

SAVE OUR FOOTHILLS QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

ROCKY ANDERSON

1. What is your long term vision for the Salt Lake City Foothills in terms of environmental protection and outdoor access?

Conservation of, and broad enjoyment of, these precious natural resources should be the overriding values driving all that is done in the Foothills. That requires conscientious maintenance of existing and new trails, which has been lacking during the past several years. It also requires careful planning of any new trails, changes in existing trails, and different uses of trails, including geological studies and analysis of existing wildlife and impacts on wildlife of anything done, or not done, in the Foothills. Erosion of trails should be resolved and avoided in connection with any trails, old and new.

I envision inclusive use of, and access to, trails in the Foothills, with cooperative use and planning with respect to any changes to and additions of trails or other uses of the Foothills. That cooperative planning requires a collaborative, open, and respectful public process of all users, potential users, and others who value the long-term sustainability of the Foothills. The failure to engage in that public process has caused incredibly wasteful actions on the part of Salt Lake City and its contractors, with a start-and-stop history that has been unnecessary and galling to almost everyone concerned.

The present “moratorium”—after some new trails have been built, followed by complaints of people and organizations feeling they were not apprised and were left out of the process—appears to many to have been politically motivated, in order to avoid the criticisms leveled against the initial plan for the Foothills and new trails. An honest, open, and collaborative process, and the conduct of relevant geological, use, and wildlife studies, could have avoided the divisiveness that has arisen out of the trails issues and the consequent delay in moving forward in a manner known to, and worked out (to the extent possible), the various passionate individuals and organizations who seek a resolution promoting their interests and values.

2. Salt Lake City has diverse communities with varying levels of access to the foothills. How will you ensure that all residents, regardless of their socioeconomic status or location, have equitable access to these natural lands?

Knowledge of and familiarity with the Foothills is the first vital step. Many people in the Salt Lake City area have no idea about what the Foothills have to offer or even how to get to trailheads and where they lead.

The city should provide valley-wide public education about the existence of and access to the Foothills and the various existing trails. There should also be adequate trailhead parking and signage that makes it clear to all—new users as well as old-timers—where they are and where they can hike and/or bike. Also, part of that public education should be lessons in trail etiquette and best conservation practices.

I'll address E-bike use by people who need peddle-assistance below.

3. As Mayor or City Council member, how do you plan to allocate resources and funding to support the maintenance, management and preservation of the foothills natural lands, given competing budgetary priorities? In the event of conflicts between recreational development and conservation, what protocols would you put into place to assist in decision-making?

There have always been adequate funds in the SLC budget for foothills maintenance and trails. We should never compromise on the conservation efforts necessary to sustain the Foothills and the quality of the experiences people can enjoy there. We are so fortunate to have these unique open lands so close to and accessible to every part of our city. They deserve a high priority in terms of the city's financial and management commitments.

There are likely to be conflicts between recreational development and conservation, but I'm convinced that those whose primary focus may be on recreational development also highly value the natural environment and want to promote conservation while also pursuing greater recreational access, including new trails. An open, civil mediated process, including all parties with different points of view, can move us toward better solutions and get us beyond the start-and-stop development of new trails that we have all experienced these past couple years. When we all listen to others and find all possible common ground, we are certain to arrive at a plan that best serves our entire community, even if there might be some compromises by some along the way.

I would pursue a process similar to what I did soon after I was first elected regarding the University light rail line, which had been voted down by the City Council before my election. I held an open house at my home for all opponents to the light rail line, obtained information about all their concerns and fears, then set to work with UDOT, UTA, the University of Utah, and some of the Council members. We figured out how to resolve or substantially ameliorate the concerns of the opponents and implemented some innovative safeguards, including a Community Coordinate Team, comprised of one person per block along the construction route, which was empowered to determine the discretionary bonuses for the contractors to assure they would do what was required under their re-negotiated contracts, including limiting hours of construction, keeping one lane open at all times, keeping dust down, and cutting some

parking places into parking strips along the route. The opponents became light rail supporters because of the open, respectful, and meaningful process in which we engaged. If we could achieve that, we can certainly achieve greater agreement among people with different views regarding trails in our Foothills.

4. How will you manage future stewardship of the Salt Lake City Foothills? What would be your priorities? Data collection? Scientific studies? Outdoor recreation education? Native plant restoration? Co-management with Indigenous leaders?

All interested parties, including Indigenous leaders, should be involved from the outset of any renewed public process regarding the future of the Foothills. Early in the process, all relevant scientific studies, including geologic, soils, wildlife, and use studies, should be completed so everyone is on the same page in terms of the objective information provided by those studies—studies that were not done by the current administration before launching forward with its consultants and the carving of new trails in the Foothills. From the present and continuing into the future on a regular basis, wise and informed stewardship of the Foothills should be viewed as our collective and individual responsibility. If presently established trails are not the best in terms of erosion and conflicting uses, we should be open to changing them, with a consensus approach whenever possible. As to any new trails, we should be clear with the public, through an open, transparent, and inclusive process, as to the uses contemplated and the interests and values advanced by the new trails.

5. Salt Lake City ordinance presently bans the use of motorized vehicles in the Foothills natural lands. How will you address or manage the increasing number of electric vehicles that are now being used in the Foothills despite this existing ordinance?

This issue should be among those addressed during an open, collaborative public process, with as much good information about the impacts on trails by different classes of E-bikes as possible. My present view is that a limited exception to the ban on the use of motorized vehicles in the Foothills should be made for Class I E-bikes (pedal-assisted) for those who meet certain needs criteria, with a use permit that goes with the person and with the E-bike (as I understand Park City presently does). We need to make the rules clear, particularly since there is so much inconsistency and sometimes ambiguity between the Forest Service, the BLM, the state of Utah, and Salt Lake City regarding E-bikes. The vastly different points of view on the subject of E-bikes on trails is reflected in the two letters to the editor found here:

<https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2022/09/28/judi-brawer-how-manage-electric/> and <https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/letters/2022/10/09/letter-e-bikes-are-not-culprit/>.