Chaffee Common Ground – Citizens Advisory Committee (CCG-CAC)

Minutes from Meeting on Thursday November 30, 2023

Meeting Called to order at 1:05 p.m.

CCG-CAC Members present: **(all attended virtually)** Cindy Williams, Sydney Schnurr, Ben Lenth, Dan Omasta, Michael Hannigan, Jim LaRue and Greg Felt - BOCC liaison. Also present Ben Doon, Administrative Support and Kim Marquis, Outreach Coordinator.
CCG-CAC Members absent: Kit Kuester

Agenda review

Cindy reviewed the agenda. The first topic is a sales tax collection and finance review. The Committee will receive an update on the Community Conservation Connection program from Natalie Allio and Wendy McDermott from the Central Colorado Conservancy. The Committee will discuss a proposed draft framework for developing Common Ground partnerships. A calendar for the 6th grant cycle in 2024 will be proposed and an update will be given on Committee Member terms expiring at the end of January 2024.

Approval of minutes from previous meeting and approval of agenda

The meeting agenda and consent agenda for November 30th and the July 24 meeting minutes were approved as presented. Motion Michael. Second Jim. Vote unanimous.

Sales Tax Collection

Ben D stated that while still at a high level, sales tax collections have cooled off. Since May, 2023 collections versus 2022 collections have seen three months with a decrease, three months with an increase and one month with no change. Annual collections are about $1,750,000 for all four funds. This is up from about $1,250,000 in 2019. If we project flat growth for 2024 compared with 2023, we are looking at just over $850,000 in unobligated funds to be dispersed in June. 2024 obligations are just over one million and 2025 obligations are just over $600k. Greg stated that the overall number of units sold is down, but due to inflation the sales tax level has remained steady.

Update Presentation on Community Conservation Connection Program

Natalie Allio and Wendy McDermott from the Central Colorado Conservancy presented information on the Community Conservation Connection program which received a 5-year grant funded in 2020. The program currently offers 5-year leases to farmers and ranchers to help keep lands in agriculture. Agricultural operators who participate in the voluntary program will sign agreements to limit nonagricultural development on their land and to continue basic agricultural management practices, including irrigation. This program is a product of the rancher task force meetings that were held in 2019. There are currently 10 properties enrolled including 1,204 irrigated-acres/wet meadows and 2,260 dry acres for a total of 3,464 acres in the program. 1,644 acres are non-easement lands and 1,819 acres are part of a conservation easement. A purpose of the program is the understanding that conservation easements can be a useful tool, but it doesn't fit for everyone and this program can provide protection for some amount of time. Natalie said that most properties that meet the current qualifications are enrolled. 900 additional acres may be enrolled in the near future. She said when the program started there were folks that quickly adopted the program and those that wanted to stand back and watch and see how it goes.

Some potential changes to the program include considering producers operating on leased property; consider increasing payments for longer periods (10 to 20 years); additional payments for wildlife friendly practices; installing wildlife friendly fencing; improving and protecting wildlife habitat; decreasing the minimum 160 contiguous acres requirement and factoring in a 5-year inflation rate increase.

Program payments are capped at $12k per producer annually and based on a per-acre rate of $17/acre wet (assessor classification: sprinkler, flood, meadow) and $12/acre dry grazing (assessor classification).

Developing Common Ground Partnerships and Proposed Framework
Cindy presented the Common Ground Partnership Draft Framework.

Chaffee County Resolution 2018-46 stipulates that Chaffee Common Ground funds will be provided "through grants and partnerships."

Partnership agreements are intended to provide a vehicle to fund successful programs sustainably. The benefit of partnerships include: building efficiency into the grant-making process and maximizing benefits to the community; sustainably funding programs with proven benefits; reducing the burden on program partners for repeated grant applications and increase the probability of sustainable Common Ground program success over time. Partnerships are considered where they add net value to the community (as compared to current state).

