

GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP SUMMARY November 13, 2023

Meeting Convened: 4:02 p.m. The meeting was held in person at the Fire Department Training Room, 625 Ute Avenue, and live streamed via GoToWebinar.

City Councilmembers Present: Councilmembers Scott Beilfuss, Cody Kennedy, Jason Nguyen, Randall Reitz, Dennis Simpson and Mayor Anna Stout. Mayor Pro Tem Abe Herman was absent.

Staff present: City Manager Greg Caton, City Attorney John Shaver, Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland, Director of Community Development Tamra Allen, Finance Director Emeritus Jodi Welch, Finance Director Jennifer Tomaszewski, Public Works Director Trent Prall, Fire Chief Ken Watkins, Sustainability Coordinator Jennifer Nitzky, Police Chief Matt Smith, City Clerk Amy Phillips, and Deputy City Clerk Selestina Sandoval.

1. Discussion Topics

a. Sustainability and Adaptation Plan

Sustainability Coordinator Jennifer Nitzky, and Consultants Anna Laybourn and Allison Bourquin presented an update on the plan process, key themes and an overview of the first project deliverable.

The Sustainability and Adaptation Plan for the City of Grand Junction provides long-range goals to guide the community, partners, and the City towards more sustainable practices and policies. This Plan complements the *One Grand Junction Comprehensive Plan* to address social, environmental, and economic implications and opportunities for sustainability and adaptation in the region to ensure a healthy future for all community members. Staff have been working with Consultants from Design Workshop and Spirit Environmental since May 2023 on a four-phase planning process. Two of these phases, "Understanding" and "Initiate and Describe" have been completed, culminating in the *Current Conditions and Community Engagement Summary* document provided in the agenda packet. The document provides a snapshot of baseline assessment research and community outreach completed thus far. The document includes community priorities (key themes) and a baseline of current challenges, opportunities, and ongoing efforts.

Staff and consultants engaged with the community to learn about the current conditions and determine key themes of the plan. Between July and September, residents provided foundational information and guidance on the planning process. These included focus group interviews; convening and listening to the steering committee; hosting a questionnaire on EngageGJ, and hosting pop-up booths at farmer's markets, Mesa County Libraries, and local schools/school programs in partnership with Eureka! Science Museum.

The five key themes that have emerged from this collection of community input include:

1. Climate Resilience
2. Waste Management
3. Energy Stewardship
4. Water Conservation
5. Built Environment

With the identification of the key themes, the next phase "Evaluate and Target" will focus on the development of goals and strategies. A technical working group will convene to help determine science-based targets and feasible, rooted-in-data strategies to achieve those targets with key performance indicators to track progress. Strategies will be cross-referenced by the steering committee and the public through an iterative process before a draft plan will be placed before Council in the final phase.

Discussion ensued regarding concerns of a perceived low community engagement turnout. The Consultants explained the ongoing efforts, including focus groups and outreach to diverse community members.

Concerns were raised about affordable housing and regulatory impacts on the working class. Questions regarding prioritization of the focus groups' input surfaced, advancing a request for more Council influence. It was suggested that major focus be on transportation and emissions.

In response to concerns raised, the Mayor emphasizes the importance of a sustainability plan, urging a comprehensive exploration of options and priorities for the City.

Discussion concluded with next steps, and a focus on developing goals, strategies, and key performance indicators (KPIs) under each theme. The Consultants stressed ongoing community input and the iterative nature of the plan and briefly delved into energy usage data, explaining the increase in natural gas and decrease in electricity usage.

On Thursday, November 16, the project team will host an open house to reveal the key themes of the plan, allow the public to provide input on the City's role in each of these areas, and provide education to encourage behavioral changes.

b. Zoning and Development Code

Director of Community Development Tamra Allen and Consultant Elizabeth Garvin gave an overview of the Zoning and Development Code Update process.

Ms. Allen stated that a final draft of the Code has been completed and adoption hearings are scheduled for the Planning Commission on November 14, 2023 and City Council on December 20, 2023. She noted that a final draft code titled the "Adoption Draft" is available on EngageGJ, along with all associated materials for the Planning Commission public hearing. In addition to the project documents, the EngageGJ site has a Zone District Identification Tool allowing users to enter an address and see how a property will transition zone districts under the proposed Update.

