

# Erin Mendenhall

Candidate for Salt Lake City Mayor



**1. Introduce yourself to our members. Describe your relationship to the Central Wasatch Mountains. What's your favorite place to visit? What are your favorite activities? What do you find compelling about the Central Wasatch Mountains?**

I grew up near the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon and spent countless days in childhood up Bell Canyon, hiking, bouldering, backpacking. Today, my family enjoys camping in the Wasatch Back in our VW pop-top van, looking for fossils in the dry creek bed around Mormon Flats and letting the kids roam on sage covered hillsides or trickling creeks. The Wasatch Mountains are a gift; so close to home, so diverse. I've gone to them since I was a child for respite, recharge, recreation.

My work in public service started as an air quality activist, turned advocate when I co-founded Breathe Utah a decade ago. In 2013 I was elected to represent District 5 on the Salt Lake City Council, then re-elected in 2017. I currently serve as the chair of our state Air Quality Board and vice-chair of the state Quality Growth Commission. I am completing my Professional Master of Science and Technology degree at the University of Utah, with an emphasis on Environmental Science. I'm

passionate about Salt Lake City, our potential, and our ability to work together to get more as the environmental leader of our state.

**2. In your mind, what are the most important issues facing the Central Wasatch Mountains today?**

The most important issue is the fact that millions of people feel the same way I do about the CWM! Use of our canyons is above and beyond the infrastructure capacity. That's why the Central Wasatch Commission is so critical. I participated in the recreation subcommittee of Mountain Accord and look forward to a role on CWC as Salt Lake City's next Mayor.

I'll add that climate change and the resulting impacts on the forests, watershed, and recreation industry are critically important as well. SLC needs to both plan on the changes happening and work aggressively to reduce CO2 emissions.

**3. Transportation. What are your thoughts about UDOT's plans for reducing traffic congestion in Little Cottonwood Canyon? How much do you think this plan should try to**

**reduce congestion by increasing the number of cars that the highway and parking areas can handle versus some form of public transit that reduces reliance on cars?**

My preference is absolutely to grow public transit. We know that no amount of traffic accommodation will ever be enough for our ever-growing population. We must invest to make public transit more convenient and more affordable than driving our cars, particularly up the canyons. Growing public transit options is a win-win for our canyons, our air, and our quality of experience.

**4. Public Lands. What are your thoughts with regard to the current Central Wasatch National Conservation and Recreation Area (CWNCRA) proposal and efforts to enact federal legislation to protect the Central Wasatch Mountains?**

I am supportive. It was a Herculean task to convene dozens of organizations and hundreds of stakeholder voices through the Mountain Accord public process to create a consensus proposal, but it was done. Now we need the federal legislation make the concept a reality and empower our local governments to do the work.

**5. Recreation. Are you concerned that very high recreational usage is harming the environment(s) or degrading the experience of being in the canyons? What zoning, ordinance or policy decisions would you support to maintain a balance of recreational use and habitat health and water quality in the Central Wasatch Canyons?**

Zoning and policies needed to support an appropriate and healthy balance are part of a

shifting landscape--population, climate change, recreation--that should be decided with data and good science, not politics. Certainly there are environmental impacts to recreation use anywhere, but there are also countless benefits from the individual to the broader society. These impacts need to be addressed through responsive policies and ongoing dialog with stakeholders. SLC Public Utilities has long led our watershed policy discussions and has worked collaboratively with the statewide community (most recently in 2018 through DNR-led process) to address evolving needs and concerns.

**6. Water policy. Utah cities have been granted authority to protect sources of drinking water under a provision called “extraterritorial jurisdiction.” In recent years this authority has come under attack by legislators, developers, and speculators seeking to diminish Salt Lake City’s ability to protect water quality. If elected, how will you insure citizens continue to have access to high quality drinking water while balancing other uses in our watersheds?**

I have been doing this work firsthand as a long-time commissioner for the state Quality Growth Commission, which was ground zero of the most recent battle against SLC's extraterritorial jurisdiction. I have worked to protect water quality for the hundreds of thousands of customers of our water while ensuring that concerns are addressed through a broad and collaborative conversation considering the issues, instead of a hurried and uninformed approach. Salt Lake City Public Utilities must remain active in the statewide discussion of water quality vs needs and threats as our

regional population doubles and water becomes more scarce.

**7. Local Ordinance(s). What types of ordinances should be put in place (or revisited) to protect the environment, water quality, access, and integrity of the Central Wasatch Mountains?**

Climate change will affect the forests, water supply and recreation of the Wasatch Mountains. The next watershed masterplan should address and plan for projected changes. Our contract with Rocky Mountain Power for energy supply to Salt Lake City is up next year and I want to be our mayor when we have the chance to renegotiate the timeline for renewable energy supply to our city. It must be faster than it is scheduled to be, today. This month I was proud to have a joint resolution passed between Mayor Biskupski and the Salt Lake City Council, encouraging Congress to enact a national price on carbon emissions. I have worked hard to champion each piece of environmental policy SLC has advanced over the last six years and will continue this work as the next mayor.

**8. Land Use Planning. The canyons are already very heavily used and, as you probably know, the population of the Wasatch Front is expected to double within several decades. What would you like the canyons to be like in fifty or sixty years, and what, if anything, do you think our government needs to do to make sure it will be that way?**

I want the Wasatch canyons to continue to be a place of respite, recharge and recreation for my daughter and sons, and their children to come (no pressure, kids).The Central Wasatch

Commission's work to address transportation access to the canyons with public transit options would make the greatest impact to the future of our canyons. Access, air quality, pavement expansion, resulting water quality, all could be improved with adequate public transit investment. The right partners are at the table to make this happen; I hope the federal government will do their part.

**9. Is there anything else people should understand about your vision, plans, ideas, or policies for the Central Wasatch Mountains?**

We live here on purpose. Living in Salt Lake City isn't cheaper than other places along the Wasatch Front, but it is rich in community. The intention that brings us to SLC is also the energy that unites us as a community to address that which is vulnerable--our environment, our immigrant population, the historic character of our city, and more. I am passionate about public service, have been honored to work as a SLC Councilwoman these last six years, and excited to serve you as our next Mayor.

*Save Our Canyons is a 501c3 non-profit organization. These questionnaires are provided for the benefit of our members and the community we seek to serve. We reached out to all candidates for the particular office and have provided responses un-edited as they were received, some candidates have opted to not respond. If you have questions about the responses, we encourage you to reach out to the candidate. If you have a comment about the questionnaire or a suggestion of others elected seats we should issue to, please reach out to Save Our Canyons. 801-363-7283, [info@saveourcanyons.org](mailto:info@saveourcanyons.org).*