

## Summary of Stakeholder Comments Provided in Focus Group Meetings Held April 8-11, April 30, and May 6, 2019

*Facilitator: Zacharia Levine, Grand County Community and Economic Development Director*

Comments provided by clients and staff of the Moab Valley Multicultural Center (MVMC): Service workers, business owners, staff

- “When I moved here 23 years ago, nothing was open November through March. It was hard if you didn’t save your money, but it was quiet.”
- “There are 10,000 people living here, but we all work two or more jobs; it is like we need a 20,000 person or larger community to fill the workforce needs. Our workers are stressed.”
- Moab needs more housing opportunities.
  - “Nothing is available, and it is very difficult for non-native speakers to be accepted in rental housing. I know so many families that are living four, even five, families in a single trailer.”
  - “Can the City and County incentivize more ADU development?”
- Overcrowding, due to the lack of supply (and perhaps even more than cost) of housing, is a huge and common problem. It leads to all sorts of other community challenges, and I am especially concerned about its effects on children.
  - Overcrowding negatively affects family life
  - Overcrowding leads to a loss in privacy, often times sanitation issues, and prevents children from having routines.
  - “It creates chaos in the household. Kids can’t thrive in chaos.”
  - “Because of crime, abuse, and natural disasters (e.g. fire) stemming from overcrowding, more and more of our ‘clients’ are living in their vehicles (or on people’s floors) for increasingly extended periods of time. It used to be a few weeks to a month; it is now, on average, six months.”
    - “This is severely affecting people’s kids. This is the most heartbreaking part of our housing crisis.”
    - “When a family is displaced and living in their car or on another family’s couch, where do the kids sleep? They don’t have beds.”
- The lack of housing in Moab is causing displacement of residents and preventing people who want to move and work here from staying.
  - “Moab has a lot of jobs. People from all over want to come here and work. But, they get here and cannot stay. I am about to lose two employees next week because they cannot find housing.”
  - “I know many people who are leaving Moab because they can’t find housing. These are good people who work hard.”
  - “We have too many jobs and not enough housing.”
  - Many Native American individuals and families have tried to come to Moab, live and work here, but have not been able to stay. Many struggle with the cultural differences, job challenges, and housing.

- Most people who leave go to larger employment markets with easier/cheaper housing, especially in Colorado. Only a small number move to surrounding areas in the region and commute.
  - “We don’t like to commute because it is a legal concern. Some people cannot drive due to their immigration status. Others are fearful even if they can drive.”
  - It was noted that if workforce housing is primarily built in the southern stretches of Spanish Valley, the City and County really need to have public transit because many service workers will not or cannot drive.
- Because of the jobs-housing imbalance and the competition among employers for a limited supply of employees, some service sector workers are making much higher wages now.
  - “Some housekeepers are now making \$20/hr. But, only the bigger companies can pay those wages, so it is negatively impacting the smaller, family-owned businesses.”
  - “Because the bigger hotels can pay higher wages, seasonal workers have much less loyalty to their employers. I have a huge problem because of seasonal employee turnover.”
    - There is tension between long-time residents/workers who care about their employers and their community and short-term/seasonal workers who have little loyalty or concern for Moab.
    - “I see work ethics going down because employees know they can find work with other employers if needed.”
  - “I like the higher wages, of course, but I prefer tranquility and comfortable working environments. I don’t want to chase the dollar. I want to work hard, have a comfortable life, and a peaceful neighborhood.”
- Landlord treatment of non-native speakers can be (and often is) terrible.
  - Simply getting information from landlords/property managers is challenging. They don’t return phone calls or respond to inquiries, even when MVMC staff is serving as the point of contact.
  - Basic transactions, including rental application processing, is super challenging.
  - For residents without immigration status, finding rental housing is nearly impossible.
    - Participants really like the Walnut Ln development idea being led by the City of Moab, but have concerns about documentation requirements
- When asked what the participants liked about Moab, the following qualities were identified
  - Small town feel
  - Relatively low crime rates
  - Acceptance of different cultures and languages
  - Relatively little emphasis on immigration status – a feeling of safety and acceptance
  - Easy to commute/not a lot of driving needed to get to work
- When asked about their general sentiments of growth and what they wanted to see in Moab, participants said:
  - “No more hotels!”
  - “We should not grow any further until our city systems can handle more growth.”
  - “I am most concerned about crime. If we grow, I don’t want Moab to have more crime. We need to work towards tranquility.”

