

GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP SUMMARY JULY 17, 2023

Meeting Convened: 5:30 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, Mayor Pro Tem Abe Herman, and Mayor Anna Stout.

Staff present: City Manager Greg Caton, City Attorney John Shaver, Director of Public Works Trent Prall, Director of Community Development Tamra Allen, Finance Director Jodi Welch, Fire Chief Ken Watkins, Deputy Fire Chiefs Chris Angermuller and Gus Hendricks, Director of Information Technology Paul Schultz, Sustainability Coordinator Jenny Nitzky, Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland, City Clerk Amy Phillips, and Deputy Clerk Selestina Sandoval

The Mayor asked for approval from Council to amend the agenda regarding item **d. Update on Building Services Contract** to be first on discussion topics and so that representatives from the County can leave after the item is completed. Council agreed.

1. Discussion Topics

d. Update on Building Services Contract

The City of Grand Junction contracts building services with Mesa County. This contract arrangement has been in place for over twenty years. Mesa County provides these services to all other jurisdictions in Mesa County except for the City of Fruita, which ended its contract with Mesa County in 2023. Under the current contract, Mesa County retains 100 percent of all fees as compensation for services rendered. County Staff provided an update on the agreement and services the Building Department provides the City. The contract expires on September 9, 2023.

Under the contract, Mesa County enforces adopted building, electrical and plumbing codes, and contractor licensing on behalf of the City.

In 2022, 53.11 percent of the value of all permits in Mesa County were attributable to permits issued in incorporated Grand Junction, 37.34 percent were attributable to permits issued in unincorporated Mesa County, and the remaining 9.55 percent of the value was attributable to other jurisdictions.

Mesa County, as the contractor, is provided the ability to set the current standard fee schedule and may amend the fee schedule at their sole discretion. Mesa County adopted a revised fee schedule for its building permits that became effective July 1, 2017, and the City subsequently adopted this new fee schedule to align with the county's fee schedule pursuant to Resolution 47-17. In 2022, the fee structure and activity generated \$2,614,416 in revenue with expenses of \$2,320,096 for the building department. The county has implemented a tracking system that enables them to deliver information regarding the percentage of staff time assigned to City projects.

The County Building Department is comprised of 22 full-time staff, including one Chief Building official, one operations manager, four plan examiners, six building inspectors, four electrical inspectors, four permit technicians, one inspection manager, and one support services manager. Together they currently support 180 average daily inspections and conducted over 43,000 inspections and issued 7,193 permits in 2022. Inspectors also work with the City to inspect short-term rental for life and safety issues and will also conduct inspections of graywater systems, should these systems begin to be utilized. They have staff available 24/7 for 911 emergency response as may be needed. They maintain 16 trucks as part of their department's fleet.

Staff recommended approval to authorize the City Manager to execute a contract for professional services with Mesa County for building permitting, inspection, and contractor licensing.

Discussion ensued, resulting in agreement to extend the existing contract through the end of the year, allowing the City time to consider revisions to the proposed contract, such as the length of contract, the need for efficiency and streamlining processes, especially for larger projects, the importance of communication and collaboration with stakeholders, City interest in providing its own legal services, time to determine the costs and implications of operating independently, and consideration from County regarding possible cost sharing and loss sharing.

a. & b. City Election and Update on I-70 Interchange at 29 Road Update

Staff reported that for years, the City of Grand Junction had contracted with Mesa County Elections (MCE) to run its April elections. In 2021, after conducting the City's 2021 April Election, MCE informed the City of Grand Junction that it will no longer be able to perform this service for April elections. In 2023, the City of Grand Junction conducted its own election.

Staff met with newly elected Mesa County Clerk Bobbie Gross and her Deputy Clerk on June 23, 2023 and after a very productive meeting, Clerk Gross agreed to conduct the City of Grand Junction's April 2025 Regular Election under C.R.S. Title 1. Council was pleased to hear the good news.

