

**GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP SUMMARY  
February 13, 2006**

The City Council of the City of Grand Junction, Colorado met on Monday, February 13, 2006 at 7:02 p.m. in the City Hall Auditorium to discuss workshop items. Those present were Councilmembers Bonnie Beckstein, Teresa Coons, Jim Doody, Gregg Palmer, Jim Spehar, Doug Thomason and President of the Council Bruce Hill.

**Summaries and action on the following topics:**

1. **GRAND JUNCTION FIRE DEPARTMENT AMBULANCE PROVIDER PROPOSAL UPDATE:** Fire Chief Rick Beaty presented the implementation plan for the Fire Department to provide ambulance service for the Grand Junction Ambulance Service Area. He reviewed the process to date and the various steps that have occurred. He said the proposal being presented is how the Grand Junction Fire Department (GJFD), as the designated service provider, will put Council's direction into action. He advised that the skill and expertise of the current service provider, American Medical Response (AMR), has never been in question. Chief Beaty said the current system is a two tier system, and said the Fire Department acts as the first responder out of five of the stations. He said the Fire Department gets trained personnel and the necessary equipment to the location as quick as possible and said AMR responds for the transport. The system works well as it allows the Fire Department to do an exceptional job and cover a lot of calls. He said it does however require a split crew which means if there is a second call that requires more than a two-person response, it strains the Department. Chief Beaty said the proposal for the new system would change the way calls are handled. He said dispatch would be the single point of contact, yet dispatch is currently overloaded, and the new proposal will add approximately 2,400 new calls annually. The Fire Department may look at using another dispatch system for the non-emergency calls. He said the ambulance would be dispatched first with a full crew. A part-time reserve force would be revived. The rates to be set will be at the maximum allowed for Mesa County which is a bundled rate plus mileage. Chief Beaty said Fire Station No. 4 would have to be remodeled to add new beds. He said the net estimated cost is \$624,424, which is less than the previous estimate due to an increase in the number of private calls, offsetting other costs. He said the attempt was to make the proposal an enterprise fund, hopefully to break even, but that is not the case.

Councilmember Coons inquired if the cost includes the billing contract (7.5% of collected revenues) and the contract for an additional dispatch system. Chief Beaty replied that the billing contractor is included as well

as the cost of additional dispatch. He said the proposal calls for staffing three ambulances 24 hours per day, 18 dual-role personnel, 3 single-role Staff and 6 to 8 reserve employees.

Chief Beaty reviewed the implementation steps and said the time frame needs to be moved out. He said the ambulances will take longer than July 1, 2006 to get and said the remodel and the acquisition of equipment will need to be taken care of. Chief Beaty said regarding personnel, he recommended the first consideration be given to AMR personnel. He said open recruitment can be conducted, but any AMR personnel hired could be active a lot quicker due to their current training, skills, expertise, and experience in this system. Chief Beaty said the dual-role employees will be required to attend a 12 week academy and any new hires from outside must serve an internship. Lastly, the communication flow to educate the public and businesses as the transition takes place is important. He said discounting is one issue that is not addressed and said the Mesa County resolution does address discounting. He said discounted contractual relationships can occur down to the Medicare allowable amount and the basic issue is dealing with Medicare and Medicaid. The payer-mix here heavily relies upon Medicare and Medicaid, especially in this area where there is a high rate of such users. Chief Beaty said there are also calls where they have no way to collect the bill, such as private pay or uninsured.

Councilmember Coons questioned if there were revenues based on the Medicare rate. Chief Beaty replied no, it is based on the maximum allowable bundled rate, less the estimated projected uncollectibles, with no increase allowed in Mesa County is projected; there is some discussion that those may be adjusted to allow itemized charges. Councilmember Coons pointed out that even if Mesa County changes the rates, the Medicare maximum allowable will still be the same.

Council President Hill asked if the percentage collected has gone up or down historically. Chief Beaty said collections were up around 60% twenty years ago compared to 41% currently, but there are more regulations and it is more difficult to get paid.

