

**FRUITA CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
MARCH 25, 2025
6:30 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The workshop of the Fruita City Council was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Mayor Matthew Breman. City Council members present were Aaron Hancey, Jeannine Purser, James Williams, Rich Parrish, and Amy Miller.

City Staff present were City Manager Shannon Vassen, City Clerk Deb Woods, Communications and Engagement Manager Ciara Amann, Chief of Police Dave Krouse, Public Works Director Kimberly Bullen, Planning and Development Director Dan Caris, City Planner Henry Hemphill, Finance Director Joe Zaher and Parks and Recreation Director Marc Mancuso.

Mayor Matthew Breman added an item to the agenda to discuss with Council the process for filling the City Council vacancy that resulted from the resignation of Councilor Andrea Downs.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. I-70 BILLBOARD LEASE DISCUSSION (6:30 - 7:00 PM)

City Manager Shannon Vassen noted that also present at the Workshop meeting were representatives from Family Health West (FHW) and the Fruita Tourism Advisory Council (FTAC) specifically for this agenda item.

Communications and Engagement Manager Ciara Amann provided a brief history about how the City of Fruita has been leasing its billboard located on I-70 to FHW since 2019. Prior to that, the City used the billboard to promote upcoming local events and to counter the Moab billboard nearby. This discussion was placed on the Council workshop meeting agenda after the FTAC expressed interest in using the billboard for marketing and promotion of the City instead of renewing the lease with Family Health West.

FHW's Director of Marketing & Foundation Eric Mello provided everyone with a handout, which was a letter from him addressed to the City of Fruita requesting that FHW be allowed to continue to lease the I-70 billboard from the City of Fruita to remind the local population and advise visitors of the availability of emergency medical services and maintain FHW's local visibility.

In the letter, Mello explained how from 2003 to 2015, he served as the Marketing Representative with Cobb & Associates, the City of Fruita's Marketing and Promotions agency and later, from 2018 to 2023, as an FTAC Advisory Board member. He also stated in the letter that surveys and conversations with local businesses indicated limited recall of the billboard among both local residents and out-of-state visitors.

At that time, the City developed a new and very successful marketing strategy of placing banners on the Co-Op grain silo that is adjacent to Highway 6 & 50 but still visible from I-70. There were, however, concerns about the City having the budget to maintain the banners and a decision was made to lease the I-70 billboard to FHW at a rate of \$1,000 per month to help offset the cost of replacing the silo banners. The City still had the ability to advertise upcoming events and attractions on the bottom

section of the I-70 billboard and even had the idea of making that bottom section electronic when the COVID pandemic hit and all such marketing efforts stopped. At that time, staff received a quote of \$9,000 for the electronic portion of the billboard.

Mr. Mello clarified that FHW very much wants to continue leasing the I-70 billboard and offered to work with the Fruita Area Chamber of Commerce to place printed ads for Fruita events and businesses in their medical offices in Fruita. He added that FHW has invested almost \$84,000 in the billboard and its Corporate office wants to consolidate FHW's services due to budgetary constraints, so their marketing and promotion is of upmost importance.

The FTAC spoke about the benefits and potential uses for the I-70 billboard such as driving people to Fruita's downtown and about the Co-Op grain silo banners (which are ten years old now) and CDOT regulations.

The City Council directed staff to obtain another quote for digital messaging on the bottom of the I-70 billboard and allow FHW to continue leasing the billboard on a month-to-month basis until more information has been gathered and decisions can be made. They also requested that the FTAC approach Barnhart Communications (the City's marketing firm) about their pricing for putting together some concept plans whether they be for the I-70 billboard, Co-Op grain silo or both that meet the goals of the Council and City, one of which is to drive people to downtown Fruita. The Council members pointed out that they are looking for mutually beneficial outcomes for both the City and its community partner, FHW.

2. DISCUSSION ON OLD FRUITA MIDDLE SCHOOL (7:00 – 8:00 PM)

On March 18, 2025, Mesa County School District # 51 provided the City Council and staff members with a tour of the old Fruita Middle School to see if the City may want to take over ownership of it. Mayor Breman asked the other Council members if they were still interested in talking to the School District about potential options for the property and they said they were.

There was discussion about how some Council members had a hard time conceptualizing what could be done with the building and the need for creative brainstorming.

City Manager Shannon Vassen noted that the 2025 Community Survey includes two questions about the Middle School so that staff and the Council might gain some insight into public opinion on the matter. It is anticipated that the results of the Survey will be presented to City Council at their Regular Council meeting of either May 6th or May 20th.

It was also discussed how more information about funding mechanisms from Special Counsel Dalton Kelley would be helpful and how some Council members felt a second walk-through of the building with community stakeholders was in order. Many also felt another Council Workshop discussion will be necessary once more information is obtained.

