

SOUTH JORDAN CITY
CITY COUNCIL BUDGET MEETING

MARCH 17, 2026

Present: Mayor Dawn R. Ramsey, Council Member Patrick Harris, Council Member Kathie Johnson, Council Member Don Shelton, Council Member Tamara Zander, Council Member Jason McGuire, City Manager Dustin Lewis, Assistance City Manager Jason Rasmussen, Assistant City Manager Don Tingey, City Attorney Ryan Loose, Police Chief Jeff Carr, Deputy Police Chief Rob Hansen, Director of Administrative Services Melinda Seager, Director of Human Resources Teresa Robinson, Associate Director of Human Resources Corinne Thacker, Fire Chief Chris Dawson, Director of Recreation Janell Payne, CFO Sunil Naidu, Director of Planning & Economic Development Brian Preece, Deputy City Engineer Jeremy Nielson, Associate Director of Public Works Colby Hill, City Recorder Anna Crookston

Absent:

Other (In-Person) Attendance:

3:40 P.M.
BUDGET MEETING AGENDA

A. Welcome, Roll Call, and Introduction - By Mayor Dawn Ramsey

Mayor Ramsey welcomed everyone present and introduced the meeting.

B. Invocation – By Assistant City Manager, Don Tingey

Assistant City Manager Tingey offered the invocation.

C. Discussion Item:

C.1. Fiscal Year 2026-27 Budget. *(By City Manager, Dustin Lewis)*

City Manager Dustin Lewis provided follow-up information from a prior Council discussion in prior budget sessions regarding I-15 interchange improvements and landscaping enhancements. He explained that staff researched how similar projects were handled in other areas, including Washington City. He noted that the Washington City interchange project had a total cost of approximately \$67 million, with the city contributing about \$2 million toward betterment enhancements. He noted that while UDOT provides funding for interchange construction, any additional aesthetic or enhancement improvements desired by the City would likely need to be funded locally. He added that if South Jordan wished to make similar improvements to its interchanges, those additional costs would be the City's responsibility.

Mayor Ramsey clarified that, based on the information provided, cities appear to be funding the landscaping and dryscape improvements associated with interchange enhancement projects to improve the appearance of those areas.

Deputy City/Transportation Engineer Jeremy Nielson clarified that information received from Washington City indicated the project followed UDOT's standard betterment process, with the city contributing funding for enhancement features. He stated that the updated information showed Washington City contributed approximately \$5 million toward the Main Street interchange project at Exit 12. He noted that staff had contacted representatives from Washington City directly to verify the information.

City Manager Lewis also provided information regarding questions about information technology projects within the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). He stated that no IT-related projects appear in the fiscal year 2026–2027 CIP budget because staff was still awaiting project quotes during budget preparation. He explained that future-year CIP planning currently includes several technology replacement projects related to servers, recording systems, and other infrastructure as part of an ongoing effort to develop a comprehensive technology master plan and replacement schedule. He also addressed questions regarding the Jordan Ridge Park expansion project, noting that a public engagement process will be conducted like other major park projects, including open houses and evaluation of multiple design options to identify amenities that best serve both the surrounding neighborhood and the broader community. He further confirmed that a City Council tour of current and future infrastructure project sites had been scheduled for April 9 to allow Council Members to review proposed facilities and project areas firsthand. Transitioning into broader budget discussions, he thanked Council Members and staff for recent collaborative discussions regarding budget planning and cash flow management. He stated that staff had been evaluating operational efficiencies and reviewing programs to identify opportunities for long-term savings and improved resource management. One recommendation brought forward by the Compensation Committee involved adjustments to employee healthcare benefits. He explained that the proposal would increase deductibles and maximum out-of-pocket limits while still remaining comparatively favorable to many private-sector plans. Staff analysis showed that only a small percentage of employees currently reach the existing deductible thresholds, and the changes would reduce the City's projected healthcare premium increase from nearly 9% to slightly over 4%. He stated that the change is projected to save approximately \$250,000 while also encouraging increased employee education regarding healthcare benefit utilization and consumer awareness. He also noted that staff have continued to review City services and programs for operational opportunities and efficiencies, including the possible return of fingerprinting services through the Police Department due to frequent public demand for that service.

Council Member Zander asked why residents request fingerprinting services.

