

GC General Plan: Strong and Resilient Economy

Draft

Section ####: Building a Strong and Resilient Economy

OVERVIEW

“For one of the most beautiful places on the planet to also be among the best places to live, play, work, and do business.” -from the Trail to Tomorrow Strategic Plan

Grand County seeks to facilitate the development of a strong and resilient economy, one that supports good jobs and a high quality of life for all residents. The foundation of the Grand County economy is in its world-class public lands, which draw visitors from around the region and world to adventure and sightsee. Millions of visitors come to Grand County each year to experience the beauty of our National and State Parks and to adventure on our public lands, which are home to world-class rafting, off-roading, biking, hiking, climbing, and many other outdoor activities. Through direct and indirect means, Grand County’s visitation economy supports the vast majority of jobs across the county and helps to sustain a level of services—from medical to dining and retail—that would not otherwise be available in a small, rural community.

Visitation by guests that come to fall in love with and help us steward Grand County’s public lands is valuable and encouraged. While visitation drives Grand County’s economy, it also strains the county’s housing market, public lands, and other local resources that must be actively managed to ensure economic and environmental sustainability.

Grand County’s economic development strategy must therefore work to keep the visitation and outdoor recreation sectors motors of the economy running at a world-class level while mitigating the stresses that high levels of visitation place on the local economy, lands, infrastructure, and quality of life. The economic development strategy also seeks to address basic challenges facing

rural communities throughout the country: improving public infrastructure, access to healthcare, and creating strong career pathways for youth to grow and thrive in their home community.

Grand County endorses an locally driven, asset-based approach to economic development, prioritizing support for home-grown businesses that will partner with Grand County residents to improve local quality of life and prosperity.

In 2023-2024, the County undertook an extensive community engagement and planning exercise, leading to the creation of the *Trail to Tomorrow: A 5-year strategic plan for sustainable tourism, economic diversification, and asset-based community economic development in Grand County, Utah*, which informs this section of the General Plan and is included as an annex to this chapter.

Making the Visitor Economy Work for Us

- a. **Strengthen:** Tap into the strength of our brand to attract visitors and foster within them a genuine connection to our public lands, creating desire to care for them during their visit and to return to visit again.
- b. **Increase Resiliency:** The visitor economy experiences ups and downs, whether seasonal or based on macroeconomic trends. Grand County seeks especially to disburse its visitation peaks across early spring and late fall periods and prepare for potential shocks to visitation trends.
- c. **Protect:** Our economy is driven by visitation to regional public lands, yet more than 95% of land in Grand County is managed by federal, state, or tribal agencies. Grand County will proactively work with visitors and land managers to ensure the sustainability of these resources for generations to come.
- d. **Specific Strategies to make the visitor economy work for the people of Grand County.**
 - i. Strengthen

1. Use a modern and targeted approach to communicate with potential visitors that is integrated with efforts to build products (i.e. guiding resources, infrastructure, trails) for them.

a. Design specific outreach and engagement strategies for sightseers and each type of adventurer. Utilize and maintain best practices for managing each of the user groups listed below.

i. Sight-seers

1. Develop more easily accessible outdoor experiences that require no gear or training

ii. Hikers

1. Grand County lacks sufficient named hiking trails that can attract visitors to the area. Develop and market day-hikes and overnight backpacking opportunities in the area.

iii. Off-Road

More named trails and suggested routes needed. Work to strengthen relationships with Off-road user groups, inviting them to visit Grand County and to support trail work and other infrastructure development to improve user-experience and sustainability.

1. Jeep-

2. OHV

iv. Biking

1. MTB, road, e-bike
 - v. River
 - vi. Climbing
 - vii. Canyoneering
 - viii. High-lining
 - ix. Base-jumping
- b. Managing public lands
 - i. Work with land managers
 - ii. Advocate to protect public lands
 1. Utilizing best practices in both visitor management and conservation to And for reasonable access to support the local economy while protecting the economic and environmental sustainability of those resources.
2. Cultural Activities. Grand County has a vibrant arts and music scene and has been home to the recording of some of the most iconic moments in film. Each of these attracts significant visitors and revenue to the county while enhancing the quality of life of locals.
 - a. Music
 - b. Art
 - c. Film
3. Connectivity
 - a. Air

- i. maintain consistent viable air service supplier contracts
 - ii. support new routes with visitor marketing in relevant geographic areas
 - iii. support infrastructure improvements at the CNY
 - b. Regional roadways
 - c. Railway
- 4. Downtown Moab: Work with the city of Moab and downtown business owners to strengthen the downtown business corridor, which is the heart of the Grand County economy. Improvements in parking, walkability, non-motorized pathways, and beautification are some potential areas for collaboration.
 - a. Encourage local businesses to meet changing economic needs through federal and state programs
- 5. Thompson Springs and the I-70 corridor

ii. Resiliency: Strengthening economic resiliency in Grand County means both identifying and supporting promising opportunities to diversify the economy and working to mitigate the inevitable ebbs and flows in revenue associated with the visitor economy.

- 1. Prepare for macro- and micro-economic shocks (i.e. recession, changes to travel trends, natural disasters) that impact visitor revenue.
 - a. Be prepared to adjust marketing campaigns to focus in key markets ie, more regionally when events constrain

international travel and visa versa when international markets are in a growth cycle

- b. Work with Grand County and regional partners to add an economic dimension to emergency planning. Put in place a strategy to communicate, coordinate, and support local-businesses during and after natural disasters.
- c. Promptly seek support from federal and state programs when a downturn is predicted or when an unexpected event threatens to Grand County economy.
- d. encourage right-sized infrastructure development to avoid over or under supply of key visitor services

2. Diversification

- 3. Broaden the base of the visitor economy. Support the development of the growing destination wedding industry, food and agro-tourism, the arts, golf, and other opportunities to engage visitors in new ways and at various times of year.

iii. Protect

- 1. Grand County should maintain strong working relationships and an active dialogue (across County departments) with state and federal public land managers to encourage sustainability and access on public lands. Grand County should, where possible, support and encourage infrastructure development that enhances recreational opportunities while protecting the natural environment that attracts visitors and improves quality of life in the County.

