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Date: March 11, 2024
To: Mayor Kudron and the Board of Trustees
From: John Crone, Town Manager
Re: Consideration to Approve an Application for a State REDI Grant

Background

The Town is considering applying for a REDI grant from the state. The grant will help pay for the RMNP West Gateway Master Plan as discussed in today's workshop. The Town needs to have official approval from the Board of Trustees to pursue the grant.

REDI grants of this kind are awarded in amounts ranging from \$25,000 to \$150,000. The grant would require a 50% match from the Town. If the Town wants to move forward with commissioning the study, the Board will need to determine how much money it is willing to spend. Then the Board will need to pass a motion allowing staff to apply for the matching grant funds.

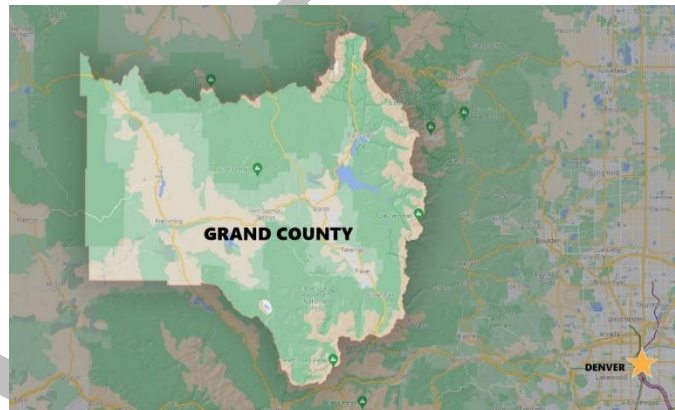
Motion

If the Board of Trustees desires to pursue the grant opportunity, then it may do so by approving the following motion:

I move to approve the Town's application for an REDI grant to fund the RMNP West Gateway Master Plan in the amount of _____.

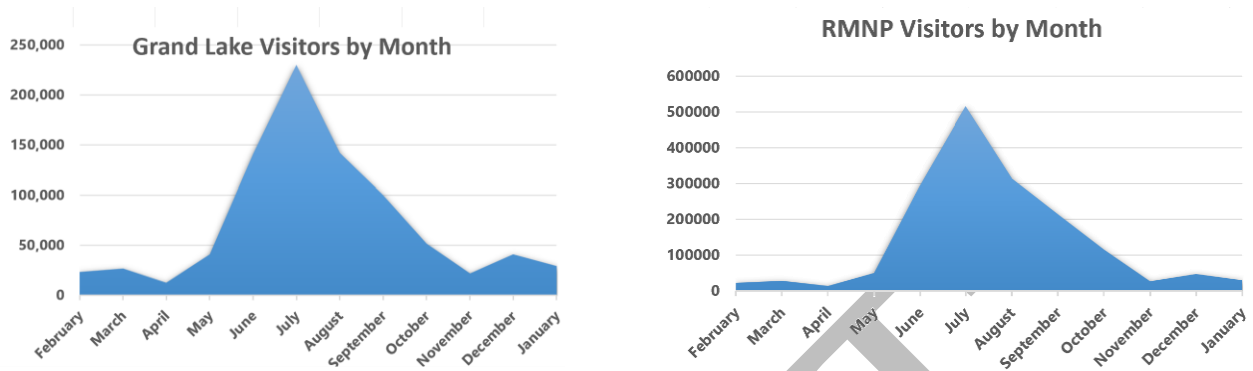
Project Name: Grand County RMNP West Gateway Master Plan
Scope: Economic Development Master Plan
Applicant: Grand County Economic Development
COG: Northwest Colorado Council of Government

Grand County, Colorado's economic foundation primarily rests on the outdoor tourism sector, with most of its top 20 employers directly involved in supporting this industry. One of the County's main attractions is the access it provides to the western half of the Rocky Mountain National Park ("RMNP"), a major national park welcoming over 4.5 million visitors annually. However, only 15% of these visitors make it to Grand County, due to various challenges, including: restricted access via Trail Ridge Road (closed from October to May); infrastructure obstacles; damage from forest fires and pine beetles; as well as workforce and lodging limitations. This results in seasonal pressures on the northwest corner of Grand County. To address this issue, a clear economic development plan is required to activate the region throughout the year, which includes the quaint tourist community of Grand Lake, Colorado. Following a recent meeting with Rocky Mountain National Park officials, including its new superintendent, it was agreed that the Grand County RMNP West Gateway Master Plan is necessary. This Plan will provide area businesses, Grand County officials, and the Rocky Mountain National Park with a strategy to sustain and grow economic activity throughout the year.



