

IN THE GAME

APRIL 1-3, 2026 GRAND JUNCTION



Session Menu Options

Quick reference of selectable session options, grouped by day and time block.

TUESDAY | March 31 | PRE-GAME FUN

TUESDAY | March 31 | 9:00 AM-8:00 PM | PRE-GAME WORKSHOPS (Registration Required)

- + **Colorado Challenge Accelerator Workshop** | *Sponsored by CDPHE + KSU TAB*
- + **Small Developer Coach Workshop** | *Partially funded by USDA Rural Development*

PRE-GAME TOURS | 3:30-5:00 PM | Depart from outside of Springhill Suites Front Door

- + **Don't Shush Us! Mesa County Libraries Does Things Differently in Serving the Community.** Celebrating 125 years as a library in Mesa County, join us to learn all the things that make the library successful, unique and something to brag about. Tour highlights include the modern 970West Studio, the Adult Learning Center, valuable partnerships, and plans for future expansion. Topics also cover specific challenges of a downtown location and showcase the library's most popular services and resources offered to the community.
- + **Museum of the West: History + How It Happens.** Explore more than a thousand years of Western history—ride in a stagecoach, “fly” a 1958 Cessna, see Ute and Fremont art, visit a one-room schoolhouse, and step into the Pastime Saloon. IN THE GAME attendees may visit anytime, or join a scheduled guided tour to go behind the scenes and learn how the museum operates, curates exhibits, and sustains its funding as a community asset.

WEDNESDAY | April 1 | SCHEDULE OF FUN

WEDNESDAY | April 1 | 8:00-10:30 AM | Morning Plenary | Grand Junction Convention Center

- + **Welcome to Grand Junction.** Take a moment to learn how downtown supports community vision and serves as a partner in creating a place people love.
- + **So Goes Agriculture, So Goes Main Street.** Exploring the relationship between agriculture, rural economies, and downtown vitality.
- + **Sacred Places, Shared Futures.** Why culturally significant places matter—and how protecting and redeveloping them strengthens communities.

- + **Cultivating Prosperity, Not Just Building Projects.** Not all growth is good growth—and not all costs show up on day one. In this concise, data-driven session, Kevin Shepherd unpacks the true fiscal impacts of development decisions, helping communities understand what they're really committing to over time. Drawing on more than 30 years of experience in engineering, planning, and municipal finance, Kevin challenges conventional assumptions and offers practical frameworks for prioritizing investments that strengthen long-term resilience, neighborhood vitality, and attainability.
- + **Downtown + Broadband.** Explore the role of digital infrastructure in supporting inclusive economic development and resilient downtowns. Brandy Reitter

WEDNESDAY | April 1 | TOURS + WORKSHOPS | 10:30AM-12:15PM

- + **Unpacking the Dynamics of Colorado's Population, Economy + Downtowns:** Explore the key population and economic trends shaping Colorado—with a sharp focus on what they mean for downtowns and commercial districts. We'll examine how growth patterns, workforce shifts, housing trends, and sector changes vary across regions of the state, and how those dynamics are influencing retail, office demand, small business development, and public investment. Walk away with insights to help position your downtown for long-term resilience and opportunity.
- + **Built to Belong: Creating a Creative District Through Collective Art:** Creative Districts aren't just planned — they're experienced. In this interactive session, Chelsea Gilmore will help participants create art that will be installed on Main Street.
- + **Saving the Station:** Sponsored by Colorado Historical Foundation, this tour will explore the reimagining of the 1906 GJ Union Depot: A visit the work-in-progress redevelopment, the history, dynamic redevelopment process, and the vision for this future community asset.
- + **Lights, Curtain, Action! Asteria Theatre at CMU:** Hop on board for a two-hour mobile tour to explore the brand-new, state-of-the-art Asteria Theatre at and downtown-campus connections.
- + **From Soil to Sip: A Century of Stewardship at Talbott Farms:** This four-hour bus and walking tour offers an **immersive look at Talbott Farms**—tastings that bring the full story from soil to sip. **4 HR MOBILE TOUR + LUNCH (10:30 AM-2:15 PM)**

