

Candidate Questionnaire
Grand Junction City Council
April 8, 2025 Election

1. What qualifications and experience do you have that can give voters confidence you should be a member of the Grand Junction City Council? Please be specific.

I am now retired after a forty year career as a physician in Emergency and Internal Medicine, including the last twenty-two years at Grand Junction's three major medical centers. I served in leadership positions throughout my career and sat on numerous boards and committees. Since moving to Grand Junction in 1998 I have been very active in the community including real estate, local business investing, non-profit work, and various boards and committees. I am currently the vice-chair of the Grand Junction Planning Commission. Throughout all of these activities I have learned how to be an effective team member who communicates well and develops good working relations, which leads to balanced pragmatic solutions. I also bring analytic skills that will help the council best evaluate and incorporate the data and studies relevant to issues at hand. I do not have any personal gains at stake that could create conflicts of interest and I am not running to promote any particular ideology or political positions. My only agenda is to help lead Grand Junction on its path to being the most welcoming and prosperous small city in the West.

2. In looking back over the past year, are there decisions the Grand Junction City Council made with which you do not agree? If yes, how would you have changed them?

The closure of Whitman Park was done too abruptly without adequate consideration of the ramifications. This started a cascade of problems for the unhoused population, the organizations that help them, and the local business community. The temporary resource center erected nearby was able to provide valuable services to the unhoused individuals, but its tenure was short lived as the city responded to community safety and economic concerns and cut the lease from two years to one. At present the plan is to create a better, but still probably temporary, resource center at another location with shelter options nearby. Whitman Park should not have been closed until there was a community-engaged plan approved for a new and improved park and construction was imminent. During the time the new park was being thought out, a plan for a substantial and possibly permanent resource and shelter campus should have been vigorously pursued with collaboration between the city, county, non-profit, and private sector stakeholders.

The revisions on 4th and 5th street were also done hastily--too fast, too far, with too little public input. The traffic and safety problems related to speedy two lane traffic through the heart of downtown have been known for decades and needed to be addressed, but there was no emergency necessitating immediate changes. I would have advocated for having a more deliberate process engaging the public along with city staff to consider a variety of options and choose the one that best results in safer movement down 4th and 5th street, is most economical, and is acceptable to the entire range of users before spending money making temporary changes. A good starting place would have been the recently adopted Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan that designates standard painted bike lanes for 4th and 5th street resembling

7th street downtown, without bollards or other buffering infrastructure or major parking changes.

3. What approach would you take in dealing with intergovernmental relations and resolving intergovernmental conflicts?

The primary intergovernmental party to the city is Mesa County, and to a lesser extent Fruita and Palisade. I believe the best approach to improving cooperation starts with developing and nurturing good relationships. This is a good point in time to make progress on our relations as we have both a new city manager and new county administrator coming on board at the same time. Having two new operations chiefs opens the door for focusing more on pragmatic issues rather than past differences. I would support having those two operational leaders identify projects and areas that the two entities can better collaborate on and for the councilors and commissioners to give those priority in funding. By having successes together, the chance of steadily increasing future collaborations that save money and improve outcomes goes up. At the same time, the more the city councilors and the county commissioners get to know each other and communicate about areas of mutual concern, the easier it will be to get on the same page for supporting collaborative projects. A great example of the type of collaboration to build off of is the Mesa County Safety Action Plan which brought together Mesa County, Grand Junction, Fruita, and Palisade to qualify for a Federal Highway Administration grant to improve road safety in the county. The more collaborations we have like that, the better the relations and the fewer the conflicts.

4. Affordable housing has been identified as a problem in Grand Junction that affects large segments of our City's population, including young people, families, and the elderly. What actions do you think the City should take to address affordable housing?

Affordable housing is a complex, multi-stakeholder issue that demands our highest prioritization. It requires robust collaboration between all stake-holders. No simple solutions or single entities can tackle the problem. Much of the problem is due to factors out of local control such as the cost of supplies and subcontractors, interest rates, inflation, etc., so our intense focus must be on identifying and addressing the aspects that we can control. The city should continue to support the non-profit sector involved in affordable housing with direct funding when possible, land when available (such as the Salt Flats project), down payment assistance support, and other strategies prioritized by their cost-effectiveness. The city also has an

excellent housing strategy document that is reviewed and updated yearly. I support that effort and would advocate to expand the housing department and to evolve the current housing strategy into a more fully developed plan to detail how the city can strategically contribute to the city-wide efforts to address affordable housing and its connection to attainable housing. Just as important, the city should collaborate with the private sector to find ways to work together to make it possible for local builders to bring affordable and attainable housing products to market in an economically feasible way as well as increase wages and job opportunities. Reducing the time and expense of the approval process and finding ways to trim expenses in areas like concrete requirements, landscaping, zoning, density, fees, and lot configuration are some potential strategies to reduce building costs. The building community can provide their best ideas on where the city can help with their building costs and then provide an accounting for how those cost savings are passed on to the buyers for the city to fine-tune this process over time. The city should give preference to builders with experience and a history of success in bringing more affordable housing product to the market.

