

Utah's Community Quality of Life Index

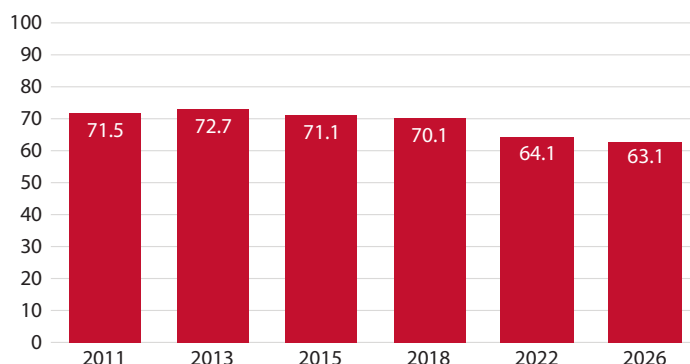
The Utah Community Quality of Life Index measured 63.2 out of a possible 100 points in 2026, dropping from 64.1 in 2022. Concerns around housing affordability, the cost of living, and opportunities for good jobs drive this decline. Community support comprises the single most important factor in a person's overall perception of their community's life quality.

The Index, developed from a statewide survey that gauges Utahns' perspectives on 20 community quality of life factors, helps illustrate broad quality of life trends.¹ The long-term decline in community quality of life indicates a growing need to address community concerns related to the factors affecting overall quality of life.

Key Findings

- **Index Decline** – In 2026, Utah's Community Quality of Life Index measured 63.2 out of a possible 100 points, its lowest level since measurement began in 2011. Concerns around housing affordability, the cost of living, and opportunities for good jobs drive this decline.
- **Housing Affordability** – Housing affordability remains the lowest-rated community factor in the Index, with an individual rating of 2.1 out of 5, representing a major concern for Utahns statewide.
- **Cost of Living** – Cost of living ranks as the second-lowest-rated community factor in the Index, with an individual rating of 2.7. Ongoing concerns about housing affordability and the cost of living contribute significantly to the decrease in the Community Quality of Life Index.
- **Opportunities for Good Jobs** – Increased concerns about good job opportunities accounted for a half-point decrease in the overall Community Quality of Life Index.
- **Community Support** – The degree to which individuals feel people support and help each other makes up the single most important factor in determining a person's overall perception of their community's quality of life.
- **Community Quality of Life Successes** – The availability of spiritual or religious activities or groups, the attractiveness of a community's natural surroundings, and the availability

Figure 1: Utah's Community Quality of Life Index



Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, Utah Chamber, and Utah Foundation

of good parks, green spaces, or places for recreation make up the top three highest-rated community factors in the Index. With respective individual ratings of 4.2, 4.2, and 4.1, these highly rated factors help buoy the 2026 Community Quality of Life Index results.

Quality of Life Factors

The Utah Community Quality of Life Index draws on Utahns' ratings of their community – the areas within 30 minutes of their home – across a series of 20 factors. The community quality of life factors covered in the survey are:

- Housing affordability
- Cost of living
- Traffic conditions
- Public transit
- Air and water quality
- Opportunity for good jobs
- Respectful communities
- Shared values
- Public school quality
- Community attractiveness
- Availability of healthcare services
- Recreational and social opportunities
- Community support
- Proximity to family
- Post-secondary education opportunities
- Community safety
- Availability of good stores
- Parks and recreation spaces
- Natural surroundings
- Availability of spiritual or religious activities or groups

2026 Results

The Utah Community Quality of Life Index measured 63.2 in 2026. This result contributes to a trend of decline in Utah's Community Quality of Life Index.

Since the Utah Community Quality of Life Index's high point of 72.7 in 2013, nearly every factor has declined significantly. The largest long-term declines include housing affordability, cost of living, traffic conditions, public transit, and air and water quality. A significant short-term decline in the opportunity for good jobs also contributed to the 2026 drop.

