

Nguyen RTB Questionnaire

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

I am an experienced scientist and public servant. Professionally, I have worked for U.S. Department of Energy for over ten years to address environmental contamination at sites that supported the Cold War. Recently, I have stepped into a role supporting programs to increase the development of renewables and energy efficiency. My experience in these roles have given me in-depth knowledge of budgets, of how to run cost-effective programs that maximize public benefit and have honed my analytical thinking and data-driven decision making.

Outside of work, I have also advocated for the public interest on both the Urban Trails Committee and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Steering Committee, helping the City plan for and better accommodate alternative modes of transit throughout our community. On a personal level, I have been a part of the local arts as a musician in both the Western Colorado Chorale and Grand Junction Centennial Band.

2. By now, you have read and considered the seven political principles we feel should guide political conduct in Western Colorado.

a. Do you endorse each of the seven principles Restore the Balance feels should guide political conduct in Western Colorado?

I do. I would even add to the principle regarding public interest - I think it should also include reference to the importance of serving public interest over self-interest. We, as a society, need to be able to advocate for things that don't benefit us directly.

When elected officials put self-interest over public interest, while not always illegal or partisan, it definitely erodes trust in institutions making a functional democracy even more difficult to execute.

b. If you endorse them all, please explain how you will work to execute these principles.

On Council, I would work to be an accessible and transparent representative, and to make decisions driven by data and by public input, weighing the needs of the community at large before making a decision. It's not easy, but I'm ready to put in the work required to do it well.

c. If there are one or more principles you do not endorse, please identify them and explain why.

N/A

3. It is important to let people know that you put the public interest first. In looking back over the past year, are there any decisions the Grand Junction City Council has made that you do not agree with? If yes, how would you have changed them?

I have two. Firstly, I think the structure around the marijuana licensing could be improved. While I understand the rationale for implementing a license cap, I also think it ultimately adds unnecessary complexity by making an equitable allocation of licenses more difficult. We have plenty of examples of communities implementing retail marijuana, and as far as I'm aware the concern over getting overrun with businesses seems like a perceived risk vs. a real one. Eliminating the cap on the number of licenses would have allowed the city to avoid the lottery system which seems to be slowing down the approval process - let the free market decide the appropriate number of marijuana shops.

My second decision I'm unsure about is the Richmark project and the associated development incentives. To be clear, I am glad we are incenting infill and development downtown. However, I'm wondering if the packages could be more tailored to achieve our goals. Based on the information available to the public it's hard to know exactly what the incentives are at each project cost "price point," but my concern is that we might be giving benefits to projects that don't need it and not giving enough to projects that do.

4. In the aftermath of the January 6th insurrection, studies and security experts are citing increased risks to local governments from extremist groups who now target meetings of city councils and school boards for potential violent protests and demonstrations around false election fraud and conspiracy theories.

a. How would you as a local government official push back against those who are undermining public confidence in free and fair elections?

I think effective pushback against these groups requires a society-wide concerted effort. We can't let these groups destroy our democracy in the near-term but in the long-term it probably takes empathy and a better understanding of how conspiracy theories take root and how people are brought back from them.

In general, I worry that a heavy-handed approach against these groups may backfire further cementing people in their views. I think a better way involves strengthening social cohesion and consistent engagement with the general public in governance (assuming they are non-violent and acting in good-faith).

With good engagement and sufficient transparency, coupled with strong systems of education, I think our society can minimize the impact of these extremist groups.

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b. What should be done to protect elected officials and the public from those using harassment to stop civil engagement and the exercise of democratic processes?

I think the presence and conduct of the GJPD officers at City Council is a good example of how to approach it. The officers are there to prevent the worst case scenario but are not front and center, fostering an environment for civil discussion without feeling intimidating to the general public.

5. The City of Grand Junction Charter provides that council elections are to be non-partisan. What do you think about local political party organizations supporting or opposing council candidates? Will you reject political party endorsements and/or direct contributions to your campaign from political parties; why or why not?

I am wholly against political party organizations supporting and endorsing council candidates, as the role is defined as non-partisan. I will reject political party endorsements and direct contributions to my campaign from political parties.

6. In the wake of the recent Orchard Mesa Pool controversy, the question of resolving multi-jurisdictional conflict has arisen.

a. What are your feelings regarding intergovernmental cooperation in the Grand Valley on this or other issues?

I understand that each of these entities have their own specific set of interests, but it's important to acknowledge that all the parties involved are also entities that serve the public interest. As such, I think figuring out how to make progress is important, too.

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

A professional facilitator could add value by guiding discussions around the collective interests of all the groups and driving the entities towards a joint solution.

c. How would you protect Grand Junction's interests while still serving the most people in the most efficient and cost-effective way?

I think a study to evaluate options is warranted. Only after knowing what the costs are to rehabilitate or revitalize the facility, can a proper decision be made. I also think it is worth noting that, should the City make a significant investment in the Orchard Mesa Pool, that efforts to increase attendance should be explored as well

as ensuring that better usage data is collected. It's hard to make good decisions with bad data.

