

SALT LAKE CITY CORPORATION

Salt Lake City's Greater Transparency for Collaborative Government Initiative

30-Day Progress Report February 6, 2009

On January 6, 2009, we, along with then-Council Chair Jill Remington-Love, announced Salt Lake City's Greater Transparency for Collaborative Government Initiative. This initiative was designed to be "transparent" and it is in that spirit we present this report on the work the City has undertaken in the first 30 days. We expect to issue future progress reports at 90 days, 180 days and one year. People interested in following the progress of the transparency initiative on a more frequent basis should visit online at www.transparencyslsgov.com.

The initiative for greater transparency will increase public involvement and make Salt Lake City government more effective. The strength of our belief in the civic benefits of transparency has been confirmed by President Obama's issuing — on his very first day in office — his own statement on the importance of "Transparency and Open Government." The directions he outlined are very similar to those set forth on January 6.

Discussions at community council meetings have provided valuable public input on specific areas where the City could improve through greater transparency and collaboration. Our website offers additional opportunities for residents to give their input.

In the spirit of increased transparency and public involvement, the City will be undertaking a new initiative to increase transparency in our budget process. Given the challenges a suffering economy presents for City finances, we believe greater transparency and public input in our budget is needed now more than ever.

We are still at the beginning stages of this important initiative and know there are many challenging questions to be addressed. We believe, however, we are off to a good start.



Ralph Becker, Mayor



Carlton Christensen, Council Chair

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Overview

In order to provide more effective government for Salt Lake City, two basic components to the greater transparency initiative will be pursued: development of policy guidelines on transparency and implementation of specific actions to provide greater transparency and collaboration. Both the policy development and the implementation components will be pursued simultaneously. This may result in having to tweak some implementation action in light of the transparency policy ultimately adopted, but the hope is not to delay implementation of transparency initiatives that make sense.

I. Policy Development

Work will be organized around the following schedule:

January 6, 2009	Announcement of the Transparency Initiative
January 6- April 6, 2009	Review Public Comments
January 19- February 27, 2009	Discussions with Community Councils and Other Interested Organizations
February 6, 2009	30-Day Progress Report
April 6, 2009	90-Day Progress Report
May 8, 2009	Revised and Prioritized Work Plan Submitted to Mayor and City Council
May 8, 2009	Preliminary Draft of City Policy on Transparency Released for Public Comment
May 8- June 8, 2009	Public Comment on Draft City Policy on Transparency
July 10, 2009	180-Day Progress Report
July 10, 2009	Proposed City Policy on Transparency Submitted to Mayor and City Council
January 6, 2010	One Year Progress Report

Public Input at Community Council Meetings

Since the January 6 announcement, City representatives have met with 12 community councils to discuss the Transparency Initiative – Bonneville Hills, Capitol Hill, Central City, Downtown, East Bench, Fair Park, Glendale, Greater Avenues, Sunnyside/Bonneville, Wasatch Hollow, WestPoint and Yalecrest. Plans are to meet with the remaining community councils before the end of February.

Attendees at the community council meetings were asked to respond to a three question survey:

- (1) On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very transparent or “open” and 1 being not transparent or “closed,” where would you place Salt Lake City government today?
- (2) What specific things do you think Salt Lake City already does well in providing transparency or openness?
- (3) What specific ways would you like to see Salt Lake City government provide greater transparency or openness?

The responses so far to Question 1 are distributed as follows with an average of 3.2

“Closed”					“Open”	No Opinion
1	2	3	4	5		
[5]	[17]	[50]	[37]	[6]	11	

Responses to Question 3 are quite varied. Examples of responses to the question of what specific ways Salt Lake City government could provide greater transparency or openness included collecting more public input on core service priorities; providing more information in Spanish; providing more information about the decision process; providing more transparency and openness in the planning process; fewer closed special sessions; holding open forums with council reps and Mayor to better understand the issues and goings on; providing better explanation of how to use the City’s electronic resources; holding more open meetings in the local communities to discuss local community issues; improving readability of documents; providing more information on the process of obtaining a business license; and providing information on the awarding of all contracts.