- “Are we prepared to keep crime down as Moab’s visitation grows? Especially crime from tourists towards residents, and also tourists towards the environment.”
- “We need more child care in Moab. How can the City and County incentivize more child care, financially and otherwise?”
- “We need to help small businesses.”
- “Teenagers need safe spaces.”
- “Residents need more public spaces. Can the City help to make the land outside the MVMC more like a public plaza

Comments provided by citizens at the local Veterans Affairs: Six veterans who have lived in Moab for between 30 and 72 years

- “It is a shame that we did not, and are not, capping growth.”
- “I don’t have a problem with the number of people who are here...I think it’s great...but we should be screaming locally and at UDOT to get the traffic fixed. We have so many infrastructure issues that need to be solved given how many people are now living here and visiting.”
- “We don’t have nearly enough housing. Low-income, affordable housing. Every administration has talked about housing...housing, housing, housing...but they haven’t done anything about it.”
- “Rotary Park is amazing. I love it. Kudos to the City for taking care of Rotary Park.”
- “We don’t want to see any more hotels. We’re ok with more housing *if it is affordable.*”
- “We need more stores that sell what locals need. We all go to Grand Junction at least once a month. We buy everything we need, have a nice lunch, and fill up on gas. That’s it. This town used to have stores that sold stuff people need on a daily basis. Now, it’s all for tourists.”
- “Food prices here are a rip-off. Everyone in this town is chasing a buck. There is way too much greed.”
- “We need to invest in public services. We need a full-time fire department. New development should be paying more for our public services – they should be buying things like new fire trucks.”
- “Hotels need to pay more for infrastructure and services.”
- “We should incentivize small, locally-owned businesses, especially those focused on locals.”
- Should the City or County approve more hotels?
  - The unanimous answer was no. However, the group said this shouldn’t be the case forever. It is possible that in the future, with a more balanced community system, that additional lodging and visitation growth could be welcomed.
- Many participants criticized the prioritization of community projects and policies, especially within the municipal budget. References were made to excessive salaries and dollars going to things other than critical infrastructure needs.
- All participants expressed a strong interest in bringing back long-running community events such as the State Fair. A comment was made that the City should not evaluate long-running community parades such as the Homecoming Parade on the basis of cost when it allows other events oriented towards tourists to occur and create community impacts. Many participants lamented the loss of community events and the growth of events for tourists.

- “We need more focus on residents. The City and County commissioners need to stop focusing on the dollar. It’s greed. They need to focus on residents.”
- “New hotels should be required to have restaurants. I’m sick and tired of having to compete for a seat in our restaurants.”
- “I commend you for coming to talk with us. No one has ever done that before. We don’t go to public meetings because they are hard for us. Thank you for coming here. I hope someone does this again.”

Comments provided by high school students: 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade (~15 students selected by teacher/principal)

- Some students reported that they walk downtown because they don’t have cars and have few other options for leisure, although they reported mixed views of the business and attractiveness of downtown. Other students said they avoid downtown at all cost because the activity and traffic levels are too intense.
- Students expressed appreciation for Swanny City Park and Rotary Park
- Students suggested that restaurants were too busy and too expensive.
  - “Moab needs more restaurants. Tourists need to sleep, but they also need to eat.”
- Students expressed a desire for more night life activity for young adults and more free common areas, such as public plazas
- “There are too many hotels, and they keep building more. I don’t like it.”
- “Hotels are allowed to be built in the wrong places. For example, the new hotel downtown across from Arches Thai could have been housing and small shops for locals.”
- “We have to travel to Grand Junction for a lot of the things we need to buy because most of our shops are only for tourists.”
- The amount of water hotels use is crazy.”
- “The City and County need to invest in Main St. We need to prevent back-ups at Arches National Park. We need better infrastructure.”
- Students noted that hotels continue to be built but there aren’t enough people to work at them. The people who do work at them earn relatively low wages.
- Students reported a desire to see more locally owned shops because they support the Moab community (and larger corporate companies do not).
- Graduating seniors in the group indicated that they couldn’t stay in Moab long-term because there aren’t any higher paying jobs and it is expensive to live in Moab. The wages are too low and the only options are in tourism and service sectors.
- With respect to design or form-based elements of new hotel construction, students suggested the following:
  - No more big block and huge hotels (structural form and scale)
  - New hotels should blend in with landscape (structural form, materials, colors)
  - “Hotels shouldn’t be an eyesore, like the Wyndham hotel under construction”

