December 16th, 2025
Chaffee County Common Ground Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting

Location: 104 Crestone Ave, Salida, CO 81201

Attendance:

Committee: Ben Lenth, Dani Cook (virtual), Paule Muelle, Sydney Schnurr (virtual), Joe Stone (virtual)
Chaffee County Staff: Gina Lucrezi (virtual), Miles Cottom, Gabe Hobson
CCCF: Betsy Dittenber, Anna Hendricks
Public: Sig Jaastad, Michael Earle

13:00 – Meeting commences.

13:02 – Guests Sig Jaastad and Michael Earle introduce themselves.

13:03 – Consent Agenda is approved.

13:04 – Miles C provides an update on the Working Lands Initiative, stating the Upper Arkansas Conservation District (UACD) was awarded the coordinator role. He adds that UACD will work with Guidestone Colorado to execute the program of work to use the specific expertise of both organizations to produce the most beneficial outcome. Answering Ben L's questions, Miles notes that the specific program of work is being developed.

13:06 – Gabe H gives an update on County Resource Councils, stating that the Chaffee Treats December meeting was cancelled due to the holiday season and the Rec Council will be held later in the week.

13:08 – Miles C presents a slideshow and gives an update on the Common Ground budget. Since 2019 Common Ground has collected more than $10 million. Through 2025 over $11.5 million has been spent or committed to future projects through the competitive grant process. The County plans to make adjustments to the program to build a sizeable and stable base fund. The goal is to grow a reserve fund balance of $3 million by 2027 and $6 million by 2030 while continuing to support long term partnerships, initiatives, and a reduced competitive grant cycle. There will not be a competitive grant cycle in 2026 due to the $1.3 million already committed in 2026. Miles C explains that the plan leaves a balance of for competitive grant cycles of $100,000 in 2027, $200,00 in 2028, $400,000, in 2029, and $500,000 in 2030. He also notes that those as baseline numbers which are likely to increase by up to $150,000 each year based on actual revenue and accounting adjustments. The tentative plan moving forward is to accept competitive grant applications in 2026 with disbursements of awards in early 2027.

13:28 – Ben L asks about the goals of having $3 million in 2027 and $6 million by 2030 in the reserve fund, noting that they are aggressive targets. He asks for more information on what large projects might be funded by the reserve fund. He also suggests having a fixed target of $500,000 for a competitive grant cycle and a more relaxed goal for the reserve fund. He also asks how the plan relates to the draft reserve policy that the CAC developed. Miles C explains that the goals were largely a product of County Commissioner priorities. He notes that there have not been any specific projects identified for the reserve fund but that the fund will enable the County to be proactive in pursuing large projects when they become available. He notes that a good example of such a project is the purchase of the 650-acre Snowmass Falls Ranch by Pitkin County in recent months. He explains that this fund could be used to leverage outside funding for larger projects. He also explains that the County's draft fund policy is designed, in part, to ensure that there are not commitments made beyond what is available in the Common Ground fund balance.

13:37 – Ben L requests a follow up on the reserve policy. He also notes that, since the reserve fund would be seed money, he believes the goals of the fund are aggressive. He points out that the Ag Resilience Coordinator is expected to help increase access to the Common Ground competitive grant program, and therefore advocates for a larger amount of funds to be available to for competitive grants. He suggests that the lodging tax allocations for Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters should come from the tourism portion of the lodging tax, which Miles C confirms it would.

