

Date: Wednesday, November 8, 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/join/9876543210?pwd=Z4qCSzGq6j2f6y6eQ>

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

The Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) met on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, at 12:30 p.m. in a hybrid setting in person and via Zoom.

The following Board members were present: Zach Thode, George Wallace, Amber Graves, Franklyn Garry, Brad Justice, Beth Conrey, Audrey Welsh, Martha Sullins, Andrew Pineda,.

The following officials and staff were present: John Kefalas, County Commissioner; Rebecca Everette Matt Lafferty, Principal Planner; Cary Weiner, Extension Director; Jess Callen, Agricultural Natural Resource Specialist; Laura Walker, Human and Economic Health Director; and Christina Scrutchins, Recording Specialist

Guests present: Sylvia Tappmberus, Megan Keith, Carly Donio, and Melissa Town.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 13, 2022

Chair Thode requested "Crescent" be replaced with "Cresset."

Member Garry moved, and member Wallace seconded the motion to approve the September 13, 2023, amended minutes of the Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board. Motion carried (8-0).

The Minutes were unanimously approved.

AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

Chair Thode requested an update from Jess Callen regarding Oregon State initiative for Larimer and Weld County.

INTERACTION WITH COMMISSIONER KEFALAS ON AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY RELATED ISSUES

Commissioner Kefalas discusses several topics. Initially, he mentions the recruitment for the AAB and the approval of additional appointments. Commissioner Kefalas welcomes a new member, Melissa Town, and expresses gratitude to Beth Conrey and Andrew for their contributions. The primary focus is on the county budget, highlighting the recent defeat of Proposition HH and its implications. The proposed budget for 2024 assumed the passage of Proposition HH, but with its failure, adjustments need to be considered, and the budget team is already analyzing the situation. Commissioner Kefalas mentions the board retreat on November fifteenth, which will further address these adjustments, with the goal of approving the budget on December fourteenth. He also touches on the Water Education Series, a joint work session with the planning commission, updates on the Water Master Plan, and progress on the strategic plan. Additionally, Commissioner Kefalas mentions an upcoming community survey to gather input for the 2024-2028 strategic plan. Commissioner Kefalas shares insights on the community survey. He mentions his last interaction with the survey, where he provided feedback on a draft copy presented to the Commissioners. Commissioner Kefalas emphasizes the importance of including age-related topics in the survey and mentions that Michelle Byrd, the public information person, will incorporate the feedback into the final version. The survey is

described as community-wide, addressing pertinent issues and including demographic questions. Commissioner Kefalas highlights the biannual nature of the survey and its role in informing the next five-year strategic plan. He clarifies that this survey is distinct from the DNR master plan survey, which is conducted less frequently, perhaps once in 10 or 20 years.

STAFF UPDATES

ITEM NO. 1 – WATER EDUCATION SERIES UPDATE (VIDEOS FROM PREVIOUS SESSIONS CAN BE FOUND AT THE FOLLOWING LINK: [HTTPS://WWW.LARIMER.GOV/PUBLIC-AFFAIRS/PRESENTATIONS/LARIMER-COUNTY-WATER-EDUCATION-SERIES](https://www.larimer.gov/public-affairs/presentations/larimer-county-water-education-series))

Member Graves discusses the intricate dynamics of water usage, particularly focusing on the concept of return flows. She explains the interconnectedness of upstream and downstream water users, highlighting that increased efficiency upstream may inadvertently impact downstream users. Member Graves emphasizes the need for infrastructure, tools, and collaboration to maximize the utilization of existing water resources. She mentions the importance of buffers, such as storage, to handle variations in water availability due to changing ecosystems. Member Graves also touches on the collaborative efforts between cities and agriculture, suggesting alternative transfer methods as a viable solution. She advocates for flexibility in water management, expressing concerns about overly rigid systems that may hinder creative solutions. Despite uncertainties about the future, Member Graves remains optimistic, citing the longstanding success of the Colorado water compact and the ability of people to adapt and find solutions over time. The Water Education Series is recognized as a valuable initiative to enhance understanding and foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders in Larimer County. Staff provided an update on Larimer County's water plan project, mentioning that last night and on Monday night, the project commenced with a presentation on goals and vision, along with a workshop. Staff directed the audience to the Larimer County planning page at larimer.gov/planning/water for further information and updates on the water planning study. Member Graves encouraged participation by highlighting a survey available on the website, where individuals could express their concerns and preferences regarding future water issues. Additionally, she noted the diversity of attendees at the recent workshop, with representation from municipalities such as Fort Collins and Loveland, as well as smaller cities and various ditch companies.