WEDNESDAY | April 1 | DINE AROUND LUNCHESES | 12:30-2:00 PM

- + **Framework to Encourage Local Development.** Uncertainty slows projects. Misalignment stalls investment. But when clarity and collaboration lead the process, development becomes predictable—and productive. Drawing from multiple community case studies, including recent work in the Town of Center, this session explores how policies, land use codes, and development review procedures can either create friction or encourage progress. Participants are encouraged to bring a "funky," outdated, or confusing code provision from their own community for live discussion. Bohannon Huston
- + **Building Partnerships That Unlock Complex Sites.** Transforming underutilized and brownfield sites takes more than vision—it requires the right organizational structure to

align public leadership, private investment, and long-term stewardship. Join Ayres Associates for a focused lunch conversation on how communities can form and manage effective public-private partnerships to tackle complex redevelopment projects. Whether launching a new entity or strengthening an existing one, this session offers practical guidance to help your partnership turn tough sites into catalytic opportunities.

- + **The Capital Cocktail: Financing Small Development Projects.** Financing small development projects is unlike bigger, institutional projects due to the lack of scale and institutional grade offer. It often takes more players and more layers to make a small deal work, and more nuanced packaging and relationships. This panel will explore several Colorado-specific tools for financing smaller projects including historic tax credits, community banking, and state agency programs. Using a moderated discussion format our panelists will share key programs available to Small Developers, and the do's and don'ts of a successful pitch.
- + **Turning Temporary into Transformational:** Before the capital campaign, before the ribbon cutting—there's Phase 0. Sponsored by MIG, this lunch session explores how temporary activations can spark long-term change. Drawing from real-world projects in Denver, Buffalo, and Houston—spanning streets, parks, and intersections at varying stages of implementation—we'll highlight how low-cost, tactical moves can test ideas, build momentum, and unlock investment. Learn how incremental improvements and creative partnerships can turn “just starting” into catalytic community impact.
- + **Dynamic Ownership Models for Building Community Wealth.** What if downtown revitalization didn't just attract investment—but built lasting local wealth? This lunch session explores practical tools for advancing employee ownership, community-owned real estate, and live-work spaces that keep dollars and decision-making local. From worker co-ops to community land trusts and shared commercial ownership models, We'll highlight strategies that stabilize small businesses, expand attainable live-work opportunities, and strengthen long-term economic resilience. Thriving downtowns aren't just built—they're owned.
- + **Powering Local Spending – Exploring Community Rewards Programs.** Cities, towns, and downtown organizations can incentivize local spending at scale. Join this interactive lunch discussion to explore real-world case studies, measurable results, and how communities are turning everyday transactions into economic development wins.
- + **Data to Deal: Using Numbers to Move Tough Projects Forward.** Challenging projects—like brownfield redevelopment, catalytic infill, or Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts—often stall when the numbers feel uncertain or the risks seem too high. Join EPS for a practical, case study-driven lunch exploring how data can clarify tradeoffs, build consensus, and unlock action. From financial feasibility and fiscal impact analysis to market studies and TIF structuring, this session will highlight how Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs) and local leaders are using data to evaluate risk, align stakeholders, and move complex projects from concept to construction. Learn how the right analysis—at the right time—can transform skepticism into strategy and turn ambitious ideas into achievable outcomes.