City Manager Dustin Lewis explained that the city frequently receives requests for fingerprinting services for employment, licensing, travel, and other purposes. Currently, residents must travel to other locations, such as the Bureau of Criminal Identification in Taylorsville, to obtain those services for a fee. He stated that with the anticipated closure of the municipal court, the City would have access to existing fingerprinting equipment currently used by the court system. Staff have begun evaluating whether that equipment could be repurposed to provide fingerprinting services

to the public. Preliminary discussions have included possible locations within City Hall and whether existing staff, such as information agents or passport office personnel, could be trained to administer the service. He noted that the City could potentially establish a fee structure that both covers operational costs and generates revenue, similar to the City's passport services, while also improving convenience for residents by providing the service locally. He indicated that staff would continue researching the operational and logistical requirements before returning with a formal recommendation. He then transitioned into broader discussions regarding long-term revenue planning and budget sustainability. He noted that increasing operational costs continue to place pressure on municipal budgets and emphasized the need to identify reliable revenue sources to support personnel, infrastructure, and service demands. He referenced recent legislative discussions surrounding property taxes, noting that there appears to be limited statewide support for significant property tax increases. He also observed that several neighboring cities are considering varying levels of property tax adjustments, including modest annual increases intended to keep pace with inflation and avoid larger future adjustments through the truth-in-taxation process.

Council Member Shelton asked which municipalities are doing property tax increases.

City Manager Dustin Lewis stated West Jordan evaluates property tax adjustments annually to capture inflationary growth and stated that West Valley City also is another city that does annually as well. He further noted that Cottonwood Heights is reportedly considering a significant property tax increase. He added based on discussions staff recently had with officials from Herriman, they are considering a property tax increase. He described transportation utility fees as one potential tool available to cities and explained that the concept originated in Utah County before being challenged in court and ultimately upheld by the Utah Supreme Court when implemented properly. He stated that transportation utility fees can be used to fund transportation-related expenses such as roadway construction and maintenance, sidewalks, street lighting, snow removal, and other infrastructure needs traditionally funded through Class C Road funds. He also explained that South Salt Lake currently implements a transportation utility fee that applies to commercial properties but not residential properties. Under that structure, fees are calculated based on the size and intensity of commercial uses, with revenues dedicated to transportation-related projects and maintenance.

Council Member Harris asked for clarification regarding the proposed transportation utility fee (TUF), specifically asking what would be assessed or charged under the transportation utility fee structure.

City Manager Dustin Lewis explained that a transportation utility fee would be used to collect revenue specifically for transportation-related operational and maintenance costs. He stated that the fee could help fund expenses such as snow removal, staffing associated with roadway maintenance, asphalt work, roadway surface treatments, sidewalks, street lighting, and other transportation infrastructure projects identified within the Capital Improvement Program. He noted that transportation utility fees have been legally challenged and upheld when properly implemented. He also explained that traditional transportation funding sources, particularly Class C Road funds generated from gas taxes, may become less reliable over time due to legislative changes and the increasing use of electric and hybrid vehicles. He stated that a transportation utility

fee would provide a transparent funding mechanism by directly connecting roadway maintenance costs with the revenue needed to support those services and maintain roadway quality within the community.

Council Member Zander asked whether imposing a transportation utility fee could discourage businesses from locating in South Jordan.

City Manager Lewis explained that the structure of a transportation utility fee can vary depending on the makeup of a community and the type of roadway impacts generated by residential and commercial uses. He noted that communities with significant industrial and commercial traffic, such as South Salt Lake, often place a greater portion of the fee burden on commercial properties due to the heavier impacts caused by large trucks and industrial traffic. He contrasted that with communities such as Pleasant Grove, where residents pay a monthly transportation utility fee similar to existing utility charges such as stormwater or sanitation fees. He explained that implementation of a transportation utility fee would require a formal study to evaluate transportation maintenance costs, determine roadway usage impacts from residential and commercial properties, and establish an equitable balance for allocating the fee structure between those users.

Mayor Ramsey noted that South Jordan experiences substantial regional transportation impacts due to landfill traffic, garbage trucks, construction traffic, and regional travel corridors that pass through the city daily.

City Manager Lewis agreed and stated that any transportation utility fee study would need to evaluate those broader impacts similarly to an impact fee study. He also explained that transportation utility fees would function similarly to water or sanitation utility fees by creating a dedicated funding source specifically tied to transportation operations and maintenance. He noted that South Jordan's roads currently maintain high condition ratings and emphasized the importance of preserving roadway quality before conditions decline. He stated that transportation utility fees provide dedicated funding and allow General Fund resources currently supporting transportation operations to be redirected toward other city priorities.

Mayor Ramsey stated that many cities are now exploring transportation utility fees due to recent legislative clarification and Supreme Court rulings. She emphasized that such fees allow cities to clearly identify transportation costs for residents.

Council Member Johnson asked about the legal process required to implement a transportation utility fee.

City Manager Lewis explained that the City would need to conduct formal studies, hold public hearings, adopt an ordinance, and complete required public notification processes before implementation.

City Attorney Ryan Loose explained that state law outlines detailed notice and hearing requirements for transportation utility fees. He stated that fees must be reevaluated every ten years through updated studies and public processes. He also noted that tax-exempt entities such as schools and churches would be exempt under current law.

Mayor Ramsey emphasized the importance of public transparency and periodic review for any transportation utility fee program.