The Grand County RMNP West Gateway Master Plan will be developed as an action item that resulted from an ongoing EDA-funded Tourism Revitalization Plan, which aims to tackle issues linked to tourism's economic impacts on the County. Indeed, data and stakeholder feedback collected during the progress of this project underscores the necessity for this Gateway Master Plan. For instance, in the gateway town of Grand Lake, the visitation of tourists closely mirrors that of RMNP, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

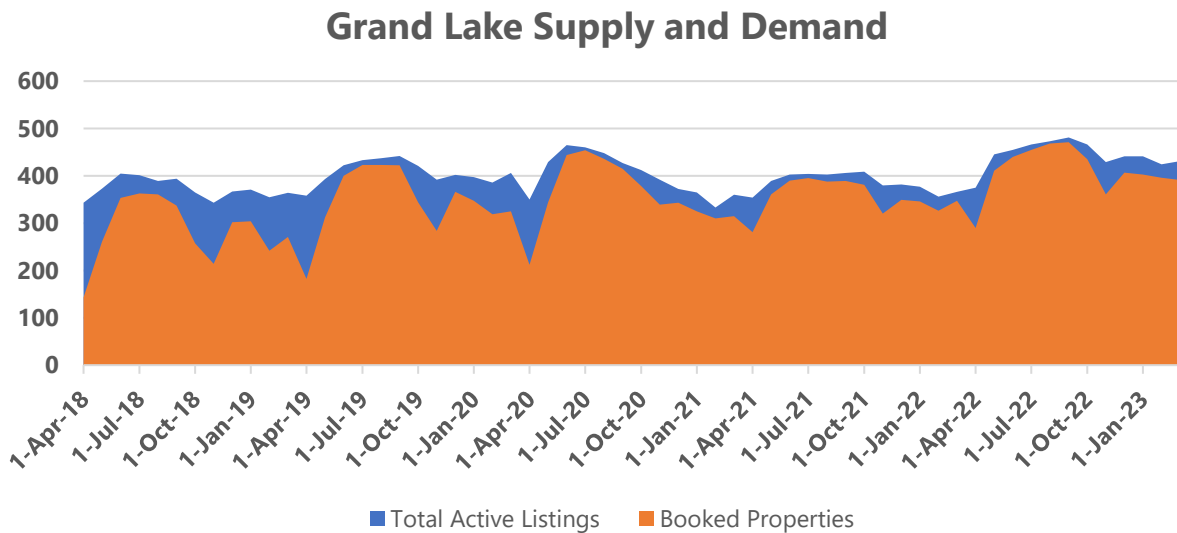
Figure 1: 5-Year Average of Visitors by Month to Grand Lake and RMNP



Source: Datafy

The busiest times for visitors usually occur between May and September, necessitating additional strategies to extend shoulder seasons to bolster the local economy. Short-term rentals also show a similar pattern, with reduced demand in April, a peak in July, and then declining demand in October (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Short-term Rentals Supply and Demand



Source: AirDNA

The desire for short-term rentals has surged by approximately 15% to 36% since 2019. Yet, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the available housing for seasonal, occasional, or recreational use has dwindled by roughly 13%. This suggests that the demand for short-term rental properties will keep rising, while the supply will remain constrained. To foster the region's growth, a diverse array of accommodation options and actions will need to be implemented.

Grand Lake's heavy reliance on RMNP as the primary driver of their economy presents a challenge by exposing them to economic instability. Furthermore, unforeseen natural disasters, such as wildfires, pose a risk to Grand Lake, neighboring communities like Granby, and the roughly 350 businesses in this area. In 2020, the East Troublesome Fire consumed nearly 200,000 acres on the western side of RMNP, affecting the areas in and around Grand Lake. This event directly impacted the sole route from Grand County to RMNP, Trail Ridge Road, causing a temporary closure. The map displayed in **Figure 3** underscores the proximity of Grand Lake to RMNP and the significance of Trail Ridge Road as the primary access point from Grand County into RMNP.

