

Date: Wednesday, May 11, 2022
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_kdWn8gFhQbiseG_alq8jeA

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

The Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) met in a hybrid setting in person and via Zoom.

The following Board members were present (some online): Zach Thode (Chairperson), George Wallace (Vice Chairperson), Kristin Ramey (Secretary), Beth Conrey, Timothy Clouse, John Cravens, Franklyn Garry, Amber Graves, Andy Pineda, and Maureen McDonough.

The following Board members were absent: Andy Pineda, Travis Horton and Greg Schreiner

The following officials and staff were present: John Kefalas, County Commissioner; Alyssa Martin, Planner I; Lesli Ellis, Community Development Director; Matt Lafferty, Principal Planner; Cesar Gardundo, CSU Intern.

Guests present: Eric Fried, Chief Building Official; Heidi Pruess, Climate Smart and Sustainability Program Manager Bob Overbeck, County Assessor.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The March 9, 2022 minutes were approved with minor corrections by George Wallace.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Updates from County Commissioner John Kefalas

Updates included:

- Fire restrictions lifted. Ditch burning may be exempted.
- County manager – job posted – for a month through May 13. Hoping to offer by June 29 after rounds of interviews. George Wallace is on a community panel.
- Morning work session regarding transportation – reconvening discussions about regional approach to transportation issues, how to cooperate among the eight municipalities. The half penny tax was in 2019.
- Behavioral health facility is underway funded by the .25 tax.

- Livermore meeting – future work session regarding Livermore water, quality, supply, etc. Chris Manley at the Health Department is working on it.
- Water planning open house.
- Good job on the local foods items – it's on the agenda for later in this session.
- Making progress on the Strategic Plan, including Goal 1 broadband, water planning,
- Joint work session with Fort Collins City Council regarding air quality and East Mulberry Corridor Plan – City Council will discuss and align internally. Commissioners brought up the ag businesses on the frontage road and maintaining them.

Zach – sent an email to Commissioners about drought and lack of feed causing a need for additional grazing opportunities. Would like assistance from BCC – is there a role from the County to assist? Kefalas will bring up at Red Feather Lakes on May 26 which will be attended by the new Canyon Lakes District Ranger for the Forest Service. Possibly discuss with DNR to allow grazing on County properties. George indicated there is potential of using some of Thorntons land for such activities.

Laurie Kadrich and Leslie will be attending a meeting in June between Northern, Thornton, Larimer County, Fort Collins, and Save the Poudre, having to do with river health and flows through Fort Collins. Thornton trying to be more collaborative.

Wellington community conversation tomorrow – will be at the new school. It will be a continuation of the discussion regarding the intersection of Highway 1, CR 9 and 62E. Discussions about intersection improvements including possibility of a roundabout.

George thanked Commissioner Kefalas for his loyal attendance.

Guest Topic Discussions

Heidi Pruess, Climate Smart and Sustainability Coordinator

Heidi introduced the Climate Smart Larimer County (CSLC) Initiative by acknowledging the valuable input from Greg Schreiner of this group.

She addressed that the initial phase defined development of an internal county plan and provided a slide overview of Phase 2 Community outreach on the plan bringing the process to the end of phase 2.

See: www.larimer.org/climate-smart for an expanded summary of the recommendations from the community engagement sessions.

Questions:

How long has it taken to prepare this? Phase 1 began in 2019 and took about year for staff to establish framework document. John indicated this is the way the Local Foods Team should have approached their project resulting in a fuller engagement process with more refined recommendations.

How do these things get integrated? Commissioner Kefalas pointed out that multiple plans integrate. E.g., solid waste – diversion. There is integration with that department and this office. Air quality is another example. With public health people making some progress and could include purchasing equipment. Also tied with other strategic plans. If something is missing, let the county know. Could integrate the ag community with some of this climate smart planning. At least looking at regenerative farming and water.

Heidi explained that the ultimate implementation plan for Climate Smart should link to all the plans – or where there may be an opportunity to link with other plans or community conversations. How we grow relates to these resources in a sustainable way.

Who will lead the implementation of the plan objectives? County might be convener or collaborator of certain objective or even be the owner of some. With regards to the private sector, it will likely be how are the objectives incentivized (e.g., funding for solar panels). The intent is not to require these things.

Local Food Work Session – Update

Kirstin – Team has some homework to clean up the presentation. Get through the school year and then do that. Will prioritize one more time. Kefalas – Confirmed the work of the group. Have done a stellar job, and there are actionable items that we can work on now, including conversations with building, etc. Did a good job of coming up with results.