City Manager Lewis suggested that if the city were to implement a transportation utility fee or similar funding mechanism, adjustments should be reviewed regularly rather than delayed for long periods of time. He noted that roadway maintenance and preservation costs continue to change over time, and more frequent evaluations would help the city remain proactive in addressing infrastructure needs and avoiding larger financial adjustments in the future.

City Attorney Loose explained that the city could adopt its own transportation utility fee ordinance as long as it is more restrictive, rather than less restrictive, than state law. He noted that one of the primary legal discussions surrounding transportation utility fees involved exemptions for tax-exempt entities under the Utah Constitution. He stated that prior legislative discussions recognized that entities exempt from property taxes, such as schools and religious institutions, would also be exempt from transportation utility fees. He explained that this exemption has been a significant consideration for cities evaluating such programs, particularly because facilities like schools can generate substantial traffic impacts while remaining exempt from the fee structure.

Council Member Zander asked for examples of fee amounts charged by other cities.

City Manager Lewis explained that fee structures vary widely. He noted that South Salt Lake charges commercial properties approximately \$45 per month for certain office complexes, while residential fees in Pleasant Grove were previously around \$8 per month. He stated that any South Jordan fee would be determined through a city-specific study. He further compared the concept to property tax increases, noting that a hypothetical 5% property tax increase on a \$650,000 home would cost approximately \$24 annually and generate nearly \$900,000 in revenue.

City Manager Lewis discussed the possibility of implementing a parks utility fee as another dedicated funding mechanism for City services and infrastructure maintenance. He noted that Herriman has utilized a parks utility fee since approximately 2014 and that Syracuse also currently implements a similar fee structure. He stated that Herriman's fee is approximately \$5 per month, while Syracuse's fee is slightly higher. He explained that the concept could function similarly to a transportation utility fee and would require a formal study to determine appropriate costs and allocations. He noted that the City's current parks budget, excluding recreation programming, totals approximately \$4.6 million annually, with the majority allocated toward personnel and the remaining costs supporting operations and maintenance. He described the wide range of assets and infrastructure maintained by the parks department, including irrigation systems, playground equipment, splash pads, sports courts, trails, restrooms, fishing ponds, pavilions, cemetery grounds, and nearly 9,000 trees within the City's urban forest. He stated that the City's tree inventory alone is valued at approximately \$13.5 million and requires ongoing professional maintenance and care. He referenced findings from the recently completed Parks Master Plan, noting that community surveys showed strong resident use and support for parks and open spaces, while also identifying concerns about aging facilities and insufficient resources for proper maintenance. He stated that the master plan specifically identified utility fees as a potential long-term funding source for maintaining and improving park infrastructure. He stated a preliminary estimate indicated that a parks utility fee of approximately \$5 per month could cover existing

operational maintenance costs while also potentially generating additional revenue for future park improvements and capital projects. He emphasized that funds collected through such a fee would be restricted solely for park-related purposes and could not be used for unrelated City operations. He also noted that even residents who may not directly utilize parks still benefit from them through increased property values, improved community amenities, connectivity, and overall quality of life enhancements.

Council Member Shelton asked whether trails could also be included within the fee structure.

City Manager Lewis confirmed that trails could be included because the parks division currently maintains both parks and trail systems.

Council Member Shelton asked whether implementation of a parks utility fee would require a formal study process similar to an impact fee study in order to authorize and establish the fee structure.

City Manager Lewis responded that implementation of a parks utility fee would require a formal study process similar to other utility fee analyses in order to determine the appropriate structure, cost allocations, and impacts. He explained that the city would first need to determine what portion of the parks budget the fee would fund, such as operational costs only or a broader share that includes personnel and capital expenses. He noted that if the city attempted to recover the entire parks budget through the fee, the monthly cost would likely approach approximately \$15 per household, which he indicated would likely be too high. He stated that staff would instead evaluate more limited funding targets and then complete a study to assess how the fee burden should be distributed. He further explained that, unlike transportation infrastructure, commercial properties generally have less direct impact on park usage. As a result, the city could potentially structure the fee similarly to South Salt Lake's transportation utility fee by placing the primary burden on residential users rather than commercial entities. He also noted that commercial properties currently do not pay park impact fees because they are not considered major contributors to park demand. He emphasized that a parks utility fee would provide a transparent funding source, allowing residents to clearly understand how the collected funds would be used specifically for park maintenance, operations, and improvements. He acknowledged that both transportation and parks utility fees carry potential advantages and disadvantages, including possible political and public perception considerations. He stated that implementation of either fee structure would require careful evaluation of community impacts, public understanding, and the broader implications associated with adopting additional utility-based funding mechanisms.