The goals of this proposed Grand County RMNP West Gateway Master Plan will address issues related to:

- Reduce seasonality such that a year-round workforce can be cultivated to sustain businesses,
- Assessing strategies to address affordable housing for that workforce,
- Attracting and retaining a younger labor force,
- Establishing effective wayfinding from RMNP to Grand Lake,
- Creating year-round programs in collaboration with RMNP,
- Addressing transportation challenges, and
- Strategizing on increased demands-drivers for non-peak tourism

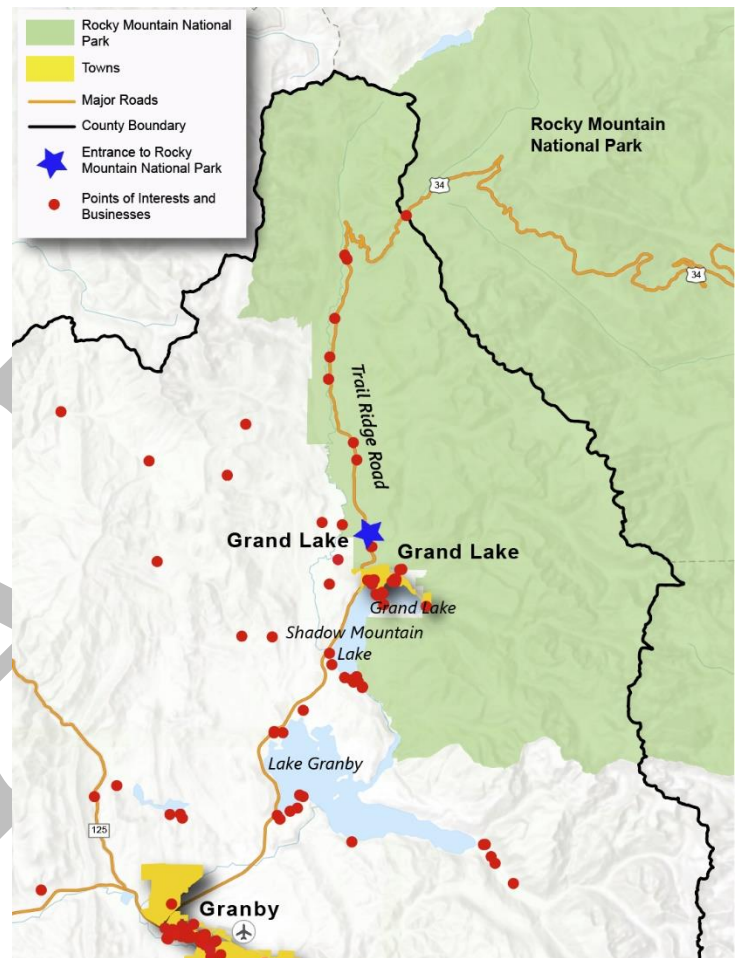


Figure 3: Project Area

The Grand County RMNP West Gateway Master Plan is essential to the growth of this area, by aiming to sustain year-round economic activity. This Plan will tackle these issues and ensure the County's economic resilience, particularly in the gateway town of Grand Lake, which is heavily reliant on RMNP. Some key tasks will include:

Task 1 – Community Outreach.

- Site Tour and Kickoff Meeting: We will collectively review the community and hold a meeting with key officials to discuss the goals of the program, communication, and public meeting schedule.
- Public Meetings: We propose to hold three (3) public meetings during this project. The initial public meeting will be utilized to collect public input and a second

meeting will be held to vet key decision points and collect additional input. A final meeting will be held to review the final draft of the plan and collect other input.

- Monthly Calls: We propose to complete a monthly check-in call to discuss findings with the steering committee.

Task 2 – Due Diligence Analysis. This task will include collecting and assessing relevant data from Town, County, State, and Federal sources. Data will be converted into GIS mapping. This will include:

- Infrastructure: Sewer, water, storm, floodplain, fiber optic, electric, etc.
- Transportation: Current patterns for public, private, pedestrian, and bicycle use.
- Land Use: Past and current plans, existing land uses
- Brownfields: Real or perceived vacant sites.
- Demographics: Population trends, age groups, etc.
- Economics: Existing business revenue, current markets, underserved markets.
- Labor Shed Data: Employment, jobs imported and exported, and labor demand.
- Community Brand: We will identify the internal and external perception of the community.

We will conduct analysis of existing data and develop recommendations based on trends. These recommendations will explore current positive and negative trends. Modeling will be used to develop recommendations and inform the final report and program.

Task 3 – Economic Framework Plan Program. In addition to this document, we will lay out a program for community growth and identify economic and community development priority sites. Plan will include maps and graphics that capture community vision and relay the next steps in a readily accessible format. The document will include the following elements:

- Community Brand Improvements;
- Infrastructure and Transportation Asset Improvements, including wayfinding;
- Preliminary Cost Estimates for Infrastructure;
- Land Use and Reuse Strategies; and,
- Asset development benchmarks.

Task 4 – Implementation Strategy. A separate Implementation Strategy Document will outline the key leaders for specific recommendations and efforts.