In the final workshops leading to the hearings, the Planning Commission reviewed several areas of the proposed Code Update in which staff has identified that the revisions do not implement or could go further to align with the principles, goals, and strategies of the Comprehensive Plan. These items include:

1. Drive-Through Regulations in the 24 Road Corridor.
2. Open Space Dedication Procedures.
3. Transitional Housing.

4. Parking.
5. Utility Undergrounding.

Discussion focused on the key areas of focus for the Update including alignment with the Comprehensive Plan, making it more concise, and addressing barriers to affordable housing. The Consultants emphasized tying the Code back to community feedback and incorporating best practices.

The project timeline, initially set for completion in the summer of 2023, experienced a delay, with the first draft remanded back to the Planning Commission after a March hearing. The City actively worked on refining the Code based on the feedback received, recognizing the role of the Planning Commission, which is appointed by the City Council.

The presentation on the Zoning and Development Code Update covered the project schedule, issues identified by the Development Code Committee, survey results on short-term costs of Code changes, and categories of issues related to implementing the One Grand Junction Plan. The presenters outlined ongoing discussions and unresolved issues, including determinations for open space dedication and drive-thrus in the 24 Road corridor overlay. They stated that the Draft Code reflects the Code Committee's recommendations, and any changes would be modifications to that proposed language.

Additional issues discussed included permitting transitional housing, allowing more surface parking, and the utility undergrounding issue. The Code Committee expresses support for the proposed Draft Code to move forward without amendments.

Council members appreciated the thorough process and discussed the different perspectives presented. Complex issues related to drive-thrus, open space dedication, surface parking downtown, and utility undergrounding require careful consideration. The Code Committee's desire to explore options related to drive-thrus and open space dedication is acknowledged, with ongoing discussions planned and a commitment to monitor the committee's perspectives on these matters.

Transitional housing is identified as a crucial topic requiring further exploration, particularly in the context of the housing needs assessment and the community's requirements. Transitional housing is described as a temporary solution aiding individuals in transitioning from homelessness to more permanent housing options, such as tiny homes or shelters.

Council expressed commitment to continue discussing these matters in future workshops, considering feedback from the Code Committee and other stakeholders. The objective is to ensure a comprehensive and well-informed decision-making process.

c. Unhoused Needs Assessment

Tamra Allen, Community Development Director, Ashley Chambers, Housing Manager, and Consultants Brandon Green, Erika Berglund, and Suzanna Powell gave an overview of the Assessment and process.

They reported that in December 2022, the City's Housing Division developed a survey to hear directly from People Experiencing Houselessness (PEH), with the goal of pinpointing gateways of entry into, and barriers against exiting out of, houselessness in Grand Junction. The design of the survey was informed by a "systems-thinking" approach to solving houselessness, which views houselessness as a solvable problem. The survey report provided a snapshot of the characteristics and experiences of PEH. At the same time, the City identified that there was a need to have a more robust evaluation of houselessness in the Grand Junction area as well as a collaborative strategy to address the growing unhoused and housing-insecure population in the community.

City Manager Caton noted that the assessment and strategy are being developed in close collaboration with the Mesa County Behavioral Health Team staff, as well as the Grand Junction Housing Authority. In addition to City funding, he reported a funding partnership was formed through Mesa County Multi-Agency Collaboration (MAC) Behavioral Health Team, Grand Junction Housing Authority, Rocky Mountain Health Foundation, and the Western Colorado Community Foundation, as well as a grant received by the City from the Department of Local Affairs.

In June 2023, the City and its partners selected JG Research and Evaluation, LLC (JG) and project partner OMNI Institute as the project consultants. Phase One (Needs Assessment - or UNHA) included aggregation of demographic data, special population identification and needs assessment, and evaluation of current and past economic conditions utilizing various governmental and local data sources. Additionally, phase one qualitative data included in-person interviews with PEH, local service providers, businesses, and community leaders. A guided conversation with 40 service providers to address and identify existing services, current gaps in services and housing, and barriers to accessing services was also held. From early July to early August, an online community survey on the unhoused was completed with 677 unduplicated results. Originally, the assessment portion was set to be completed in mid-September; however, additional time was needed to aggregate data due to the significant community response in both the community survey, interviews, and the volume of data from local and government agencies.