City Attorney Loose provided additional context regarding recent legislative and legal discussions surrounding transportation utility fees and other potential municipal fee structures. He referenced the 2023 *Larson v. Pleasant Grove* case, which upheld transportation utility fees and prompted ongoing legislative discussions regarding guardrails and limitations for such fees. He explained that two primary concerns emerged during legislative discussions; exemptions for tax-exempt entities and concerns that cities could begin creating numerous service-related fees that resemble piecemeal taxation. He noted that legislation ultimately clarified that tax-exempt entities, including schools and religious institutions, would remain exempt from transportation utility fees. He also stated that current state law specifically allows public safety utility fees only for smaller

municipalities and towns, while larger first- and second-class cities such as South Jordan are prohibited from implementing those fees. Regarding parks utility fees, he explained that transportation utility fees have now been expressly codified in state law, providing cities with clearer authority to implement them. In contrast, parks utility fees are not specifically addressed in statute. He noted that cities could potentially argue they possess general authority to adopt such fees unless expressly prohibited under existing municipal authority doctrines. However, he cautioned that implementing a parks utility fee could draw legislative attention and potentially prompt lawmakers to revisit or restrict municipal fee authority in the future. He advised the Council that these legal and political considerations should be weighed carefully when evaluating potential future revenue sources and utility fee structures.

City Manager Lewis discussed the possibility of creating a public safety district as an alternative funding mechanism for police, fire, EMS, and emergency communication services. He explained that while first- and second-class cities are prohibited from implementing a direct public safety utility fee under current state law, cities are permitted to establish public safety districts. He proposed potentially implementing a public safety district beginning in Fiscal Year 2027–2028 to create greater transparency regarding the cost of providing emergency services within the community. He recommended initially funding the city’s annual contribution to the Valley Emergency Communications Center (VECC), which currently totals approximately \$1.1 million annually, including costs allocated to police, fire, EMS, and related emergency communication services. He noted that these costs represent the infrastructure and staffing necessary to support 911 dispatch and emergency response services and stated that independently providing those services would require substantial capital investment and staffing resources beyond the City’s practical capabilities. He explained that beginning with VECC-related expenses would allow the city to establish the district gradually and transparently, rather than immediately shifting all public safety costs into the district structure. He stated that future increases in public safety staffing or operational needs could later be incrementally incorporated into the district over time. He further recommended that, if the district is not implemented immediately, the city considers funding the upcoming VECC costs using one-time reserve funds during the current fiscal year. He explained that recent legislative discussions focused heavily on municipal reserve fund balances, with some lawmakers expressing concern regarding cities maintaining reserves approaching the statutory maximum. He stated that using reserve funds for this purpose would demonstrate responsible financial management while reducing reserve balances closer to levels legislators have indicated are more appropriate. He added that this approach would also provide additional time to properly structure and implement a public safety district in a measured and transparent manner.

Council Member Shelton asked staff to explain the process required to establish a public safety district, including how the district would be created and implemented.

City Attorney Loose explained that the process for creating a public safety district would follow statutory procedures similar to the process previously used for creation of the King Benjamin Holland Park gate. He stated that the city would first provide the legally required public notices and then conduct a formal public process allowing residents to present objections, concerns, or arguments against formation of the district. He explained that the City Council would establish a board to hear public input and evaluate the proposed district. Following completion of the statutory timelines and hearing process, the Council could formally create the district. He noted that the

action would be subject to referendum procedures. He further explained that once created, the district would operate under its own governing board, which could consist of the City Council acting in that capacity. The district board would then establish the tax rate necessary to fund the services provided through the district. He noted that while the governance structure would shift administratively to the district, the city's police and fire services would continue operating as South Jordan Police and Fire Departments under the district structure. He also referenced prior regional public safety district models, including the transition from county sheriff services to Unified Police Department and earlier regional fire district structures, as examples of how similar district-based service models have operated in Utah.

Council Member Shelton asked whether the proposed public safety district structure would begin with a specific, identifiable expense such as the VECC costs and then gradually incorporate additional public safety expenses over time. He further asked whether future transfers of public safety expenses from the city's general fund into the district would occur through subsequent board or Council actions and approval processes.

City Manager Lewis explained that there are multiple ways the city could structure funding within a future public safety district. He stated that the city could continue funding existing public safety operations through the current combination of property tax and sales tax revenues while gradually shifting future cost increases into the district structure over time. He noted that under that approach, additional expenses such as employee compensation increases, equipment purchases, or expanded staffing needs could eventually be funded through the public safety district rather than the city's general fund, allowing the transition to occur incrementally rather than all at once.

Council Member Shelton asked whether, under the proposed structure, public safety employees could effectively receive compensation funded from both the city's general fund and the public safety district, using the example of salary increases being paid through the district while existing compensation remained funded through the general fund.

