquatics Center, we upgraded locker facilities, replastered the pool, added a new pool toy, improved deck drains and restrooms, and gave the entire indoor area a fresh coat of paint.
- I am proud to say that promises made, are promises kept. England Acres is just a few weeks away from the completion of Phases 2 and 3, which include a beautiful new trail system, trail lighting, new bridges, a basketball court, an Xtreme Ninja Fitness course with lighting, an east pavilion and restrooms, a super playground, two dog parks, additional parking, and more recreational sports areas.

Museum Improvements

- At the Tooele Valley Museum, we made the campus more accessible with ADA sidewalks, railings, and a new deck.
- Preserved our history by installing new railcar roofs, covering Engine #11, moving the historic railroad ticket office to the park, and scanning and documenting museum archives.

- With a \$100,000 grant from Rio Tinto/Kennecott, we are adding museum displays and hands on educational exhibits.

Community & Event Centers

- Our Community Center was transformed from the Teen Center after supporting the Boys & Girls Club for 20 years. We upgraded HVAC, installed new sports flooring, ADA ramps, and parking lot improvements—making it a gathering place for residents.
- At the Dow James Building, we installed new sports flooring for pickleball, basketball, and walking, upgraded the kitchen and restrooms, repainted the interior, and enhanced facilities for disc golf.

Cemetery

- The entire perimeter fence was replaced at Tooele City Cemetery.
- Nearly all roads were resurfaced, a new roadway is being added, and the last cemetery house removed.

City Services

Tooele's progress is made possible not just by what is seen, but by the critical work of departments that often operate behind the scenes.

- Our Community Development Department continues to keep pace with growth in our City. A continual increase in permits for residential and commercial properties have kept our staff busy. Our building inspectors continue to keep up with inspections to ensure that construction meets the highest standards.
- Our Finance Department ensures that we remain fully compliant with state and federal laws. Their diligent work protects Tooele City from fraud and safeguards the responsible use of taxpayer dollars.
- Our Information Technology team keeps the City safe from cyberattacks and other threats to our systems. They are also the guardians of sensitive information for public safety and the City attorney's office.
- The City Recorder's Office protects and preserves all official records, ensures meetings are noticed, recorded, and documented according to law, acts as the City's purchasing agent, and provides critical administrative support to our Fire Department.
- The City Attorney's Office drafts all resolutions and ordinances, prosecutes City cases, and responds to claims brought against the City.

Human Resources

Our Human Resources Department has faced enormous challenges in recent years, especially during COVID and in today's competitive labor market. Their top priority has been balancing fiscal responsibility with the well-being of our employees.

- 48 new positions have been added in the last 8 years, including Directors for Public Works, IT and Economic Development, as well as additional law enforcement, parks and public works positions. Annual COLAs, step increases, and on-call pay adjustments have also been sustained.
- HR set and met the goal of raising our minimum entry-level wage to \$10.20 by 2020.
- During COVID, not one regular status employee lost their job. Staff were reassigned where needed, safety guidelines were implemented, and all requirements of the Family First Coronavirus Response Act were met.
- In response to high turnover, police wages were increased by 20% to remain competitive.
- As the labor market tightened, the council invested \$1.2 million to revise the City's salary schedule and address retention challenges.
- Even when health insurance rates increased by 30% in Fiscal Year 2024, HR worked tirelessly with providers to ensure employees had affordable plan options.

Library

Our Tooele City Library remains a cornerstone of learning and community connection. After facing challenges a few years ago, new policies were implemented to ensure the safety of both staff and patrons. Today, the library is once again a welcoming, secure place to learn and explore.

Recent improvements include:

- New carpet, furniture, and patron computers.
- An awning and book drop on the north side for staff safety and convenient access.
- A new catalog system that improves service while saving \$11,000 annually.
- The transition to a fine-free system, which has encouraged more items to be returned.
- Recognition in 2021 with an award for exceptional service during the COVID lockdowns.
- Significant water conservation efforts, including the removal of turf and addition of decorative rock and stamped concrete—along with the addition of our iconic buffalo statue.
- Replacement of the 25-year-old HVAC system with a new, energy-efficient model.

City Hall

City Hall itself, completed in 2000, has aged well but required updates to remain efficient, secure, and welcoming. Improvements include:

- Replacement of the original boiler and chiller.
- Water wise-landscaping around the building for long-term water savings.
- Flexible seating in the council chambers with wheeled tables and chairs for more versatile use.
- Security doors, glass enclosures, new carpet and paint in all suites, and a remodeled break room.
- We restored the beauty of City Hall by cleaning the brick and bring back its original look.

Finally, security upgrades have been a priority. New cameras have been installed throughout the City—including at our parks, pool, golf course, and public buildings—ensuring that our facilities remain safe and well-protected.