7. Homelessness and affordable housing have been identified as problems in Grand Junction that affect 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 these problems?

Homelessness and affordable housing are multifaceted problems that will ultimately require multi-pronged solutions, many of which lie within the purview of the City Council to implement. Maintaining affordability is a cornerstone of my campaign, and an area that touches on both the issues of homelessness and affordable housing.

Incentives for infill, development, redevelopment and ADUs are a good place to start. Appropriate incentives are needed to maximize supply development at the price points that are attainable by wages within the community. Zoning decisions and infrastructure development also have a role to play, by allowing more housing types to fit more life situations, and by enabling low-cost ways of life through mixed-use developments and increased mobility options.

To address homelessness, effective engagement with the unhoused is a critical first step - let's make sure we're actually addressing the needs of the homeless and not jumping straight to solutions without consultation. Additionally, partnering with the various service providers around the community who serve the unhoused will be important, as they are already doing the work and likely have insights and ideas to help close existing gaps.

8. Economic development is listed as one of Grand Junction's strategic priorities. According to the City's 2023 adopted budget summary, economic development spending will constitute 8% (\$19.5 million) of the total combined budget.

a. What means would you utilize to evaluate the merit and effectiveness of the city's economic development strategy?

I'm struck by how narrowly this term is defined in the 2023 Grand Junction City Budget and personally hold a much broader view of what can be considered economic development. I believe that a clear and predictable regulatory environment with strong infrastructure could be considered economic development in that it creates an environment in which business can thrive.

But for the items that are included under the "Economic Development" header, I think it's important that we establish performance criteria and define what success looks like in the context of that budget line item. For example, Grand Valley Transit is getting almost \$600k in the 2023 budget - I am very supportive of

alternative modes of transport to car-ownership, but how are we measuring success and are we consistently improving on those goals over time? To me, these are the types of questions that are important to ask when evaluating budgets.

b. What steps would you take to determine that the level of funding for the city's economic development strategy is appropriate or should be increased or decreased?

I think benchmarking against similar communities is a good place to start when determining an appropriate level of funding. I also think it's important to note that not every economic development initiative has to cost much - streamlining city processes and evaluating regulations/policies for efficacy are ways that could promote economic development and cost very little to implement. In short, provide sensible regulation to support the public interest where necessary and minimize hurdles otherwise.

c. If elected, how would you ensure that funding the city's economic development strategy is fair to new businesses, existing businesses, taxpayers who are not business owners, as well as pro-growth and no-growth interests?

This is the heart of good governance - in weighing diverse interests we must always stay cognizant of the primary "shareholder" of government, the taxpayer. Threading that needle is hard but I'm prepared to do that work; to engage with interested parties around City decision-making, and to ensure that we are maximizing public good and considering those without a voice in any decision, and not just caving to the loudest voice in the room.

9. Are there City expenditures that you think could be reduced without sacrificing City residents' quality of life or fiscal responsibility? Are there City expenditures that you think should be increased?

Yes, the City must live within a budget, and within that budget we should be getting good value and high quality services for our taxpayer dollars. But I am hesitant to "arm-chair quarterback" as an outsider to the finer details of City expenditures, especially given the lack of context and understanding that is available to an average citizen.

I am, however, a firm believer in continuous improvement and the large gains that can be accrued by making incremental progress over time - this mentality is what I'd like to see expressed in City operations. To me, quality services that are in line with our community priorities is more important than pinpointing specific line item expenditures for more or less funding. I think it's also worth noting that while a budget can be considered a "statement of priorities" that not all solutions have to cost a lot, and sometimes inexpensive measures can still achieve our important goals.

10. What do you feel are three OTHER important issues and or concerns facing the City of Grand Junction and what solutions do you have in mind?

Strengthening Community: Decades of social “atomization” and the rise of social media have taken a toll on community cohesion. How communities start to undo this damage will be a challenge for years to come. I believe investing in public spaces to connect, businesses that provide “third places” and strong education systems are all ways to strengthen social cohesion.

Mobility: I think investments in alternative modes of mobility are going to be absolutely essential for the future. And there are so many benefits to be gained from doing so - increased social connectedness, reduced infrastructure costs and public health benefits to name a few. What the city is doing around the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, as well as hiring a Mobility Planner are important steps in that direction that I believe must continue.

Water Use and Drought: The arid West is experiencing unprecedented drought conditions, and these conditions are expected to grow worse in the coming decades. It would behoove the City to ensure that it is not caught off guard by these changes. Ensuring adequate water supply through conservation or capital measures will be critical to the long-term viability of our City. For example, the City could expand education around water use and incentivize low-water landscaping at the citizen level. At the City-wide level, the City could examine its operations at its parks and golf courses to see if there are opportunities for better water management.