Many Utahns frequently cite high quality of life as a reason for living in the Beehive State. The decline across many survey factors highlights opportunities for policymakers, community leaders, businesses, and other stakeholders to address areas of concern while preserving the factors Utahns continue to rate highly. Opportunities to improve Utah's community quality of life, based on survey results, include:

- Addressing housing affordability
- Reducing cost of living pressures where possible
- Increasing the availability of good jobs
- Improving air and water quality
- Building on how much Utahns support and help each other
- Investing in transportation and public transit infrastructure and programs

State and local governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and community organizations can all play roles in improving Utah's quality of life and maintaining Utah as a great place to live.

Community Quality of Life Factors

Housing affordability, the cost of living, and traffic conditions represent the three lowest-rated factors in 2026, and maintain their position at the bottom of the rankings from the 2022 survey.

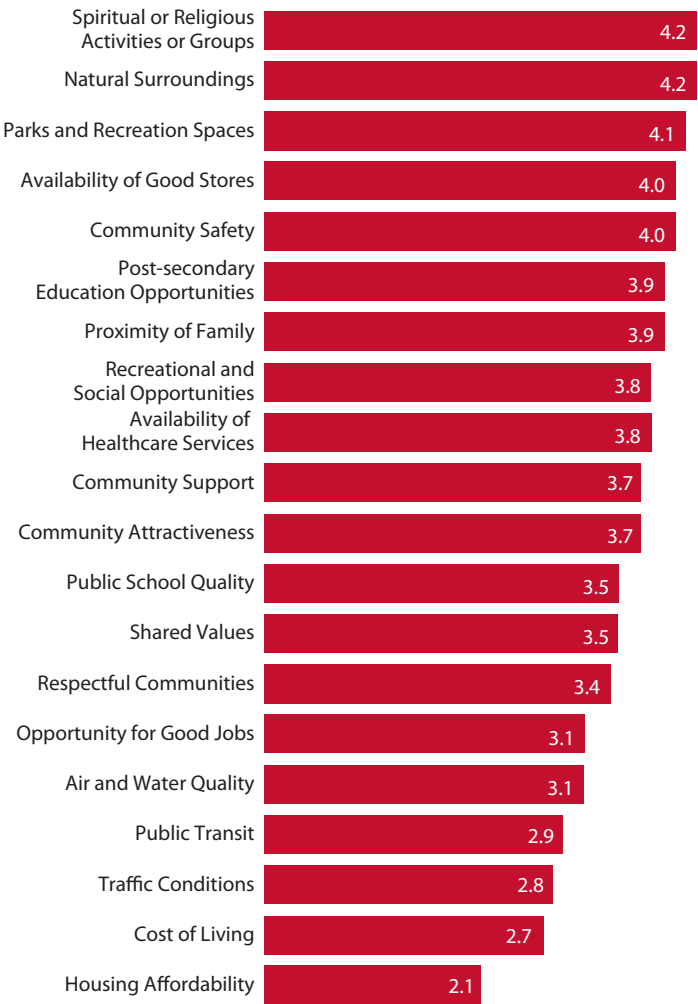
Meanwhile, the availability of spiritual or religious activities or groups, the attractiveness of a community's natural surroundings, and the availability of good parks, green spaces, or places for recreation represent the three strongest-performing factors and maintain their positions at the top of the rankings from the 2022 survey (Figure 2).

Quality of Life Trends

From 2013 to 2026, the individual ratings for many community quality of life factors declined significantly. The five largest decreases in performance ratings, listed from largest to smallest, are:

- Housing affordability
- Cost of living
- Traffic conditions
- Public transit
- Air and water quality

Figure 2: Community Quality of Life Factors Ranked by Performance, 2026



Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, Utah Chamber, and Utah Foundation

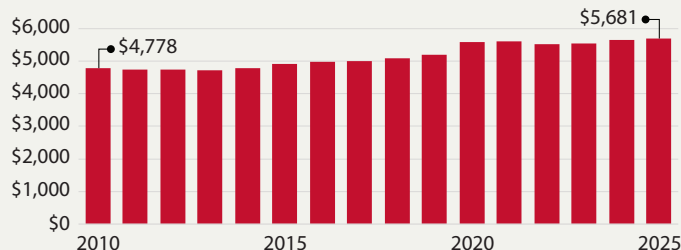
Many factors in the Index saw significant decreases in the late 2010s and have changed little since the initial major declines. However, two factors, parks and recreation spaces and community safety, continue to receive similar performance ratings over time, receiving individual ratings of 4.3 and 4.0 in 2011 and 4.1 and 4.0 in 2026, respectively.