- Hotels should be required to put in underground parking to keep the ground level better for people walking and biking
- Hotels should have to invest in the Moab community
- Students suggested the City needs better biking infrastructure
- Students liked the idea of mixed-use development in the City, so long as adequate parking or minimal traffic was included. Students communicated the need for smaller living spaces for single people.
- Students talked a lot about “community vibe” or community character
  - Special events influence community vibe. Some events (e.g. car show, arts festival, music festival) enhance community vibe. Others detract from it (e.g. competitive sporting events).
    - Students expressed a desire to see the City and County exercise more discretion in special event approvals. “We should be much more selective.”
    - “How do we keep events that start out for locals geared towards locals, such as the summer concert series? It seems that over time events just become about tourists.”
  - Students expressed a desire to see more cultural and ethnic diversity in Moab and Moab’s special events, but noted that cost of living was a barrier to achieving this goal.
  - Hotels change the character of Moab. They privatize space and create a divide between visitors and residents.
    - “Hotels change the vibe of town because the space within them is not for anyone except their guests. The general public is not allowed. Each new hotel means more space that is unavailable to residents.”
  - “We feel disconnected from the town because our community and economy are so oriented towards tourists. As it grows...as more hotels are built and more tourists visit...Moab feels less like home and more like other people’s playground. We need to prioritize the feeling of home. People working 2-3 jobs don’t have the time, energy, or resources to attend local events or community gatherings even if they want to.”

Comments provided by middle school students: 7<sup>th</sup> grade (6 students selected by principal)

- When asked about their general perceptions of Moab, students said,
  - “There is not much to do in Moab for teenagers/young people because all the activities are for tourists. They are expensive and not for us.”
  - “We need public transportation so it is easier for us to get around. Traffic is so terrible that we can’t even complete our daily tasks. Parking is terrible.”
  - The students communicated that Moab’s scenery is beautiful, but it is not enough to satisfy their needs for extracurricular activities, or to balance out the cost of living in the area.
  - “Moab is for tourists. We need to fortify our town and invest in it for locals.”
  - “There aren’t enough workers because people are leaving Moab since it is a tourist town and too expensive.”
  - Students agreed there are not enough restaurants in Moab

- “We want more open space with shade. We love the Moab Parkway.”
  - “We need more hangout places.”
- The students expressed a desire to have the ability/option to work. Some wanted to work in order to have spending money, others wanted to be able to support their families.”
- Students communicated a desire to see dark skies protected.
- When asked about their opinions of increased density and development in the downtown area, student responses were:
  - “We’re not into seeing taller buildings if they block our views of the canyon walls.”
  - Students suggested that visitors come to Moab for the scenery and landscapes, so building a downtown that is similar to the urbanized areas from which people come diminished Moab’s attractiveness/uniqueness. They also suggested that Moab’s scenery is integral to its community character and identity.
    - “Scenery is Moab. If we take away the scenery, we take away Moab.”
- When asked about the ways Moab is changing over time and development trends in general, students said,
  - “Growth is good, but we need to dial it back because our small town cannot handle it. We don’t have enough people and our infrastructure is old.”
  - “We think Moab is too much for the tourists.”
  - Students suggested that Moab/Grand need to fix all the potholes around town if we are to grown.
  - “We just need to slow down.”
  - “Moab is expensive for visitors and residents, but visitors have so much more money than us.”
  - “The RV parks are low quality.”
  - “You can’t thrive, or even survive, in Moab. We want to work in order to save money so we can move elsewhere.”
  - “Moab is a trap. People can’t make enough money to live here, or enough to leave.”
  - “Growing up in a tourist town, you learn to hate it. I don’t want to live in a tourist town.”
  - “A lot of my friends have had to leave because it’s too expensive for their families to stay here.”
  - “Growing up in Moab, you become so aware of costs. Cost of housing, cost of food, and cost of clothing...everything. When I think of other places I might live someday, I mostly think about their costs of living.”
  - “We can’t stand what Moab is becoming. If you didn’t buy land a long time ago, or have land passed down from your grandparents, it’s impossible to live here.”
- Regarding downtown Moab and Main St., a student said, “We like Main St. because of all the small shops, especially the local shops. We like a small town feel.”
  - “We don’t want a Wal-Mart because that will destroy our small, local shops.”
  - “Everything here is low-quality and underdeveloped, but way over-priced.”
  - “We need more local shops. More services and shops for locals. Less corporate.”
    - “We like places like KZMU, Wabi Sabi, Moonflower, Wicked Brew, and The Rave’n Image.”
    - “We need more clothing and appliance stores that locals can afford.”

