

GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP SUMMARY **January 8, 2024**

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, Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland, Finance Director Jennifer Tomaszewski, City Clerk Amy Phillips, Deputy City Clerk Krystle Koehler and Records Technician Jacob Samuels-Logan.

1. Discussion Topics

a. CMU Proposal

President Marshall of Colorado Mesa University (CMU) introduced his proposal for a partnership between CMU and the City to fund a Mental Health Provider Retention program. The proposal requests a one-time contribution from the City of \$500,000. Funds would be used to incentivize qualified individuals to remain in Grand Junction by providing financial assistance to attract and retain mental health social workers in the nonprofit sector to address local mental healthcare needs.

The partnership would develop a Master of Social Work Student Loan Repayment Program to provide financial support to successful applicants of \$10,000 annually for three years as long as they remain employed in the local mental healthcare field. Funding would be disbursed subject to performance review and verification of continued employment with a Grand Junction-based non profit. Participation would be limited to ten participants per year initially and may be renewed after the initial three-year period based on success and impact on the community.

Discussion revolved around concerns and questions regarding the proposal. Some main points include:

1. **Funding Structure:** Concerns about the structure of the funding and the possibility of additional requests for money in the future. The Council emphasized the need for clear assurances that the program will be sustainable without requiring more funds from the City in the future.
2. **Geographical Focus:** Discussion requested narrowing the radius of the program to ensure that the funds benefit the Grand Junction community specifically rather than extending to areas that may not directly impact the City.
3. **Claw back Provisions:** Questions were raised about the repayment structure for the forgivable loans and the potential for claw back if participants leave the program early. The idea is to clarify whether the repayment is deferred or spread out over the service period.
4. **Number of Participants:** Concerns were raised about the number of participants and whether the program is scalable. The discussion includes considerations about the demand for mental health professionals and the ability of local nonprofit organizations to absorb the graduates.

5. **Working for Nonprofits:** Questions were raised about the requirement for participants to work for nonprofits. The concern is whether there are enough nonprofit mental health providers in the area to accommodate the number of graduates from the program.

Overall, the conversation highlighted the need for careful planning, clear agreements, and assurances to address potential challenges in implementing the proposed social work program.

Additional points raised regarding the Partnership Program:

1. **Cost of Master's in Social Work:** The cost of obtaining a Master's in Social Work was discussed, with an estimation of \$40,000 to \$45,000. It was mentioned that the proposed program would cover \$30,000 of that cost, leaving the students with some financial responsibility.
2. **Competitive Application Process:** The idea of implementing a competitive application process was introduced, where applicants demonstrate their commitment to the community and their intention to pursue clinical licensure. This approach could help ensure that the program attracts individuals genuinely interested in staying in the community.
3. **Limited Funding:** It was mentioned that the City might not have additional funding available for this program, and there's a discussion about the involvement of the City in such initiatives.
 - **ARPA Funds Allocation:** Council mentioned that the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds for 2024 are currently allocated to housing and homeless services in the budget. However, there was a willingness to reallocate some of these funds for the proposed mental health program.
 - **Community Preference for Face-to-Face Learning:** The importance of face-to-face learning and local connections for students in the proposed program is emphasized. The community and students have expressed a preference for in-person education, practical skills development, and building networks within the community.
 - **Engagement with County and Collaboration:** Council suggested to engage with the County and explore collaboration, leveraging additional contributions and participation. The potential partnership with the County was seen as an important part of the CMU partnership.
 - **Consideration of Other Funded Programs:** The concern was raised that the City is already allocating significant funds to programs like scholarships, and there's a need to justify additional funding.
 - **Housing and Mental Health Connection:** A discussion arises about the interconnectedness of mental health and housing. The importance of addressing both aspects was acknowledged, with an emphasis on breaking the cycle where mental health issues contribute to housing instability.

Next Steps, Council directed staff to continue communication with CMU to refine the program and partnership to move the proposed program forward.

b. Tax-Exemption for Secondhand Stores

Councilmember Kennedy requested that this item be considered by the Council.

