



A New Mural for *Out of the Blue*

Community Insights Report

With responses from over 1,700 individuals, participants shared insights about what makes *Out of the Blue*—affectionately known as “The Whale”—and the surrounding neighborhood special. Applying artists are invited to review this information to incorporate community values and insights into their proposals.

Background

[*Out of the Blue*](#), affectionately known as “The Whale,” has become a playful and meaningful landmark that brings people together and adds character to the 9th & 9th neighborhood. Created by artist Stephen Kesler and installed in 2022, the sculpture sits at the 900 South 1100 East roundabout and currently features [*Point of Reference*](#), a mural by local artist Michael Murdock.

To keep the sculpture fresh and connected to the neighborhood, the Salt Lake City Arts Council commissions a new mural every few years. The Public Art Program is issuing a Call for Artists, in the form of a Request for Qualifications, inviting Salt Lake County-based artists to submit their applications. Finalists will be selected to develop design proposals, and one artist will be chosen to paint the next mural. This rotating mural program is designed to bring in new stories, styles, and perspectives, allowing the piece to continue evolving alongside the neighborhood.

To help artists gain a better understanding of the people who spend time around Out of the Blue and how the sculpture is experienced today, the Public Art Program launched a survey inviting residents and visitors to share their thoughts about the 9th & 9th neighborhood, the city, and the sculpture itself. This feedback will help guide future mural decisions and make sure Out of the Blue continues to reflect the spirit, creativity, and personality that people love so much.

Community Insights

Methods

Survey outreach included ads on the City Cast Salt Lake podcast and mentions in their Hey Salt Lake newsletter. We also put up lawn signs with QR codes around the 9th & 9th area and shared stickers and posters with nearby businesses. In addition, the survey was widely promoted on the Public Art Program's and Salt Lake City Arts Council's social media channels.

Results

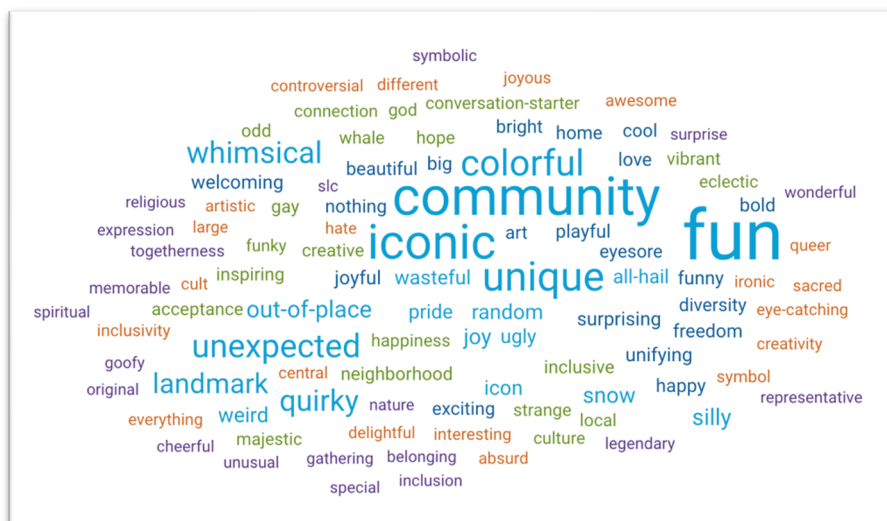
The survey ran from August 4 to September 15, 2025, and received 1,709 responses from people across all seven Salt Lake City Council districts. Throughout the survey analysis period, responses were grouped according to the respondents' connection to Salt Lake City, including residents of the 9th and 9th neighborhoods, Salt Lake City residents, and non-city residents. Responses from all groups were closely aligned with the overall findings. The summaries below provide a combined overview of the results, as all three groups responded similarly.

In 1-3 words, what does “The Whale” mean to you?

People often describe “The Whale” as fun, iconic, and unique. Many see it as a playful and unexpected landmark, adding personality to the city and bringing people together.

Some people also said *Out of the Blue* feels like a community symbol, something locals share, talk about, and feel connected to. A few mentioned that it represents pride, creativity, and acceptance.

Overall, *Out of the Blue* comes across as a beloved and distinctive part of the community that sparks joy and conversation.



10 Most Common Words

1. Fun
2. Community
3. Iconic
4. Unique
5. Colorful
6. Unexpected
7. Whimsical
8. Quirky
9. Landmark
10. Out of Place

What is “Out of the Blue” about Salt Lake City?

