

GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP SUMMARY **April 15, 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, and Mayor Pro Tem Abe Herman. Mayor Anna Stout was absent.

Staff present: Interim City Manager Andrea Phillips, City Attorney John Shaver, Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland, Engineering and Transportation Director Trent Prall, Community Development Director Tamra Allen, Housing Manager Ashley Chambers, Police Chief Matt Smith, City Clerk Amy Phillips, and Deputy City Clerks Krystle Koehler and Selestina Sandoval.

1. Discussion Topics

a. Homeward Bound Resource Center Update

Chris Masters with Homeward Bound gave a quarterly report regarding the Resource Center.

During the October 30, 2023, Workshop, City Council was presented with a comprehensive proposal by the Executive Directors of United Way of Mesa County and Homeward Bound of the Grand Valley, along with the Chair of the Homeward Bound board for a proposal planned for the acquisition, construction, and staffing of a temporary Resource Center aimed at serving individuals experiencing houselessness and other vulnerabilities. Once operational, the Center would function as an ultra-low barrier facility, offering vital services and support. The Resource Center would be managed and staffed by Homeward Bound, with contributions from faith-based and other service providers to ensure comprehensive assistance with basic needs.

Following consideration, City Council adopted Resolution 95-23 on November 1, 2023, supporting funding for the Resource Center. A total of \$912,400 was allocated from ARPA funds in 2023 to cover capital expenses, startup costs, and one month of operating expenses.

The estimated annual operating costs of \$356,600 per year, was approved for 2024 during the City's 2024 budget process from the housing and unhoused project and services budget. An additional \$33,025 was requested and approved due to capital overages. For 2025, a budget recommendation of \$356,600 has been proposed, with the funding source to be determined during the budget development phase.

Despite challenges related to utility installation delays, the Resource Center officially commenced operations on January 30, 2024. Currently, the Resource Center operates seven days a week from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. during the winter season, with anticipated adjustments in hours as daylight hours increase. The facility provides a range of essential services, including showers, restrooms, and healthcare, while also serving as a centralized hub for community partners to deliver resources and support.

To maintain transparency and collaboration, and to ensure compliance with the Operational and

Lease Agreement, Homeward Bound agreed to provide a Quarterly Report for the Resource Center that includes:

1. **Financial Report**
2. **Facilities Report**
3. **Health and Safety Metrics**
4. **Operations & Service Council Metrics**
5. **Community Concerns**
6. **Success Stories**
7. **Outstanding Issues or Concerns**

Mr. Master's report noted that the Resource Center has been open for 75 days and served over 8,200 individuals, providing meals, showers, and transportation to shelters. He stated they've reduced strain on other community resources with over 16,000 services provided, including shelter transports. The facility tracks individuals for shelter placement and demographics. It successfully addresses guest concerns and provides various services fostering a sense of community. Staff members are trained in emergency response, and the Center collaborates with partners to offer comprehensive services. Efforts are made to maintain order and accessibility, address community concerns, and operate under budget. Neighboring businesses perceive the Center positively, recognizing its impact and effective management. Plans for continuous improvement include:

- Enhancing staffing and support services,
- Adapting admission criteria, and
- Strengthening community relationships.

Discussion touched on financial reports, future plans, emphasis on transparency and learning from the initial startup phase, partnership between the housing department and stakeholders with a focus on community trust and ongoing collaboration.

b. Unhoused Strategies Implementation Plan

Tamra Allen Community Development Director and Ashley Chambers Housing Manager presented the proposed Unhoused Strategies and Implementation Plan. They explained that in December 2022, the City initiated proactive measures creating a survey to directly engage with People Experiencing Houselessness (PEH), aiming to identify entry points into houselessness and barriers hindering their transition out of it in Grand Junction. This effort, informed by a "systems-thinking" approach, provided valuable insights into PEH characteristics and experiences. Subsequently, the City collaborated with the Mesa County Behavioral Health Team and Grand Junction Housing Authority to conduct a comprehensive Unhoused Needs Assessment (UHNA), funded by various sources including the City, as well as partnerships, and grants. JG Research and Evaluation, LLC (JG) and OMNI Institute were selected as project consultants. The UHNA included demographic data aggregation and qualitative data collection through interviews and surveys. The second part of the effort was to create an Unhoused Strategy Plan whereby findings from the UHNA were folded into a strategic plan through focus groups and feedback sessions with various stakeholders.

On January 22, the Unhoused Needs Strategic Report was presented to City Council and County Commissioners, followed by a request for further discussion and adjustments to the draft strategies.

In response to City Council's direction, City staff met with an ad-hoc workgroup of partner organizations to develop a comprehensive framework for the Unhoused Strategies and Implementation Plan, incorporating input from key stakeholders.

A project timeline overview highlighted the collaboration efforts addressing the immediate housing needs and housing instability. Stakeholders provided feedback on the draft strategy, emphasizing collaboration and inclusion of people with lived experience. Action teams and workgroups were proposed to translate strategies into actionable steps. Continuous improvement and adaptability were stressed, acknowledging the complexity of houselessness. Collaboration among stakeholders, including service providers and those experiencing houselessness, was highlighted as crucial.

Efforts to streamline services, improve housing stability, and increase affordable housing stock were recognized. Data collection and sharing was emphasized for better understanding and addressing houselessness. Workgroups comprising subject matter experts were proposed for informed strategy implementation and the following key objectives were identified to reduce houselessness and increase successful housing placements:

- Unhoused and at-risk population in Mesa County
- Housing and supportive services
- Barriers in unhoused care system function
- Engagement with law enforcement and first responders
- Recommendations for strengthening care continuum.