Staff provided an update on the status of the I-70 Interchange at 29 Road, which was a follow-up to the May 18, 2023 Joint City/County Workshop and discuss issuance of transportation bonds as a potential funding source for this project. Issuance of bonds would require voter approval. Staff explained that an interchange at 29 Road has been identified since the 1990's in many local and regional plans to enhance local and regional connectivity, as part of a larger plan to provide connections in and around Grand Junction. The proposed interchange improvements, in coordination with other regional improvements, have been envisioned to complete the transportation loop around Grand Junction, provide critical community access, support economic opportunity, and enhance local and regional connectivity.

Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of placing various questions before City voters on the November 7, 2023 County coordinated election ballot.

Council asked staff to provide additional information for Council consideration at its July 31, 2023 workshop regarding:

- I-70 Interchange at 29 Road and Issuance of Transportation Bonds as a Potential Funding Source for the Project
- Council Salaries
- Charter Amendment to Allow the City to Lease City Property for up to 99 Years for Affordable Housing

c. EV Readiness Draft Plan

Resource Stewardship principle of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, proposed action items to improve public and environmental health include improving EV charging infrastructure, implementing policies to reduce air pollution, and educating the public about community-wide actions that can be taken to limit environmental impacts. Additionally, in the previous Council's Strategic Plan implementation matrix, one of the actions under the Quality-of-Life priority stated: "Create an EV Readiness Plan". Due to these components, staff saw the need to work with utility providers in the area to create a comprehensive community-wide EV Readiness Plan.

In January 2023, the City began working with Xcel Energy's Partners in Energy to create and implement this EV Readiness Plan over the coming years. City staff and consultants from Partners in Energy will present the draft Electric Vehicle (EV) Readiness Plan.

Grand Junction is located at the crossroads of two major regional travel corridors and is uniquely situated to benefit from the ongoing transition to electric vehicles (EVs). Nearly 10 percent of newly registered vehicles in Colorado in 2022 were EVs, making the state a top-five national leader in EV adoption, and almost a million Colorado-registered EVs are expected to be on the road by 2030. By implementing infrastructure and policies that attract EV-driving travelers and local and regional commuters, the City sees an opportunity to become a vital regional charging hub. For this reason, and due to the outcomes of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan Principle 8: Resource Stewardship, the City is now preparing an EV Readiness Plan that will ensure the City seizes this opportunity for the benefit of the entire community.

Over the past seven months, the City has been working with consultants from Partners in Energy, a free Xcel Energy consulting service, to create a plan that is inclusive, robust, and pragmatic for Grand Junction's unique community. Focus areas of the plan include incentivizing public adoption, increasing public infrastructure, and transitioning institutional fleets. With the guidance of City staff and consultants, a Council-approved steering committee referred to as the EV Action Team helped develop the goals, vision, and short and long-term strategies of the plan.

Community input was gathered through numerous avenues to provide the Plan with more direction. These included an EV and ebike event hosted by Western Colorado Alliance, an EV Ride and Drive event co-hosted by the City and Clean Energy Economy for the Region (CLEER), staff-led focus groups, an EV Plan Open House, and engagement activities hosted on the City's EngageGJ.org platform.

Staff and consultants presented the draft plan to Council. Presenters requested feedback on the specific goals and strategies outlined in the Plan before moving forward with the adoption process. The public comment period will be open from July 21 through August 7, 2023.

Council expressed enthusiasm for the Plan, and thanked staff and the consultants for their hard work. Council asked that the Plan include alternative fuels such as the City's CNG program.

e. **Grand Junction Fire Department (GJFD) and Clifton Fire Protection District (CFPD) Cooperative Services Feasibility Assessment**

Chief Watkins gave a quick overview of the assessment, reporting that GJFD and CFPD have worked together for several years to provide emergency services to overlapping geographical areas and provide mutual aid to each other as needed. The idea of creating a more cooperative arrangement has been discussed throughout the years and third-party studies have suggested that this could be an option for the agencies.

