

Date: Wednesday, July 12, 2023

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: Hybrid - In-Person: Lake Estes, 3rd Floor, 200 West Oak Street, Fort Collins or Virtual, Zoom Link:
https://larimer-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_i8-Z_4qCSzGq6j2f_6y6eQ

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

The Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) met on Wednesday, July 12, 2023, at 12:30 p.m. in a hybrid setting in person and via Zoom.

The following Board members were present: Zach Thode (Chairperson), George Wallace (Vice Chairperson), Amber Graves, Franklyn Garry, Martha Sullins, Tim Clouse, and Brad Justice.

The following officials and staff were present: John Kefalas, County Commissioner; Lesli Ellis, CPIR Director; Rebecca Everette, Community Development Director; Matt Lafferty, Principal Planner; Alissa Martin, Planner II; and Christina Scrutchins, Recording Secretary

Guests present: Carmen Former and Emily Hunt

AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

Moved Discussion and Action Items Item No. 2 - Thornton Land Use Strategies (Not Pipeline) - Emily Hunt above Staff Updates.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Member Frank moved, and member Amber seconded the motion to approve the January 11, 2023, and May 10, 2023, minutes of the Larimer County Estes Valley Planning Advisory Committee as presented. Motion carried (7-0).

INTERACTION WITH COMMISSIONER KEFALAS ON AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY-RELATED ISSUES

Commissioner Kefalas gave an update on the new LC Agriculture Extension Agent position and the Cresset Center for Ecology, Agriculture and the Arts, and they will be presenting a next week's meeting.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

ITEM No. 2 - Thornton Land Use Strategies (Not Pipeline) - Emily Hunt

The Northern Properties Stewardship Plan is a complementary process to Thornton's agriculture-to-municipal water transfer. While Thornton's water will be used in accordance with Thornton's water rights decree, the Stewardship Plan is a vision for the management and future land use of Thornton's 18,000 acres. Funding would include Bureau of Reclamation, WaterSmart: Water Marketing Strategy Grant; City of Thornton; Colorado Water Conservation Board - Colorado Water Plan Grant, South Platte Basin Roundtable Water Supply Reserve Fund, Metro Basin Roundtable Water Supply Reserve Fund, Statewide Water Supply Reserve Fund; Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) - Energy Impact Administrative Grant. The community-driven process would be the following: Subject Matter Expert Interviews (February 2020); Steering Committee Meetings (ongoing - eight meetings from November 2021 to present); Water Optimization Study Group (October 2022 to present); Weld County Commissioners Meeting (July 2021, March 2022, November 2022, March 2023); Regional Working Group Meetings (Jan 2023) Poudre Valley RE-9 Meeting (January 2023); Towns of Eaton, Ault, and Pierce Meeting (February 2023); Town of Ault Meetings (recurring); Farm Tenant Open House (March 2023); Community Open House (March 2023); Joint Regional Working Group Meeting (June 2023); and Upcoming Community Open House (July 2023). Calls to action – Maintain key components of the region's

agricultural heritage, support transitioning agricultural economies, promote economic diversification, address a future with 1 million residents in 2040, and Advance regional approaches to land and water planning and management. The Northern Properties Stewardship Plan is for two (2) outcomes. Outcome 1 Land Use Assessment: A stakeholder-driven assessment of community land use objectives and Outcome 2 Water Optimization Study: A stakeholder-informed study of opportunities to maintain irrigation on Thornton farms with non-Thornton water. Even though most farmland under the WSSC system continues to be irrigated, municipalities and local water districts own the majority of WSSC shares. Private developers have acquired and continue to acquire farms and/or water from farms on the WSSC system to serve new development.

STAFF UPDATES

ITEM NO. 1 - POLLINATOR RESOLUTION UPDATE

The policy has been completed and adopted.

ITEM NO. 2 - WATER PLAN UPDATE

Through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, Larimer County selected and has engaged SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA) and AE2S, to work with staff, other advisors, the public, boards and commissions, and the Board of County Commissioners to prepare a Water Master Plan. The consultant firms have capabilities to address cultural, natural, and water resources management, wildfire planning, regulatory compliance, and climate change. They also can address water challenges and risks such as future water demands and the use of available water rights. The project is partially funded by the Federal Emergency Management Act's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). Last year as a precursor to the plan, Larimer County engaged a consultant, Brendle Group, to conduct the regional water Existing Conditions study and to facilitate work sessions and an open house to do initial visioning and goal setting. The Existing Conditions Report and Executive Summary are below. The work from 2022 is foundational for the next stages of water planning.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

ITEM NO. 1 – CLIMATE SMART – HEIDI PRUESS

Heidi provided the Committee members with the Larimer County Policy and Procedures and the CC4CA Policy.

