Arbor Day Foundation

TREEUTAH
PLANTING TREES · GROWING COMMUNITY

SOUTH SALT LAKE

ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITY TREES DAY

PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY CONFERENCE 2026

Growing Together: How Cities and Nonprofits Can Enhance Community Forestry

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ARBORDAY.ORG

Growing Together

How Cities and Nonprofits Can Enhance Community Forestry

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sslc.gov/242/Neighborhoods · treeutah.org

THE GAP NOBODY FILLS ALONE



Ask most city officials what they know about community forestry: "not much." Ask most urban forestry nonprofits how a city actually works and they have the same answer.

That is not a problem. It is an opportunity.

The Gap Nobody Fills Alone

South Salt Lake needs

A true urban forestry program

An urban forester on staff

Community forestry that reaches beyond city property

A canopy equity strategy

Donations, partners, friends, and volunteers

Trees! Native, homeowner-friendly, and budget-friendly

TreeUtah needs

Sites for planting trees and educating the public

A training ground and testing ground for new ideas

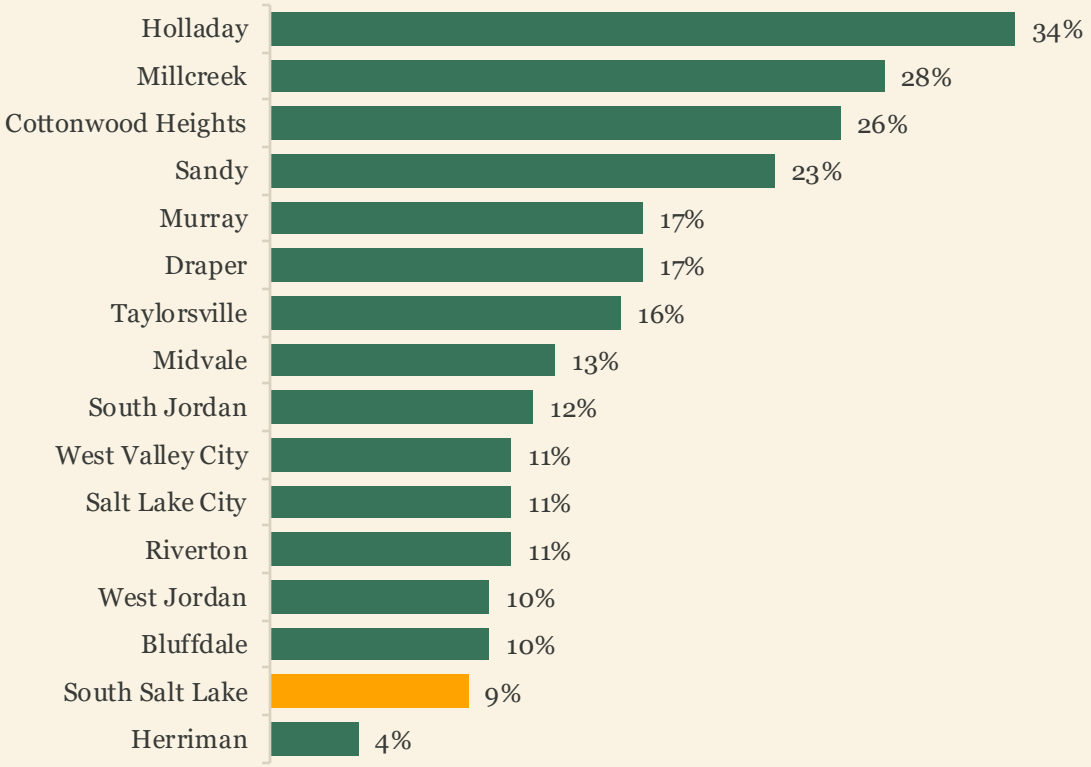
Insider access: how city departments coordinate land, trees, and public works

Donations, partners, friends, and organizers

Healthy homes for trees that we can help steward

Tree Equity: The Canopy Map Is a Map of Need

Tree canopy across Salt Lake County



Source: Tree Equity Score (American Forests); SSL Urban Forest Management Plan

The people under that canopy

26,000 residents and 4,000 businesses

Within Salt Lake County, South Salt Lake has the:

Highest share of people in poverty (43%)

Second-highest share of people of color (50%)

Highest unemployment (7%)

Highest share living in linguistic isolation (9%)