In terms of specific things the City already does well, responses to Question 2 listed the work of community liaisons to community council meetings, the City’s website, the City’s television station, notice of public meetings, and City Council communication.

As additional community councils respond, numbers will be updated to provide a more complete report. Representatives of the business community, the media, and other organizations interested in greater transparency in City government will also be surveyed.

Transparency Website

The City created a special website, www.transparencyslegov.com, to support the Transparency Initiative. The purpose of the website is to provide information to the public about transparency and to obtain public comment on the directions the Transparency Initiative should take. Since January 6, the transparency website had nearly 5000 visitors – 1000 of them visiting more than once.

Public Education

Since January 6 the following blogs have been added to the site:

“President Obama on Transparency” (Matt Lyon)

“Salt Lake Planning Division, Transparency Action and Opportunities for Information” (Nole Walkingshaw)

“Objectives of a Transparent Government” (Ed Rutan)

“What Is the City Currently Doing In Transparency?” (Matt Lyon)

“Thank You for Participating!” (Mayor Becker)

Plans are to add one new blog every week. Future blogs will include reports on transparency actions being taken by individual City departments.

New materials have been added to the “References” section, including President Obama’s recent memos on transparency and the Utah League of Cities and Town’s recently published book “Making Sense of Dollars: A Guide to Local Government Finance in Utah.”

Public Input

The website includes both a “forum” feature and a “wiki” feature for the public to provide comments. Very few comments have been submitted to the forum page; none on the wiki. Hopefully members of the public will use these features as they become aware they exist.

Website visitors may respond electronically to the same survey being distributed at community council meetings. Survey responses from community council meetings and electronic survey responses will be posted.

II. Implementation of Specific Initiatives

The following are specific actions that have been taken since the January 6 transparency announcement. Each action is coupled with an explanation of why the action will promote greater transparency and collaboration in government.

(1) Increased Transparency in the Budget Process

Transparency Rationale: Preparation, review and adoption of the City's budget are among the most important actions the Mayor and City Council take. The financial challenges the City faces for the upcoming budget make transparency — both in terms of providing background information to the public and receiving public input on the issues — more important than ever. [See Draft Scope of Work, paragraphs 9, 10, 18, 29]

Description: The City already provides a great deal of transparency for the budget process. For example, memos analyzing the various budget issues are available on slcgov.com; City Council work sessions on the budget (like all City Council meetings) are televised on SLC TV Channel 17; and a public hearing is held before the Council votes on the budget. The City intends to make the budget process more transparent this year by providing more information to the public and providing more opportunities for public input on budget issues.

On February 5 the City discussed with community councils chairs possible ways the City could provide useful budget information to the public at upcoming community council meetings. Specific “visual” materials were discussed. The City will also meet with business groups and other community organizations to determine what types of budget information they believe would be of most value to their members.

The City will also provide more information on slcgov.com. Already up on the website are the January 27, 2009 Status Report to City Council on Current Revenues & Budget, and the June 17, 2008 League of Cities & Towns presentation to the City Council on “Truth in Taxation”. These presentations will also be broadcast on SLC TV Channel 17.

The Utah League of Cities and Towns also recently published an informative book on municipal financial matters, “Making Sense of Dollars.” Extracts of the book have been placed on slcgov.com. Copies of the book itself are available at all Salt Lake City Public Library branches, or you may contact the League directly.

