

THE GRAND JUNCTION PLAN OF  
CITY GOVERNMENT

According to the writings of James H. Rankin, an historian and a City Commissioner from 1911 to 1915, the history of Grand Junction and adjacent territory dates from the passing of the Ute Indians from what was known as the Ute Reservation in western Colorado to the region set aside for them in Utah. "The tragic Meeker massacre and the slaughter of the soldiers under Major Thornburg who had been sent to Agent Meeker's relief occurred in 1879. These outrages aroused the whole state, mass meetings were held and the removal of the Indians was demanded. The Government then took action and by a treaty the Indians surrendered all claim to the lands on the Western Slope, receiving lands in the Uintah Basin in Utah and certain annuities."

"In the late summer of 1881 the last of the Indians were removed, and as the land had already been declared public land, the frontier towns were crowded with people anxious to enter the reservation and secure the best locations. Some of these men were adventurers but many were real empire builders. During the summer of 1881, a party of government surveyors had been sent in but they were ordered out when the Indians threatened trouble."

"At 5:00 a.m. September 4th, 1881, the bugle was sounded and all were permitted to enter. A few pioneers entered the Grand Valley from the west but more came from the east. The base of all supplies was so far away that the first comers could do little more than stake out their claims and then return to Gunnison for provisions. It was at this supply point that Governor George Crawford (who had won his title of "Governor" during the early days of Kansas) had an interview with some of the men and induced William McGinley to return as the guide for a party just formed. Besides the Governor, this party consisted of R. D. Mobley, H. R. Warner, Colonel Morris, and S. A. Harper. They crossed the Colorado River on September 22 and on the 26th formally located Section 14 as the townsite and at once began to haul logs for cabins." The original townsite extended from First Street to 12th Street and from South Avenue to North Avenue.

"On October 10, 1881, the certificate for the incorporation of the Grand Junction Town Company was drawn and filed. For nearly three months the town could hardly be called a town, for not a store or even a saloon existed on the site. All provisions were brought from Gunnison or the government cantonment in the Uncompahgre Valley, and the nearest post office was seventy-five miles distant. Also, there was still a dread and fear of a reappearance of the Utes."

"On November 5th, a meeting was held and a petition prepared and circulated asking the government for a post office. By common consent, the name "Grand Junction" was adopted because the townsite

was at the junction of the two largest rivers in the state. During the month of April, 1882, R. D. Mobley was installed as postmaster of the new city post office."

"The first election in the City took place on June 1, 1882, and was for the purpose of electing a school board for the new district. H. E. Stroud, O. D. Russell, and W. M. McKelvey were elected. The school house at this time was a picket cabin near the corner of Fifth Street and Colorado Avenue. Miss Nannie Blain was the first teacher."

"Soon after the school was established, the citizens were called upon to vote regarding the incorporation of the town. The election was held June 22, 1882, and 62 votes were cast for incorporation with one vote cast against incorporation. On July 15, 1882, a citizens' meeting was held on Colorado Avenue to nominate a mayor and trustees for the new Town of Grand Junction. R. D. Mobley was the choice for Mayor, but the next morning C. F. Shanks was nominated in opposition and was elected becoming the first Mayor of Grand Junction. P.H. Westmoreland was elected City Clerk, and A.A. Miller, J. M. Russell, G. W. Thurston, and W. F. Gerry were elected Trustees."

"As the day of the county election of 1882 drew near, party lines were forgotten in the desire to get men who would be favorable to division of Gunnison County. As Grand Junction was the only polling place within a radius of fifteen miles, over 1,100 votes were cast. Most of them were by men working on the railroad grade that was now getting close to the City. It was on election day that quite a perceptible earthquake shock was felt over the valley. During the latter part of November, a census of the City was taken which showed a population of 524. On December 6th, Mayor Shanks entered in the land office at Leadville the subdivision which included the townsite."