Second-highest health burden

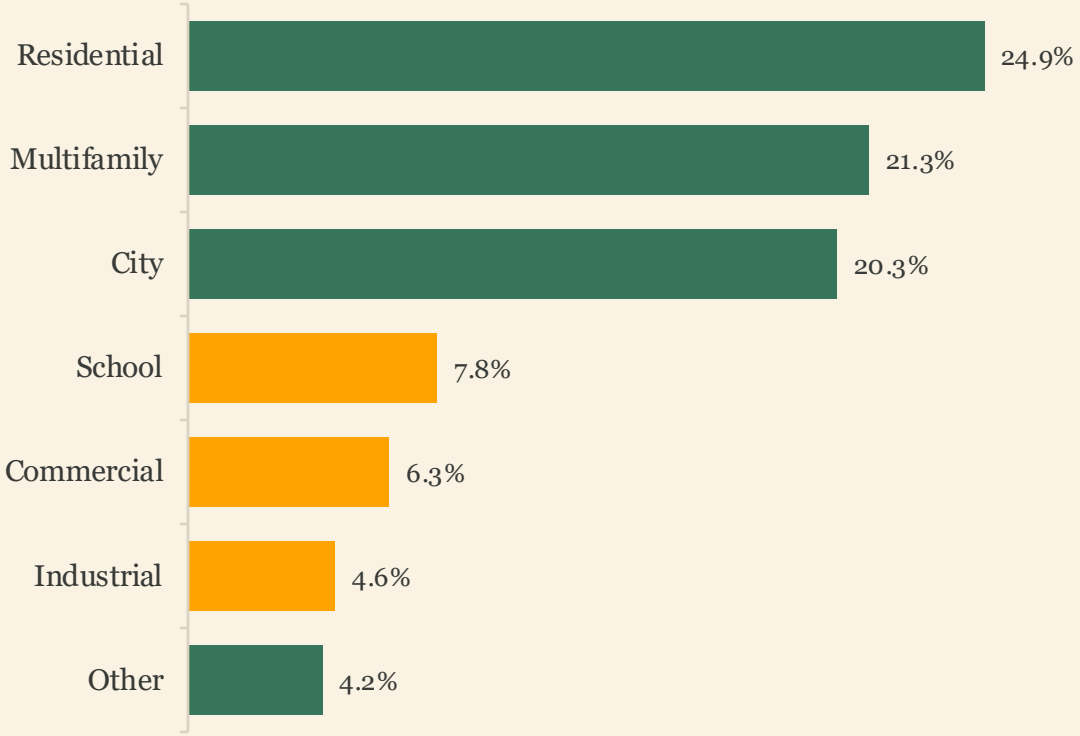
Lowest homeownership rate (34%)

Second-lowest tree canopy (9%)

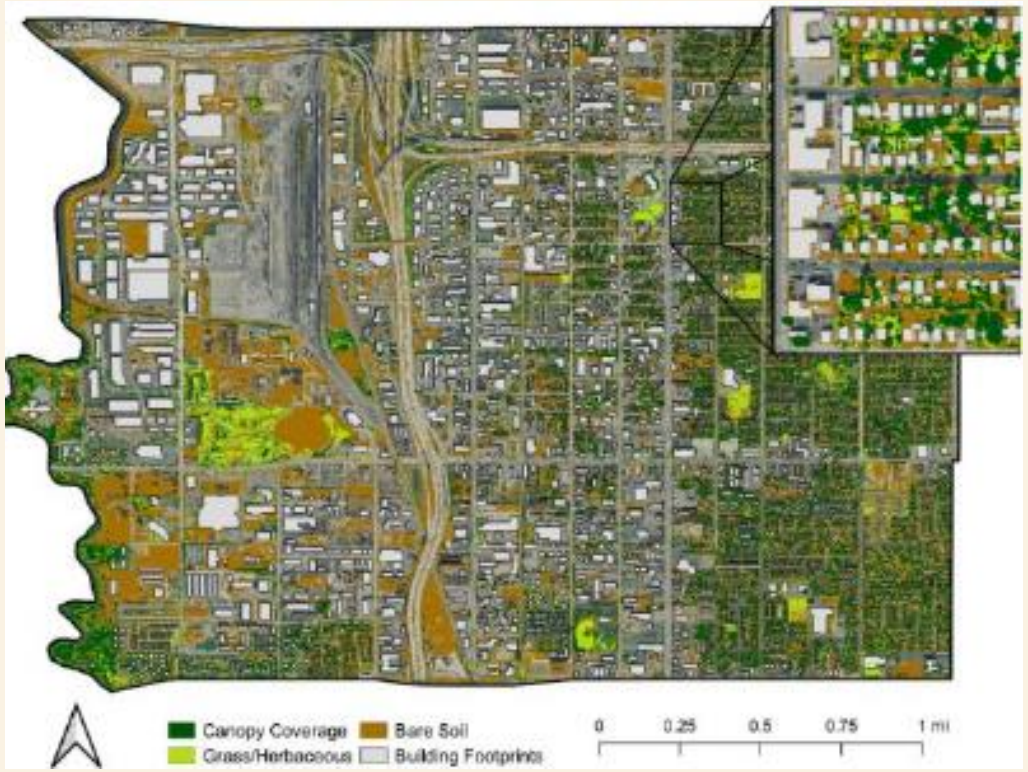
Shade, cooler streets, and cleaner air follow the canopy. Equity means planting where they are missing.