Members discussed their involvement in two advisory groups focused on water planning. One member highlighted the challenges of understanding the activities in both groups. Virtual integration was praised for its effectiveness, and a member inquired about coordination between the climate initiative and ongoing series. While acknowledging logistical silos, it was noted that individuals involved in both committees aim to bridge communication gaps. Collaboration at a higher level was emphasized, with Leslie Ellis overseeing climate-smart initiatives and water planning at the county level. A suggestion was made to discuss the proposed expansion of Halligan Reservoir in future meetings, considering its implications for municipal water supply and discussions on water sharing. The need for a 1041 permit from Larimer County for the Halligan Reservoir project was discussed, with a reminder of limitations during the review period. Discussion concluded with a suggestion to have a presentation on the Halligan Reservoir project before the review period to avoid conflicts, and information about an upcoming public webinar on the project's status.

ITEM NO. 2 – UPDATE ON THE ROLE OF EXTENSION AND THE AAB

There has been discussion about the possibility of relocating the board from the Community Development Department back to extension. The historical background indicated that the board had previously been anchored in extension before moving to its current department. The overlap of the board with various county departments due to its role was acknowledged. Currently, the work plan is being reviewed, taking note of the draft versions of new policies and procedures for boards and commissions. Once finalized, there are plans to assess the impact of these regulations

on the board, aligning them with the existing bylaws and the approved work plan. The goal is to ensure the board's proper placement, possibly in the extension office, considering the complex and interconnected nature of the issues the board deals with, such as land use, climate, and water-related initiatives. It was emphasized that, regardless of the shift, community development would still have representation and participation in all meetings, even if not responsible for logistics and administration. The historical context of the board's original tie to extension was mentioned, and the recent focus of the extension office on local agricultural production was considered. The advantages and disadvantages of the potential move were discussed, acknowledging the need for a delicate balance to cover the diverse issues the board addressed. The administrative requirements were not expected to undergo a significant shift, given the experience in managing various boards and commissions.

The importance of improving communication and collaboration between the natural resources and agriculture sectors was highlighted, considering the involvement of multiple departments in handling board affairs. The decision-making process was contingent upon the finalization of new policies and the completion of the board's work plan trajectory. The aim was to ensure the board's proper placement for effective support and functionality. The need for a stronger connection with CSU, especially in addressing technical issues, was recognized, and the ongoing efforts to enhance dialogue between CSU and the county were mentioned. The perspective was shared that rerouting through extension made sense for improved connectivity and collaboration. Addressing the challenges, the commitment to finding the right people to meet the needs of the board was acknowledged. Engagement with CSU over the last couple of years had been part of the effort to rebuild relationships, and there was a desire to further engage with Vice President Pritchett in the coming spring to strengthen connections.

The Extension department is closely collaborating with Leslie Ellis on developing a transition proposal for the Larimer County Ag Advisory Board. The proposal will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners, considering the pros and cons of the transition. Concerns have been raised about maintaining dialogue with the Open Lands Advisory Board and the Department of Natural Resources during the transition, as both boards are currently under Leslie's umbrella. Efforts are underway, led by Commissioner Kefalas and Chair Thode, to improve dialogue and collaboration during and after the transition. The focus is on ensuring continued access and functionality for various departments and groups.

ITEM NO. 3 – OREGON STATE INITIATIVE FOR LARIMER AND WELD COUNTY.