The board discussed if it would be possible to have DNR look into small acreage properties for those entering the AG industry. It was noted that that was a recommended item and the last meeting, which DNR attended and there was some receptivity to looking at Malchow Farm. John stated that this will be part of the prioritization.

Ad advisory board might have a role in what goes into the next strategic plan, including relating to working farms and ranches. Talked about housing for farm workers and labor. Local food service into school service, and possibly for jail as a local food consumer. Talked about soil health and will talk about a pollinator resolution. Need to do priorities and wish list for top 5.

Kefalas – It would be helpful to make a list of short-term and longer-term follow up items. E.g., whether or not jail or corrections could utilize more local food. That's an actionable item. Offer suggestions on who should do it (e.g., year-round farmers market – could there be an update at a future meeting – CSU and Energy Institute).

What about webpage for advertising local food (e.g., farmers market)? Does extension put the information about where to find things regarding all agricultural info in one place. Staffing maintenance of a webpage is a challenge.

Cesar Gardundo (intern) gave an overview of his background and progress being made regarding his intern activities. He answered general questions from the Board.

Lesli shared the proposed designs for the right-to-farm signs and asked the board what their preference would be. The Board agreed to select the one that is most noticeable, preference was the green and brown on white background.

Eric Fried, Chief Building Official presentation

Eric provided an overview of the 2021 Building Code Updates. He addressed why we have building codes and what authority the County has to regulated building including AG buildings. He noted that occupancy of buildings dictates what building regulations or applied (e.g., is the building used as utility/accessory building or for assembly uses).

When do building regulations apply to existing buildings? Generally, the regulations apply if the use/assembly of the building is changed from what it was originally approved for.

When does labor housing require sprinklers? If a single-family structure there is no requirement, but when constructed to house multiple groups (dormitory style housing, Triplexes, and the like) sprinklers becomes a requirement. Modular housing, tiny homes and the like will not require sprinklers as they operate as a single-family occupancy.

When does hiring an employee trigger these requirements? It is not about hiring employees, it has more to deal with the occupancy and use of the building (e.g., moving from a barn to a packaging plant).

The Board discussed the building permit process can feel punitive in that not everyone knows what to expect. How can this be avoided? How do we ease regulatory burdens? How to we improve the sharing of information?

Board member McDonough share her frustration sharing her experience with seeking a permit for a barn and having her project put on hold because buildings constructed by the previous property owner did not get permits. They felt like they were being punished for things they had no control over, even though they were trying to do the right thing.

It was suggested that knowing where the line is for obtaining a permit would be helpful to know where so ag community can be comfortable seeking permits to make improvements to facilities.

Commissioner Kefalas noted that communication is a critical thing, and Code compliance informing property owners about what need to be done is often a difficult task as it creates controversy.

Discussion suggesting use of the press (North Forty, Fence Post, or Coloradoan) might be useful to sharing information with the rural community.

Fees. Could we adjust fees? Set of incentives. Can we reduce fees? BCC could set a policy on fees. We could do some research – on incentives for farmers. Keep on the table.

Is there a way to streamline – an industry that expands? Or meets climate goals? Partnership with Jacob's team?

Other Discussion Items:

Zach indicated that he met with Duane at Solid waste and discovered that compost actions on hold. Could there be an analysis related to generating energy? Regional dialogue with wastewater providers. Follow up with Laurie and Duane. On hold. Generating energy through digestion. Stimulating wastewater conversation. Bigger on energy generation. Animal feed was lower. There might be better more long-term solutions than compost.

Table CSU items.

Webpage – IT - could there be links? Make it a priority item for the next meeting.

Didn't adopt the changes to the bylaws – add to the agenda next time.

Adjourned at 3:08.

The following topics are tabled for now:

- Agricultural districts tabled in part due to lack of staff resources. George would like us to discuss a commercial agricultural zoning district in the future and connect merchants. Rezoning is tabled for now, but there will be part of the Community Development work plan later this year. There is a brief discussion with the Assessor on the hurdles with taxing and incentives with more needed outreach. A letter in the workplan can be included to explain the issue.
- Carbon Sequestration – not many ag producers visited the climate workshop a few weeks prior, substantial input is needed for the next steps. Will follow up on a USDA grant and a partnership and funds for climate smart commodities for agriculture and forestry. The funding would go to larger scale transformational projects. Heidi Pruess may have more information on grant opportunities. Two members were interested.

(Note: Zach Thode followed up after the meeting with a reminder that the CSU intern and outcomes needs to be on this work plan.)

The committee briefly discussed the Thornton northern properties. They are forming a group to identify solutions.

The meeting adjourned at 3:08 pm.