- + **From Blight to Bright.** Join us for a combined lunch and tour that will explore two redevelopment projects and highlight how the support from brownfields technical assistance can support a project. The lunch will dive into an under-construction gathering place plaza, while the tour will take a behind-the-scenes walking tour of The Junction, downtown Grand Junction's newest housing development. This guided experience explores how a long-vacant former City Market site was transformed into a vibrant, modern 256-unit apartment community in the heart of downtown. Participants will walk the site and learn about the vision, development process, challenges, and community impact of delivering downtown housing—and why projects like The Junction are critical to successful downtown revitalization. **4 HR TOUR + LUNCH (12:30–4:15 PM)**

WEDNESDAY | April 1 | AFTERNOON TOURS | 2:30–4:15 PM

- + **Creative by Design: Public Art, Events, + Grand Junction's Cultural Commitment.** Creativity is embedded into Grand Junction's downtown identity. This two hour walking tour highlights the city's commitment to arts and culture through the Creative District, the Art on the Corner program, and a robust calendar of events that activate Main Street throughout the year. Learn how public art is selected, managed, and sustained, and how these efforts collectively foster a creative culture that supports local artists, engages the community, and makes downtown a place people want to return to again and again.
- + **Don't Shush Us! Mesa County Libraries.** Celebrating 125 years as a library in Mesa County, join us to learn all the things that make the library successful, unique and something to brag about. The tour highlights include the modern 970West Studio, the Adult Learning Center, valuable partnerships, and plans for future expansion. Topics also cover specific challenges of a downtown location and showcase the library's most popular services and resources offered to the community.
- + **From Grain to Glass: Inside Ramblebine Brewing.** Step inside Ramblebine Brewing and Rockslide Brew Pub for a two-hour walking tour that takes you from grain to glass. Participants will explore the brewery's production spaces, hear the story behind the craft and brand, and learn how a locally owned brewery contributes to downtown energy and culture. The experience includes guided tastings, conversation with the brewery team, and time to connect craft brewing, place, and community.
- + **Downtown Cocktail Class.** Explore the world of craft cocktails with a course for would be crafters! Two personalities explore the impact that a single spirit makes in a recipe. A mojito for example- rum, lime, sugar, mint. What if we switched the spirit to gin? Or tequila? Even whiskey? The class encourages guests to swap out spirits in recipes that they might not expect to work with other spirits. Something that is often done in the craft cocktail realm.

WEDNESDAY | April 1 | 5:00–7:15 PM | Evening Plenary Session

Live Auction | Mesa Theater

Three Dinners (start at 7:30PM)

- + Community Connection Dinner
- + URA or District Dinner (Invite Only)
- + KARAOKE | 8:30–9:30 PM | Quincy's

THURSDAY | April 2 | SCHEDULE OF FUN

THURSDAY | April 2 | PLENARY | 8:30–10:30 AM | Convention Center

- + Welcome to Grand Junction
- + **Engaging Youth in Leadership.** How communities can build leadership pathways and authentically engage young people in shaping downtown futures.
- + **Proof of Progress: What's Working in Downtowns (and How to Do More of It).**
Communities across Colorado are navigating complex challenges, yet downtown leaders are delivering real progress. In this interactive session, BID and DDA leaders will each share one practical “nugget of wisdom,” followed by a moderated, solutions-focused discussion with audience participation. Attendees will leave with actionable ideas and renewed momentum for the year ahead.

THURSDAY | April 2 | 10:30 AM–12:15 PM | Concurrent Sessions | Depart from Convention Center

- + **Plug + Play Retail: How to Launch a Downtown Pop-Up Program (And When Not To) with Molly Alexander.** Pop-ups can turn empty storefronts into buzz-worthy destinations — fast. They spark energy, support local entrepreneurs, and give downtowns a low-risk way to test new ideas. But here's the truth: sometimes the best strategy isn't launching a pop-up at all. In this practical (and candid) session, we'll walk through the real-world playbook for creating a downtown retail pop-up program — from securing space and recruiting businesses to marketing, managing risk, and measuring impact. We'll also talk about when a pop-up program makes sense... and when it doesn't. You'll leave with tools, templates, decision-making frameworks, and lessons learned so you can confidently determine whether a pop-up is the right move for your community — and if it is, how to do it well.
- + **Main Street as a City Park: Designing Experience.** Grand Junction's Main Street functions as more than a corridor—it's a city park in motion. This two hour walking tour explores how and why Main Street came to be managed as a park, including the role of Parks and Recreation in maintenance, budgeting, and long-term stewardship. We'll look at how trees, gardens, lighting, and playful installations are intentionally designed and cared for to enhance the experience of the canopy and urban fauna, creating a downtown that is both functional and joyful year-round.