People shared a wide range of answers, from single words to full stories. Responses highlighted Salt Lake City as a place that defies expectations while being home to diverse and accepting communities.

“It’s about finding the unexpected, but in the most familiar and welcoming way possible.”

-9th & 9th Resident

- **Access to Nature:** Many respondents highlighted the rarity of having such a vibrant urban center tucked between the Wasatch Mountains and the Great Salt Lake.
- **Progressive Energy:** Other themes include the City’s growth and progressive energy, while still recognizing its history and long-standing roots.
- **Surprising Qualities:** Salt Lake City consistently surprises both visitors and locals with its vibrant arts scene, urban amenities, and overall openness.

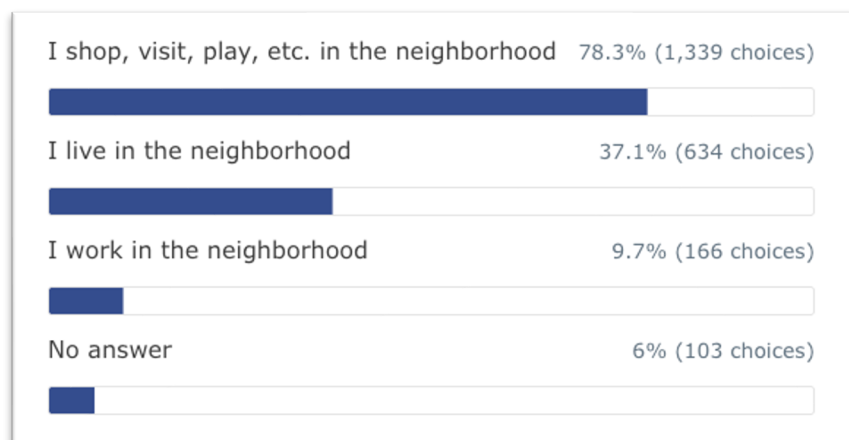
What makes 9th & 9th unique?

Overall, people view 9th & 9th as a walkable, creative, and welcoming neighborhood with strong community energy, unique local businesses, and memorable features, such as the *Out of the Blue* sculpture. There is nostalgia for its past and concern about losing its distinctiveness, but overall, it remains a cherished, lively, and welcoming part of Salt Lake City.

- **Walkability and Local Businesses:** People love 9th & 9th, because it’s one of the few places in Salt Lake City where you can easily walk, bike, and enjoy lots of unique, locally owned shops and restaurants.
- **Community, Inclusion, and Diversity:** Many describe 9th & 9th as a warm, inclusive neighborhood with a quirky, creative vibe that feels welcoming to everyone, especially LGBTQ+ residents and people who don’t fit the mainstream.
- **The Whale:** The sculpture is viewed as a fun and memorable symbol of the neighborhood that many people adore, although a subgroup feels it doesn’t match the area’s older character.
- **History and Change:** People discussed the area’s countercultural roots and how it has evolved over time, with some yearning for the old, more affordable feel. Others appreciated its continued growth and vibrancy.
- **Critiques and Concerns:** Some shared worries about gentrification, rising costs, and the area feeling less unique or inclusive, along with practical concerns like parking and affordability.

Demographics

Respondents indicated their connection to the 9th & 9th community, selecting one or more of the following options:



Most people who answered this question said they spend time in 9th & 9th to shop, visit, or hang out, and a smaller share said they live or work in the neighborhood. We used this information to review responses from people who live in the area, and their answers were very similar to the overall group, with no significant differences.

Key Considerations

Overall, responses revealed that *Out of the Blue* is widely celebrated as a symbol of fun, quirkiness, and community. *Out of the Blue* is seen as playful, whimsical, and iconic, sparking pride and conversation while embodying the city's countercultural spirit, though a few respondents called it "ugly" or "garish."

Salt Lake City itself is perceived as unexpectedly diverse, progressive, and vibrant, boasting a creative and welcoming community, a strong arts scene, and a close connection to nature. However, respondents also noted ongoing challenges, including homelessness, environmental concerns, and tensions surrounding religious influence.

9th & 9th is valued for its walkability, eclectic local businesses, inclusive atmosphere, and role as a lively gathering space; however, some have expressed concerns about upscale development, rising costs, loss of local character, and commercialization.

While the overall sentiment emphasizes pride in these places, the responses also reflect awareness of the social, cultural, and economic pressures they face. Despite these challenges, respondents clearly value these places for how they bring people together through landmarks, local businesses, events, and spaces where the community can connect.