13:39 – Sydney S asks the CAC if the reserve policy being proposed by the County meets the requirements of the ballot language for the Common Ground sales tax which was approved by the voters, noting she is uncomfortable with the policy. Joe S agrees with Ben L that more money should be allocated to the competitive grant cycle. Sydney S would be more comfortable with the proposed reserve fund policy if she knew what the fund would be used for. Ben L cautions that purchasing ranches since there is a priority to keep working lands working and the County is not positioned top operated them. He requests an explanation for how the stated goals support the Common Ground fund, suggesting that the acquisition of land does not fit within the goals of the Common ground fund. Miles C notes that the CAC will be asked for input on any expenditure of the reserve fund. Joe S asks about the appropriateness of a County acquiring and managing water rights. Miles C notes that it is common for local municipalities to own water rights. Joe S replies that the municipalities are water service providers, and the County is not. Gina L points out that Buena Vista owns a farm for the water rights and employs someone to manages the farm. She expresses the need to have a reserve fund that is available when opportunities arise as well as finding ways to use the Common Ground fund to benefit the benefit as a whole, not just those that are able to apply to a grant. She points out that the Common Ground fund has been spent liberally without planning for the future which she does not believe is a responsible approach to managing the fund.

13:56 – Ben L expresses the desire to continue the conversation, suggesting that the County needs to add a process to the plan. He adds that there needs to be clarity about the goals, uses, and purposes of the plan for the Common Ground fund. He agrees that there needs to be fiscal responsibility but that there needs to be additional discussion and explanations on the amounts identified for the reserve fund. Paul L expresses support for a reserve fund that is available for big project opportunity but agrees with Ben L that there needs to be additional discussion.

14:00 – Miles C gives a brief explanation of the budget process moving forward, adding that the 2027 competitive grant budget should be set by late 2026. The budget will be reviewed year after year but there should be a model to work off. Ben L asks if the County considered gradually increasing the contributions to the reserve fund since the Common Ground fund has more commitments on the front end. Miles C answers that it was considered but the front-end commitments through multi-year grants were a driving factor for the reduction in available funds for competitive grant cycles in the coming several years. Betsy D points out that the reserve policy proposed by the CAC would allocate $1.4 million to the reserve fund in the first year as opposed to the $1 million the County has proposed. Miles C adds that this reserve fund is not explicitly a fund intended for purchasing land or water rights but is available for any major need that may arise which fits under the Common Ground ballot language. He also argues that showing a commitment to grow the reserve fund to the identified levels can incentivize third parties to partner with the County, knowing that additional funds will be added to the reserve fund that can be committed to reimbursement or future payments.

14:09 – A brief discussion of the timeline for additional questions and the approval of a budget by the BOCC ensues. Miles C suggests that questions be submitted sooner than later as a budget would be approved by August at the latest and likely much sooner. Betsy D adds that the prospective applicants will need to know that the amount of money available in a competitive grant cycle will be lower and suggests a deadline of the end of quarter one of the fiscal year to have a final budget for the 2027 grant cycle. Sydney S requests for the CAC to be able to review how any additional funds from increased tax revenue or returned funds are being allocated.

14:16 – A discussion of the scoring criteria review begins. Betsy D discusses the results of the applicant survey including applicant type (rec, ag, or forest health), if they were awarded, grant cycle timing, and a summary of what worked well and what could be improved. A more detailed report of the survey will be sent out.

14:21 – Miles gives an update on policies and roles of the CAC, County staff, and CCCF. County Staff will be directing the month-to-month management of CAC meetings, agendas, and the Common Ground Program. CCCF will continue to administer the grant program. Betsy D adds that CCCF is focused on grant requests, disbursements, and reports, whereas County staff will be lead committee functions and policy development.

14:26 – Ben L asks if the draft policies developed by the CAC are still being reviewed. Miles C confirms that the policies are being reviewed. It’s also being assessed whether any of the policies are already addressed by existing County policies. He notes that the County wants to ensure policies are as consistent as possible across all County boards and committees.

14:29 – A discussion on committee officer elections begins. Joe S offers to nominate existing officers to retain their current roles. The CAC agrees to vote by email since two members are absent.

14:31 – The group discusses meeting scheduling for the upcoming year. The CAC will continue to meet on the 4th Tuesday of each month. The April meeting may need to be rescheduled.

14:37 – The group discusses scheduling a CAC social gathering and agree to coordinate it by email.

14:38 – Meeting adjourns.