The majority of factors in the Index changed little from 2022 to 2026. Eight factors saw a minor increase, nine saw a minor decrease, two saw essentially no change, and one, the opportunity for good jobs, saw a significant decrease. The drop in individual performance from 3.5 in 2022 to 3.1 in 2026 for the opportunity for good jobs represents a 10% decrease and alone accounts for a half-point decrease in Utah's Community Quality of Life Index. No other factor changed significantly from 2022 to 2026. Minor increases and decreases among the remaining factors largely offset one another, underscoring the relative stagnation in Utahns' perceptions of community quality of life.

Spotlight: Opportunities for Good Jobs

Utahns' ratings of opportunities for good jobs declined significantly from 2022 to 2026. After adjusting for inflation, average monthly wage growth flatlined to 0.6% from \$5,646 in 2024 to \$5,681 in 2025 (Figure 3), potentially contributing to the lower rating of the opportunity for good jobs.² Among other benefits, workers continue to view pay as an important predictor of job quality, potentially influencing decisions to seek opportunities for job change and advancement.³ Beyond evaluating future jobs, slow wage growth can also impact workers' purchasing power, potentially affect their perceptions of their current jobs, and contribute to broader economic concerns.⁴

Figure 3: Real Average Annual Monthly Nonfarm Wage, Utah, 2010–2025

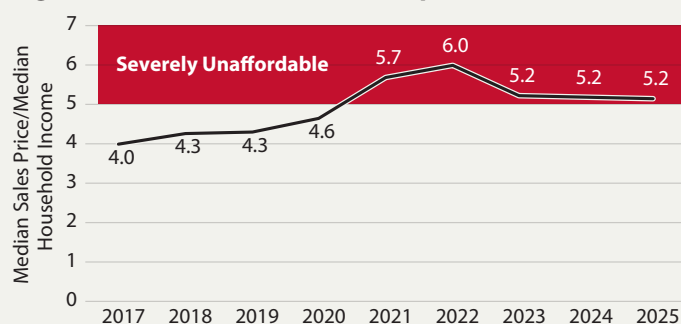


Note: Dollars adjusted for inflation to the most recent year of available data using the Consumer Price Index from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services

Spotlight: Housing Affordability

Higher home prices can reduce quality of life for prospective buyers by making homeownership less affordable, even as rising values increase wealth for existing homeowners. At the beginning of 2026, the median sales price of a single-family home in Utah ranked among the ten most expensive in the country at \$544,000.⁵ According to Utah's median multiple, home prices in Utah fall within the severely unaffordable range (Figure 4).⁶ While rent affordability improved, a growing number of renter households remain priced out of a median-priced home, with 91% of renters priced out in 2026, up from 59% in 2015.⁷ Ongoing housing affordability challenges threaten Utahns' quality of life and, if not addressed, may worsen as the population grows.

