

**The Municipal Cost of Homelessness in  
Grand Junction, Colorado  
2005-2012**

**Report to the Grand Junction City Council**

**July 18, 2012**

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## Contributors

John Camper

Bill Roth

Cynthia Cohn

John Shaver

Andy Martinez

Kimberly Swindle

Monica Million

Cory Tomps

Kathy Portner

Chris Wilson

Sam Rainquet

John Zen

## Executive Summary

One of the most difficult problems facing the City of Grand Junction is that of homelessness, and more particularly the crimes, calls for service, and associated incidents of community disorder caused by the chronically homeless.

The Grand Junction Police Department was recently asked by City Council to provide a review of the steps taken since 2005 to deal with homelessness. In addition, we were asked to estimate and analyze the municipal costs associated with homelessness in our community. The figures contained within this report should be regarded with caution. As discussed in further detail later, the methods by which we count homeless related police contacts are subject to misinterpretation, and a number of assumptions had to be made in order to gather some of the statistics provided. Where assumptions were made, they are noted in the body of the report.

The costs incurred by the City since 2005 to address the issue of homelessness in Grand Junction are estimated at \$2,278,332, and are summarized in the following chart:

<b>Summary of Estimated Expenses</b>	
Expense	Amount
Police Calls for Service	304,361
HOT Implementation	252,676
Fire Department Calls for Service	1,134,340
Camp Clean-up Efforts	16,188
CDBG Funding	560,767
Discretionary Funding	10,000
Total:	\$ 2,278,332

Since 2005, the Grand Junction Police Department and Grand Junction Fire Department have responded to 6524 calls for service related to the homeless population, at a cost of \$1,438,701.

In an effort to address the issue in a more proactive manner, a Homeless Outreach Team was formed by the Police Department, at a salary cost to date of \$252,676. The intent of that team is to provide intensive intervention to the homeless individuals who generate the greatest number of calls for service and most significant level of community disruption. After an initial increase in homeless related calls for service, likely due to the implementation of the team and their proactive efforts, calls for service are declining somewhat in 2012. In addition, the team has generated a lengthy list of success stories regarding individuals who have been relocated or placed into treatment services.

The City has spent \$570,767 of Discretionary and/or Community Development Block Grant funds to support homeless related programs since 2005.

An additional \$16,188 has been spent on camp clean-up efforts since 2005, and we recently began increasing such efforts along the riverfront.

A truly comprehensive report on the costs of homelessness would also include those costs incurred by service providers and other entities such as St. Mary's Hospital, Colorado West Mental Health, Hilltop, and many others. For reasons of necessity, the scope of this report is limited to the costs incurred by the City of Grand Junction.

### Historical Overview

- A relatively small subculture of chronic homeless, generally described as transients or vagrants, were a major source of police and fire calls for service, and an increasing drain on police and fire resources.
- The problem is not new. Police Department Annual Reports from the 1930's refer to 'Vagrancy' as the most significant police problem in Grand Junction.
- The historical method for handling the problem...ticketing...had not been successful in reducing the problem. Transients rack up numerous tickets that go unpaid, they are briefly jailed on warrants, and when they are released the cycle starts all over again. Calls for service continued to increase.
- Our relationship with service providers was minimal, and marked by distrust. The firing of four officers for willfully damaging a homeless camp had further deteriorated the relationship with service providers and transients.
- In January, 2010, we started a Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), modeled after a similar effort in Colorado Springs that proved to be highly successful. Three officers were initially assigned to the team. They first concentrated on improving relationships with service providers, as well as trying to gain trust among the transient population.
- As trust was gained, HOT has been able to link dozens of transients with the proper services, relocate them with responsible family members, get them into drug and alcohol treatment programs, and find available housing. HOT has registered at least 39 confirmed "success cases" in which a transient was permanently removed from homeless and vagrancy status.
- In a recent workload analysis of HOT, their intervention effort on behalf of 27 particularly chronic homeless individuals was studied to determine the number of calls that had been generated by each individual prior to and after intervention. It was found that prior to intervention, those 27 individuals accounted for 247 calls for service and 275 hours of officer time. After intervention, they accounted for 14 calls for service and 17 hours of officer time; a reduction of 233 calls and 258 hours.
- For every transient that is permanently removed from homelessness, dozens of police and fire calls, as well as citizen complaints are prevented. Major cost savings are incurred, not only for the city, but for medical entities such as St. Mary's Hospital, Colorado West Mental Health, etc.