In early 2022, CFPD experienced vacancies in both their Chief and Deputy Chief Positions. The CFPD Board of Directors approached GJFD, requesting that the two agencies evaluate cooperative services and, since AP Triton was already conducting a study for GJFD, a cooperative services feasibility study was added to their scope of services at a shared cost between the agencies.

The AP Triton Cooperative Services Feasibility Study was completed in September 2022 and included generalized comparisons of both organizations. This study suggested that a cooperative agreement between the agencies may be feasible and recommended an intergovernmental cooperation agreement or a joint operating agreement, both of which would need further exploration.

Based on the information presented by AP Triton on November 14, 2022, at the City Council Workshop, the Grand Junction City Council requested that a more detailed study be conducted. In January 2023, GJFD entered into a management agreement with the CFPD to provide management oversight of their department. Through this agreement, the City provided a Deputy Fire Chief to oversee the department's day-to-day operations and perform a more detailed cooperative service feasibility assessment between the two departments.

During the previous seven months, a study was completed that looked at all aspects of CFPD and assessed the differences between the two agencies and the estimated cost of closing any gaps needed to enter into a cooperative service agreement. This assessment included members from both fire agencies and representatives from multiple City departments.

After evaluation and consideration of the information herein, the recommendation is that CFPD and GJFD not pursue cooperative services. This recommendation is based on the following analysis which was provided in the agenda documentation.

- There are significant gaps in all areas evaluated and considerable time and funding will be needed to close those gaps if the GJFD and CFPD are to operate in a cooperative arrangement.

- The agencies operate under different response models and considerable personnel and operating resources will be needed to align the response models to operate as one agency.
- The City of Grand Junction and GJFD are in a high growth period with the First Responder expansion projects. The City must prioritize the deliverables of the First Responder Tax; to efficiently and effectively open the additional fire stations to meet the current service demands.
- The assigned workload across GJFD and the City approaches or exceeds current capacities. Taking on the additional CFPD service area and the additional administrative needs are not feasible currently.
- Based on the financial analysis, the cost for CFPD to match the staffing and service level of the GJFD would create a substantial burden on the CFPD annual budget. The costs include both start-up/one-time costs and annual ongoing costs. At the required level of service, CFPD current revenues would not support the increased operational expenses and would exhaust all reserves by 2026. Sustainability would require a near term increase in the property tax mill levy, as well as a continued increase in mill levy to keep pace with increase in annual expenses moving forward.

The additional administrative burden that would be required to enter a cooperative services arrangement would be too great for the current staffing of GJFD and partner departments within the City. The energy and resources required to make a successful transition would detract from the primary objective to fulfill the promises of the First Responder Tax. These challenges include:

- Coordinating testing, transfer, and skills review for the 18 current CFPD employees and adding nine new employees in an academy to meet staffing recommendations at CFPD, while simultaneously coordinating academies for the current and immediate GJFD staffing needs would be extremely challenging.
- Adequately staffing GJFD Administration to provide administrative and logistical support in all areas, training and continuous improvement of existing programs, and fire prevention services to meet current demands, while simultaneously absorbing a significant additional workload with CFPD.

The impacts of cooperative service extend beyond GJFD within the City of Grand Junction. Finance, General Services, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legal, Parks, and City Administration would all need to contribute time and resources to make this a successful venture.

Council consensus was to support the recommendation and place this item on the August 2, 2023 City Council Agenda for final action.

2. City Council Communication

none

3. Next Workshop Topics

City Manager Caton reported the items for the July 31, 2023 Workshop will be:

- a. Purchasing Policy Update
- b. Emerson Skate Park
- c. City Election
 - I-70 Interchange at 29 Road Update
 - Council Salaries
 - Charter Amendment for Affordable Housing Leases

4. **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the Workshop adjourned at 8:30 p.m.