5. Homelessness has been identified as problem in Grand Junction. What actions do you think the City should take to address homelessness?

Homelessness has surged due to economic factors creating an untenable gap between what folks earn and what housing costs. Homelessness is not new, but has never been seen at this scale before. The efforts to address the humanitarian needs of the unhoused must continue to be supported, mostly through supporting the aid agencies devoted to that mission. At the same time, the surge of homelessness due to economic hardship must be urgently addressed. In particular the city through its housing department should continue to facilitate development of the newly forming Mesa County Collaboration for the Unhoused (MCCUH) and support finalization of the collaborative Unhoused Strategy and Implementation Plan. Interim housing so that people have a place to live safely while they are trying to climb up the economic ladder back into solid housing is an important component that the city is pursuing, although many challenges exist to bringing these projects to fruition. I support continuing the efforts to work through those challenges and get interim housing product available ASAP. The success on reducing homelessness will depend on how well we can address these problems as a coordinated and collaborative system, because well-meaning but disjointed efforts will not suffice.

6. Economic development is listed as one of Grand Junction's strategic priorities. How do you assess the merits and effectiveness of the City's economic development strategy?

The Grand Junction economic strategy is well conceived and has had considerable success. In my 27 years here, I have seen a notable diversification, strengthening, and modernization of the local economy. The One Grand Junction Comprehensive plan lays out a vision for economic growth and development and provides guidance for the strategic plans that fund initiatives and allocations. This sensible and pragmatic approach has resulted in manageable

growth and greater economic stability and sustainability. The key to its ongoing success is to continue collaborating and directly supporting our major partners such as GJEP, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Incubator. The rural jump-start zone tax credit program is a good example of the fruit that supporting and collaborating with our economic development partners bears. Whereas I believe we are moving in the right direction, I acknowledge that at times relationships with partners are strained when the communication breaks down and the city appears to be acting on its own without adequate involvement of the private sector. I would advocate for being more committed to engaging our partners earlier and more meaningfully in pursuing our economic development goals. When evidence of frayed relationships first appear, we should immediately address the concerns underlying those rifts and get back on the same page to be trusting partners. Furthermore, we should whenever possible use local expertise more and rely on outside consultants less. This will result in better relations with our private partners, more balanced “home grown” solutions, and less government spending.

7. Please comment on the City’s Strategic Framework for 2024-2026 as it relates to the City’s budget and capital plans. Are there City expenditures that you think should be increased or decreased?

In my opinion, the 2024-26 strategic framework pulls too hard from the aspirational aspects of the 2020 Comprehensive Plans at a time when more fundamental operational priorities should be more prominent. A glaring example is the omission of the housing crisis among the five strategic outcomes (Placemaking; Thriving and Vibrant; Welcoming, Livable, and Engaging; Safe and healthy; Resource Stewardship). Housing has only a passing mention--“ensuring residents can comfortably live”-- under the heading of “Placemaking”. There is no indication that we are in a severe housing crisis that is devastating nearly every aspect of the community. It would be more appropriate to have the first strategic outcome be something like “Adequate Housing for All”. Favoring aspirational goals over real-life deficiencies is a critical flaw in the current approach to our funding strategy that I would address assertively as a council member. As to expenditure shifts, my priority would be to increase the funding and support for both the private and non-profit entities that can show positive gains in wages, housing cost reduction, and assistance for under-housed citizens, which are the three main aspects of the housing crisis. I believe this can be accomplished with modest spending cuts on amenities across the board until a time when the housing crisis is substantially reduced and there is more room in city’s budget to spend very far beyond the necessities. We can achieve steady increases in amenities that enrich our quality of life over time if we are mindful of when and how we fund them in the face of more urgent needs.

8. What do you believe are three other important issues and/or concerns facing the City of Grand Junction and what solutions do you have in mind?