Kelsey Amar, an Oregon State University researcher, is collaborating with the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) on a climate data project. The project aims to analyze climate data from the past 50 years, including soil moisture, precipitation, and temperature changes, to create a working group in Larimer and Weld County. The goal is to determine the most relevant data for producers to assist them in adapting to future changes. The project invites participants to join a working group session at the Larimer County office, offering a \$50 Jax's gift card for participation. The initiative, successful in Willamette Valley, seeks to expand nationally to provide climate data for agricultural counties across states. Producers interested in participating can contact Jess for more information.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

ITEM NO.1 – East Mulberry Plan update - Fort Collins Staff

In 2020, the plan to annex an enclave area into Fort Collins was initiated, and it is scheduled for adoption by the city council on November 21. The Enclave area became eligible for annexation in 2021, facilitated by an intergovernmental agreement between the county and the city for the annexation of areas surrounded by city limits. Originally conceived as a phased annexation, the

plan evolved into a potential threshold annexation process, allowing for flexible timelines based on future factors such as development projects and natural resource protection.

The presentation addressed various aspects, including city sales tax exemptions for agricultural operations, enterprise zones, and nonconforming uses. The focus was on updating the land use code for East Mulberry. The Enclave area, eligible for annexation since 2021, was discussed, with an existing intergovernmental agreement between the city and county in place for annexation of surrounded areas. The presentation covered the transition from a phased annexation approach to a threshold annexation process, influenced by feedback from the city council.

During the discussion, some members suggested the creation of an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) that would maintain the area as commercial Agriculture zoning in the county, potentially saving significant effort. Concerns were expressed about the uncertainty surrounding annexation, emphasizing the need for positive and collaborative planning between the city and county. The project team acknowledged the suggestion but emphasized the existing obligation to consider annexation, as outlined in the intergovernmental agreement. Factors such as logical jurisdictional boundaries and infrastructure complexities were mentioned as considerations for annexation. The team encouraged feedback and expressed openness to understanding specific concerns related to potential annexation.

Further concerns were raised about potential risks associated with annexation, citing examples like Denver outlawing meat processing within city limits. The importance of preserving businesses, such as a livestock sale barn, crucial in the agricultural community, was stressed. Concerns were also voiced about the potential increase in the cost of doing business for annexed commercial entities, impacting their tax basis and ability to attract new businesses. In response, the project team addressed the taxation aspect, highlighting exemptions for agricultural uses from sales tax and minimal changes in property tax. The team committed to avoiding unintended tax burdens on businesses through annexation.

The discussion included considerations and reasons behind annexation, with the plan suggesting an industrial zone district for the area around the interchange upon annexation. The goal is to add allowable uses, including livestock auctioning and meat processing, implement dealerships, vet suppliers, agricultural cooperatives, and ag retailers, preventing these uses from becoming nonconforming.

A member questioned why the city doesn't leave the area in the county, and the response provided insight into the complexities of service responsibilities. The team clarified that the county is not seeking to unload the area, but service-related challenges, such as policing, become more complicated when areas are surrounded by the city. The member emphasized the change in tone regarding annexation, indicating it's a mutual consideration involving the county. The team acknowledged the need for better communication about the advantages of annexation and potential benefits for businesses.

Another member shared concerns about potential changes in policies and rules after annexation, such as tax increases or alterations to operational practices for businesses. The importance of clear communication of the annexation strategy was highlighted to address uncertainties and fears among enterprises. The member suggested that a more transparent approach would help alleviate concerns about potential policy changes.

The discussion emphasized aligning with the city's plan during development within the growth management area and intergovernmental agreements. Clear communication was stressed to ensure businesses and stakeholders are aware of the intentions and potential impacts of annexation. Concerns were raised about the impact of Fort Collins' grocery tax on agricultural businesses if the area is annexed into the city. Some members suggested exploring options to redirect funds collected from a grocery tax to support agricultural businesses or food systems work.

Shared concerns related to the proposed development and annexation were discussed. Specifically, a section in the city's report regarding the enhancement of existing irrigation ditches and canals for multi-use trails raised concerns. Caution was advised in implementing trails through canal areas, emphasizing the need to consult with canal companies to address potential issues with public access. Inquiries were made about referrals sent by the city to local entities, expressing concerns about stormwater management and potential challenges for canal companies due to proposed developments.