- Students had many recommendations for how Moab and Grand should prioritize policies and budgets (in addition to what was noted above)
  - In relation to their desires for space that is oriented to young people and the ability to work, students suggested the City and County support the creation of a “Kid-café,” which has comfortable seating/hang-out space, creative space, food/drink options, etc. The “Kid-café” should be within walking distance of the schools
  - “We need to capitalize on our small town, homey feel.”
  - “We should emphasize quality over quantity.”
    - Fewer and smaller hotels, and AirBnBs/Bed and Breakfasts, would do a better job of giving tourists a close-up look at local culture than big box hotels
  - Students’ top solutions included:
    - Affordable housing
    - Slowing down growth
    - Creating entertainment for kids
    - Improving roads
    - Allowing fewer hotels
    - Creating more and different job opportunities (esp. for young people)

Comments provided by local business owners: retail, restaurant, outfitter, professional services, real estate, hotel/hospitality, general development

#### Focus Group 1: Broker, Restaurateur, Hotel Owner

- There will be increased interest in developing hotels in Moab/Grand County because it is so easy to develop hotels here. The hotel development industry knows this – our zoning regulations are minimal and impact fees hardly reflect the real costs of impacts. Customer demand will increase, which may justify more hotel/motel rooms. However, occupancy rates will probably fall yet hotel developers will still try to build.
  - The City and County should require more from hotel developers in terms of form (not just finish).
- Participants communicated a willingness/acceptance of growth management policies, such as capping the amount of new lodging development that approved each year.
  - “Slower growth could be good in order to let us catch-up in areas like housing and infrastructure.”
  - “We can’t stop growth, but we need more control over it.”
- Growth is very much a function of marketing and advertising Moab, and that needs to be addressed
  - “We are at a point where maybe we do need to stop advertising. We can’t handle any more tourists. We’re at capacity, for now at least.”
- Moab does not have enough restaurants. When visitors come here and need to wait 1-2 hours for mid-grade restaurants, that negatively impacts their experience.
- Moab does not have enough retail space, restaurant space, medical office space, or places for mechanics shops that serve both residents and tourists, such as ATV/UTV/bike shops. One local

real estate broker indicated that small business entrepreneurs represent very little, if any, of their client base now because it is so difficult to find space for new start-ups.

- Entrepreneurs need space!
- Some areas that deserve attention as potential mixed-use development nodes include:
  - West end of Center St.
  - 400 North and 500 West
  - East Center St. and 400 East
  - Mill Creek Dr. and 400 East
  - Mill Creek Dr. and Powerhouse Ln.
  - 100 South and 100 East
- Many hotels are reporting flat or diminished occupancy and/or revenue in 2018 and a slow start to the 2019 season.
- Nightly rental owners have seen diminishing returns since 2016/'17
- Most, if not all, employers are struggling with employee attraction and retention. Employee housing is an area where the City and County need to continue focusing efforts.
  - A local broker suggested the County's housing policy efforts will begin to pay big dividends in the coming years.
    - *The news and early indicators (e.g. road construction) of USU Moab coming online is increasing interest in multi-family development because developers see a solution to having multiple months of vacancy that results from seasonal employment*
  - Employees are stressed out. As a result, they are more likely to provide poor customer service.
    - Some larger employers are paying better wages and even providing benefits, but that is not easy for most of the smaller employers in Moab
- The City and County need to invest in more alternative transportation infrastructure
- The County should protect the mixed-use development potential around Spanish Trail Rd and US 191 as well as Resource Blvd. and Spanish Valley Dr.

#### Focus Group 2: Retailers (tourist and non-tourist specific), Brokers, Restaurateurs, Professional Services; Outfitters

- Communities that Landmark should study: Jackons, WY; Stapleton, CO; Bentonville AR
- In the public domain, negative comments greatly outnumber positive comments regarding tourism development. Even though some people may support tourism development, they don't speak out as much.
- The nexus between housing availability/affordability and employee attraction/retention is resulting in significantly diminished customer service and customer experience
- Moab now has a nationwide reputation of what NOT to become...what to avoid
- Business representatives are interested in diverting a greater proportion of tourist dollars to quality of life infrastructure and amenities, including housing.
  - TRT conversation but also other sources.

