Speculation about the future of the suburban American dream has intensified as economic conditions, energy concerns, and climate change make the low-density landscape of single-family homes increasingly unviable. There has been growing literature on architecture, planning, and policy efforts to reimagine automobile suburbs for a more sustainable future through introducing urban densities, green infrastructure, and transit-oriented development to suburban areas accustomed to the converse. Yet there has been little ethnographic research that sheds light on generative frictions accompanying the incremental transformation of spatial habits, aesthetic conventions, and sedimented anxieties. This talk draws on four summers of fieldwork in an unlikely site for the making of environmental subjects—a massive master-planned community in Utah’s Salt Lake Valley spearheaded by a global mining conglomerate on remediated mining land—and asks how we might conceptualize assemblages of environmental subject-making at the intersection of sustainable urbanism, neoliberal governance, corporate social responsibility, religious values, and social justice concerns.

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