Phase 2 (Strategy) development will kick off the week of November 13. JG, in partnership with The OMNI Institute, will host several focus groups to discuss the reported findings of the UNHA data and begin strategic planning. This will include feedback sessions with concerned citizens, first responders, local service providers, business leaders, the faith community, and those with lived experience. The Unhoused Strategic Plan (Phase 2) will include researched best practices, tools, and strategies for meeting the assessed needs of the unhoused community, provide recommendations for additional services, and scalable strategies, and provide numerical targets for supply by housing or shelter type and give some potential opportunities for future funding sources.

The presentation briefly touches on interactions with first responders, specifically the Grand Junction Police Department, and highlights data on encounters, gender distribution, substance use, and incident types. Overall, the presentation aims to offer a comprehensive view of the issue by incorporating data from various sources.

Continuing, the focus shifted to the housing infrastructure and supportive services available in Grand Junction. The housing continuum, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and subsidized affordable housing, is explained, with definitions for each housing type provided. The importance of each component within the continuum is emphasized to address the non-linear trajectory of individuals experiencing homelessness.

The presentation delved into the geographic distribution of the risk of becoming unhoused, identifying areas with the highest relative risk. Factors like the rent-to-income ratio are considered to understand housing affordability, with data presented on changes in this ratio from 2016 to 2021.

A discussion follows on the percentage of occupations with a median rent-to-income ratio exceeding 30%, indicating potential challenges in housing affordability. The analysis suggests that wages have not increased at a similar rate to jobs in sectors at risk, contributing to the housing crisis.

The presentation concludes with a transition to housing infrastructure, discussing the utilization and capacity of emergency shelters, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing.

Differences in available beds or units across these housing types are highlighted, along with the role of various entities in providing different housing options.

The presentation identifies supportive services available for individuals' experiencing homelessness, including outreach, case management, and housing navigation. The variety of services aims to address the diverse needs of this population, highlighting collaborative efforts across multiple entities in Grand Junction.

The presentation explores barriers and challenges faced by individuals accessing services, categorizing them into education, resource, and process challenges. Education challenges include stigma and a lack of awareness, while resource challenges involve limited funding and staff.

Identified gaps in the system of care were discussed, with transitional housing recognized as a high-priority need. Permanent supportive housing is highlighted for individuals with chronic physical or mental health conditions, and there's a consistent call for additional subsidized affordable housing.

The concept of sanctuary camping, providing legal spaces for camping, was discussed as a potential solution, particularly among those currently unsheltered. The presentation estimated the potential demand for different housing types based on the unhoused population, emphasizing the inadequacy of current capacity within temporary emergency shelters.

The issue of mental health services as a high priority need for the chronically unhoused population was discussed acknowledging the prevalence of mental health issues among individuals experiencing homelessness.

Overall, the presentation provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, gaps, and potential solutions in addressing homelessness in the Grand Junction area, drawing on input from key informants, experts, and community members.

Concluding discussion, the topic of prevention and diversion services was highlighted, emphasizing the cost-effectiveness of preventing homelessness compared to addressing it once it occurs. Rental assistance programs were discussed as a means of preventing homelessness, with cost estimates provided for individuals at risk of homelessness due to being doubled up or living below the poverty level.

Key takeaways included economic challenges, estimated size of the homeless population, the need for various housing resources, and the importance of supportive services. The next steps are outlined, including the development of a strategy document and continued engagement with the community to ensure support for proposed strategies.

Efforts to address immediate challenges, such as winter-related issues for vulnerable populations, were discussed, including expanding emergency shelter options and engaging faith communities. Ongoing initiatives, such as shelter expansion and long-term leasing of motels, were mentioned, along with discussions around securing funds for outreach, emergency shelter, and support for vulnerable populations during the winter.

Council members express gratitude for the information provided in the report, highlighting the importance of translating data into actionable strategies for the community.

2. City Council Communication

None

3. Next Workshop Topics

City Manager Caton reported the items for the December 4, 2023, Workshop will be:

- a. Zoning and Development Code

Adjournment

There being no further business, the Workshop adjourned at 8:15 p.m.