CFO Sunil Naidu explained that under the proposed concept, existing public safety expenditures would remain funded through the city's general fund and existing property tax structure, while future increases or new expenditures could be assigned to the public safety district if the city chose to do so. He stated that the city could also eventually transition additional public safety expenditures into the district over time. However, he noted that if expenditures were shifted from the general fund into the district, the city would need to correspondingly reduce the related property tax allocation within the general fund to avoid duplicating funding for the same services.

City Attorney Loose explained that any public safety district created by the city would be subject to the truth-in-taxation process and would require clear identification of the district's intended scope and purpose at the time of creation. He stated that the city would need to determine whether the district would fund only specific services, such as emergency communications costs, or whether it could eventually encompass broader law enforcement or full public safety operations. He noted that the district would be established as a limited-purpose public district, meaning its authority and funding purpose would need to be clearly defined and publicly noticed. He explained that residents would have the opportunity to review and respond to the proposal during the public process, and the city would need to provide supporting financial information and rationale

regarding the proposed funding structure. He further explained that, after creation, the district would independently levy taxes through its own truth-in-taxation process. He referenced prior examples involving regional public safety entities such as Unified Police Department and noted that in some historical cases, new district taxes were implemented without corresponding reductions to existing county tax rates, which became an important consideration in how residents perceived the overall tax impact.

Police Chief Jeff Carr added that prior to the formation of Unified Police Department and related municipal service structures, the Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office was funded through the county general fund, even though portions of the Sheriff's Office primarily provided police services only to unincorporated county areas and contract cities. He stated that the Legislature became involved and determined that the funding structure created concerns related to taxation and representation. As a result, a separate municipal fund structure was created to segregate those municipal police service costs from the broader county general fund. He noted that those legislative changes were part of the broader restructuring that occurred during the formation of the regional policing model.

City Attorney Loose stated that his understanding was that when Unified Police Department was created, the county continued collecting its existing tax revenues while the new district separately levied its own tax. He emphasized that the structure and scope of any future public safety district created by South Jordan would ultimately be determined by the City Council, including whether the district would be narrow or broad in purpose and how associated taxes would be structured. He explained that creation of a district would involve a statutory process that includes public notices, hearings, and procedural requirements, after which the district would become subject to referendum provisions.

Council Member Shelton stated that if the city intended to pursue creation of a public safety district, the process would likely need to begin during the fall in order to allow sufficient time for the required notices, hearings, and implementation procedures.

Mayor Ramsey stated that South Jordan is not the only municipality currently evaluating the possibility of establishing a public safety district. She noted that several Salt Lake County cities are having similar discussions as they work to identify sustainable methods for funding police, fire, EMS, and other emergency services. She emphasized that cities are trying to determine how to maintain adequate public safety resources while also providing residents with greater transparency regarding the actual costs associated with delivering those services and the funding options available to support them.

City Manager Dustin Lewis noted that time was limited due to a scheduled closed session later in the meeting and recommended moving forward with the proposed employee benefits adjustments and continued evaluation of repurposing existing fingerprinting equipment to provide public fingerprinting services. He stated that, unless the Council had concerns, staff would proceed with incorporating those items into future planning. He then requested Council discussion and direction regarding several potential long-term funding options that had been presented, including modest property tax increases to capture inflationary growth, implementation of a transportation utility fee, a parks utility fee, or creation of a public safety district. He asked the Council to provide feedback regarding which options staff should further evaluate and pursue.

Council Member Shelton expressed support for further exploring a parks and trails utility fee, stating that it would help residents better understand how park and trail resources are maintained and funded. He indicated that he believed the concept could be acceptable to residents because of the transparency associated with directly linking the fee to park services and amenities. He also expressed support for moving toward creation of a public safety district, noting that while many details would still need to be resolved, he viewed the approach as a transparent way to demonstrate the actual costs associated with providing emergency services. He stated that, over time, he could envision eventually shifting all public safety services into the district structure, though he acknowledged that such a transition would likely occur gradually over many years. Additionally, he voiced support for utilizing a portion of the city's reserve funds to help address current funding needs, acknowledging that he had not previously expected to support using reserve funds in that manner. He stated that he was uncertain about implementing a property tax increase specifically to capture inflationary growth, particularly if the city were also considering additional funding mechanisms such as parks utility fees or transportation utility fees. He added that he was still undecided regarding the transportation utility fee concept and had not yet formed a clear opinion on that option.

Council Member McGuire raised concerns regarding residents living in master planned communities such as Daybreak who already pay HOA fees supporting neighborhood parks and amenities. He questioned whether residents may perceive an additional parks utility fee as duplicative.

Council Member Zander expressed concern about residents west of Mountain View Corridor who currently have fewer city park amenities nearby and questioned how the fee would be perceived by those residents.

Mayor Ramsey responded that citywide amenities benefit all residents regardless of neighborhood and noted that statistically valid resident surveys consistently demonstrate broad citywide support for South Jordan's parks system. She emphasized that residents choose different neighborhoods for different reasons but collectively benefit from citywide services and amenities.