- + **Turning Toward the River: Grand Junction’s Riverfront Story.** Join us for a mobile tour to explore how Grand Junction turned its face back to the river on this guided tour of Las Colonias, Dos Rios, and The Eddy. This immersive experience highlights how strategic investment, partnerships, and placemaking have transformed the Colorado Riverfront into a connected system of parks, development, and community gathering spaces. Participants will learn how these projects came together, the economic and quality-of-life impacts they’ve generated, and what’s next as the riverfront continues to evolve.
- + **Vines, Views + Vitality: The Palisade Development Tour:** A Deep Dive into Agritourism, Innovation, and Colorado’s Premier Craft Culture. Experience the blueprint for successful rural revitalization in the heart of Colorado’s fruit and wine country. Hosted by the Economic Development Council of Colorado (EDCC) and the Town of Palisade, this immersive tour explores the strategic intersection of agritourism and community planning. From data-driven strategies to combat retail leakage to the complexities of water security and riverfront activation, participants will gain first-hand insights into how Palisade balances "smart growth" with its deep agricultural roots. **4 HR MOBILE TOUR AND LUNCH (10:30 AM–2:15 PM).**

THURSDAY | April 2 | DINE AROUND LUNCHESES | 12:30–2:00 PM | Depart from Convention Center

- + **From Master Plan to Funding: Securing Grants and Donor Support for Community Projects.** Join GOCO and DHM Design for a lively lunch discussion as we explore inspiring case studies from small-town communities across Colorado! We’ll take a deep dive into community master planning, uncovering funding opportunities, and leveraging grants to turn visions for local streetscapes, wayfinding, and recreation projects into reality. This session will highlight how small communities can champion change and bring local initiatives to life through smart planning, thoughtful design, and public engagement. Whether you’re a town planner, business owner, or outdoor enthusiast, this lunch will serve up fresh ideas and inspiration on how collaboration and design can transform your community’s outdoor spaces!
- + **Downtown, Let’s Make It Official: Structuring Success with BIDs, DDAs + Smart Planning.** Is your downtown ready to level up? Join P.U.M.A. for a practical conversation about when communities move from informal efforts to more structured tools like a BID, DDA, or formal downtown plan. We’ll explore funding, governance, and how to determine the right next step to build sustainable momentum.
- + **Lighten Up! Letting Retail Breathe to Promote Downtown Vibrancy.** Hear from veteran downtown management practitioner, Sarah Wiebenson, now founder and principal of Boulder-based Grounded Collaborative, about the strategies and programs she has developed over the years to promote retail vibrancy, and emerging approaches to addressing persistent retail vacancy drivers.