Location: slcgov.com (City Council webpage – “Budget Information”); SLC TV Channel 17; Salt Lake City Public Library—Main and Local branches; community meetings to be scheduled

(2) Planning Division Initiatives

Description: The Salt Lake City Planning Department is actively working to achieve greater operational transparency. Recent efforts to bring more information to the public include the following:

- Publication of *Urbanus*, a monthly electronic newsletter letting people know what is going on in the Planning Division.
- The Salt Lake City Planning Division **Strategic Plan** is intended to provide direction to and support the staff of the Division by creating guiding principles and goals to establish and improve the Division functions. It is also used by staff to improve the planning culture within Salt Lake City.
- The “**Planning in Salt Lake City**” brochure provides a simple, clear overview of the basic purpose and functions of the Planning Division.
- The **Citizens Access Portal** allows citizens to look up an address and see what construction and land use activities have been permitted and/or are going through a public process for that site. Citizens may also see where the activity is in the approval process and associated comments. Contractors and property owners may use the Citizens Access Portal to view and schedule building inspections for permits. The Planning Division demonstrated the Citizens Access Portal to the Community Council Chairs.

Transparency Rationale: Providing citizens with access to information regarding governmental processes facilitates public involvement. Citizen satisfaction increases as information becomes more readily available and easier to understand. (See Draft Scope of Work, paragraphs 5, 7, 9, 20)

Location: Each of these information sources may be accessed via a single website at: <http://www.slcgov.com/ced/planning>.

(3) Council Transmittals

Description: The Mayor submits proposals for legislative action to the City Council by means of a document called a “Council Transmittal.” The Council Transmittal includes a summary of the proposal and relevant background documents, including the text of a proposed ordinance or resolution as the case may be. Currently, Council Transmittals (which are public documents) are placed on the City’s website as part of the “Council Packet” for the meeting when the matter is scheduled for briefing to the Council. Going forward, Council Transmittals will be placed on the City website at the time that they are sent by the Mayor to the Council.

Transparency Rationale: Providing earlier, more convenient access to Council Transmittals can facilitate public input to the City Council on the proposal involved.

The Transparency Initiative will also consider ways in which the public can provide earlier input for the executive branch side of the process.
[See Draft Scope of Work, paragraphs 15, 16]

Location: www.slcgov.com

(4) Boards and Commissions Website

Description: Salt Lake City has 26 public boards and commissions. These groups advise the Mayor and City Council on a number of policy objectives, provide regulatory oversight over a number of building and zoning issues, and govern (in an advisory capacity) specific divisions of Salt Lake City government. These boards are one of the best ways individuals can gain a better understanding of Salt Lake City government and provide input on policy objectives. The new website will provide in-depth information regarding each board or commission, its activities, and its members.

Transparency Rationale: Constituent boards and commissions play an important role in Salt Lake City government. Their actions both influence City government and the day-to-day lives of the City's constituents. The new website will facilitate a greater awareness of the City's Boards and Commissions and help increase participation within the various groups.
[See Draft Scope of Work, paragraph 12]

Location: www.slcgov.com

(5) Conflict of Interest – Advisory Opinions and Waiver Decisions

Description: Pursuant to Salt Lake City Code Section 2.44.210, the City Attorney is authorized, upon request, to issue advisory opinions on the application of the City's conflict of interest policies. These opinions already are available to the public upon request (subject to redaction to protect personal privacy interests) pursuant to both City Code Section 2.44.210C and Government Records Access and Management Act ("GRAMA"), but our experience suggests that the public is generally unaware that such opinions exist.

Similarly, Section 2.44.180 provides that waivers or determinations of non-applicability of the City's conflict of interest provisions may be granted. These documents are filed with the City Recorder, but again, our experience suggests that the public is also generally unaware of these documents.

At a later stage of this project, we expect to assess whether Salt Lake City's current conflict of interest ordinance needs to be updated to fully protect the public interest.

Effective January 2, 2009, the City will place these documents on-line.