Figure 4: Home Price Median Multiple, Utah, 2017–2025

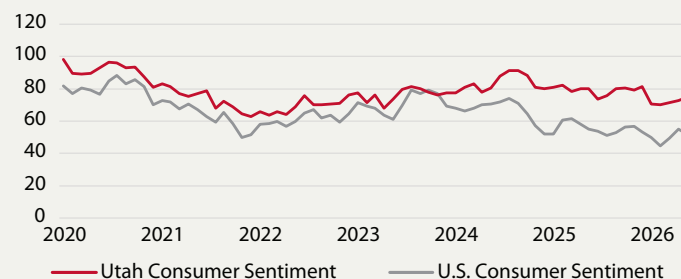


Note: Ratio of 5 to 4 is considered seriously unaffordable, 4 to 3 moderately unaffordable, and 3 and below affordable.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

Spotlight: Cost of Living

Inflation, or the growth in the general price level of goods and services, remains stubbornly elevated across the nation. In August 2026, the U.S. Consumer Price Index increased 3.4% from a year earlier.⁸ In the second quarter of 2026, the cost of living index for Salt Lake City equaled 101.4, meaning on average, goods cost 1.4% more in the Salt Lake City area than in the rest of the nation.⁹ Consumer sentiment in Utah hit a multi-year low in early 2026, potentially representing general unease with the state of the economy (Figure 5).¹⁰ Economic unease can affect life quality as rising prices strain household budgets and lead Utahns to adjust their spending and work habits.

Figure 5: U.S. and Utah Consumer Sentiment Index, 2020–August 2026



Source: University of Michigan Surveys of Consumers and Zions Bank Consumer Sentiment Survey

Demographic Trends

Various demographic characteristics can affect an individual's community quality of life rating. Among the various demographic characteristics included in the survey, religion and income level show the most meaningful link to overall community quality of life ratings.

On average, actively religious Utahns report significantly higher quality of life ratings across 15 of the 20 factors measured in the survey. The Utah Community Quality of Life Index score of actively religious Utahns sits eight points higher, at 69, than their non-active or non-religious counterparts score of 61.

Additionally, Utahns who earn \$79,000 or more saw an Index score of 66, four points higher than their counterparts Index score of 62.

Additionally, perspectives on community quality of life differ between urban and rural communities. Utahns in more rural counties rated air and water quality, traffic conditions, shared values, and natural surroundings higher than Utahns in more urban counties. Meanwhile, Utahns in more urban counties rated the availability of good stores, public transit, post-secondary education opportunities, the opportunity for good jobs, and the availability of healthcare services higher than Utahns in more rural counties. However, when accounting for the other factors, no notable difference existed between rural and urban residents in the overall Index.

Quality of Life Factor Importance

In addition to measuring the performance of each community quality of life factor (summarized by the Utah Community Quality of Life Index), survey data help calculate the importance of each factor. In 2026, the most important factors in determining an individual's overall community quality of life included community support, community attractiveness, and cost of living. This continues the trend, begun in 2018, of community support ranking as the most important factor in an individual's community quality of life. The analysis indicates that community support, though not among the highest-rated factors, has the strongest effect on an individual's overall perception of community quality of life.

Meanwhile, the three least important factors were public transit, traffic conditions, and proximity to family. Since 2018, public transit and traffic conditions have continued to rank as the least important factors, meaning that even though they rank in the lower quintile in performance, they affect an individual's community quality of life less than other factors.

Endnotes

1. Find the full Utah Community Quality of Life report, produced in partnership by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, Utah Chamber, and Utah Foundation, at <https://gardner.utah.edu/public-policy/utahs-quality-of-life/>.
2. Utah Department of Workforce Services and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/data/library/wages/annualprofilewages.html>)
3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2026/article/what-makes-a-job-better-survey-evidence-from-job-changers.htm>)
4. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/cpi/factsheets/income.htm>)
5. National Association of Realtors (<https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/StateOfState-Sep2026-Revised.pdf> - Figure 2)
6. Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute (<https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/StateOfState-Sep2026-Revised.pdf> - Figure 17)
7. Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute (<https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/StateOfState-Sep2026-Revised.pdf> - Figure 28)
8. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cpi.pdf>)
9. The Council for Community and Economic Research Cost of Living Index (data published by Utah Department of Workforce Services <https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/data/library/wages/costofliving.html>)
10. Zions Bank Consumer Sentiment Survey (<https://gardner.utah.edu/zions-bank-consumer-sentiment-survey/>)