- HOT and other city officials have been active participants in the community-wide effort to develop a 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.
- Some specific areas of concern were effectively addressed due to collaboration with citizens, service providers, and other agencies:
  - Transients were congregating at Hawthorne Park at an alarming rate. Intensive patrol, combined with advocacy from neighborhood groups and cooperation with HOT and Parks and Recreation, resulted in a marked decrease in the problem.
  - An area in the County known as The Point had become overrun with transient camps, and was causing both sanitation problems at the river and safety issues for the railroad. The railroad and the Mesa County Sheriff's Office, with assistance from HOT and Homeward Bound, successfully relocated dozens of transients, and a fence has since been erected cutting off access to the area.
  - Numerous instances of vicious dog attacks were being experienced, generally attributed to transients at both Whitman Park and The Point. Dogs were being bred for protection, and also to sell as a source of income. The PD worked with MCSO, Animal Control, and other entities to address the issue in an effective manner. The problem was eliminated through arrests, court orders, and the confiscation of many vicious dogs.
- As the HOT program has matured, and we enjoy much improved relationships with service providers, we are now combining enforcement efforts along the riverfront with continued relocation and treatment efforts. Public and private property along the river has been identified for targeted removal of transients, due to both the illegality and the danger presented by living in those areas. Cooperation of private property owners for trespassing enforcement is being acquired, and public areas are being posted for campsite removal and enforcement when necessary. This effort has met with considerable resistance by several homeless advocacy groups.
- Due to numerous patrol vacancies caused by attrition and prior budget cuts, HOT was reduced by one officer. It is now a team of two. The department is committed to returning to a more effective team of three at the earliest opportunity.
- In 2011 City Council approved a CDBG grant in the amount of \$50,000 to be used to purchase appliances and furnishings for the St. Martin's Place apartment complex for homeless veterans. The project was built and is managed by Catholic Outreach, one of Grand Junction's homeless service providers.

- Earlier this year, City Council approved discretionary funding of \$10,000 for the Karis Foundation to aid in the acquisition of a shelter for homeless teens. The shelter was successfully opened this month. Another \$85,000 in CDBG funding was just approved by City Council this last week as part of the overall CDBG allocation for 2012. Also awarded as part of the 2012 CDBG funding process was \$109,971 to Homeward Bound of the Grand Valley to go toward acquisition of an expanded homeless shelter building, and \$12,638 to Catholic Outreach for repair and remodel to their short-term, emergency housing unit.

## Homeless Related Calls for Service

### Police

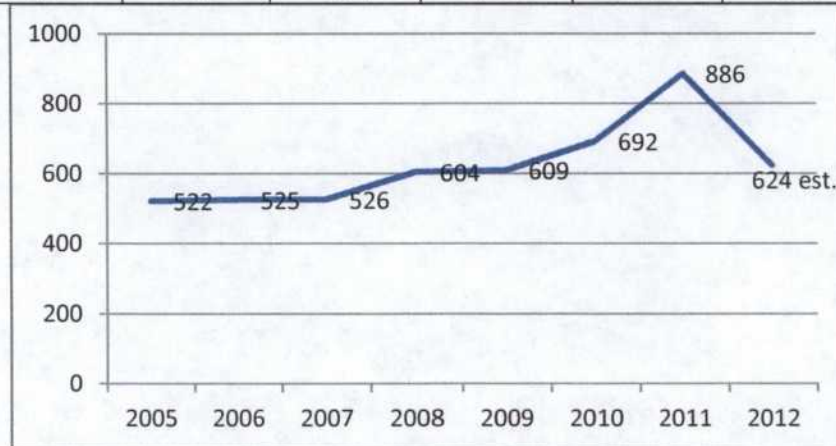
The capturing of homeless related calls for service is difficult, as it is dependent on the words "homeless" or "transient" being noted somewhere in the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) notes applied by dispatchers at the time of the call, or added by officers as the call is being handled or reported.

The process is inherently inconsistent and very likely results in under-reporting of homeless related calls for service. For example, if a 'suspicious subject' call is received by dispatch, but the caller makes no note of the fact that the subject appears homeless, that call would likely not be tabulated as homeless related. Conversely, it is certainly possible, though less likely, that dispatch would get a call in which a subject is described as homeless, but the officer soon learns that is not the case. The CAD search for homeless related calls for service would still count that call as such.