Council Member McGuire stated that if the city were to pursue a parks utility fee, it would be important to clearly identify and communicate the specific improvements and projects the funding would support. He referenced the Parks Master Plan and noted that residents have consistently expressed interest in trailhead improvements and expanded trail connectivity throughout the community. He emphasized that careful consideration would need to be given to how the funds are allocated and how residents perceive the benefits of the fee, particularly because some neighborhoods may not directly see major park improvements for many years. He noted that future park development opportunities may be limited in certain areas of the city and expressed concern that the long-term distribution of benefits could create challenges or concerns among residents if not structured thoughtfully.

City Attorney Ryan Loose noted that one significant distinction between a park's utility fee and a transportation utility fee is the impact base associated with each service. He explained that parks are primarily utilized by residential users, meaning a parks utility fee would likely fall largely on

residents rather than commercial entities. In contrast, he stated that transportation infrastructure is impacted by both residential and commercial activity, making commercial properties more appropriate participants in a transportation utility fee structure. He noted that the differing impact bases and how they affect residents and businesses are important considerations for the Council when evaluating potential fee options and economic impacts.

Council Member McGuire noted that many park amenities, such as pickleball courts, are heavily used by residents from across the entire community rather than only by nearby neighborhoods. He stated that there is currently no direct mechanism to capture those broader usage impacts through dedicated funding. He also expressed hope that fees collected through recreation leagues and programs help offset some of the maintenance and operational costs associated with park facilities, though he acknowledged that he was not familiar with the specific details of how those revenues are currently allocated. He expressed that he still had some concerns regarding how a parks utility fee would be assessed and distributed among residents. He acknowledged that certain park amenities and facilities are clearly used by residents citywide and therefore provide communitywide benefits supported through the parks system. However, he expressed concern that gaining public support for such a fee could be more challenging in master planned communities where residents may already perceive that they contribute toward open space and amenity maintenance through existing community or homeowners association structures.

Council Members and staff discussed potential public reaction to a proposed parks utility fee, particularly within the Daybreak area and other master planned communities. Questions were raised regarding how residents might respond to an additional monthly fee and whether a transportation utility fee would be more appropriate than a parks utility fee. Council discussion noted that parks and trails consistently rank among the community's most valued amenities in resident surveys, while transportation and traffic concerns are also regularly identified as major community issues. Staff clarified that a transportation utility fee would primarily fund roadway maintenance and related operational costs, rather than directly alleviate traffic congestion or peak transportation demand. Council Members discussed the reality that the city's continued growth will increase long-term transportation maintenance obligations, including roadway repairs, snow removal, sidewalks, curb maintenance, street lighting, and aging infrastructure needs. There was also discussion regarding whether trails could potentially qualify as transportation-related infrastructure for funding purposes. Concerns were expressed regarding equity and geographic distribution of park benefits, particularly as future population growth continues west of Mountain View Corridor. Council Members discussed whether residents in newer or master planned areas may perceive that they are contributing toward park maintenance without receiving equal access to future City Park investments, especially in areas where private or HOA-maintained amenities already exist. Discussion also included recognition that some large regional parks and trail systems serve residents citywide, even when located within specific neighborhoods or communities.

City Manager Lewis noted that the city is actively working to expand and connect regional trail systems throughout South Jordan, including future connections extending from Butterfield Canyon across the valley. He explained that portions of those trail connections still need to be constructed within areas such as the Shoreline and Rio Tinto properties to complete the broader regional network. He also pointed out that several amenities maintained through the parks budget, including the city cemetery, serve residents citywide regardless of where they live within the community.

He stated that residents in master planned communities also contribute toward maintenance of those broader City amenities. At the same time, he acknowledged that residents in master planned communities may compare a potential City parks utility fee to the fees they already pay through homeowner's associations and question the difference in cost and services provided.

Council Members and staff continued discussing long-term growth impacts and funding considerations associated with parks, trails, and regional amenities. Council Members emphasized the importance of considering future population growth west of Mountain View Corridor, particularly within the Rio Tinto and Shoreline development areas and other master planned communities. It was noted that a significant portion of South Jordan's future population growth is expected to occur in those western areas, potentially representing a large share of the city's overall residents in coming years. Discussion also focused on the long-term impacts future development may have on any proposed fee structures, noting that future residents and developers would eventually contribute into whatever funding systems are established. Council Members recognized that implementing funding mechanisms earlier allows future growth to participate in maintaining expanding infrastructure and amenities over time. Additional discussion referenced the continued expansion of Bingham Creek Regional Park, including future phases expected to add major recreational amenities. Council Members acknowledged that ongoing park growth and additional regional facilities will continue increasing long-term maintenance and operational responsibilities for the city. Staff also noted that any future fee structure would require detailed public communication and transparency regarding how funds are collected and spent.