The city conducted an in-depth fiscal impact analysis of annexing the area, weighing potential revenues from sales tax against anticipated costs, including stormwater upgrades, street maintenance, and policing. Annexing the outlined area is projected to result in a substantial budget deficit, prompting the city council to approach the strategy and sequencing of annexation with caution. The county currently maintains the area at a county level, but city residents' expectations for higher levels of maintenance and services pose a challenge for the city's budget.

The discussion highlighted the city council's obligations outlined in the intergovernmental agreement, emphasizing the importance of maintaining logical jurisdictional boundaries. Concerns were raised about potential uneasiness and a lack of engagement with all the agricultural related business currently found in the E Mulberry area and current commercial agricultural zone as well as ag producers who use those businesses regarding annexation plans. A member expressed the need for close work sessions with merchants to address their concerns, particularly in relation to utilities, storm drainage, and possible restrictions. There was a suggestion to include a placeholder indicating future engagement sessions with the affected businesses.

The response from the project team assured that engagement with the agricultural community was a priority, emphasizing a gradual process with ample opportunities for discussions and workshops. The conversation emphasized the sequential nature of the plan, the desire for effective outreach, and clarification that the adoption of the plan did not commit the city to immediate annexation but triggered careful scrutiny and further community outreach when specific areas were considered.

ITEM NO. 2 – Local Food Policy Council - Audrey Welsh

The presentation discussed the Northern Colorado Food Shed project's two-year planning initiative, led by the Food Shed project. They obtained a regional food systems partnership grant in 2021, bringing together various organizations. The steering committee, comprising organizations like Project Recovery, La Familia, Family Center, Growing Project, CSU, and Poudre Valley Community Farms, worked on community assessments and organizational planning. Working groups focused on producer support, community support, public outreach and policy, and market and infrastructure support.

The key outcome was the identification of a potential Food Equity Policy Council. Research involved focus groups, community engagement, and interviews with policymakers and existing Food Policy Councils. The proposed council aims to promote food sovereignty and address system vulnerability. The presentation emphasized collaboration with entities like the Ag Advisory Board, serving as a resource and bringing research-based recommendations. The project is seeking an implementation grant to move forward.

The discussion highlighted the need for transparency, objectivity, and careful consideration of the council's role. The potential council is viewed as a nonprofit entity, providing research-backed recommendations and facilitating community engagement. The presenters sought feedback and expressed interest in collaboration with the Ag Advisory Board. Board members acknowledged the potential benefits and offered support for future collaboration, recognizing the importance of clear communication and effective interaction between the entities.

ITEM NO. 3 – Solid Waste Update – Duane

They are in the final stages of interviews with consultants for the next phase of their solid waste program, focusing on diversion technologies, composting, biochar, and anaerobic digestion. The landfill is also exploring options for capturing energy from plastic materials. There's anticipation for more detailed updates in January, including information about the next phase and related initiatives.

Work Plan and Task Groups

ITEM NO. 1 – Voluntary Ag District Update

The discussion included the need to obtain formal involvement from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and leadership commitment. It was mentioned that no actions have been taken without attempting to include DNR, and efforts were made to communicate the desire for collaboration, particularly during an upcoming Open Lands Advisory Board meeting. The best method for coordinating these efforts and formalizing leadership responsibilities, whether with Shane Atkinson, DNR, or another entity, is still under consideration. Help from the Commissioner's office is being sought to determine the next steps, and it is anticipated that this will be included in the work plan for the next year.

ITEM NO. 2 – Food Systems Discussion

Discussion was included in Discussion Item No. 2 – Local Food Policy Council - Audry Snyder Walsh

ITEM NO. 3 – Work Plan Discussion

The discussion revolves around the work plan, including topics such as Voluntary Ag districts, local food systems, engagement, and solid waste. There is some interest in adding Legislative Review and discuss being proactive in addressing statewide initiatives that could impact the board's work. The East Mulberry plan is briefly mentioned, and there's a suggestion to potentially include it in the work plan. The conversation also touches on the complexities of the plan, interactions with the city, and feedback provided during a meeting. The need for proactive engagement and participation in external committees, such as CCI, is discussed, along with the limitations of being a reactionary advisory board. The work plan focuses on key areas of concern and action for the board.

ADJOURN

With there being no further business, the hearing adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

FUTURE COMMUNICATION ITEMS

None.