South Salt Lake Has: Low Canopy + High Industrial & Institutional

Tree canopy by land use



Land cover



The biggest opportunity sits on land the city does not own: industrial, commercial, and school parcels.

Source: South Salt Lake Urban Forest Management Plan (Eocene Environmental Group, 2024)

Our Park Strips Are a Problem

Tree inventory fact

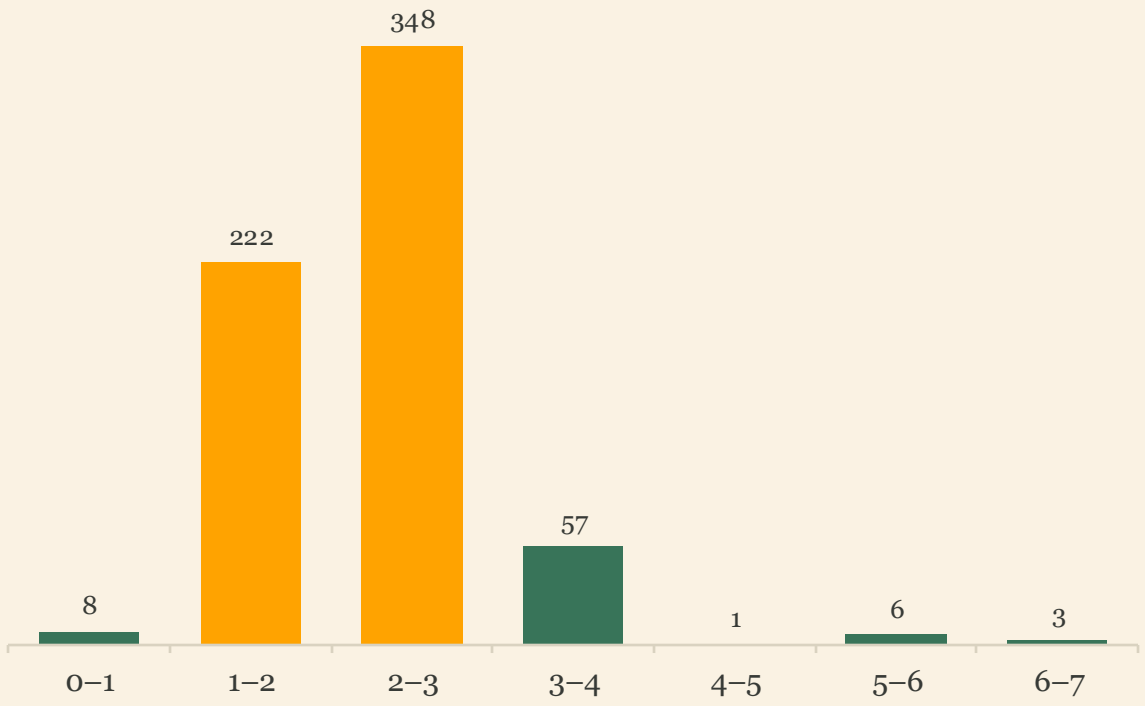
90%

of park strips are under 3 feet wide

Most of the city's street-tree space is too narrow for a healthy tree.

Out of 645 park strips sampled, only 10 were wider than 4 feet. Planting the right tree in the right place means looking beyond the park strip, so we plant in parks, open space, and private yards.

Park strips by width (feet)



Source: Ailish Ferrick research, April 2026. Representative sample of the city.

TreeUtah Has: Expertise and Reach

The skills most cities never had the budget to build

36 years planting trees across Utah

6000 to 12000 trees planted with ~5000 volunteers each year

Arborist-led planting events that are safe, well-organized, connected to the community and fun enough for people to come back again and again

Smart species selection, logistics, and outreach for tree giveaways

A trusted expert voice and partner to diverse community groups

Programs that can be piloted in a small city and then scaled statewide



LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

"It's the little things citizens do. That's what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees."

— Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize laureate



Learning in Both Directions

What the City gained (and had to admit it needed)

Real community forestry expertise, delivered at the city's scale and capacity

Planting events that are more organized, better attended, and reach more of the community

Credibility and practical support that moved the urban forest plan and tree committee from good intentions to action

A trusted partner for volunteer projects and parks trees

A way to contract out services a stretched staff cannot deliver

What TreeUtah gained (and had to admit it lacked)

A window into how city departments actually coordinate to care for land and trees

A seat on city committees and planning processes

A laboratory: a city small enough to pilot programs, learn fast, and refine before scaling statewide

Insider perspective that makes TreeUtah a better partner in every city it works with

New relationships with other organizations through the city

COMMON GROUND

What real partnership looks like on the ground: collaborating to reach the neighborhoods that want and need trees most.