The Council directed City Manager Vassen to contact School District #51 to schedule a second walk-through while everyone waits for the results of the 2025 Community Survey in the meantime.

3. OVERVIEW OF FRUITA'S EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN (8:00 – 8:30 PM)

City Manager Shannon Vassen explained that at a Council Workshop meeting about five or six months ago, someone on the Livability Commission asked what happens when there is an emergency that affects the whole City.

Chief of Police Dave Krouse advised that there is a governing document named the *Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)* that is based on best standards and best practices and is widely adopted by many communities in Colorado. He reviewed sections of the EOP including the “Table of Contents” and “Emergency Support Functions (ESFs).” Krouse further explained that depending on the nature of an emergency event (incident), the EOP shows which City Department(s) need to be involved, but the main important roles belong to the City Manager, Mayor and City Council. The City Manager has the ultimate decision-making authority while the Mayor and City Council members provide leadership by making policy decisions (e.g., requesting resources from other jurisdictions) and communication with the public and other elected officials. The City Manager is responsible for declaring an emergency, which is then ratified by the City Council.

Councilor Hancey asked Chief Krouse what Fruita’s biggest risks might be. Krouse responded that some of those incidents could include train derailments of hazardous materials, flood, wildfire and weather events. There are also mass casualty events such as shootings at schools (for example). He noted that the State of Colorado requires that public safety personnel are required to complete continuing education and every month, Fruita Police Officers and Lower Valley Fire Protection District (LVFPD) personnel meet with officials in Mesa County to discuss and review emergency plans. Krouse also commented that Mesa County is widely known for its cooperation with federal agencies when it comes to public safety.

Krouse continued that the EOP is reviewed every two years and it was last updated in 2024. At that time, former City Manager Mike Bennett wanted to make a few changes to the EOP which will be reflected in the latest update dated March of 2025.

City Manager Shannon Vassen pointed out that going through the COVID pandemic was valuable in learning how to manage and emergency and that he and Communications and Engagement Manager Ciara Amann often attend communications and other related training.

Councilor Purser asked how quickly the Mayor and City Council would be alerted to an emergency. Vassen responded that depending on the incident, he would be in communication as soon as he obtains the information to share. Krouse pointed out that he, Vassen and Amann are very aware of the things that might spur questions of the City Council by the public. Vassen added that his goal is to overcommunicate at times.

Krouse explained that the newest update of the EOP is currently in draft form and requested that the City Council send any feedback they may have to the City Manager.

4. CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON COLORADO SENATE BILL 24-131 (8:30 – 8:45 PM)

Fruita Police Chief Dave Krouse reviewed the bill, which essentially bans the carrying of firearms in certain areas in Colorado such as government buildings and anywhere court proceedings are being held. He stated that for the City of Fruita to opt out of the legislation (provided for in the bill), it would be challenging to come up with signage language on certain days and could lead to enforcement issues.

Councilor Hancey asked if City employees would be allowed to carry a concealed weapon during Municipal Court hours. City Manager Shannon Vassen acknowledged that he would need clarification from the City Attorney to answer that question, although he supposed if the City did allow for it, it could be challenged.

There was discussion about how the Town of Kersey interpreted the law so that they opted out of Senate Bill 24-131 except for their employees and whether that might be an option for Fruita. Mayor Breman said he was not in favor of having different rules for different people or even the perception of such. Chief Krouse added that doing something like what Kersey did would make enforcement very tricky for his police officers.

Councilors Miller and Purser were in favor of opting out of the bill as much as possible with Councilor Purser commenting that bad guys don't care about laws and she doesn't like taking people's rights away.

Chief Krouse stated that he could figure out a way to communicate the Council's position if they wanted to opt out of the legislation.

Councilor Hancey requested that staff provide Council with an example of ideal signage that would prevent as much confusion as possible. Chief Krouse stated that he feels that would be a discussion to have with City Attorney Mary Elizabeth Geiger and Public Works Director Kimberly Bullen.

Councilor Hancey asked whether moving the Fruita Municipal Court would be feasible. Vassen responded that that would not be an option for now nor a short-term solution.

Chief Krouse offered to look into the opt-out option and work with Attorney Geiger, City Manager Vassen and Public Works Director Bullen on it.

There was consensus from the Council to pursue opting out of SB 24-131 while court is in session.

It was noted that staff will need clarification from Attorney Geiger about employees of the City being able to opt out. Mayor Breman advised everyone to be prepared for the possibility of getting an opt-out position overturned.

