

How do you feel about plans to transform downtown SLC?

Amid a massive proposal to bring a new sports and entertainment district to downtown Salt Lake City, we asked you to share your hopes and concerns. The responses below come from our Top Stories newsletter subscribers and our social media followers.

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"I think it's great. We need reinvestment back into downtown before we end up like a lot of other downtowns fading out. This is an opportunity for us to create a pedestrian area that our city desperately needs. I really hope the area around the arena is redeveloped." — *Tyler, Salt Lake City*

"Economic growth cannot be the only reason to build this downtown sports arena. We do not need another tax incentive-based development to further fuel the Utah property value increases." — *Derek, American Fork*

"It's sickening to see so much money — and tax dollars — being spent on entertainment when so many Utahns are drowning in Utah's housing prices.

A billion dollars could build a lot of the affordable housing Utah so desperately needs." — *Kari, Orem*

"I am a lifelong hockey fan and have lived in SLC my entire life. I hope for balance: Preserve Japan town and invest in it, keep Abravanel Hall and UMOCA while still keeping sports and entertainment in the heart of the city. You know what doesn't add a shred of value to downtown? Gateways. Knock it down, save the train station, Depot and raze the rest. Good riddance. It's a ghost town save for the bare edges. Let's put that vast amount of wasted space to good use." — *Alison, Millcreek*

"It's really exciting — as long as we don't lose a symphony hall to gain a professional sports team." — *Jennifer, Lehi*

"Having lived in SLC a total of 20 years, I'm excited about rejuvenating economic prospects for downtown SLC. However, I worry about whether this development will simply profit the

wealthy and inflict further economic and social harm on west-siders. What specific plans are being made to avoid these significant issues?" — *Robert, Provo*

"I have two principal concerns about this proposal: 1. The possible loss of existing convention and cultural venues to the downtown area, such as Abravanel Hall and the Salt Palace, which support non-sport diverse opportunities for Utah residents; and 2. The use of general public tax money, such as the increase in general sales taxes, which burden everyone, to support the recreational and sports interests of the few. I feel strongly that the expense of creating this concept should be born primarily by those who use it and profit from it. Perhaps a special taxing district should be created for the development so that only those who buy goods and tickets within the 'sports district' will pay an extra sales tax on those purchases, and those who own the venues within the special district will pay a special income and property tax for the privilege and benefit of doing so. If these two concerns

can be resolved, then I'm in favor of the proposal." — *David, Salt Lake City*

"I go downtown for three reasons, and three reasons only: The opera, the symphony and the Broadway movie theater. I sincerely hope these important cultural icons are not threatened by noisy, obnoxious sports fans." — *Keri, Millcreek*

"I honestly don't care. But I do care about the current buildings that area contains, like Abravanel Hall. I go to the symphony, ballet, etc. regularly. And I would not have moved here recently from Atlanta if these options were not available." — *Brandi, North Salt Lake*

"I swear to god, if I'll don't house all the unhoused — you will all see the first glimmers of hell for your greedy selfishness. \$1 billion but can't even keep your citizens out of the streets. You make me sick to my stomach. I am." — *Jess, West Valley City*

"I like the idea. Just make sure you integrate it into the cultural area around Abravanel Hall, as well as somehow return the concept

of Japan town into it [and] the LDS Church's plan for a park-like downtown area just to the north of it. If done correctly, it could be an awesome downtown for everyone!" — *Eric, North Salt Lake*

"I do not want to pay for it, nor should they be allowed to tear down any existing buildings that serve the entertainment or cultural needs of Salt Lake City — specifically Abravanel Hall — not to mention it is one of the best architectural contributions to our entire state." — *Christine, Salt Lake City*

"I'd rather see affordable housing and disability services than sports. My disabled friends in Utah are barely surviving." — *Nate, West Valley City*

"I hate going downtown because parking is so awful — expensive and hard to find. I think sports is highly overrated. With the threat of destruction of Abravanel Hall, the main reason I ever venture to downtown, I would find no desire ever to go downtown. The loss of cultural events would be the kiss of death to Salt Lake City's downtown." — *Ann, Salt Lake City*

How one young Utahn is helping youth who have experienced homelessness improve their mental health

This is part of a series of interviews with young Utahns making meaningful impact on their communities — and their own — mental health. Read more at sltrib.com.

Since 2019, AJ Perez has worked with Salt Lake County Youth Services on the Youth Action Board. She started with the Salt Lake County Youth Services Milestone Transitional Living Program, which connects young Utahns experiencing homelessness with safe housing, stable employment and connections to ongoing support and resources — including therapy — and now works as the social work liaison for the Salt Lake County Youth Action Board.

She recently earned her master's

degree in social work and says her experience working with young Utahns has helped her be more "open-minded" when dealing with tough topics — like mental health.

"We get emotional and passionate when we're in these Youth Action Board meetings," she told me in a recent interview. "I try to see everybody's perspective, see where everybody's mental health is at."

This Q&A with her has been edited for length and clarity.

Sara Weber: Being 25, you're not far off in age from a lot of the people you work with, right? What is that like for you?

AJ Perez: It's difficult sometimes, because these individuals are incredible. I want them to be my friends, but I



AJ Perez is a social work liaison for the Salt Lake County Youth Action Board.

have to be professional. We're not here to be friends. We're here to be mental health professionals.

But it is really fun to kind of see people my age and how different we have grown up — the different experiences that everybody had come from, to see how far each individual has come.

What kind of challenges do you encounter?

I grew up in a low-income household. My parents both had two to three jobs at a time just to keep us in housing, so working with individuals who have experienced homelessness, I try not to project myself onto them. I just try to be that support, that advocate when they need it. If they need

my voice to stand out, then I will be there for them.

As someone studying social work, what do you think about the current conversation around social media, mental health and misinformation?

A lot of this generation is getting their mental health diagnoses from TikTok and Instagram. They're like, "Because this influencer has this type of anxiety, I have it because I also feel that way." But then they don't know where to go with that.

Okay, you may have depression, but here are some coping skills. Did that work for you? It didn't? Okay, let's try these other lists. Did that work for you? Okay, we're getting closer.

Children are sponges. You give them something, they're going to absorb it. Having those real conversations, like "Are you genuinely feeling this way? Or is it because it's something that you've witnessed somebody else that you relate to going through?" helps differentiate them as an individual.

We've talked a bit about challenges — could you tell me about some of the positive impact you've seen?

Once you get a person opening up

and actually communicating to you, it's always a win. With one client in particular, she did not take to me very well at the beginning. And then towards the end, we were okay. And I took that as a win. Like we had progressed a little bit.

And just seeing the growth. It takes time, especially with this kind of population. It's a lot of fight and flight for them. Because they're on edge, you know. They just experienced homelessness. So taking every little victory as it comes, like, "Oh, they showed up for an appointment, let's go!"

What advice do you have for other young Utahns who are looking to get into the space where they can improve their own mental health and help others do the same?

Educate yourself, and always assume there is more to learn. You may know a lot about a certain topic, but there's always more to learn.

Never believe that you're greater than somebody else, especially when they need support. You are their peer — you're there for advocacy. Advocacy is truly just meeting someone where they are, not thinking you're above them or below them, but that you're helping them.

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