



## Building for the Future of Meals on Wheels Mesa County

Since 1970, Meals on Wheels Mesa County has been a critical safety net service, helping older adults age in place and remain at home. Its programs, which include healthy food and social interaction, are keeping both hunger and loneliness at bay in Western Colorado.

The organization, which is sponsored by St. Mary's Medical Center, provides:

- Community meal sites where isolated older adults can share a meal and companionship with others
- Drive-through meal services for older adults who need a little extra help putting food on the table
- Daily meal delivery to home-bound older adults and friendly, regular social visits to ensure that someone in the community is watching out for vulnerable older adults.



Meals on Wheels Mesa County is focused on meeting the nutritional needs of older adults and provides consistent volunteer opportunities for the same age group. Meals on Wheels Mesa County experienced exponential growth throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and anticipates growing even further, potentially serving 200,000 meals annually by the end of 2021.

Additionally, Mesa County is experiencing a growth in the 60+ age demographic—approaching 25% of the overall population—which also increases the need for activities and services for older adults.

Program leadership recognized that the current, aging Meals on Wheels facility on Chipeta Avenue was no longer adequate to meet the growing needs of the community. To prepare and deliver more meals, the program needs a larger space with increased storage, improved cooking equipment, and better access to highways for the hundreds of volunteers who pick up meals for daily delivery every year.

Prioritizing collective impact and innovation through collaboration, Meals on Wheels is partnering with Food Bank of the Rockies, the largest food distribution organization in Western Colorado, to expand food assistance capacity for Mesa County. The partnership includes building a new, efficient, and accessible shared facility in Grand Junction with dedicated space for Meals on Wheels Mesa County to grow. The two organizations are fundraising together to make their shared vision a reality.

## **The Opportunity**

The new Food Bank of the Rockies/Meals on Wheels Mesa County facility will greatly increase both organizations' capacities to serve residents of Mesa County and Western Colorado and help advance the Mesa County Blueprint to End Hunger.

The facility is a new, 50,000 square-foot building with a 60% increase in usable space for Meals on Wheels Mesa County. Increases include a large updated kitchen, more cold and dry storage, more efficient office space for program staff and volunteers, and shared conference and volunteer support spaces that will help improve volunteers' experiences and help retain their service as the program grows.

Meals on Wheels Mesa County anticipates that in this new space, they will have the flexibility to increase their daily meal service from 600 hot meals each day to 1,000 meals each day. The increase comes through:

- Increased volunteer training and work space to allow more volunteers to support the organization
- A larger commercial kitchen that will help Meals on Wheels Mesa County prepare and distribute about 270,000 pounds of food annually by 2027
- Increased storage space that will allow Meals on Wheels Mesa County to make more bulk purchases to reduce supply chain costs and increase efficiency.

The shared space between Meals on Wheels Mesa County and Food Bank of the Rockies is about creating collective impact. In bringing together two organizations and people who all share the same vision—an end to food insecurity—the partners will achieve greater economies of scale, identify innovative solutions, attract additional partners, and make an even greater impact.

## **Community and Donor Support**

As part of its partnership with Food Bank of the Rockies, Meals on Wheels and the St. Mary's Hospital Foundation are working with the Food Bank of the Rockies to fundraise for the project as a whole, which includes the Meals on Wheels kitchen space.

Community members and donors can support this effort by making a contribution to the overall project, or to support kitchen equipment for Meals on Wheels specifically.

After reviewing its existing equipment and the needs to update the kitchen to be more functional and meet commercial kitchen requirements, Meals on Wheels Mesa County has identified \$455,058 in total kitchen equipment costs for the new facility.