"A mass meeting was held on December 28, 1882, for the purpose of petitioning the legislature to create a new county in the western portion of Gunnison County. W. J. Miller was sent to Denver to assist in bringing this about. February 11, 1883, the bill creating Mesa County passed the legislature and three days later was signed by the Governor. On February 21, Governor J. B. Grant paid the new County a visit and was accorded a handsome reception at the Brunswick Hotel, which had been completed and was quite a pretentious three-story brick building. Soon after the Governor's visit he appointed the following officers for the new County: M. L. Allison, Clerk and Recorder; Martin Florida, Sheriff; Robert Cobb, County Judge; G. W. Thurston, T. B. Crawford, and B. T. Carey, Commissioners; J. N. McArthur, Coroner; S. G. Crandall, Treasurer; A. J. McCune, Surveyor; and William Keith, Assessor. The County Commissioners of Mesa County met with those of Gunnison County in June, 1883, and agreed to assume \$7,208 of the indebtedness of the old county, and a bond for that amount bearing ten

percent interest was issued. The first term of the District Court for the new County was held in January, 1884, and was presided over by Judge M. B. Gerry."

"In the spring of 1884, school bonds to the amount of \$10,000 were voted and a school building was ready for the fall term of school. Before this time, the Honorable James W. Bucklin, who had been elected to the legislature, had urged the Federal Government to establish an institution for the education of the Indians. The Government responded by establishing Teller Institute, located about one mile east of the City on a tract of 160 acres donated by the citizens. It remained for many years a prominent Indian School. The school was finally withdrawn and has since been replaced by the State Home and Training School."

On May 31, 1885, a special census for the town of Grand Junction was completed by John C. Montgomery, Commissioner of the Census, which showed a population of 378 as filed in the office of the Secretary of State in Denver. By the year 1890, the population was 2,030. Under the provisions of the Colorado General Statutes, Section 3363, Grand Junction was entitled to be advanced to the grade of a City of the second class. The Board of Trustees deemed the change of grade desirable and adopted an ordinance on March 10, 1891, dividing the City into four wards with two aldermen being elected from each ward.

Over the course of the next eighteen years, the City had only vain hopes and unfulfilled promises for City improvements. The Honorable James W. Bucklin explained in an article published October, 1911, in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, that the two wards lying south of Main Street had about one-fourth of the electors and nine out of the ten saloons of the City, yet they had one-half of all the Aldermen. "This condition was intolerable, and strenuous efforts were made from time-to-time to create another ward north of Main Street. All these efforts failed because the City Council simply refused to consider the public welfare, and there was no method of compelling such consideration." By this time (early 1909), the population was approximately 7,000.

At the regular City Council meeting February 9, 1909, a petition signed by 322 persons was submitted to the City Council calling for a Charter Convention. The petition requested that the proposal be submitted to a vote of the qualified electors of the City at a Special Election to be held on April 6, 1909, pursuant to the provisions of Article XX of the Constitution of the State of Colorado. A Committee of three members of the Council, W. C. Boyer, J. C. Plank, and A. W. Drew, were appointed to investigate and report on the merits of the petition. The Special Committee reported back on February 24, 1909, as follows: "We, the undersigned Committee herewith submit our report on the question of the petition presented to this Council asking for a

special election to be held on April the 6th, 1909, submitting the question of a Charter Convention to a vote of the voters of said City, and also requesting this Council to pass an Ordinance calling for said election."

"In as much as over three hundred voters of the City have signed this petition asking that this election be held we deem it proper to submit the question to the voters of said City and while your Committee consider it an unnecessary expense to introduce this Ordinance above referred to and publish same still we believe that the extra precaution of having the matter properly before the people by passing this ordinance will justify the expense attached thereto."

"Your Committee further begs leave to state that we are opposed to a Charter Convention and do not endorse the introduction of said petition in any manner and submit therefor the following reasons:

First--In order to get this matter before the people it will require at least three elections, one to be held April the 6th and if voted upon favorably another to be held for the election of twenty-one taxpayers to frame a Charter and a third to be held that the people may adopt or reject the Charter as framed by said members.