Common Ground: Tree Giveaways

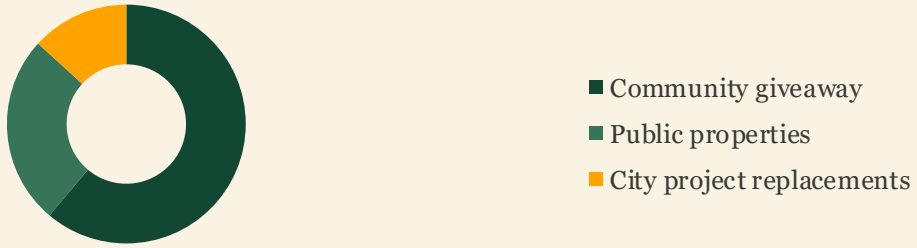
From 25 trees in 2022 (we were so proud) to 192 in 2026

TreeUtah now fully manages the city's giveaway: requests, applicant contact, tree matching, ordering, and customer service

The city pays for some, TreeUtah pays for some, and many "extra" trees find great homes!

We have learned a lot about species, logistics, and what residents want. Next: data collection and monitoring

355 trees planted in 2026





Common Ground: Natural Open Spaces within the city

Neither of us owns them, but they need our help. Together we can provide:

Coordination across city and county departments

Arborist-led volunteer facilitation that goes beyond digging holes

Leveraging grants together to bring positive impact to spaces in need

Flexibility as we grow: TreeUtah watered on its own time to start but now that it's a proven value, the city budgets for it!









Common Ground: Tree Committee

The community that learns together sticks together

TreeUtah helped launch the committee with professional advice

Committee includes members of various city departments, citizens of various backgrounds, nonprofits, tribes, and is growing!

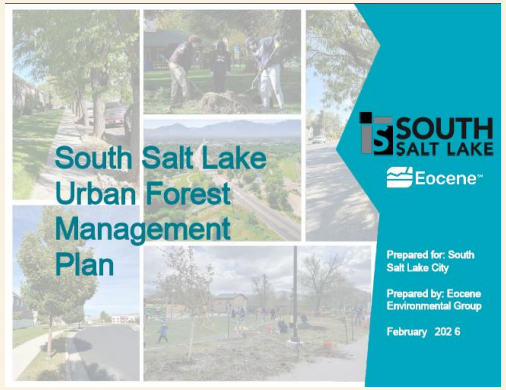
Helps set priorities and goals, select projects, and spot overarching plans and opportunities

Gave the Urban Forest Management Plan the credibility and support to gain traction

Reality check: we can't only plant trees. We also need to protect them from removal, water them, and prune them

Target: 500 trees a year

Where we are, and where we are going



	Today	Goal
Public trees	3,264	**22,710**
Canopy coverage	7.3%	**12%**
Trees per capita	0.125	**0.3**
Investment per capita	$3.74	**$21.50**

The 2024 Urban Forest Management Plan sets the targets; the tree committee keeps them moving.

Common Ground: Reaching Every Neighborhood

Meet people where they are

Ask what people want, allowing communities to define meaningful tree projects

Tree Equity Score and the city's underserved-area map for definition

Build trust: 9% of residents live in linguistic isolation and two-thirds rent, so outreach goes through multifamily connections, landlords, and trusted community voices, and TreeUtah Team Leaders

Work alongside partner orgs: Promise South Salt Lake, the Confederated Goshute Tribe, Fit To Recover

Right tree, right place: a diverse selection of tough trees that are homeowner-friendly for various needs

Volunteers from the neighborhood, not just for it, so that planting days build relationships, not just canopy

Transport trees to those in need



Common Ground: Partners and Projects

The more the merrier

Goshute Garden in South Salt Lake

Tracy Aviary's Pia Okwai Jordan River Nature Center

Jordan River Commission Oxbow restoration

Central Valley Water Reclamation Facility

Promise South Salt Lake and United Way Day of Caring

Community groups like Fit to Recover, Hogle Zoo, corporate volunteer teams

Working together makes each of us a better partner to everyone else



Common Ground: Education and Public Commitment

Ask: what is the purpose of this planting?

The city refers everyone to TreeUtah for planting and tree-care advice

We table at each other's events and share credit publicly and online

A giveaway participant now serves as a volunteer garden coach











Key Takeaways

1

Plan together

Start with the equity map, then the shared plan. Not one-off favors.

2

The more the merrier

Invite community groups, families, schools, churches, businesses, neighbors… and people walking by!

3

Give each other autonomy

Let the expertise shine. Trust is built by handing things off and being flexible enough to learn.

4

Say yes!

Then figure out who is watering. Opportunities compound when both sides default to yes.

"Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new."

— Ursula K. Le Guin, The Lathe of Heaven



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Thank you.

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