Council members discussed balancing immediate action with long-term strategy, recognizing resource limitations and the need for comprehensive approaches.

They highlighted bureaucratic concerns but also stressed the importance of data-driven decision-making, public engagement, and collaboration for success.

They spoke of the need for collaboration between the City, County, and service providers deeming it essential and raising questions regarding the City's participation/responsibilities as well as City departments' involvement. Communicating the importance of addressing houselessness to the community and securing ongoing support was emphasized, as well as promoting the benefits of investments in houselessness solutions.

c. Undergrounding Existing Overhead Utility Lines

Tamra Allen, Community Development Director and Trent Prall, Engineering and Transportation Director reported that the Zoning and Development Code requires that all new utility lines be undergrounded and that any existing overhead utilities be installed underground except when the development has less than 700 feet of frontage, in which case the Director can accept cash payment in lieu. The burden of undergrounding an overhead utility line is borne fully by the property owner on which the power poles have been installed, and it is generally perceived by the development industry that the requirement to underground along frontages less than 700 feet puts an unfair burden on development that happens to have overhead utilities along the property frontage. For development with frontage less than 700 feet, with the option to pay the in-lieu fee, the rate was established in 2005 and is set at \$25.65 per linear foot. The actual estimated average cost to underground utilities is approximately \$300 per linear foot.

In 2018, participants in the City's ad hoc Development Roundtable identified the issue of undergrounding requirements for existing overhead utilities as a development challenge to staff. Subsequently, in 2018, staff discussed several options for addressing the issue with the City Council and received direction to continue working with industry representatives. Over the course of the past five years, staff has worked intermittently with the roundtable to identify an approach that would better address the community's needs.

Engineering revisited the 700-foot threshold with both Xcel and Grand Valley Power (GVP) in 2022. The input received from both entities advised that 700 feet, or roughly one city block, is an appropriate threshold as the intent is to avoid unsightly piecemeal segments of underground and overhead lines that increase costs for converting short segments of overhead to underground later.

Discussion continued on this topic when the Code Committee took up this issue as a part of the Zoning and Development Code update. As expected, the Code Committee recommended the requirement be removed from the Code. This recommendation was supported during the review and recommendation process by the Planning Commission. At that time, Community Development staff also supported the removal of the code requirement while the consultant team (Clarion Associates) recommended "maintaining the current undergrounding requirement while pursuing a policy discussion at the City Council level to determine whether City participation in the undergrounding costs for some projects would provide an overall benefit to the community."

The City Council's adopted Code update maintained the requirement to underground existing overhead utility lines. Staff was directed to bring the topic of utility undergrounding to a City Council Workshop for additional policy discussion and direction in early 2024.

Discussion considered the relationship to the Transportation Capacity Payment Program, which requires developers to pay for improvements necessary for access but does not require construction of adjacent half-street improvements. Some other Colorado communities have similar undergrounding requirements, but exemptions exist for higher voltage lines and short runs.

The rationale behind undergrounding utilities lies in addressing various drawbacks associated with overhead distribution lines. Overhead lines are prone to outages from falling trees and can pose safety hazards to drivers. They also detract from the aesthetics of an area. In contrast, underground lines offer benefits such as increased reliability, enhanced public safety, and improved aesthetics, leading to potentially higher property values.

The Comprehensive Plan supports the undergrounding of utilities as part of responsible growth and infrastructure improvements to enhance safety and quality of life. Several policy options have been explored to address the financial burden on developers and ensure alignment with community goals.

For developments with frontages less than 700 feet, options include maintaining the current in-lieu fee or increasing it to reflect the actual cost of undergrounding. For developments with frontages greater than 700 feet, options include continuing to require undergrounding of secondary lines at full expense or exploring alternatives such as City participation in undergrounding costs, reimbursement agreements, or a City-Developer cost-sharing model.

Staff recommended considering options that address the high cost of burying primary and feeder lines and updating the outdated in-lieu fee. They suggested exempting primary and feeder lines from undergrounding requirements while still requiring undergrounding of secondary lines. Additionally,

they propose adjusting the in-lieu fee annually to reflect actual costs or eliminating the requirement altogether.

Discussion centered on finding a practical approach to balance development needs with community interests regarding utility infrastructure.

There was recognition of the complexity involved in decision-making, balancing community desires with the need to reduce barriers to housing development. Compromises, such as exempting feeder lines or only requiring secondary lines, are proposed to mitigate costs while still achieving community goals.

Mechanisms for funding undergrounding projects, such as setting aside funds from transportation projects or leveraging franchise agreements with utility companies, and incentivizing undergrounding through reduced fees for developers, with collected funds used for projects or incentives were also advanced.

Council directed staff to continue to develop a standard for utility company fees, propose policy changes that balance community desires with the need to reduce costs for housing development and return to a Workshop in early summer with additional recommendations.

2. City Council Communication

Councilmembers spoke to the Dolores National Monument designation and asked if the Council would like to reconsider its support. Council chose not to reconsider. Councilmembers asked if there was interest in scheduling a second regular meeting in June since the June 19th meeting will be cancelled due to the Juneteenth Holiday. There was no consensus to schedule a second meeting. Council was notified that the Orchard Mesa Pool item has not been scheduled for further discussion as staff is waiting for the School District's response.

3. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Workshop adjourned at 9:00 p.m.