Second--The law provides as follows: 'But if the said Charter be rejected then within thirty days thereafter twenty-one members of a new Charter Convention shall be elected at a special election to be called as above in said City and they shall proceed as above to frame a Charter, which shall in like manner and to the like end be published and submitted to a vote of said voters for approval or rejection. If again rejected the procedure herein designated shall be repeated (each special election for members of a new Charter Convention, being within thirty days after each rejection) until a Charter is finally approved by a majority by those voting thereon.'

Third--It would also seem to your Committee that inasmuch as there are a great many matters of vital interest to this community that will be brought up within the next twelve months that this question of a Charter Convention, which can be adopted at any time upon thirty days notice should be allowed to rest for at least that length of time and a Council be elected at the spring election by the people unopposed by the idea that there is a possibility of their offices being merged into a commission form of government.

Fourth--Your Committee also desires to report that they consider the expense attached to the adoption of a Charter form of government would be very large and would materially increase the rate of taxation and with a very probable chance of the present form of municipal government remaining unchanged.

Fifth--Your Committee also desires to state that it has looked into the article of the Constitution which is the authority for this election and can find no reference in the title of the act wherein the cities of the first and second class are referred to and your Committee firmly believes that in so much as the body of said act refers to cities of the State of Colorado other than the City and County of Denver that said act is unconstitutional and an election held thereunder could be of no force and effect."

The Committee's report was accepted by the Council and thereafter Ordinance No. 155 entitled "AN ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR THE SUBMISSION OF A PROPOSAL FOR A CHARTER CONVENTION TO THE VOTE OF THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE CITY OF GRAND JUNCTION AT A SPECIAL ELECTION TO BE HELD AT THE TIME OF THE NEXT GENERAL CITY ELECTION, APRIL 6, 1909."

Quoting from the Honorable James W. Bucklin: "For four years immediately preceding the first charter vote, the city had been continuously in the hands of Republican and Democratic machines. Pretending to fight each other they were always in close alliance. Just prior to the first charter election, these machines had called separate primaries, but after the charter movement, recalled their action and made a formal alignment. Up to that time they had been overwhelmingly dominant, and behind them were men loudly professing party alliance, but whose political principles have always been in harmony with the Interests."

"What gave vitality and force to our reactionary government were not these machines or men, but the saloon and public service corporations, that is, the favor seeking Interests. The Electric Light Plant had been able to secure a franchise in which an attempt was made to prevent competition. This was as vicious a franchise as could be drawn, and public talk was full of charges of corruption. Afterwards the council entered into an exorbitant ten-year contract with the Franchise Company for lighting for the city, notwithstanding another company was ready to make a much more favorable contract. No opportunity was given the competing company to make good."

"A street car franchise was granted containing no adequate protection of the city's interests. Citizens who appeared before the council asking that the rights of the city be protected were given but scanty consideration, and their requests denied."

"When women of the city appeared before the council asking that the law against vice be better enforced, they were calmly told to apply to the courts."

"The waters of the two rivers which flow by the city contain more or less alkali in solution, is hard, and frequently muddy. For more than twenty years the city has been trying to get mountain water, pure and

soft from the hills. This action was prevented by the reactionaries, who after a 13 years war, could not prevent municipal ownership of our water plant. After such municipal ownership, when the Interests no longer demanded bad water, the reactionaries changed front, electing machine men pledged to mountain water. But they had made good. Thousands of dollars were paid by the reactionary governments to special attorneys and engineers to get mountain water, most of which was wasted. Bonds to construct these works were hawked about, but could not be sold. In ways too numerous to mention, the money of the city was wasted, and its financial credit impaired."

"It was out of such conditions that the city awoke one day and determined to change the entire system. Arrayed against the proposed charter were all the stand-pat and reactionary forces, the Public Service Corporations, the Saloon Interests, the political machines of both political parties, the city council and city officials, most of the judges and clerks of election with special policemen appointed for each polling place, together with two daily newspapers controlled by such interests. Supporting the charter were all the churches, the independent and progressive republicans and democrats, the socialists, single taxers and Chamber of Commerce, the leading daily newspaper, the labor organizations and a majority of the thinking element. It was a battle royal and the whole matter was thoroughly thrashed out in the newspapers, in the churches, and on the stump. By these means the people were thoroughly educated and acted with unusual intelligence and caution. At the election four-fifths of all precincts were carried for the Charter, the total vote cast being 1514 for, and 1089 against adopting a Charter. Afterwards the progressives nominated 21 delegates to the Charter Convention consisting of 7 members of organized labor, 6 bankers, 1 lawyer, 1 physician, members of all churches, socialists, single taxers, progressive republicans and democrats, and the leading business and real estate men. The reactionaries also nominated a ticket, but withdrew it after finding it would have no show of election. The Charter was therefore formulated and written by the progressives and adopted by an overwhelming majority at the polls."

