

Date: Wednesday, September 13, 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, September 13, 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), Kristin Ramey (Secretary), Amber Graves, Travis Horton, Timothy Clouse, Franklyn Garry, and Brad Justice.

The following officials and staff were present: John Kefalas, County Commissioner; Lesli Ellis, Community Infrastructure Resource Director; Rebecca Everette, Community Development Director; Matt Lafferty, Principal Planner; Daylan Figgs, Natural Resource Director; Meegan Flenniken, Program Manager Land Conservation; and Christina Scrutchins

AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Amendment

From: 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).

To: 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 Agricultural Advisory Board as presented. Motion carried (7-0).

Member Wallace moved, and member Garry seconded the motion to approve the July 12, 2023, amended minutes of the Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board. Motion carried (8-0).

The Minutes were unanimously approved.

INTERACTION WITH COMMISSIONER KEFALAS ON AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY RELATED ISSUES

Commissioner Kefalas gave a brief update regarding the Solid Waste, Strategic Plan, Water Education Series, and East Mulberry Corridor Plan.

Solid Waste – As of August 31, 2023, Larimer County has terminated negotiations with Republic Services, who were selected to build and operate a new landfill north of Wellington. This decision means the county will now be involved in building and operating the landfill. The County is also considering options for a modified transfer station and changes to the recycling center. Additionally, the county is moving forward with Tier 2 projects related to yard waste, food waste, diversion, and emerging technologies, despite financial challenges. The Commissioner emphasizes the need to manage solid waste effectively while focusing on the diversion and handling of organic materials. There will be discussions regarding upcoming contract negotiations with the solid waste department, focusing on food waste, forestry waste, organic materials, and composting. The department is also evaluating anaerobic digesters for converting commercial and food waste into renewable natural gas. These developments suggest a need to revisit the

5-year plan, and there will be ongoing discussions about intergovernmental agreements to reprioritize projects due to changing conditions.

Water Education Series – The first Water Education Series had over 50 attendees and took place on August 21st. The next session is set for September 20th, and it's encouraged for Board members to attend. These sessions are available both in person and online, with recordings accessible on the organization's YouTube channel. The second session on September 20th will run from 6 to 8 PM. Subsequent sessions include one on October 18th focusing on watershed health and in-stream flows, and another on November 16th. The final session in November will focus on identifying appropriate action steps for the future and charting the way forward. Education is meaningful when it can be applied to bring about positive and meaningful change.

East Mulberry Corridor Plan – Larimer County has had two work sessions with the City of Fort Collins to provide updates on the East Mulberry Corridor plan. They mention questions regarding the potential annexation of an agricultural area north of East Mulberry and adjacent to the frontage road. The response from the city planning officials is that annexation is unlikely to happen in the near term, and city zoning designations will only be applied at the time of annexation. They plan to designate the area around the I-25 interchange as industrial but also add permitted uses and standards to protect existing agricultural service businesses upon annexation. The goal is to preserve and allow businesses to continue operating as they are when annexation occurs. One option is to update the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to better address the specific needs of the Mulberry Enclave, as the current IGA is outdated and doesn't fully account for this area. Another option is the creation of a new zoning designation or district that aligns more closely with the intended use of the area, possibly naming it the "Add Commercial Enterprise Zone. Staff Everette is part of the core team for the East Mulberry plan and can relay this feedback and mentioned the possibility of city officials presenting to the AAB for further input. The East Mulberry Corridor plan is scheduled for adoption by the City Council, but it won't immediately dictate when or how areas are annexed. The ongoing conversation aims to ensure that annexation is carried out in a way that preserves existing uses and the area's intended purpose. The city of Fort Collins shares the goal of supporting and preserving existing businesses in the area and is open to suggestions for achieving this. Upcoming steps in the process include a City Council work session on October 10th. The first reading of the East Mulberry Plan is scheduled for the end of the year, specifically on December 5th, and the final draft of the plan will be ready in late August or early September of the following year. It's important to note that approving the plan doesn't automatically trigger annexation. The draft plan is accessible online, and the staff will provide a link for the board to review the goals, strategies, and policies outlined in the draft plan.

Strategic Plan – The County Commissioners are in the final stages of completing their 5-year Plan for 2023. Commissioner Kefalas is requesting input and feedback from the Board members to ensure the plan incorporates their important insights and recommendations.

