

GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP SUMMARY

November 18, 2024

Meeting Convened: 5:30 p.m. The meeting was in-person at the Fire Department Training Room, 625 Ute Avenue, and live-streamed via GoTo Webinar.

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

Staff present: Interim City Manager Andrea Phillips, City Attorney John Shaver, Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland, Interim Finance Director Jodi Welch, Community Development Director Tamra Allen, Utilities Director Randi Kim, Transportation and Engineering Director Trent Prall, Housing Manager Ashley Chambers, Housing Specialist Sherry Price, Deputy City Clerk Misty Williams, and City Clerk Selestina Sandoval.

1. Discussion Topics

a. Council Legislative Agenda/Policy

Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland presented a comprehensive overview of the City's legislative engagement process.

Key points included:

- Current Practices:
 - Legislative tracking, advocacy via Colorado Municipal League (CML), providing feedback to legislators, drafting letters of support or concern, and giving testimony at the state capitol.
- Proposed Policy Goals:
 - Clarify the roles of staff and council in legislative matters.
 - Ensure timely communication of legislative actions to the council.
 - Establish a structured process for city-initiated legislation.
 - Formalize an annual review and adoption of the legislative agenda.
- Draft Agenda: The staff proposed adopting the CML's legislative policy statement as the foundation and incorporating local priorities like housing strategies.
- Council Discussion:
 - Councilmembers debated scenarios of potential misalignment with CML's positions. They emphasized the need for flexibility, with Council deciding deviations on a case-by-case basis. Discussions also highlighted the importance of clear procedures when Councilmembers speak publicly on legislative matters, ensuring alignment with the City's official stance.

b. Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Action Plan Update

Transportation Planner Rachel Peterson and Engineering and Transportation Director Trent Prall shared findings from the SS4A Safety Study, which identified critical crash areas and outlined safety goals.

Key points included:

- **Crash Data:**
 - Grand Junction had 58 fatalities and 305 serious injuries between 2016-2022.
 - Mesa County's traffic death rate is 17.6 per capita, significantly higher than Colorado's average of 13.1.
 - Data showed urban intersections and corridors (e.g., state highways) as hotspots.
- **Community Feedback:**
 - Concerns included speeding, red-light violations, and inadequate pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure.
 - Public input shaped a focus on education, enforcement, and high-impact engineering solutions.
- **Four Focus Areas:**
 - **Building Safe Streets:** Address high-risk zones with countermeasures like roundabouts and signal improvements.
 - **Protecting Vulnerable Road Users:** Enhance education and infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists.
 - **Addressing Dangerous Behaviors:** Focus on behavioral issues like speeding and red-light running through education and enforcement.
 - **Creating a Culture of Safety:** Establishing collaborative efforts among agencies, law enforcement, schools, and nonprofits.
- **Additional Discussion:**
 - Council raised concerns about balancing enforcement with engineering solutions and questioned the plan's emphasis on multimodal infrastructure over vehicular safety.
 - Challenges in addressing speeding and enforcement limitations due to staffing.
 - Support for traffic calming measures and leveraging new tools like crash dashboards.
 - Potential legislative changes to reduce speed limits in targeted areas.

c. Possible Amendment of the Grand Junction Sales Tax Code

Interim Finance Director Jodi Welch gave an overview and recommendations:

Key points included:

- Introduced as a pilot program, the proposal sought a two-year exemption from city sales tax for 501(c)(3) used merchandise retailers to encourage reuse and support lower-income shoppers. Five eligible retailers were identified, including Salvation Army and Goodwill.
- Staff expressed concerns about:
 - **Administrative Challenges:** Limited enforcement mechanisms for reporting and lack of licensing requirements for exempted retailers.
 - **Equity Issues:** Potential unfair advantages for certain nonprofits over for-profit or other nonprofit businesses.
 - **Budget Impacts:** Estimated revenue loss of \$350,000 to \$375,000 annually, not accounted for in the 2025 budget.
 - **Uncertain Effectiveness:** Difficulty in tying the tax exemption directly to measurable behavior changes.
- **Council Discussion:**

- Supportive Arguments: Advocates emphasized the environmental benefits (reducing landfill waste), financial relief for vulnerable populations, and potential for Grand Junction to lead statewide efforts for a circular economy.
- Concerns Raised: Some councilmembers highlighted competing priorities, especially the need for resources for housing and public safety. Questions were raised about the lack of staff support and the long-term viability of the program.
- After deliberation, the council voted 5-2 against directing staff to draft an ordinance for the proposal.

2. Council Communication

Budget Discussion:

Councilmembers expressed concerns over the five-year capital improvement plan's lack of balance. A workshop was proposed post-2025 budget adoption to address long-term budget planning.

Fourth and Fifth Streets Concerns:

Mounting community pushback regarding the pilot traffic-calming measures was discussed. Issues included perceived safety risks, economic impacts on businesses, and frustration from drivers. Staff was urged to prioritize public feedback and provide updates on project data.

Winter Shelter Planning:

Council requested updates on winter shelter initiatives for the unhoused population. Staff noted zoning approvals and ongoing collaboration with nonprofits.

3. Next Workshop Topics

Mayor Herman outlined future workshop items.

4. Other Business

There was none.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Workshop adjourned at 7:37 p.m.