Grants and Funding

I'm proud to report that Tooele City has secured more than \$12.2 million in grant funding to strengthen infrastructure and improve quality of life for our residents.

These grants have supported a wide range of important projects, including:

- Installing generators for our wells to ensure reliable water service, even during emergencies.
- \$1 million for a new trail connection between Smelter and England Acres, expanding recreational opportunities and walkability.
- \$1.5 million for improvements to Droubay Road, helping meet transportation and safety needs.
- \$4 million from the EPA to develop new water wells, protecting our long-term water supply.
- An Active Transportation Study to guide future planning for trails, bike lanes, and pedestrian connections.
- CDBG funding for critical sewer line replacements, ensuring our infrastructure keeps pace with growth.
- Support from the UDOT Safe Sidewalk Program to expand safe pedestrian access throughout our community.

Together, these grants represent smart partnerships and responsible planning—leveraging outside resources to deliver lasting benefits for Tooele City.

Partnerships

We know that partnerships are vital to building a stronger community, and Tooele City has been blessed with many meaningful collaborations.

- Together with the Sons of Utah Pioneers, we completed the restoration of the historic Carnegie Library. This beautiful building houses their museum, and I encourage all residents to visit and learn more about the rich history of our City.
- In partnership with the Life's Worth Living Foundation, we placed a powerful new statue at Veterans Park to honor those who have served and to provide resources for veterans struggling with thoughts of suicide.
- We also partnered with local artist Marvin Hitesman, whose incredible talent has given us lasting memorials to our veterans. His statue at Veterans Park now honors all who served in Vietnam, and he has plans for another statue recognizing Korean War veterans. We hope to see that vision realized.

- With members of the Dow and James families, and with the support of our Fire Department and Fire Association, we created a permanent memorial honoring Danny James and Lauren Dow, who made the ultimate sacrifice in 1975.
- With the generous contribution of Aaron Peterson, we saved the historic Ritz Theater. His substantial donation of the building to the Tooele City Arts Council ensures this community treasure will be preserved for generations.
- We partnered with the Tooele Bit N Spur and negotiated a contract allowing them to revitalize their historic grounds. They have made significant improvements, and their dedication to our community is deeply appreciated.
- We continue to meet with leaders at the Tooele Army Depot and Dugway Proving Ground to support their vital missions.
- We partnered with Switchpoint to repurpose the former Harris Elementary School into a homeless shelter, transitional housing to help residents in need get back on their feet.
- And with the Tooele County School District, we have collaborated on several key projects to allow sharing of district and City properties in exchange for the acquisition of the former district bus garage to expand our Public Works facilities.

These partnerships demonstrate what can be achieved when we work together. By combining resources and commitment, we are creating opportunities, preserving history, honoring service, and building a stronger future for Tooele City.

Economic Development

We understand Economic Development. We know that this is the only way to ease the property tax burden on our residents and provide job opportunities here in our valley.

Tooele City has welcomed a remarkable variety of new employers and businesses. On the industrial side, companies like Carvana, Leitner Poma, Central States Manufacturing, Minova, Plastic Ingenuity, and Ashgrove have brought hundreds of new jobs to our community.

In retail and services, we've seen exciting growth with national names like Hobby Lobby, TJ Maxx, Sierra, Five Below, and Ulta Beauty—alongside new restaurants such as Chili's, Wingstop, and Chipotle. We've also expanded hospitality with Home2 Suites, and Microtel Inn & Suites opening soon.

And the momentum continues. Coming soon are Smith's Marketplace with a fuel center, plus Beans & Brews, McDonald's, Jersey Mike's, Einstein Bagels, Tropical Smoothie Café, Chase Bank, America First Credit Union, Ross and Bath & Body Works.

These efforts are paying off. In less than five years, commercial property tax values have doubled—and we did it without offering a single local tax incentive.

I want to thank our local business owners, developers, and partners for believing in Tooele City and investing in its future. Your commitment continues to create jobs, grow opportunities, and strengthen our community.

Community & Quality of Life

A strong City isn't just measured by finances or infrastructure—it's measured by the quality of life we provide for families.

Tooele is more than streets and buildings—it's people. And it has been a privilege to serve alongside so many who care deeply about this community.

The Road Ahead

We still have challenges. Growth will continue to test our infrastructure. Housing, water, and transportation will remain pressing issues for the next generation of leaders.

But we are better prepared than ever before. We have plans and studies in place, strong financial footing, and a community spirit that will carry us forward.

Closing

We strengthened public safety. We invested in people, parks, and community pride. And most importantly, we proved that honest, transparent government can deliver real results.

Tooele is a City built on resilience, hard work, and heart. It is a hometown to be proud of. And as I prepare to pass the torch, I do so with gratitude—for our council, our staff, our volunteers, and most of all, for you, the people of Tooele.

The state of our City is strong, and its future is even brighter.

May God continue to bless our great nation, our state and our City.

Thank you!