

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## Environmental activists, community members join city officials in protest of bill that aims to convert northwest Salt Lake City into an international trade hub



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Environmental activists and community members on Sunday joined the ranks of Salt Lake City officials speaking out against a bill that aims to create a self-governing international trade hub in the city's northwest quadrant.

The National Audubon Society, Westpointe Community Council and Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment, among other groups, gathered at the state Capitol to protest Senate Bill 234, which many said was being pushed through the Legislature without adequate community input.

Sen. Jerry Stevenson, R-Layton, on Tuesday introduced the bill, which proposes the creation of an Inland Port Authority that would develop a trade zone in northwest Salt Lake City where goods could circumvent coastal ports of entry to be received and

processed. Lawmakers have until Thursday, when the session ends, to consider the legislation.

The bill's quick turnaround concerned many who spoke at Sunday's news conference, including Westpointe Community Council Chairwoman Dorothy Owen.

"I don't have the answer, but it doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out that they're rushing this through because they don't want to answer a lot of questions," Owen said.

Salt Lake City officials — including Mayor Jackie Biskupski and Councilwoman Erin Mendenhall — also recently denounced the bill, saying it threatens the city's control of zoning and taxes in the roughly 38 square mile area. The proposed hub is about one-third the size of the city and runs along the city's north and western borders, south to 2100 South and east to Interstate 215, minus Salt Lake City International Airport.

The area includes neighborhoods and will soon house the new state prison and a new Salt Lake Community College campus.

While some at the conference spoke out against the possible environmental implications of developing the land, which hosts migratory birds and other wildlife, Owen said her main concern is the precedent the bill would set, where the state could take control of a city's land and override established zoning and tax rules.

"It may be us this time, but it could be St. George the next time, or Vernal, or who knows where," she said.

Activist and businessman Terry Marasco, who also attended the Sunday event, told The Salt Lake Tribune that the tension between community members and city and state government officials was bad for business.

Since bringing in business is the goal of the hub, Marasco said fighting about it is counterintuitive.

He and others offered a solution: Table the bill for now and bring all the stakeholders together to hash out a deal.

Stevenson, the bill's sponsor, wasn't immediately available for comment Sunday evening. But he recently said he would work with city officials to address their concerns as the bill progresses through the Legislature.

House Speaker Greg Hughes has said the vision for the inland port is too large for Salt Lake City to oversee itself, which is why the bill creates a port authority to govern the project.

Prior to the Senate bill, city officials had been preparing their own plans to develop an inland trading hub to take advantage of the unused land in the area and tap it for financial gain. Plans to develop the area into an inland port have existed for decades.

SB234 passed unanimously out of its Senate committee Friday. It will next be heard in front of the full Senate.



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