

GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP SUMMARY

August 19, 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, Mayor Pro Tem Randall Reitz, and Mayor Abram Herman. Anna Stout was absent.

Staff present: Interim City Manager Andrea Phillips, City Attorney John Shaver, Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland, General Services Director Jay Valentine, Community Development Director Tamra Allen, Mobility Planner Henry Brown (Virtual), Parks and Recreation Director Ken Sherbenou, Engineering and Transportation Director Trent Prall, Finance Director Jennifer Tomaszewski, and City Clerk Selestina Sandoval.

1. Discussion Topics

a. Avalon Theatre Presentation

Debbie Kovalik and Matt Thornton from the Avalon Theatre Foundation Board, along with Maria Rainsdon, the General Manager for OVG360, provided City Council with an update regarding their recent and future activities and needs.

The Avalon Theatre, established over a century ago, has evolved from a community cornerstone to a venue in need of modernization to remain competitive. Key historical milestones included its acquisition by the city in the early 1990s and various renovations funded by the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and community donations.

The theatre has received upgrades like a digital marquee, a new sound system, and ADA-compliant facilities. However, additional improvements are necessary, including a new sound system, updated theatrical lighting, and backstage amenities. The Avalon faces competition from newer venues, such as the state-of-the-art Colorado Mesa University (CMU) Theatre. The Avalon's ability to attract high-profile acts is limited by outdated equipment and infrastructure. They requested continued financial support from the city, specifically \$100,000 for 2025, to expand community grants, upgrade facilities, and maintain the theatre as a cultural hub.

b. Shared Micromobility (e-scooter) Pilot Study

Grand Junction's 18-month Shared Micromobility Pilot began on May 16, 2023, and will expire on November 16, 2024, if no further action is taken. Mobility Planner Henry Brown presented an update on utilization and proposed system changes.

The pilot program launched in May 2023 with the goal of integrating shared micro-mobility (e-scooters) into the city's transportation network. The program has seen over 200,000 miles of travel, primarily between downtown, CMU, and the riverfront.

While the program has been generally successful, some concerns were raised about cluttered sidewalks, safety issues, and accessibility for unbanked users. Additionally, there is interest in expanding the program to underserved areas, including the airport and Horizon Drive.

Staff recommended extending the pilot through the end of 2024 or until a permanent permitting process is established. This extension would allow for further refinement of the program, including improving parking infrastructure and potentially expanding the service area. Council expressed support for the pilot's continuation and agreed to the handling of the extension administratively.

c. Whitman Park Final Schematic Design Presentation

Schematic design including cost estimates for the renovation of Whitman Park is complete. The selected design team, led by DTJ Design, facilitated the public process that drove the resultant schematic design. The first round of the in-person public process occurred on April 1 and 2. Along with that productive round of public meetings, a survey was sent and posted to [EngageGJ.org](https://engagegj.org) and 940 surveys were completed. This reflects a tremendous amount of community interest in the future design of Whitman and informed the final schematic design. Three concepts were presented to the community in the next round of public engagement on May 13 and 14, including a Council workshop. This additional public process included focus groups with all individuals who expressed an interest in this project, various stakeholders, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) and a community-wide public meeting.

Following the presentation of the three concept designs, from the feedback provided, a preferred design concept emerged. Two concepts were fused into a final schematic design, which included cost estimates. A strategy that includes phases for the project will also be provided at the workshop and enable the renovation given that City resources need to be balanced with other key projects. The final design balances event-driven amenities with attractive drop-in amenities to ensure a busy park throughout the day. With all the new residents downtown, including those at the Junction and the Terminal (still in development stages), it is expected this will be used by nearby residents as well as the broader community as a part of visits to downtown. For example, should this renovation move forward, Downtown Grand Junction is discussing the possibility of holding the tree lighting ceremony in Whitman. If renovated, it would become a true urban park with a high concentration of amenities in an efficiently laid out design. This is all intended to maximize the use of space while still protecting and ensuring broad public enjoyment and benefit of the mature tree canopy.