Staff reported that the City collects approximately \$675,000 in sales tax per year from approximately 32-34 Secondhand businesses. These consist of various business types, including pawn shops, high-

end antique stores, thrift stores, used sports equipment and game stores, clothing consignment, and auction, and estate sales businesses.

The City Municipal Code identifies items already considered exempt from sales tax. Below are a few of these exemptions, which are listed in Municipal Code section 3.12.070, including:

- All sales of food
- Utilities (such as electricity and gas)
- Sale and purchase of medical supplies
- Direct sale to charitable organizations in conduct of its functions and activities
- Sales made by schools, school activity booster organizations, and student classes if proceeds are used for the benefit of the school or student organization.

It was also noted that Municipal Code section 3.12.050 states:

*"The sales tax levied by GJMC [3.12.030\(a\)](#) shall apply to the purchase price of the following:
(a) **Tangible personal property that is sold, leased or rented, whether or not such property has been included in a previous taxable transaction.**"*

The last item staff noted was the 2024 budget. Given the recent changes from the Colorado Legislature special session, which resulted in an estimated decrease in property tax revenues of \$600,000, this would further impact the deficit created going into the 2024 budget.

Discussion including tax policy changes, and how the exemption could reduce items going to the landfill and increase recycling operations. Other discussions focused on processes and next steps. Discussion included:

1. **Support for the Concept:** There was a sense of support for the concept of reducing waste and helping the community, but there was a need for further discussion regarding details and potential budget impacts. Discussion explored the need to look at grant opportunities but noted the importance of prioritizing City needs and the financial impacts of pursuing grants. It was suggested to turn the proposal over to Staff, particularly the sustainability team, for further evaluation, research, and grant exploration. Staff would provide regular updates and memos to keep the Council informed.
2. **Involvement of Recycled Colorado:** Involve *Recycled Colorado* for its expertise and insights into similar policies was advanced.
3. **Process and Strategic Planning:** The importance of fitting the proposal into the City's strategic plan and evaluating it from a staff perspective was emphasized, suggested that the proposal could fall under the category of **Resource Stewardship**.
4. **Potential Survey:** The idea of conducting a survey was mentioned.

Next Steps: Involve staff in further researching and refining the proposal, aligning the proposal with the City's strategic plan, and exploring grant opportunities. The need for ongoing communication through regular updates and memos and making the proposal a collaborative process to refine the proposal and build something that could work for Grand Junction.

2. City Council Communication

Discussion covered various topics:

1. **School Impact Fees:** There is a plan in motion for quick action with the school district regarding the collection of impact fees. Urgency was emphasized, and the item will be agendaized as soon as the requested information is received from the school district.
2. **Airport Relations:** The issue with the Airport Authority's refusal to share all information with the City's liaison was discussed. There was a request to address the matter in an open meeting between the City and the Airport Authority.
3. **Homelessness and Emerson Park:** The upcoming construction in Emerson Park, impacting the homeless community, was mentioned. Plans to issue a news release within days, along with signage, were included in the discussion. The City aims to communicate the plan respectfully to the homeless community.
4. **Direct Report Evaluations:** There was a brief discussion about the upcoming staff evaluations. Some concerns were expressed about the previous year's process and it was suggested that changes to the evaluation process be discussed.
5. **Resignation from the Horizon Business Improvement District:** An announcement was made about a resignation from the Executive Director of the Horizon Drive Business Improvement District. There's a mention of potential changes in board members' duties.
6. **Role of Council as Liaisons:** It was noted that staff is developing a memo defining the Council liaison's role for each of the City's Boards and Commissions.

3. Next Workshop Topics

City Manager Caton reported the items for the January 22, 2024, Special Workshop will be:
Joint meeting with County Commissioners at the County beginning at 4:15 p.m.

- Unhoused Strategy Report
- Compost Facility Update

1. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Workshop adjourned at 7:29 p.m.