STAFF UPDATES

ITEM NO. 1 INTRODUCTION - JESSICA (JESS) CALLEN AG/NR SPECIALIST @ EXTENSION

Jessica's passion for agriculture began in her hometown in Oregon, leading to her involvement in farming, starting with a rhubarb farm in 6th grade and eventually growing a pumpkin patch and a Christmas tree farm. Her parents also became farmers, inspiring her to pursue agricultural education. She attended Southern California, majoring in environmental science and engaging in urban agriculture for about 3 years. To further her education, she came to CSU and studied soil science under Jean Kelly, focusing on soil erosion, agricultural planning, and natural land management. She gained experience through internships at NRCS and Oregon State University. In her new position, she aims to understand the needs of the local community and established organizations and apply her expertise in soil science while continually seeking to learn and grow

DISCUSSION ITEMS

ITEM NO. 1 ROBERT KARP AND DANA BURGS - CRESSET CENTER FOR ECOLOGY, AGRICULTURE, AND THE ARTS & DANA BURNS - URICK FARMS

The project, known as the Cresset Center, involves two farms, Urick Farm and Zeiler Farm, both located in Larimer County. Urick Farm, a century-old family farm, is well-suited for diversified organic farming, with a beautiful frontage

along the Big Thompson River. The Cresset Center project aims to create an environmental education center on these farms in partnership with the nonprofit organization, Cresset Farm Development Initiative (CFDI), and the Burns & Calkins family. Dana Burns and Robert Karp lead the day-to-day operations of the Cresset Center. The mission is to inspire the ecological and social imagination of the northern Front Range of Colorado by establishing a sanctuary for biodiverse agriculture, wildlife, education, cultural exchange, and the arts. The project addresses challenges such as the loss of farmland and ecological habitat, labor shortages, economic viability, water rights, permitting, and farmer training. They aim to create a model farm relevant to the region, focusing on regenerative, diversified, organic farming, traditional family farm size, and local food. The project seeks feedback from the board regarding its relevance to the Agricultural Advisory Board's work, the labor shortage issue, and possible ways the board can assist with the project's challenges. The AAB made several recommendations about organizations that could assist in the Cresset Center's efforts. Zach Thode Clarified that the AAB is strictly an advisory board to the County Commissioners and could cheer on the Cresset Center but couldn't do much more than that at a board level.

ITEM NO. 2 DAYLAN FIGGS - UPDATE REGARDING AG STRATEGIES AND MASTER PLAN SURVEY QUESTIONS AND EFFORTS.

In 2023, a survey was conducted to inform the work of the Natural Resources Department and their partners, who share in the open space sales tax. The survey aimed to address questions from eight municipal partners regarding conservation priorities, outdoor recreation activities, funding, crowding, conflicts, and public access barriers. The survey is similar to the previous one, with the main changes focusing on crowding and barriers. It's a statistically valid survey sent to about 10,000 randomly selected individuals countywide. The schedule includes survey design, distribution, data collection, and analysis, with a final report and presentation expected in winter 2023. The survey link will be made available to the public. The AAB made several recommendations to questions on the survey to better represent agricultural values.

ITEM NO. 3 HEIDI PRUESS - CONTINUED DISCUSSION REGARDING CC4CA POLICY.

Heidi informed the board that she is seeking feedback from various boards and committees. The comments received align with those from other groups. Some members believe that a challenge the County will face is the preference for buyers to support farmers with lower emissions, a contentious issue. They prefer not to hold farmers and ranchers directly accountable for emissions but instead focus on helping them reduce emissions. The discussion covered various topics related to agriculture, carbon sequestration, and carbon markets. Members suggested offering credits in the carbon market for those who have already implemented carbon-reducing practices. The conversation revealed a division between offset programs and agriculture, with concerns about changing rules and the shift toward mitigation strategies. Clear and effective language, removing vague terms from documents, and focusing on integrated land use and transportation planning for reduced car dependency were emphasized. Predicting environmental outcomes in agriculture was seen as a challenge. Promoting prosperous agriculture and protecting agricultural data were important goals. The conversation also touched on distributed energy production and concerns about utility companies affecting rural landscapes. Collaboration with a local food policy council for influencing policy recommendations was considered, and discussions about solid waste and organic waste management timelines were ongoing. Engagement in the watermaster planning process was encouraged, as was the development of the County's 5-year Strategic Plan, with potential focus areas including water sharing and other pertinent topics. There were requests to reference incentives for distributed energy production and reduce the use of broad terms like "responsible, sustainable, and efficient."

WORK PLAN AND TASK GROUPS

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR WORK PLAN FOR THE YEAR?

Water sharing was identified as a high-priority issue within their strategic plan. While affordable housing was mentioned, no detailed conversation took place. The discussion introduced a proposal to establish a paid local food policy council, aiming to make policy recommendations and seek engagement, Audrey Snyder-Walsh will be attending the November meeting to clarify what this council will require. Additionally, participants emphasized the need for active involvement in the water master planning process. The group considered incorporating food waste and composting into solid waste management but lacked specific details regarding the timeline. The Board also pondered the inclusion of certain initiatives in a 5-year strategy plan, such as air quality monitoring in collaboration with ESAB.

VOLUNTARY AG UPDATE

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Board member Tim Clouse's term will end in November 2023, and applications are now accessible on the Larimer County AAB webpage for individuals interested in pursuing a position on the AAB.

ADJOURN

With there being no further business, the hearing adjourned at 3:03 p.m.