Nevertheless, based on that method of CAD search, the statistics that follow have value in estimating homeless related calls for service, and are certainly helpful in showing how those calls are trending.

GJPD Transient Homeless Related Calls for Service  
2005 through June, 2012

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012, to 6/28
522	525	526	604	609	692	886	312



Total GJPD Homeless Related Calls for Service since 2005: **4676**

(Note that for 2012, total annual calls for service are estimated based on calls through June.)



The sudden rise in calls for service in 2011 is most likely related to the formation of the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), which began in January, 2011. The team generated its own statistics through heavily proactive efforts, in addition to numerous calls being referred to the team by dispatch and other officers.

As noted earlier, the tabulation of homeless related calls for service is clearly an estimate, based on CAD data that is likely under-reported. Estimating police costs generated by those calls is even more fraught with assumptions that may have varying degrees of accuracy. For example, it is not possible to determine how many minutes an officer spent on each homeless related call for service, and therefore some assumptions were made in generating the following chart:

*Assumptions:*

- Each call for service was handled by two officers
- Each call for service took ½ hour to handle
- The officer salary varied over the time period, so the current hourly salary of \$30.37 is used for this table.
- Dispatch costs are based on the \$34.73 per-call cost currently charged to all GJRCC member agencies.

Year	Calls for Service	Officer Costs	Dispatch Costs
2005	522	\$15,847.92	\$18,129.06
2006	525	\$15,939.00	\$18,233.25
2007	526	\$15,969.36	\$18,267.98
2008	604	\$18,337.44	\$20,976.92
2009	609	\$18,489.24	\$21,150.57
2010	692	\$21,009.12	\$24,033.16
2011	886	\$26,898.96	\$30,770.78
2012 to date	312	\$9,472.32	\$10,835.76
	4676	\$141,963.36	\$162,397.48
		Total:	\$304,360.84

The Homeless Outreach Team, formed in January 2011, must also be included in the costs incurred by the City of Grand Junction in addressing homeless related calls and issues. For 2011, the team was staffed by two officers and one corporal. Due to a rapidly emerging heroin problem in late 2011, unrelated to homelessness, the HOT Corporal was pulled from the team in order to aid in staffing a Street Crimes Unit. The team will likely be staffed by only two officers for the remainder of 2011. Staff agrees that the team is more effective when staffed by three, however, and it is our intention to return the team to that staffing level when deployment allows. The salary costs for HOT, estimated through June 2012, are as follows:

Year	Salaries
2011	\$189,507.00
2012	\$ 63,169.00
Total	\$252,676.00

### Fire

Tracking homeless related calls for service for the Fire Department is complex as well. Most of the calls are EMS related and, depending on the nature of the call, it may result in a transport to the hospital, or the subject may simply be treated and released on scene. The Grand Junction Fire Department began transporting in 2006, and since that time they have responded to 1,848 EMS calls for service involving homeless individuals.

The homeless related EMS calls for service, and associated dispatch costs, are as follows:

Year	EMS Calls for Service	FD Fees for Service	Dispatch Costs	Total
2006-2012, to date	1848	\$1,070,159.00	\$64,181.04	\$1,134,340.04

In terms of fires, (or non-EMS calls) unless the Fire Department makes an arrest, it is not possible to determine how many fires are directly related to the homeless. Clearly they respond to a number of brush and cooking fire calls likely related to homeless camps, but the number and cost are not tracked.

## Costs Incurred by Other City Entities

### Cleanups by Neighborhood Services: Procedures and Costs

Camp cleanups are investigated and completed on a complaint basis. Code Enforcement will receive the complaint either from citizens or the Police Department. Once a complaint is received Code Enforcement, along with the Police Department, will do an on sight inspection to determine the validity and seriousness of the complaint. If it is determined that conditions exist that would warrant further action, Code Enforcement takes the evidence to the City Attorney's Office for review. If they find that further action is necessary, a notice is drafted by City Attorney staff. The notice gives description of property, date of cleanup, and advises anyone living there that they need to remove their items before cleanup and gives resources available to them.