- + **Main Character Energy: Storyliving + Storytelling through Film in Colorado Downtowns.** An exploration of CO's film ecosystem and what that means for downtowns across the state.
- + **Capital That Circulates: Revolving Loan Funds for Local Business.** Strong downtowns need strong small businesses—and access to capital makes the difference. Join Colorado Enterprise Fund (CEF) to explore how revolving loan funds can fill financing gaps, support entrepreneurs, and keep local dollars working in your community. Learn how flexible lending tools help build a more resilient and inclusive local economy.
- + **Gettin' TIFfy Wit It.** (Na Na Na Na Na Na Na - A Tax Increment Finance Remix)
This high-energy talk breaks down Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and how communities use it to turn bold ideas into reality. From downtown revitalization to unexpected projects—yes, even a gondola—we'll explore how future tax growth funds today's development. Whether you're a policy wonk or just TIF-curious, come learn how cities get creative (and sometimes controversial) when they start gettin' TIFfy wit it.
- + **On the Route: Connecting Downtowns + Colorado Byways.** Join the Colorado Byways Program for a working lunch on how downtowns can better connect with their nearest scenic byway. Explore simple strategies to attract travelers, strengthen local storytelling, and extend visitor stays—plus learn about the new itinerary marketing program designed to help communities package and promote authentic local experiences.
- + **ReUsing Buildings for the Creative Economy.** Join us as we explore the concept and realization of adaptive reuse projects, considering the site, fundraising, and tenanting. This lunch will be a pre-meeting prior to the tour of **Creative Redevelopments in Action** to explore the concept and realization of adaptive reuse projects, considering the site, fundraising, and tenanting. **4 HR Lunch + Tour (12:30-4:15 PM)**

THURSDAY | April 2 | AFTERNOON TOURS | 2:30-4:15 PM | Meet outside of SpringHill

- + **Main Street Remix: Innovation, Ideas + Iconic GJ Stories.** Main Street isn't just a street—it's Grand Junction's living room. On this two-hour walking tour, sponsored by the Grand Junction Downtown Partnership and led by local thought leader Zebulon Miracle, participants will stroll Main Street and explore the ideas, experiments, and community choices that shaped it. From public art and trees to retail and gathering spaces, this tour dives into how Main Street became a functional, beautiful city park—and how it continues to evolve.
- + **Sweet Streets: Chocolate, Craft + Colorado Flavor.** Enjoy a two-hour walking tour that starts with an inside look at Enstrom Candies, exploring the history and craftsmanship behind their iconic toffee. We'll then wrap up at Carlson Vineyards with a wine and chocolate tasting that celebrates local flavor, legacy businesses, and downtown connection.
- + **Retail Roots + Rising Stars: A Grand Junction Downtown Tour.** Take a walk through the heart of Grand Junction and discover what keeps its downtown retail scene thriving. This guided tour along Main Street and Colorado Avenue blends legacy businesses with fresh startups, showcasing the mix of history, hustle, and hometown pride that fuels a successful

district. Meet business owners, hear their Western Slope stories, and see how strategic support—from façade improvements to district partnerships—helps retailers grow and adapt. Stops include longtime favorites like Triple Play Records and Working Artists Studio, alongside newer ventures like Garvey's Gardens, Colorado Cool, and Gear Junction. Come explore the secret sauce behind a resilient downtown—one storefront at a time.

- + **From Grain to Glass: Inside Grand Junction's Brewing Culture.** Step inside Ramblebine Brewing and Rockslide Brew Pub for a two-hour walking tour that takes you from grain to glass. Participants will explore the brewery's production spaces, hear the story behind the craft and brand, and learn how a locally owned brewery contributes to downtown energy and culture. The experience includes guided tastings, conversation with the brewery team, and time to connect craft brewing, place, and community.

THURSDAY | April 2 | Power of Story Telling + Colorado Downtown Excellence Awards | 4:30–7:00 PM | Mesa Theater

Join us as Colorado Public Radio interviews three of our awards finalists and then we host an awards' celebration.

7:30PM | DINNER ON YOUR OWN | Anywhere you like! Historic Lowell School Food Trucks have specials if you wear your nametag!

8:30PM | AFTER PARTY | Good Judy's

FRIDAY | April 3 | PLENARY | 9:00–11:00AM | SpringHill Suites

- + **Understanding Colorado and the Grand Valley.** A local historian shares some fun history and how it has impacted development, character, and downtowns in Colorado and in Grand Junction.
- + **Regional Downtown Strategy Playoffs.** A fun regional strategy session where participants join facilitated roundtables to tackle downtown challenges, share ideas, and exchange practical strategies. Light competition and prizes add energy while helping peers leave with useful takeaways and new regional connections.