Parks and Recreation Director Ken Sherbenou gave an introduction, and representatives from DTJ Design presented the schematic design. They explained that Whitman Park is slated for a major renovation to transform it into a key downtown green space. The park's redesign is part of a broader effort to revitalize the area, complementing nearby developments like the Junction Project and the Terminal Project.

The design process included extensive community input, with over 900 survey responses. Key concerns from the public included safety, lighting, and maintaining the park's mature tree canopy. Design Features: The proposed design includes enhanced lighting, improved safety features, and preservation of the existing tree canopy. The park is intended to serve as a vibrant, accessible space for both local residents and downtown visitors.

Due to budget constraints, the project will be developed in phases. The initial phase will be funded through existing parks and recreation resources, with future phases dependent on additional funding.

The council acknowledged the importance of the project and supported the phased approach, emphasizing the need to secure funding for subsequent phases.

d. Request for City Contribution to Liberty Apartments Project by Aspire Residential, LLC

Aspire Residential LLC ("Developer"), represented by John Gargas, requested the City assist in funding a 192-unit apartment complex called Liberty Apartments located at 2651 Stacy Drive. The Developer is requesting a total contribution from the City of \$1,723,186, of which \$715,000 would purchase the land, \$625,248 would pay the project's impact fees, and \$382,938 would go toward relocating a drainage ditch on the property.

Aspire Residential, LLC, presented a request for a city contribution to the Liberty Apartments Project, a development aimed at providing affordable housing in the city. Aspire Residential outlined the project's scope, including the number of units and the anticipated impact on the local community. They outlined their request for financial support from the city to help cover development costs and ensure the project's viability. The specifics of the request, including the amount and proposed use of funds, were discussed.

The Council considered the request in the context of the city's budget and ongoing commitments to other projects. The discussion highlighted the importance of affordable housing but also the need to balance financial support across various initiatives.

e. I-70 at 29 Interchange Road Intergovernmental Agreement

Mesa County and the City of Grand Junction have been collaboratively developing the 29 Road corridor as a major arterial for more than 25 years. More recently, staff has been working with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) on the planning, environmental, and permitting components for the proposed interchange with I-70. Colorado State Transportation Commission approval will be sought later this summer, followed by FHWA consideration/approval of the Interstate Access Request this fall.

The funding strategy for the interchange is an important consideration for the City Council. If the City Council commits to the proposed draft intergovernmental agreement (IGA), the City will agree, subject to annual appropriation, to participate in the repayment of the \$80 million debt necessary to build the project. The IGA is an important step in Mesa County's consideration of referring a ballot measure to the November 5, 2024, election. That ballot measure, if approved by the voters, will be for the issuance of bonds to finance the I-70 Interchange at 29 Road and the associated reconstruction of 29 Road from the interchange to Patterson Road. The IGA draft is attached.

The discussion focused on the terms of the IGA, the roles and responsibilities of each party, and the anticipated benefits of the interchange improvements. The project aims to enhance traffic flow and safety at a key intersection in the city. The Council provided feedback on the agreement and discussed potential adjustments to ensure the project aligns with the city's transportation goals. There was general consensus on moving forward with the agreement to a regular meeting for consideration.

2. Council Communication

Mayor Herman gave an update on Orchard Mesa Pool discussions with Mesa County Valley School District #51. He noted the escrow they requested from the City increased from \$100,000 to \$200,000.

3. Next Workshop Topics

Topics for future workshops were briefly discussed, noting that due to the September 2nd meeting being canceled due to the Labor Day holiday, a special workshop had been scheduled for September 9th.

4. Other Business

Councilmembers discussed the City Manager search process, specifically concerning a proposed meet-and-greet event for candidates. The intent was to create an opportunity for the public and city staff to interact with the candidates. The Councilmembers discussed the structure of the event, whether to include a feedback mechanism and the transparency of the process. There will be two sessions, one for city staff and Stakeholders and another for the general public.

The conversation also briefly touches on other business, such as a potential joint meeting with County Commissioners and vacancies on various boards.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Workshop adjourned at 9:44 p.m.