Michael said partnerships can increase the probability of success overtime. Predictability can be helpful.

The partnership program and individual partnership agreements will be subject to Board of County Commissioner approval. Cindy said the idea is to address partnerships as they come-up prior to each grant cycle.

Dan asked what program could potentially be supported by a partnership and how much would the overall cost be. Cindy said the Conservation Connection Program could run about $125k per year. Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters could be $200k-$250k per year. The Chaffee Chips program would likely come-in with a long-term capacity ask as well.

Michael said we need to ask if a partnership would result in a high impact to the program, or if it could still be good as a grant proposal. The program should have a critical community need and be part of a mature, well-run organization. A partnership could cut down on an organization's administrative burden and have more money and time available on producing results.

Syd said she's like to see a renewal date every 5 or 10 years. 20 years seems like a really long time for a partnership. A lot can happen in 20 years. Michael suggested reviewing partnerships every 5 years.

Ben L expressed concern about pitfalls of partnerships and any unintended consequences. He has concerns about the optics of favoritism.

Michael said the biggest challenges with partnerships is when staff and boards have significant turnover and experience a real loss of institutional memory. Other times organizations experience resources issues and no longer have the funds to run certain programs or keep staff.

Ben D stated that we still need to be mindful of the TABOR Amendment to the Colorado Constitution, which prohibits counties from entering into multi-year agreements. All partnership agreements will have to include the phrase "subject to annual appropriations" and there is no way to create an ironclad agreement that guarantees funding for a set amount of years.

Partnership agreements may be considered as requested by prior grantees but must occur outside of a competitive grant cycle. The consideration process will include: an initial presentation by project partner/s summarizing program intent and results to date to screen potential partnerships; the Common Ground Citizens Advisory Committee will vote following such presentations on whether a full partnership application/presentation is warranted. Next steps will be approved by a majority, with a goal to reach consensus.

If the initial proposal concept is approved, then Partners will provide an application presentation to include: proposed partnership term; proposed partnership budget including in-kind and cash match funds; partnership goals and deliverables; admin cost and justification; partnership benefits to one or more of the 3 Common Ground program goals.

Applications will be considered by the Common Ground Citizens Advisory Committee and compared to current revenues and investment commitments. Applications must be approved by the majority of Committee members, with an aim toward consensus, at all decision stages. Partnership agreements will be proposed to the Chaffee Board of County Commissioners for approval and be subject to annual appropriations.

Partnerships will be managed with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement with Common Ground and Chaffee County. Partnerships are required to communicate results by making an annual presentation to the Committee. Results will be reviewed by the Common Ground Committee. Common

Ground reserves the right to conduct a financial review or audit of all partnerships. Partnerships that do not meet program goals or are out of compliance with MOU agreements may be recommended for termination by the Common Ground Committee by majority vote.

Calendar for 6th Grant Cycle

Proposed 2024 GRANT SCHEDULE

Applications posted – Wednesday January 17th

Community Q&A session - Monday January 22nd @ 9:00 a.m.

Pre-Application due date Friday February 16th @ 5:00 p.m.

Full Application due date Friday March 22nd @ 5:00 p.m.

Committee Meetings to Review Applications – April

Grants awarded by BOCC May 2024

Checks mailed by June 15th

Board Member Term Updates

Kit's and Dan's Board Terms expire on January 31st 2024. The County published a notice of pending board vacancies. A letter on intent needs to be submitted to the county administration office by 4:00 p.m. on November 30th for consideration. Ben D expects that the deadline will be extended. Kit indicated that she will not seek reappointment. Committee members are encouraged to contact anyone they know that might be a good fit for the Common Ground Committee. Generally speaking, it is difficult to get people to serve on the various volunteer boards.

Other Business

None.

Next Steps

The next meeting will be on Wednesday December 6th at 1:00 p.m. Agenda topics include an update about the Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters programs and a discussion to finalize the framework for the partnership program.

Public Comment

None.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 3:02 p.m.