Council President Pro Tem Palmer asked about outsourcing the dispatch and questioned if the budget shown is adequate. Chief Beaty suggested that dispatch should have dedicated Fire and EMS dispatchers. Paula Creasy, Communications Center Manager, suggested it would take five additional call takers and said that cost should be shared by all users.

Council President Pro Tem Palmer questioned the coverage of special events. Chief Beaty said AMR currently does the special events and said there will be an expectation for the GJFD to provide that service as well.

He said it can be addressed in varying degrees and said the events should be charged. Chief Beaty said the GJFD could be on standby at some events that don't require an ambulance there throughout the event.

Council President Hill questioned meeting the deadline and asked if the deadline was moved to September 30, 2006, would there be a change in the financials. Chief Beaty said he does not think the City can meet the July 1<sup>st</sup> date and suggested September 30, 2006, continuing the interim relationship with AMR until then. The change to the financials is \$590,000 for costs in 2006.

Council President Pro Tem Palmer questioned if some service areas outside City limits are exclusive with GJFD. Chief Beaty said he is not sure and said the County does not think the GJFD can make it exclusive. City Attorney Shaver said the GJFD can help with 911 calls but there may be non-emergency calls outside the City limits but the number may be negligible.

Councilmember Coons said that she is uncomfortable with this proposal and said she feels this is a different proposal than the December 16, 2005 proposal. She stated that this is not responsive to the RFP since one of the requirements was that this be up and running July 1<sup>st</sup>. She said this proposal states the need to contract out for additional dispatch and add personnel to the dispatch center, which was not included in the budget. Also, the confusion to the proposed dual roles is not clear. She is not comfortable with this proposal as it is written.

Chief Beaty said the only change in staff is the 21 dual-roles versus 18 dual-roles and 3 single-role staff.

Council President Hill called a recess at 8:45 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:55 p.m.

Chief Beaty concluded the timeline should be moved to September 30, 2006 and said that he cannot answer all of the questions regarding dispatch. He said the costs of those increases are generally born by the City since that is where most of the calls come from.

Paula Creasy, Communication Center Manager, wanted to reiterate Chief Beaty's statement on the impact of the Communication Center. She said that she supports Chief Beaty's request regarding the single point of contact for all of the emergency or non-emergency calls and said looking at the impact to the current staff, she feels they can't add any more to the current staff. She said that she estimates five additional dispatchers could be added without additional equipment.

Councilmember Doody asked for additional clarification regarding the increase in emergency and non-emergency calls. Ms. Creasy said they have brought on more medically trained staff and said they are also training the existing personnel as well.

Council President Hill questioned adding five new people to the Department, how the costs would be allocated out. Ms. Creasy said if contracted out it won't be as great of an impact.

Councilmember Spehar confirmed that the situation is critical regardless of the new proposal.

Councilmember Beckstein asked what positions are needed if there was no change to the current workload. Ms. Creasy said the budget request was for two dispatchers, one supervisor and radio technical position.

Council President Hill asked Ms. Creasy if she could get there with adequate resources. Ms. Creasy replied yes.

Councilmember Beckstein questioned if staff had help from Ron Lappi, Administration Services and Finance Director, in preparing the financials. Chief Beaty stated yes. City Manager Arnold said there was a meeting with the City Manager, City Attorney, and Finance Director regarding the review of the financials.

Councilmember Doody questioned if grants are available. Chief Beaty said there is one possible grant but the process will not be open until June of this year. He said there will be notification in September or October if the grant is approved. There maybe other grants available such as the Fire Act Grant.

Council President Pro Tem Palmer questioned whether or not Chief Beaty was privy to the AMR proposal and if there will be significant change in the financials and how sound are the current financials. Chief Beaty said the financials are reasonably sure with the exception of dispatch.

Councilmember Doody questioned the percent of collections. Chief Beaty said some private billers may have a better percentage of collections and charge as little as 4% to 4.5% for the collections. He suggested bidding out for the collection service.