2. Support and connect visitors with relevant conservation and education efforts.
 - a. Support Agro-tourism and voluntourism
 - b. Support outdoor education in all sectors

Addressing Fundamentals

Eliminating bottlenecks to economic development and working to ensure all residents have a place in the Grand County economy.

e. Workforce

- i. The housing shortage for our local workforce is perhaps the biggest obstacle to strengthening the Grand County economy. The county has facilitated and made significant investment in addressing this challenge in recent years (add some numbers). Still, 45% of homeowners have mortgages exceeding 30% of their income, and resident surveys have found housing affordability tops the list of economic concerns.

1. Continue to address the shortage of workforce housing as an economic development priority. Significant state economic development funding has been directed to creating additional workforce housing over the past five years. The County and Economic Opportunity Advisory Board should stay apprised of developments in housing policy and the housing market in order to, as warranted, continue to support housing initiatives.
2. Major challenges require an All-of-government response. Grand County economic development staff should support the land use plan

update and work with the Planning Department to encourage workforce housing creation.

3. Develop temporary services to accommodate local workers living out of vehicles to provide access to safe and sanitary living conditions; while more permanent solutions are found

- ii. Attract workers for the high quality of life Grand County offers

f. Education

- i. Facilitate connections between local businesses and educational institutions.

While education is primarily a function of the GCSO and USU, a strong education system is vital to local economic health and should be supported by local economic development organizations and local businesses in order to better prepare all residents for job opportunities.

1. A strong emphasis should be placed on vocational training in order to address workforce shortages in the trades.
2. Similar emphasis should be placed on medical training, such as the USU nursing program and the project to develop a destination EMS training program.
3. Emphasis on education and training related to natural resources management.

g. Childcare

- i. Essential to workforce
- ii. Ask Moab Community Childcare for stats for this section

h. Buildable Land (Ask Planning and Zoning to review/add to this section)

- i. Land use policy should work in concert with economic development policy to correct imbalances in the regional economy and drive growth in ways that

improve resident quality of life. Land use policy at both the county and municipal levels can incentivize the development of housing for the local workforce and the development of retail and services that residents currently travel great distances to find (i.e. clothing stores, dry cleaning).

- ii. Review land ownership near existing infrastructure to identify possible buildable land opportunities with willing owners in all categories
- i. Noise and Traffic Mitigation
 - i. Noise - strengthen partnerships with businesses that contribute (rental outfitters, short term rental operators)
 - 1. Explore rerouting certain types of traffic in ways that could benefit both locals and visitors
 - ii. Traffic mitigation - work with city of Moab and UDOT
- j. Supporting local non-profits that support vulnerable residents of Grand County and fill gaps in public services
 - i. Create a mandate to provide ongoing support to the public services ecosystem that is supported by nonprofits?
 - ii. Maintain a current database of federal, state, and private foundation funders focused on supporting vulnerable foundations

Supporting Local Businesses and Entrepreneurs

- k. Encourage and support local entrepreneurs at all levels to fill local and visitor needs with local resources to keep revenues local whenever possible. We have tons of entrepreneurs but not nearly enough support for them
 - i. Work with state offices to ensure state-funded programs are working at peak performance for Grand County businesses

ii. Create additional support structures for local businesses

1. Support a process to assess viability and seek potential federal and/or state funding for a business incubator/accelerator
2. Work with the Small Business Development Center, the Moab Area Chamber of Commerce, the Women’s Business Center of Utah and other relevant groups to educate local businesses and connect them to potential financial and business strategy resources.
3. Reach out to regional municipalities and counties with strong support for their entrepreneurs to identify best practices that might be replicated in Grand County.
4. RURAL BROADBAND

iii. Policies to support Entrepreneurs and Small Business

1. Support local entrepreneurs as they navigate licensing, especially for home-based businesses, which are key to economic development in Grand County due to limited availability and affordability of commercial real estate.
1. Target “tourism-adjacent”/ public land related / rural focused industries to broaden our economic base while taking advantage of local economic assets, our rural setting and our public lands..
 1. Weddings and conferences
 - a. Weddings in particular are already a growing industry. With support
 2. Food—beverage—agriculture ecosystem
 - a. Grand County has developed a strong hospitality industry to serve visitors. It also has a strong history of ranching and

agriculture. Opportunities for growth include agro-tourism, food production (small-scale food manufacturing), support for catering and restaurant startups,

- b. Support a process to assess viability and seek potential federal and/or state funding for a multi-user commercial kitchen to support local food-industry startups and small businesses. Assess the viability of a long-term County role in supporting such a facility.

3. Search and Rescue and outdoor recreation guiding education

- a. Grand County has exceptional SAR and guiding services. The concentration of knowledge in these sectors can be leveraged to make Grand County a center for instruction and the development of best practices.
 - i. Could tie into Addressing Fundamentals > Education

4. Creative Economy

- a. Film: Ask Bega for a short paragraph on impact and strategy for growth
- b. Art
- c. Artisans

5. Natural Resources

- a. Take a pro-active approach to resource extraction that does not rely on speculative investors, but rather focuses on economically viable natural resources that could be sustainably sourced using pre-planned restoration techniques

Draft