Council Member Harris acknowledged that discussions involving additional fees or increased costs for residents are difficult but recognized that the city must identify sustainable funding solutions to maintain current service levels and community standards. He stated that staff had presented several potential funding tools and options for the Council's consideration and expressed appreciation for the work staff had done to identify possible approaches. He noted that while none of the options are easy and all would likely involve challenging public conversations, the city ultimately faces a choice between identifying additional revenue sources or reducing service levels.

City Manager Lewis stated that staff needed direction from the Council to finalize preparation of the tentative budget. He noted that the city was already midway through March and explained that budget decisions needed to be incorporated into the upcoming fiscal planning process. He stated that if the Council proceeded with the proposed employee benefits adjustments, implementation of fingerprinting services, creation of a public safety district funded initially through reserve funds, and either a transportation utility fee or parks utility fee, staff believed the City could balance the budget while still funding the proposed Capital Improvement Program projects, requested personnel additions, salary adjustments, and employee cost-of-living increases previously discussed with the Council.

Council Member Shelton expressed support for exploring the parks utility fee and public safety district concepts. He stated that transparency regarding city services and costs is important and suggested residents may be more receptive to a parks utility fee than other alternatives.

Council Member Johnson stated that the city would still need to complete the formal study and evaluation process before determining how any proposed fee structure would ultimately be applied. She noted that the analysis could identify differences in usage or impact among various areas of the community, which could affect how fees are structured or allocated.

Council Member Harris acknowledged concerns regarding residents in master planned communities who already pay homeowners association fees for local parks and amenities. However, he also noted that residents in other areas of the city may not be receiving significant new park development while additional parks and amenities continue to be constructed in western portions of the community. He stated that there would likely be difficult public conversations regardless of how fees are structured, as different areas of the city may perceive the distribution of park investments and benefits differently. He emphasized that balancing those competing perspectives would be challenging as the city evaluates future funding options.

Mayor Ramsey expressed support for considering a parks utility fee, emphasizing that residents choose to live in different areas of South Jordan based on varying preferences and amenities, but ultimately all residents are part of one city and benefit from the overall quality of community services and infrastructure. She noted that annual statistically valid resident surveys consistently show strong citywide support for South Jordan's parks system across all districts. She referenced the long-term implementation of a parks utility fee in Herriman and stated that residents there have become comfortable with the funding structure because they understand the direct connection between the fee and park services provided. She emphasized that any proposed fee would not be arbitrary but instead tied specifically to maintaining and improving valued community amenities. She further stated that while individual residents may use parks at different stages of life or with varying frequency, parks remain an important community asset that contributes to the overall quality of life throughout the city. She noted that because the benefits of parks extend citywide, she believes a more uniform approach to funding those amenities is appropriate. She concluded that the consistent positive survey feedback regarding parks is a significant factor in her support for exploring a parks utility fee. She expressed support for strategically utilizing reserve funds rather than waiting for legislative mandates regarding reserve levels. She emphasized the importance of maintaining adequate savings while balancing taxpayer impacts.

City Attorney Loose clarified two legal considerations regarding a potential park's utility fee. First, he emphasized that the previously discussed \$5 monthly amount was only a preliminary conceptual estimate and that the actual fee amount would ultimately be determined through a formal study process. He noted that the final numbers could be higher or lower depending on the findings of that analysis. Second, he explained that revenues generated from a park's utility fee could only be used for the specific services and operations identified as part of the fee. He distinguished the fee from impact fees, which are used to construct new facilities or expand infrastructure capacity. He stated that a parks utility fee would instead fund ongoing maintenance and operational costs such as mowing, irrigation, fertilization, tree trimming, repairs, and related parks department operations. He also noted that the city could legally choose whether the fee would fund only direct operational expenses or also include personnel and administrative costs associated with maintaining the parks system.

Council Members and staff discussed whether a potential parks utility fee should include funding capacity not only for ongoing maintenance and operations, but also for incremental implementation of priorities identified in the Parks Master Plan. Staff explained that maintaining the city's current level of service over time will require additional amenities and infrastructure as the community grows, and that the fee study could be structured to evaluate funding both operational needs and selected future improvements. Council Members emphasized that any proposed fee would need to remain reasonable and transparent while also demonstrating measurable progress toward identified park and trail improvements. Discussion included the possibility of dedicating a portion of future fee revenues toward capital improvements or identified projects within the master plan, including trail connections, regional park amenities, and future development in western portions of the city. Council Members also discussed the importance of ensuring residents throughout the city can see direct communitywide benefits from any fee structure, particularly in rapidly growing western areas such as Rio Tinto and Shoreline. Discussion referenced the regional use of amenities such as Highland Park, Bingham Creek Regional Park, trails, and future park phases, with recognition that many facilities serve residents citywide regardless of neighborhood boundaries. Staff noted that future developments will also include additional park obligations and maintenance responsibilities that the city will eventually assume. The discussion then shifted toward budget priorities and implementation sequencing. Staff summarized that the Council appeared interested in moving forward with additional analysis regarding a park's utility fee and the creation of a public safety district while continuing to study a transportation utility fee for possible future consideration. Council Members expressed interest in conducting the parks utility fee study first, while also beginning preliminary evaluation of a transportation utility fee for future budget discussions. Staff explained that using reserve funds for the upcoming fiscal year to cover VECC costs would provide time to establish a future public safety district while balancing the immediate budget needs. Council Members discussed the importance of understanding the financial implications and timelines associated with each option, including whether sufficient time exists to complete the necessary studies and public processes before adoption of the upcoming budget.

