

# EQUITABLE AIR QUALITY TASK FORCE

April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 – Salt Lake City, UT

## I. PROJECT SCOPE

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Air quality is a prevalent issue for many Salt Lake City (SLC) residents. However, associated health impacts are intensified for vulnerable individuals, such as those experiencing homelessness. Currently no air quality committee exists in SLC, and many at-risk groups throughout the valley continue to be exposed to poor air quality without sufficient advocacy, policy, or planning to address this environmental justice issue. We aim to propose a SLC charter for a committee that focuses on air quality through the lens of equity.

## II. BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

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Global population is expected to grow by about 27% by the year 2050.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, studies project that in the next twenty years the population of SLC will double.<sup>2</sup> The city has also seen an incredible increase in housing prices, while simultaneously seeing a decrease in affordable housing. In 2010 the monthly rental costs for a two-bedroom apartment in SL county was \$832, compared to over \$1,100 in 2018, a 32% cost increase, which is still less than the average monthly rent in SLC of \$1,237.<sup>3</sup> It is frequently recommended that housing accounts for no more than 30% of monthly gross income. If one were to make minimum wage, live in the average square foot apartment in SLC, and follow this recommendation, they would be required to work approximately 134 hours a week. Accompanied with this rise in housing prices is a decrease in affordable housing in SLC. Some projections show that if left unchecked, housing prices in Utah in 2044 could be comparable to San Francisco's current rates.<sup>4</sup> It is easy to imagine the formidable increase in homelessness and polarization of socioeconomic status that SLC can expect to see with the combination of the prospected population growth, increase in housing prices, and decrease in access to affordable housing.

The economic impacts of homelessness and income inequality are quite severe. Individuals experiencing homelessness do require medical care, with the average individual acquiring \$18,500, up to \$44,000 for frequent visitors, in medical expenses.<sup>5</sup> Further, 33-42% of those experiencing homelessness live with some

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<sup>1</sup> "World Population Prospects - Population ...." <https://population.un.org/wpp/>. Accessed 18 Mar. 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "Study: Utah to nearly double population by 2050 - The Salt Lake Tribune." 18 Apr. 2014, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=57833427&type=CMSID>. Accessed 18 Mar. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> "Rental prices up in Utah, housing availability down | KSL.com." 20 Aug. 2018, <https://www.ksl.com/article/46378804/rental-prices-up-in-utah-housing-availability-down>. Accessed 18 Mar. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> "Housing Gap Coalition - The Salt Lake Chamber." 4 Jan. 2019, <https://slchamber.com/housinggapcoalition/>. Accessed 18 Mar. 2019.

<sup>5</sup> "The Business Case for Ending Homelessness: Having a Home ...." <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4046466/>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

form of respiratory infection.<sup>6</sup> It is common knowledge amongst those who live in SLC and in the Salt Lake valley that poor air quality events, such as inversions, wildfires, and heightened ozone periods, force those with respiratory infections to stay indoors when possible and often cause those without respiratory infections to have increased difficulty breathing. Those affected by homelessness, be they sheltered or unsheltered, do not possess the luxury of escaping indoors on short notice to avoid poor air conditions. Rather, they must constantly inhale compounds and particulate matter, which can exacerbate or even cause various respiratory infections. Studies also show that in countries such as the U.S., income inequality in a given community has severe negative impacts on the amount of goods and services produced within that local economy.<sup>7</sup> In 2013, the Nobel prize winner in economy, Robert Shiller, stated that income inequality is “the most important problem that we are facing now today” in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> The issue of air quality and the issues of homelessness and income inequality in SLC are closely related and their relation is an environmental justice issue. City officials must recognize that these issues play into each other in many ways. These issues are urgent and require the full attention and cooperation of the city to address them.

This project is of great importance to the SLC, and is, indeed, relevant to major cities around the globe. A quick internet search shows that there is currently no committee on air quality nor is there a committee of any sort on environmental justice in SLC. This is alarming considering that SLC has very severe air pollution issues, especially with regards to particulate matter and ozone. It is also surprising that SLC has not formed a board which focuses on environmental justice considering that SLC has been transitioning into a leadership role on solving various sustainability and climate problems over the past decade by serving on the White House Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience, ranking in one poll in the top twelve sustainable cities in the U.S., and being awarded the Mayors’ Climate Protection Award in 2013.<sup>9,10,11</sup> SLC needs to continue its growth in international leadership on environmental policy by focusing on local environmental justice issues, particular with regards to the most prominent issue of air quality in the valley.

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<sup>6</sup> “Respiratory infections in the homeless - UWOMJ.” <http://www.uwomj.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/v78n2.61-65.pdf>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

<sup>7</sup> “How does income inequality affect economic growth? | World ....” 9 Jul. 2015, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/07/how-does-income-inequality-affect-economic-growth/>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

<sup>8</sup> “Rising inequality ‘most important problem,’ says Nobel-winning ....” 14 Oct. 2013, [https://www.sltoday.com/business/local/rising-inequality-most-important-problem-says-nobel-winning-economist/article\\_a5065957-05c3-5ac0-ba5b-dab91c22973a.html](https://www.sltoday.com/business/local/rising-inequality-most-important-problem-says-nobel-winning-economist/article_a5065957-05c3-5ac0-ba5b-dab91c22973a.html). Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

<sup>9</sup> “12 Cities Leading the Way in Sustainability | BillMoyers.com.” <https://billmoyers.com/content/12-cities-leading-the-way-in-sustainability/>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

<sup>10</sup> “State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force On Climate Preparedness ....”

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/resilience/taskforce>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

<sup>11</sup> “Mayors Win First Place Honors For Local Climate Protection Efforts ....” 24 Jun. 2013, <https://www.estormwater.com/mayors-win-first-place-honors-local-climate-protection-efforts>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.