Some Members would like for the language to be updated.

The Board of County Commissioners office is asking for the AAB members to review and give feedback on any changes or language changes by the next scheduled meeting on September 13, 2023.

Staff will send a Word document to the AAB with the opportunity to make edits.

WORK PLAN AND TASK GROUPS

ITEM NO. 1 – VOLUNTARY AG – GEORGE WALLACE

It was decided to withdraw, for now, their Proposed Legislative Issue Form for 2023 to Colorado Counties Incorporated (CCI) for enabling legislation at the State level regarding the creation of VADs at the county level. They are very appreciative of the time, effort, ideas, and important considerations offered by all of you who helped us with several iterations of their proposal. Second, they have learned a lot during the process of developing the proposal and its several revisions. They think it would be good to summarize what they learned as they continue, to think about ways to minimize the loss of agricultural land and water in Colorado. Some of what they learned may be useful to existing programs and entities who work on this important long-term issue.

One reason for their decision to withdraw for now is that they were hoping they would be able to develop more incentives at the state level that would complement those that might be developed at the county level. They saw this as important for motivating producers to stay in production for an extended period (10 years in most other states), but that proved to be difficult. The 21 states that have enabling legislation for the creation of VADs typically offer some State financial incentives, as well as State support to counties for the creation of VADs. They originally hoped that Colorado might offer such things as; a) tax credits or differential assessment on farm and ranch residences for VAD participants; b) priority given to VAD participants who wanted to initiate permanent protection as the cap on tax credits

neared; c) priority given to VAD participants for the GOCO monies allocated annually for helping landowners with transaction costs for permanent conservation; and d) earmarking some of the Federal monies given to Colorado for ag land protection for VAD participants.

Apart from the transaction costs incentive, which was still alive and under discussion, the other incentives were elusive. Adjusting farm and ranch residential assessments would require creating a new property tax sub-category which is possible, but they were told that it would likely face some resistance. The major land trusts, while acknowledging that the VAD concept has merit, were not comfortable with the tax credit cap priority incentive because it muddies the water about the need to extend that tax cap. Finally, the Colorado Department of Agriculture could not favor VAD participants being earmarked for some of the Federal monies headed their way for supporting ag land because it would discriminate against producers who want to protect their land but who live in counties that had not adopted a VAD. After they had removed these things from the proposal, they felt that it had lost some of its strength.

There were, however, a number of positive things to emerge from this process and their conversations with you all that they hope will be kept alive by CCI members, land trusts, local governments, and staff at the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) and others. There are other ways besides financial incentives that the State can facilitate ag land protection at the county level.

1. Most agree that there is a need to facilitate more communication, field trips, and exchanges among counties that have ag land and water protection efforts underway. Some of you thought that this seems like a proper role for CDA.
2. Counties and NGOs would appreciate some help from State entities with accessing Federal Monies that will be coming to the State for ag land and water protection which would help county-level efforts.
3. There is almost unanimous agreement that the continued loss of ag land and water is indeed a long-term sustainability issue that needs heightened emphasis at the State level. People supported the idea of a review of current state policies and their effect on the loss of ag land or the continued viability of farms and ranches.
4. Counties can still consider creating their own Voluntary Ag Districts without enabling legislation at the state level. An intermediate conservation approach for landowners not ready to initiate permanent protection is seen as a useful tool by most of you. There are a considerable number of smaller incentives that counties in other states package and offer producers willing to stay in production. These could be summarized and shared with the counties.
5. The cap on the State tax credit needs to be increased to accommodate the considerable number of landowners currently wishing to permanently conserve ag land and water.
6. They need to keep working on and incentivizing water-sharing agreements and alternative transfer mechanisms (ATMs) that keep water on farms and ranches while allowing some use of that water for domestic needs.
7. It was recognized by most that, while the degree and type of pressure on ag land and water differs across the state, the loss continues and will likely come back to haunt us. They are all in this together and more needs to be done.

ADJOURN

With there being no further business, the hearing adjourned at 3:02 p.m.

FUTURE COMMUNICATION ITEMS