City Attorney Shaver wanted Chief Beaty to answer the rest of Council Pro Tem Palmer's question of whether or not he was privy to the AMR proposal.

Chief Beaty said that he saw AMR's proposal prior to the initial committee review and said once that process concluded and the resubmittal took place, he signed a confidentiality agreement in December when the information became public.

Council President Hill asked Council's pleasure on taking public comment.

Councilmember Coons stated that she is not comfortable with the proposal as it stands and questioned if Council could give direction tonight.

City Attorney Shaver stated that Council can give direction but cannot make decisions except at a formal City Council meeting.

City Manager Arnold stated the resolution is a recommendation to the County Commissioners and said the County Commissioners will make the final decision for the approval or not.

Councilmember Coons questioned if the resolution would include the implementation plan.

City Attorney Shaver said it only requires a recommendation and stated that he would recommend including all findings but not the complete plan.

Council President Pro Tem Palmer said it has not been past practice to accept public comments at Monday night workshop meetings.

City Attorney Shaver stated the resolution of the County says the City can name "who", subject to ratification by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and said the BOCC can request additional information.

Councilmember Beckstein stated that she agrees with Councilmember Coons and questioned what is the purpose of tonight's meeting. City Attorney Shaver stated the purpose is to get Council comfortable with adopting the resolution and making the recommendation to the County Commissioners.

Councilmember Beckstein said she would like to take questions from the public tonight.

Councilmember Coons stated that she would like to have a public hearing on Wednesday night.

Councilmember Thomason stated that he would probably not want to have a public hearing. He said that he would not like to revisit the whole thing again at Wednesday night's meeting.

Councilmember Doody said that he agrees with Councilmember Thomason and said Council has been working on this item since last summer and felt they have heard a lot of input from the community and feels that he has heard all that he needs to hear to make a decision.

Councilmember Spehar concurred and said the workshops are for Council's discussion which does not mean Council can turn it into a public hearing. He said Council President Pro Tem Palmer was on the committee and recommends the GJFD, so he would support that direction.

Councilmember Coons said that she would still like to proceed with a public hearing on Wednesday.

Councilmember Beckstein agreed with Councilmember Coons.

Councilmember Spehar wanted to be responsive to some of the issues that have been raised and go over some of the points that were made in the presentation and recommended by City Manager Arnold and City Attorney Shaver. He raised the issue of competence, the multiple responders under the current system and personal experiences with his family in the last 2 or 3 years with emergency medical response. Councilmember Spehar felt the new system will remedy those issues. He said with the implementation date, he feels the City can not delay this process and wants to make an attempt to meet the July 1<sup>st</sup> date.

Council President Pro Tem Palmer noted the work of the EMS study group and all the public input. There are two arguments; unfair government competition versus cost. He felt there are legitimate government functions which include fire protection and emergency medical service. He said the City should move forward noting this will be a better system.

Councilmember Coons said that she agrees with the first responder as a public function, but questions the transport to nursing homes. She said in the original conversations it was stated that personnel will be fully cross-trained and stated this proposal does not have that.

Councilmember Doody said that he would still like to move forward with the GJFD.

Councilmember Thomason stated that he has not changed his mind and would also like to go forward with the GJFD.

Councilmember Beckstein stated that she has great concern about the Fire Department taking care of non-emergency care, especially with Medicare and Medicaid. She feels that it needs to be addressed

regarding the decrease in revenue and a negative cash flow to the taxpayers. She does not want to see this continue forward.

Council President Hill said with the current system it looks clumsy with the two-tiered response but the efficiency allows the Fire Department to get back and be ready for the next call. He said partnerships with other entities, including the private sector, cross the line when taking over private transport of non-emergency cases. He said that he can't support it now but it will be on Wednesday night's agenda. Since only two Councilmembers wanted a public hearing, there will be no public hearing.

**Action summary:** This item will be placed on the Wednesday, February 15, 2006 agenda and there will be no public hearing.

## **ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