The property is posted two weeks before the cleanup date to give anyone living there time to remove personal belongings. (The HOT Team has been authorized to give 3-5 days notice when they post). Notices are either taped or stapled to poles, trees, sign posts or any other permanent stationary item found around the perimeter of the property to be cleaned up. Notices are also posted around the interior of vacant lands, left at camp sites when found and at the head or along any trail leading into a cleanup site. The Police Department may or may not be involved when posting occurs, as determined by the Code Enforcement Officer.

This procedure is normally used for vacant lands where camps have been set up. There are times when Code Enforcement deals with transients who set up camps on parcels or in buildings where the land owner is sent a notice from Code Enforcement concerning the accumulation of junk/rubbish from the trash or other items discarded by the people camping or occupying these parcels. In the case of vacant lands, the owner will then go in and clean the site, thus removing any camps on his or her property. In the case of buildings, we may involve the Building Department who will determine if the building is unsafe and can either order the owner to board up the building or demolish it. The Building Department will post the building and send notice to the owner. In either case, anyone found living in these building is given ample time to remove their belongings, and are aware of any actions months before they occur.

In all instances, the Police Department is involved and can give anyone illegally living at these sites a trespass summons if they are still present after receiving due notice.

Code Enforcement sets up the clean-up date and gains the assistance of the weekender crew through the Sheriff's Department. The crew is instructed on cleanup procedures and the need to set aside and hold for 30 days all items of value, so that those items may be reclaimed. All other items are discarded and taken to the landfill. Stored items are kept in a locked gated area at City Shops, and can only be obtained by first meeting with Code Enforcement and providing a description of the item.

The Police Department is present at cleanups to ensure the safety of those involved in the clean up.

From 2007-2012, Neighborhood Services/Code Enforcement completed 20 clean-ups. In order to estimate the cost of such cleanups, several assumptions were made:

*Assumptions:*

- An average of 10 yards of junk is removed per clean-up @ \$25/yard plus bags/gloves.
- An average of 18 hours of City staff time per clean-up (6 hours for 1 Code Enforcement Officer and 2 police officers).
- Jail crew time not included.

Based on these assumptions, the **estimated cost for the 20 camp cleanups to date is \$16,188.**

Parks and Recreation

At the time of this report, we have been unable to obtain estimates of the time and costs related to transient issues within Grand Junction parks. Clearly Parks and Recreation spends a great deal of resources dealing with the cleanup and maintenance of parks frequented by transients. That information will be added to this report if and when it can be obtained.

Municipal Court

For each arrest and summons that is generated by the Police Department, there are obviously significant associated municipal court costs. Unfortunately, municipal court data is not kept in such a way that can be meaningfully reported and/or translated into a per case cost. The time spent on each case by the judge, attorneys, and court clerks is not tracked. As in law enforcement, some cases are very routine and some require an inordinate commitment of time and talent.

In addition, the Municipal Court does not necessarily know who is or is not homeless. Certainly they are personally aware of the status of many defendants, but in most cases that information is not available. The best information the court has is based on violation codes that are typical of homeless related offenses (i.e., theft, indecent exposure/urinating in public etc.), but even those cannot be directly tracked to homelessness.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds

From 2005 to present, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds were provided by the City to the following service providers for projects that are directly related to homelessness:

Service Provider/Grant Recipient	CDBG Funds Provided
<u>2005-2011:</u>	
Housing Resources of Western Colorado: handicap access for homeless vets	\$30,000
Grand Valley Catholic Outreach: housing	\$100,000
Homeless Shelter: wall	\$40,000
Homeward Bound of the Grand Valley: van purchase	\$21,071
Homeward Bound of the Grand Valley: shelter repairs/improvements	\$6,000
Grand Valley Catholic Outreach: soup kitchen remodel	\$88,725
Grand Valley Catholic Outreach St. Martin Place	\$50,000
Homeless Shelter: bathroom remodel	\$30,000
Total:	\$365,796
<u>2012</u>	
Karis Foundation: purchase of youth shelter	\$85,000
Homeward Bound of the Grand Valley: homeless shelter purchase	\$109,971
Total:	\$194,971
Total 2005-2012:	\$560,767

Discretionary Funding

As previously noted, in early 2012 City Council approved discretionary funding of **\$10,000** for the Karis Foundation to aid in the acquisition of a shelter for homeless teens. That shelter has successfully opened.