City Attorney Loose advised that if the city ultimately pursues a public safety district, the district's stated purpose should likely be broad enough to allow future expansion of public safety funding responsibilities over time without requiring creation of an entirely new district structure.

Mayor Ramsey summarized the discussion by stating that the Council appeared generally supportive of further exploring a parks utility fee and creation of a public safety district. She noted that implementation of a public safety district would take time and that the Council appeared to be leaning toward using reserve funds initially to cover the first year of emergency communications costs. She stated that the initial intent of the public safety district would be to fund 911 and VECC services, with the possibility that additional public safety costs, staffing, or services could be incorporated into the district over time as future needs arise.

City Attorney Loose stated that, in addition to exploring the parks utility fee and public safety district, the city could also begin evaluating a future transportation utility fee. He noted that staff could start studying the transportation fee structure while the other funding mechanisms are being developed so that the Council would have additional information and options available in the coming months or during future budget discussions. He explained that this phased approach would

allow the city to compare the potential impacts and benefits of each funding mechanism over time while already having the parks utility fee and public safety district concepts moving forward for consideration.

City Manager Lewis explained that a transportation utility fee could be implemented at any time and would not necessarily need to align with a specific fiscal year or budget cycle. He stated that implementation would primarily require amendment of the city's fee schedule following completion of the appropriate study and analysis. He noted that the city could begin studying the transportation utility fee immediately and, if the resulting numbers and structure were appropriate, implement it at a later date. However, he indicated that staff would not recommend building the current budget around anticipated transportation utility fee revenues until the city had more complete information and formal analysis regarding the program.

Council Member Johnson asked which potential funding mechanism staff believed would place a greater financial burden on residents, specifically comparing a parks utility fee and a transportation utility fee.

City Manager Lewis explained that the cost and impact of a transportation utility fee would depend heavily on how the fee is structured and what specific services or infrastructure costs are included. He stated that a transportation utility fee could potentially result in a higher monthly charge than a parks utility fee, although the burden could also be adjusted between commercial and residential users depending on the methodology selected. He noted that there are many variables involved in calculating a transportation utility fee, making it difficult to estimate precise impacts without first completing a detailed study to determine what costs the city intends to cover and how those costs should be allocated. He contrasted that with a park's utility fee, which he stated would likely be more straightforward to evaluate because the operational and maintenance costs associated with parks are easier to identify and define.

Mayor Ramsey emphasized that any consideration of new fees or district structures would involve a very open, transparent, and public process. She stated that it is important for residents to clearly understand the actual costs associated with the services they are already receiving and paying for through existing city operations and taxes. She noted that the intent of discussing these funding mechanisms is not to create hidden costs, but rather to provide greater clarity and transparency regarding the true cost of maintaining services and infrastructure within the community.

City Attorney Loose stated that, unlike transportation utility fees, there is currently no specific statutory process outlined in state law for implementation of a parks utility fee. However, he recommended that the city follow a similarly structured and transparent process as the one established for transportation utility fees. He explained that utilizing an already recognized and established procedural framework would provide a cleaner and more transparent public process, including clear notice, public involvement, and identifiable standards for evaluating and implementing the proposed fee structure.

Council Member McGuire motioned to recess the City Council Budget Meeting and move to executive closed session for the discussion of the purchase, exchange, or lease of real property. Council Member Zander seconded the motion. Vote was 5-0, unanimous in favor.

D. Executive Closed Sessions:

D.1. Discussion of the purchase, exchange, or lease of real property.

Council Member Harris motioned to adjourn the executive closed session and return to the City Council Budget Meeting. Council Member Johnson seconded the motion. Vote was 5-0, unanimous in favor.

Council Member Shelton motioned to adjourn the March 17, 2026 City Council Budget Meeting. Council Member McGuire seconded the motion. Vote was 5-0, unanimous in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

The March 17, 2026 City Council Budget Meeting adjourned at 5:39 p.m.

This is a true and correct copy of the March 17, 2026 City Council Budget Meeting Minutes, which were approved on May 19, 2026.



South Jordan City Recorder