- A lot of privately held land is undeveloped and/or underdeveloped. What can the City and County do to incentivized necessary and beneficial development on such lands.
- All participants strongly agreed that Moab/Grand County do not need additional lodging.
  - However, more commercial development is needed because the pressure on a limited number of businesses is resulting in poor customer service.
  - Some suggested that residents should be given more opportunity to do short-term rentals in their homes as a way of spreading tourism revenue to a larger number of people in Moab
- One business owner expressed frustration that increases in commercial property taxes are forcing them to consider profit generating activities that are not actually in their business or personal goals/interests in order to cover the increases in their property taxes.
- Multiple business owners reported that there are not enough incentives for building workforce housing
- Business owners communicated a desire for managed growth, increased investment in developing the downtown environment.
  - Some communicated the need for a bypass in order to support walkability and bike friendly streets
  - When one business owner suggested the creation of a “walking district,” others agreed
- There was a comment about the difference between unit counts and room/occupant counts. One hotel unit might accommodate 2-3 guests, but one condo or ONR unit might accommodate 10-15.
- There was discussion surrounding the appropriateness of building a downtown parking garage in the context of rapidly changing transportation technology and the need to shift focus from private automobiles to public transit
- Participants discussed the pros and cons of spreading the downtown experience beyond the existing CBD, but consensus did not emerge
- Business owners expressed a desire to see local legislators and state representatives change the TRT formula to allow for more money to go towards growth issues such as workforce housing
- It was suggested that new hotel approvals could/should be a function of workforce availability
- Multiple people complained about noise. Business owners, residents, and many visitors want peace and quiet.
- “It is just too easy to develop hotels here. And, there is a big disconnect between hotel developers’ evaluation of the development opportunity (i.e. profitability) and WHY visitors are coming to Moab.”
- “We need to re-establish our reputation from a place where anything goes to a place where excellence is expected. For instance, come to Moab and leave your car at your hotel...it is very easy.”
- There were a couple recommendations that Moab/Grand better accommodate non-traditional housing opportunities, like tiny home communities, long-term visitor areas, etc.
  - Examples provided were Washington, Texas, and Colorado (tiny home communities), and San Diego (camping is allowed constitutionally because the City isn’t doing enough to provide for affordable housing opportunities).

Comments provided during the April 9, 2019 Trail Mix Committee meeting: Representatives of different non-motorized trail user groups and federal land management agencies

- One member noted that three couples who are friends have moved away from Moab or are currently making plans to do so because of recent growth trends in visitation and motorized recreation activity in the Area.
- One member has observed that businesses all over town have “Help Wanted” signs due to the high costs of housing for employees. The member shared his experience from two years prior. After returning to Moab from a short time away, he could not find a room to rent for less than \$600 despite having grown up in the community and possessing a large network.
- Trail Mix members believed that high housing costs and increasing employment opportunities have contributed to a significant uptick in longer term camping on public lands near Moab. Many individuals cannot afford housing, so they live in various vehicle types in temporary locations on public lands and commute into town, adding to traffic, parking, and environmental degradation.
- One member suggested the biking community in its entirety, including shops, outfitters, and resident-users agreed that Moab has enough tourists, should not try to attract any more, and would benefit from fewer special events.
- Another member pointed out that many residents have made inaccurate statements, perhaps due to bias or misinformation, about the current level of trail damage throughout the county, noting that trail damage has decreased in many areas due to the efforts of Trail Mix and land management areas. Nevertheless, maintaining high quality trail networks requires more money and staffing.
- BLM and USFS representatives reported a significant uptick in the number of negative reviews and/or complaints received from visitors having poor experiences due to overcrowding on public lands. In particular, the Willow Springs area is generating a lot of complaints.
- The BLM representative suggested that visitor expectations have changed over the years, but they are not being satisfied.
- The USFS representative confirmed that workforce dispersion due to housing costs is affecting forest service lands in the La Sal Mountains. The USFS has had to put more resources to monitoring campers who try to stay beyond the 14-day limit.
- The group suggested that Grand County consider developing “Long-Term Visitor Areas (LTVAs)” similar to what Arizona has created. These areas could accommodate seasonal workers who are not capable of competing for limited traditional housing stock in Moab.
- An event organizer indicated that hotels have seen occupancy rates drop because event participants have reacted negatively to local hotels charging excessive rates or requiring two-night minimums. Some hotels have changed their rate offerings, eliminated minimum stay requirements, and collaborated with the organizer, and as a result, those hotels have reached full occupancy during event weekends.