*Please see the attached list of kitchen equipment needed, as well as renderings and plans for the new space.*

## **Building a Functional Commercial Kitchen for Meals on Wheels Mesa County**

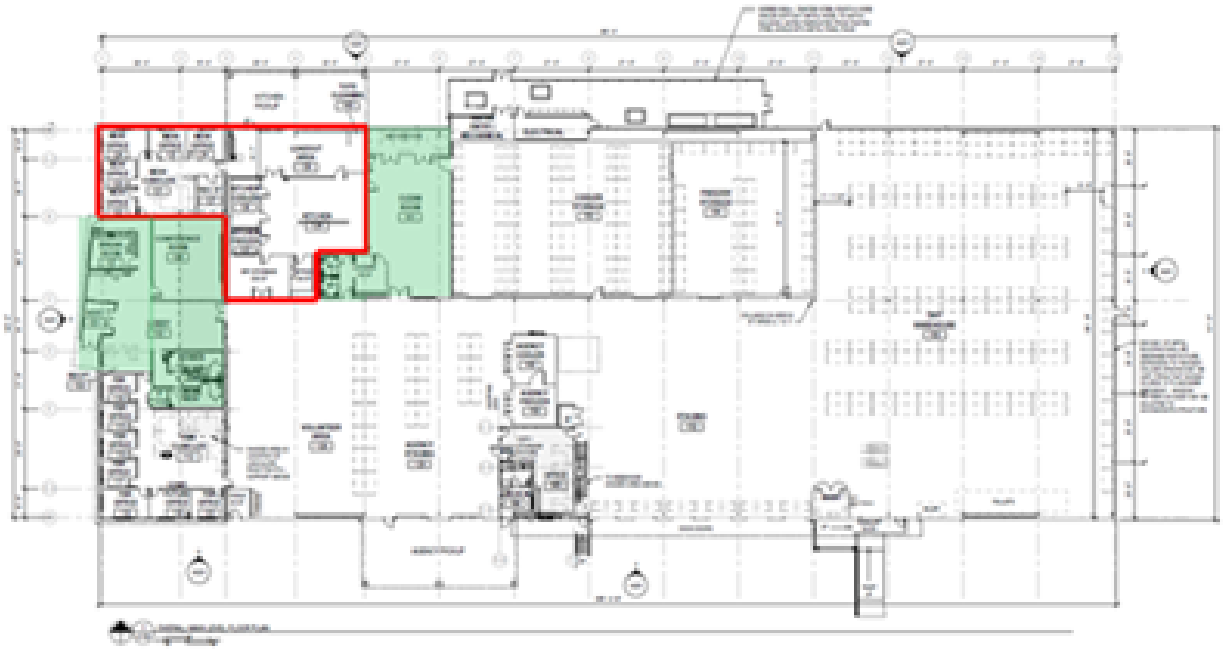
Meals on Wheels Mesa County is planning to re-use some existing equipment, including commercial food processors, slicers, and food choppers; high-capacity tilt skillets; and two double-convection ovens. This equipment will be moved to the new facility and installed by professionals.