Transparency Rationale: One of the purposes of transparency is to assure that the City's elected and appointed officials and City employees do not allow their personal and financial interests to improperly influence their decisions on City matters. The City has adopted detailed conflict of interest rules in Chapter 2.44 of the Salt Lake City Code. Placing advisory opinions and waiver decisions on-line will facilitate accountability to the public.
[See Draft Scope of Work, paragraph 17]

Location: slc.gov.com (City Attorney's Office webpage)

(6) Salt Lake City Emergency Management 18-Month Action Plan

Description: Salt Lake City has recently adopted an 18-Month Action Plan for Emergency Management. One of the five objectives of this plan is "overhaul of our public outreach to prepare our employees, citizens, and businesses to function and contribute during times of disaster, [including] organizing a healthy, viable volunteer coordination program." Another objective involves establishing a City Emergency Advisory Committee which would include a Stakeholder Group of representatives of public and private entities that have a stake in Salt Lake City's emergency preparedness. It is very important that the Stakeholder Group be broadly based. Volunteer coordination also will be key activity. The Emergency Management webpage is currently under renovation to facilitate providing better public notice and obtaining more public input.

Transparency Rationale: Broader public awareness of and participation in Salt Lake City's development of its emergency plans are critical to the City's preparedness should disaster strike. [See Draft Scope of Work, paragraphs 10, 11, 12]

Location: slc.gov.com/City Directory/Emergency Management

(7) Employees' Book Club Discussion of

Transparency, How Leaders Create a Culture of Candor

Description: Approximately 25 City employees have signed up for a February 18 book club discussion of the book written by Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman, and James O'Toole. (A second session is tentatively planned for February 26) While this book supports the importance of transparency with the public, its focus is on transparency within an organization with a special emphasis on the sharing of information.

Transparency Rationale: The transparency initiative will not succeed without the commitment of City employees. This discussion group format is one of a variety of ways the City will use to help employees understand the importance of transparency to the effective operation of City government. [See Draft Scope of Work, paragraphs 10, 12]

(8) Discussions of Transparency with Senior City Staff

Description: The City Attorney has discussed the importance of the transparency initiative in meetings (most prior to January 6) with the senior staff of the following City Departments: Airport, City Attorney's Office (civil practice), Fire, Management Services, Public Services and Public Utilities.

Transparency Rationale: The transparency initiative will not succeed without the commitment of the City's senior managers.

Location: Not applicable

(9) Fraud, Waste & Abuse Website

Description: The Salt Lake City Corporation Fraud, Waste and Abuse Website has been up and running since it was announced on January 6 as part of the Transparency Initiative. Employees and the public may use this website to report possible incidents of fraud, waste or abuse in the operations of Salt Lake City government. (They may also use the phone.) Reports may be made anonymously.

Transparency Rationale: One of the purposes of transparency is to ensure the accountability to the public of the City's elected and appointed officials and employees for the proper performance of their jobs. If a City official or employee is abusing the public trust, this website provides a mechanism for reporting. An important feature of the website is that the person making the report can track the status of the City's action on the report.
[See Draft Scope of Work, paragraphs 13, 30]

Location: www.slcgov.com/fraud or 801-535-6464

(10) Public Legal Opinions of the City Attorney's Office

Description: Written communications between the lawyers in the City Attorney's Office and City officials and employees concerning legal advice are generally protected from public disclosure by the attorney-client privilege. This principle is recognized in GRAMA. See Sections UCA § 63G-2-304(17) and (18). However, the City may waive this privilege and release the written legal advice to the public if

it believes that it is in the City's interest to do so. On occasion, the City has released legal opinions of the City Attorney's Office to the media, but as a practical matter the opinions have not been accessible to members of the general public who may be interested in reviewing the opinions in greater depth. Effective January 2, 2009, legal opinions of the City Attorney's Office which have been made public will be made available online. At a later point in the project, guidelines will be developed on when privileged attorney-client communications should be released to the public.

Transparency Rationale: While confidentiality is fundamental to effective communication between attorney and client, legal issues are occasionally at the center of a controversy of great public interest, for example, the Main Street Plaza transaction. Better public understanding of legal issues can facilitate public input and accountability. [See Draft Scope of Work, paragraph 25]

Location: The opinions will be placed on the webpage for the City Attorney's Office at slcgov.com under "Public Legal Opinions."