The June 22nd, 1909, City Council Minutes contain an abstract showing the results of the canvass of election returns held June 8, 1909, "for the election of the members of the Charter Convention resulted in the election of the following members, they having received majorities ranging from 736 votes to 755 votes over the number of votes cast for any other candidate or candidates: James W. Bucklin, George R. Barton, H. R. Bull, Alfred R. Cullen, William Campbell, William E. Dudley, W. P. Ela, George W. Fletcher, Ernest M. Gilpatrick, William C. Herman, Shepherd H. Hutchinson, William H. Lee, W. J. Moyer, C. P. McCary, John Murphy, Frank Sawyer, Marcus M. Shores, David T. Stone, Thomas M. Todd, B. W. Vedder, and James Woods."

The first meeting of the Charter Convention was held on Saturday, June 12, 1909, at 10:00 a.m. at City Hall. Each delegate submitted his Certificate of Election to the City Clerk and each of them took the Oath of Office and filed the same with the City Clerk. The delegates elected James W. Bucklin as President, Bostwick W. Vedder was elected Vice President, and James Woods was elected Secretary. At their adjourned meeting at 8:00 p.m. June 12, they consented to meet, unless otherwise ordered, on each day of the week, except Sunday, at 7:30 p.m. Committees were formed and assigned their duties. At the August 6th, 1909, meeting of the Charter Convention, the members had completed the drafting of the Charter. The President and Secretary were instructed to file with the City Clerk of the City of Grand Junction "the docket record and Minutes of this Convention." Those same Minutes reflect the following Resolution unanimously adopted by the entire Convention present (18 members):

"RESOLVED, that we express our sincere thanks to the Honorable James W. Bucklin, Chairman of this Convention  
First--For his fair decisions in his capacity as Chairman, and for his sincere respect for the opinions of each member of this Convention.  
Second--For the great amount of labor he has given to this Charter, and we recognize that while he wanted a Charter that would give the people of this city total power to govern themselves that he also wanted it to be the product of each and every member of this Convention."

The Charter was submitted to a vote of the people at a Special Election held September 14, 1909, and was carried by a majority vote of 538. Since its adoption in 1909, there have been 22 amendments to the Charter. November 2, 1909, was the first election held after adoption of the City Charter. The first Commissioners were Thomas M. Todd, Bostwick W. Vedder, Herman F. Vorbeck, Stephen J. Scoville, and Charles K. Holmburg. Embodied in the Charter adopted in 1909 was the "headless and non-partisan preferential ballot." In the words of Mr. Bucklin "The Preferential Ballot for cities is a plan to restore majority elections and true representative government. It was originated for and first formulated in the Grand Junction Charter."

The Commission form of government lasted in Grand Junction until November 8, 1921. A vote of the people on the fifth amendment to the Charter to "Provide for a more representative and effective City Government and providing for a City Manager and repealing Sections of the Charter in conflict herewith" resulted in the Council/Manager government of today.

The Honorable James W. Bucklin stated that the keynote to the Charter is found in the first sentence of its Prefatory Synopsis as follows: "The intent and purpose of this Charter is to establish a free and independent City, and to restore to and vest in the people of the City, so far as the Constitution of the state will permit, their natural, inherent, and inalienable right of local self-government, with all its powers, duties, and responsibilities." He further recited that the purpose of the Charter was to establish a municipal democracy. "Every effort was made by its authors to make our Charter democratic, the most democratic in America."

Respectfully submitted,

Neva B. Lockhart, CMC  
City Clerk  
October 22, 1991