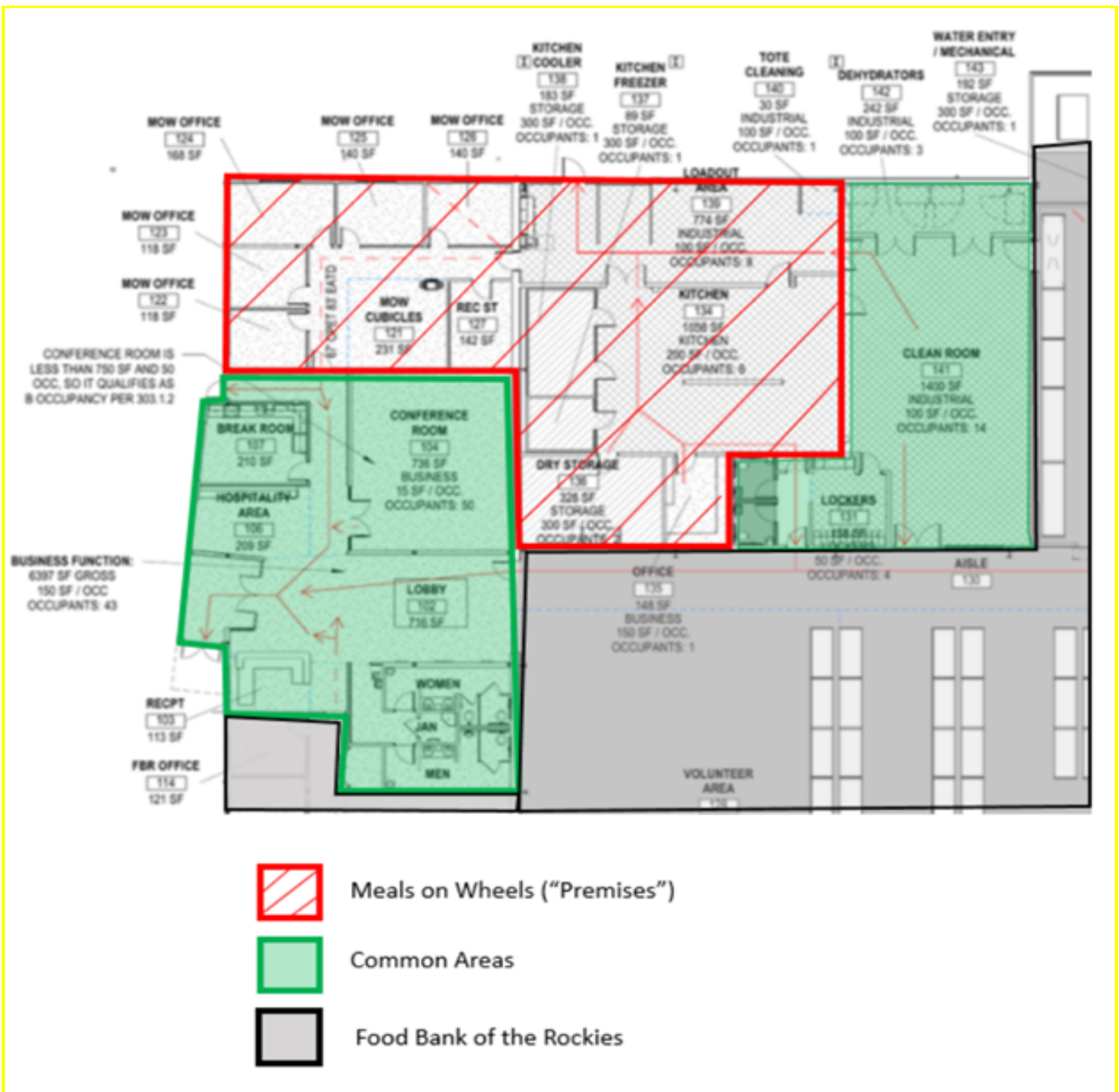
New equipment needs are those that will replace existing equipment that has reached end-of-life or to replace equipment that cannot be safely moved from one location to another. The following list of new kitchen equipment will outfit Meals on Wheels Mesa County with an updated, comfortable, and efficient commercial kitchen that can increase the program's capacity to serve more older adults.

- Floor troughs: Keep volunteers and staff safe from spills and help keep the kitchen spotlessly clean
- Walk in cooler and freezer with compressor racks: Efficient cold storage system to increase the amount of food that can be purchased and prepared daily
- Hand sinks: Keeping volunteers and older adult clients safe with excellent hand hygiene
- Dry storage shelving: Sturdy storage solution to safely and cleanly store dry goods
- Prep and work tables and shelves: Large, clean, and safe work stations for staff to prepare meals in bulk for delivery and distribution
- Exhaust hoods and fire suppression systems: Maintaining a safe environment for staff and volunteers working near ovens and ranges
- Three-well food warmer: Maintains safe food temperatures for prepared meal items while volunteers assemble and pack meals for delivery and distribution
- Disposer: Eliminates food waste without adding it to a landfill
- Pre-rinse faucet, high-capacity dishwasher, commercial dish tables, and compartment sinks: An efficient system for washing pots, pans, and utensils during and after meal preparation to reduce water use and decrease the time between dirty and clean dishes
- Pot and pan shelving: Safe storage for the most frequently-used pots and pans
- Delivery, set-up and placement of equipment: Professional and insured delivery and set-up of new equipment

The total cost for necessary new equipment, in addition to the costs of having it delivered to the new facility and set up for use, is \$455,058.

Recognition of donors who support the kitchen project will be recognized through St. Mary's Hospital Foundation's newsletters and annual reports, as well as through potential naming opportunities for significant contribution. To learn more, please contact Carmen Shipley, St. Mary's Hospital Foundation Executive Director, at [carmen.shipley@sclheath.org](mailto:carmen.shipley@sclheath.org) or 970-298-2015.





On September 14, we participated in a small, private ground breaking event (see photos below) for the new facility.