5. DISCUSSION ABOUT PROCESS FOR APPOINTING A NEW CITY COUNCIL MEMBER (ADDED TO THE AGENDA) (8:45 PM)

City Manager Shannon Vassen explained that staff had placed an advertisement in the Daily Sentinel to solicit applications for the City Council vacancy that resulted from the resignation of Councilor Andrea Downs. The applications are due to the City Clerk's Office by no later than 3:00 p.m. on Monday, April 14, 2025.

Vassen also explained how pursuant to Fruita Municipal Code Section 2.10.020, any Council Member appointed to fill a vacancy shall serve until the next regular municipal election. At the next regular election, the three (3) candidates receiving the highest number of votes shall be elected to four-year terms and the candidate receiving the next highest number of votes, in descending order, shall be elected to a two-year term. Pursuant to the Fruita City Charter, the Council has sixty (60) days to appoint someone from the date of the vacancy, which was March 17, 2025. The appointment is

approved upon majority vote of the Council at an open meeting, which means that the appointment has to be made by no later than the May 6, 2025 Regular City Council meeting.

City Clerk Deb Woods stated that she will forward all applications to the Mayor and City Council immediately after 3:00 p.m. on April 14th and would also notify them throughout the day that day about how many applications were coming in.

Mayor Breman directed each of the Council members to email him with their five (5) top candidates after they review the applications. The Mayor will then narrow those down to the finalists that will be interviewed at a Special Meeting on Tuesday, April 29, 2025 after spending about a week reviewing the applications. Mayor Breman stated that he would prefer to conduct interviews in Executive Session to protect the privacy of the interviewees, but Vassen said he would have to check with the City Attorney to see if the Council would be able to cite the purpose of the Executive Session as “Personnel” matters when the candidates won’t actually be employees of the City yet.

City Manager Shannon Vassen said he would forward the interview questions to the Mayor and Council members that were asked of candidates the last time there was a vacancy on the City Council.

OTHER ITEMS (8:45 PM)

Councilor Purser complimented the latest edition of the City Link by calling it wonderful and beautiful. She asked the other Council members if they would be taking any time off in May. She wondered whether the Council should cancel the May workshop meeting due to City offices being closed on May 26, 2025 and the Regular Meeting on June 15, 2025 for the Colorado Municipal League Conference.

Due to the resignation of Andrea Downs from City Council, Councilor Williams said he would take over as Council Liaison for the Museums of Western Colorado and Councilor Purser offered to take over the Arts and Culture Board in the interim of appointing someone to fill the vacancy.

Councilor Purser thanked the other Council members for considering the Fruita Tourism Advisory Council’s (FTAC’s) proposal for the I-70 bulletin board.

Councilor Williams thanked staff for taking of the issue about the tree over the pathway at Little Salt Wash Park.

Councilor Miller reported that she attended a very valuable ADA Seminar in Palisade. She also said the Livability Commission is working on a yellow dot program and that the board received an update from Fire Marshal Travis Holder with the Lower Valley Fire Protection District (LVFPD). She also asked City Manager Shannon Vassen if staff had direction for downtown businesses that will be affected by the South Mesa Street Improvements. Mr. Vassen responded that he would look into it, but noted that a lot will be dependent on the contractors unless the Council wanted to direct them on what to start on first. Staff still anticipates construction to start in June or July.

Vassen noted that the City has a table reserved at the Grand Junction Economic Partnership’s (GJEP’s) Economic Summit that seats up to ten. Mayor Breman noted that the format has changed and said he would send more information to the Council members to review at the Regular Meeting of April 1st.

Mr. Vassen was asked about how the process for hiring an Assistant City Manager was going.

Vassen replied that staff received 50 applications and will need to do some initial screening to narrow those down to between two to four. Over the next month, the candidates will be interviewed by the City's Leadership Team. Vassen pointed out that the applicants were a mix of current and seasoned managers, upcoming managers, and local and non-local people from both internal (to the City) and external sources. The Mayor and City Council members will be invited to meet the finalists at an Open House where there will be comment cards, although ultimately, Mayor Breman shared it is a staff decision. Breman further explained that staff will incorporate the Council's feedback, but that the Council should acknowledge that they don't approve of the appointment by any formal action. After an applicant has been chosen and hired, they will come to meet the Council at one of the Regular Council meetings.

Vassen noted that the Fruita Academy would again start up the following Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. in Council Chambers. 30 people signed up to participate, which is the maximum number of allowed participants.

Vassen also reviewed the upcoming agenda items for the next Regular Council meeting of April 6, 2025.

Mayor Breman pointed out that there is a Sheriff that lives in Fruita and suggested that the Council acknowledge and honor him. Vassen offered to reach out to him.

Vassen also noted that the Town Hall scheduled for April 15, 2025 (in place of a Regular Council meeting) will be an opportunity for the public to talk to the Mesa County Commissioners.

ADJOURN

With no further business before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Woods
City Clerk