- i. Public Trust is my highest priority--the “meta” issue on which all other issues and problems depend. Any government must have a mutually trustful relationship with its citizens to be effective. Public trust in the city government is at a low point. Many people from all spheres I have talked to before and during my campaign complain that the city government (and the council) are lacking in transparency and communication, and that they are advancing changes without enough meaningful public input and buy-in. They often feel blind-sided. Restoring and retaining that essential public trust can only be earned over time with genuine, consistent, proactive engagement of the public when significant changes that affect their lives are being planned and implemented.
- ii. Multi-modal transportation is a desirable outcome for our city to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible, but the devil is in the details. The city has adopted plans for motorized and non-motorized travel that are well thought out and vetted by the public and should serve as the starting point for future changes. Expanding our travel options by modifying existing roadways and adding new ones, however, is an expensive process with many decisions to be made along the way that have to be taken in context of the state of the budget and the effects on other important concerns. Achieving our vision of a transportation system that is safe, efficient, and inclusive to all types of transportation will require patience and strategic allocation of funding to make sure the road facilities best match the usage. The public must be meaningfully involved as major changes are contemplated. Our already approved plans should be followed when they still make the best sense, and modified appropriately when circumstances have changed.
- iii. Sustainability was a high priority expressed by the public in forming the 2020 One Grand Junction Comprehensive Plan. In response, a Sustainability and Adaptation Plan was developed and adopted by the city council in 2023. There was robust and diverse guidance provided by a citizen advisory committee to the staff and consultant who wrote the plan. As with the multi-modal plans discussed above, the greatest challenges will be in the decisions of when and how to fund and implement the plan. The plan has six major focus areas (Built Environment; Climate Resilience; Energy Stewardship; Waste Management; Water Conservation, and City Leadership) that will contribute to the long-term livability and prosperity of our community, but finding short-term funding for long-term goals will require thoughtfulness, discipline, and excellent communication with the public. I am committed to fulfilling the public’s desire for increased sustainability and adaptability in a patient and fiscally responsible way.

9. By now, you have read and considered the seven political principles we feel should guide political conduct in Western Colorado. Please give us your opinion on the merits of the principles and let us know if you are willing to observe them.
- i. Compete over values, principles, and ideas--find common ground to solve problems and legislate. This is the essence of collaborative leadership common to all boards, councils, committees, etc. While adhering to these principles does not guarantee success, violating them leads to discord, dysfunction, and failure. I have employed this approach over my long career in medicine and on numerous boards and committees outside of medicine with success. Meeting people where they are at, finding common ground, establishing a factual framework, and agreeing on shared fundamental deep values is the pathway to successful balanced decision-making which is the task that elected officials are charged with.
 - ii. Fact and evidence-based reasoning. As a person of science with a 40 year career in medicine I am deeply wed to fact and evidence-based reasoning and decision-making. Not only am I committed to this process, I am also highly trained and experienced in analyzing the validity of data to determine how “factual” it really is, and I am trained, experienced, and proficient at analyzing methodology that attempts to determine cause and effect relations that the data suggests. There are innumerable pitfalls in study methodology that must be understood before accepting an author’s conclusions, and it is necessary to have council members with those skills to assure that when we think we are being evidence-based we actually are.
 - iii. No person or party has a monopoly on public policy; communication and good faith negotiations are essential. As a politically unaffiliated candidate with no personal gain in mind, I come into this election completely in accord with this principle. I believe I can model and encourage this ethic to help the council communicate effectively with civil debate and a spirit of compromise to yield balanced outcomes.
 - iv. Public interest before party interest. Fortunately, the council elections are not associated with political party. I am in total agreement with this principle and hope that party politics do not become a factor in the election or enter into the council’s deliberations. Should that happen I will do what I can to identify and deter it and will strongly resist getting dragged into the fray.
 - v. Extremism is antithetical to public service and balanced problem solving. The key to serving the entire public is to seek balanced policy and legislative solutions to the community’s pressing needs and problems. This requires leaders that eschew extreme positions, are able to acknowledge differing opinions, and operate with a “give and take” approach to reach needed compromises and balance. It requires

experience and maturity to know that our decisions will not please everyone and some degree of backlash is inevitable.

- vi. Run and hold office without harassment or threats. This is a bedrock principle of our country that applies to all levels of elected leadership. We have been blessed in Grand Junction by a low level of this despicable behavior compared to some other places, and I deeply hope that it stays that way. Threatening and harassment often stem from extremism. Modeling civil, collaborative, and respectful behavior diminishes the contagion of extremism and helps reduce emotional reactions that lead to harassment and threats.
- vii. It is prudent of elected officials to temper personal freedoms with responsibilities of community leadership. I agree with this principle and have considerable experience with exercising this type of professionalism throughout my medical career. I have certainly lived my life my own way and pursued my personal interests, but I am always mindful that I have gained the trust of the public to be a professional that looks after their wellbeing and I accept that my actions in public should not give cause to question my integrity or trustworthiness. I practice this type of professionalism now as the vice-chair of the planning commission, and if elected to city council I will continue in this vein of professionalism inside and outside of City Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken Scissors

Candidate, At-Large city council seat.

February 20, 2025