

Meeting Summary: Agricultural Subcommittee Meeting #7

Attendees: Christina Tate, Dena and Lonnie Malouff, Denise Bohemier, Caryl Schmid, George Morley, Mae Morley, Michelina Ceglia, Dick Norton, Commissioner Hotter, Roy Horvath, Ned Jefferies, Fran Reynolds

Staff: Tracie Hughes, Courtney Krueger, Marjo Curgus, Jason Meininger

Discussion Summary:

Marjo distributed the survey results and a draft memo for discussion and final review. The group went through each strategy and further discussed and refined recommendations to go to the working group. The strategies below reflect the discussion of the working group and their final recommendations.

Next Steps:

Marjo was to make the following changes in the memo then send it out to the Agricultural Subcommittee. Dena, Christina, and Denise agreed to be present at a Working Group meeting to discuss the recommendations.

II. Strategy Recommendations

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

GOAL: Recognize historic rights of livestock passage on and across county roads.

~~Work with the agricultural community to identify key passage routes on county and state roadways and develop a voluntary system to alert drivers through electric message boards and/or county distribution lists.~~

~~Comment: the ag committee feel that this is only a small issue at best and that the government has bigger priorities.~~

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

GOAL: Support agricultural innovations and sustainable technologies; promote and stimulate local markets as well as export markets for locally-produced agricultural products; encourage development of facilities for value-added products.

1. Provide development fee discounts or waivers for activities directly associated with agricultural operations, such as application fees, building fees, plumbing and mechanical fees, planning permit fees, impact fees and road and bridge inspection fees.
2. Identify and remove regulatory barriers to value-added production of agricultural products.
3. Allow land uses on agricultural lands that support agricultural operation as the primary use.
4. Exempt county sales tax on locally grown food.

~~Support collaboration between economic development organizations (Buy Local, Chambers, LEAD, etc.) and agricultural support organizations (Ft. Lewis College, CSU, Cattlemen's, Farmers Market) on projects to increase local purchasing, branding and product promotion. (e.g. buy local, coops, marketing, etc.)~~

~~Provide support to agricultural organizations to research and assess potential new crops, markets, and opportunities for local producers (e.g. carbon sequestration, biofuels, crops, etc.)~~

~~Support the development of agricultural infrastructure, such as a distribution center, which supports and increases the capacity of local food supply.~~

~~Support applications for State economic development grants for new markets for both local and export markets.~~

New strategies:

6. Support applications for State economic development grants that support opportunities for local producers to access new local and export markets.

7. Support the development of agricultural infrastructure which supports and increases the capacity of local agriculture and food supply (e.g. distribution center, commercial kitchens, etc.)

Comment: The agriculture subcommittee felt that many of the existing organizations do a good job already (strategy 5) and should be supported by agriculture community. While they may need to coordinate more, whether the government ought to have a role in promoting that coordination was not widely supported. They felt it ought to come from the agricultural community groups themselves. If there is an agricultural advisory group, it can be the forum for that strategy. However, supporting the expensive infrastructure to allow these organizations to succeed at their missions was supported. Hence several of these were deleted and modified. They thought 6 and 8 could be combined and commercial kitchens (listed elsewhere) could be added to 7.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

GOAL: Support the enhancement of local food, fiber and forest production systems (growing, processing, marketing, consumption).

- ~~1. Provide consumer education programs that emphasize benefits of local agriculture.~~
- ~~2. Support education and assistance to the local agricultural community about accessing value added production opportunities.~~
- ~~3. Encourage CSU extension to more active in educational endeavors that support both traditional and non-traditional agriculture.~~
- 4.1. Support development of a resource guide which summarizes existing agricultural organizations and programs available in La Plata County.
- 5.2. Use a voter-approved financing tool to support farm and agricultural organizations and land acquisitions projects.

Comment: again there was a feeling that the existing groups are already doing much of this.

GOAL: Promote access to healthy, affordable, culturally-influenced, and sustainably produced food, sourced as locally as possible.

1. Promote local food production and agriculture uses during the development review process.

GOAL: Promote resource-efficient growth and settlement patterns.

1. Designate future growth areas supported by the provision of new or enhanced infrastructure. Allow agricultural uses and limited retail development in designated rural centers throughout county and along highway corridors, ~~but not large-scale commercial development outside urban growth areas.~~

Comment: There seemed to be agreement that there are existing rural areas where more intensive development is already occurring. There was not agreement on whether strip

development ought to be allowed or not. They felt that they could live with this if the last statement was removed since they feel the market will determine this.

GOAL: Meet local energy and materials needs as much as possible through efficiency and with locally or regionally renewable resources.

1. Encourage the location of solar and wind farms.
2. Maintain access to gravel that reduces transportation distance.
3. Encourage development of renewable fuel infrastructure.

Comment: Sawmills, which was in the draft strategies was seen as a use, not a strategy.

Goal: Support investment in adequate and sustainable water resources for social, environmental and economic purposes.

1. Educate the community about the use of efficient water distribution and irrigation techniques without compromising water rights.
2. Advocate for legislation to create agricultural water-banking to protect water rights and promote conservation.
3. Promote the use of water harvesting and gray water systems and reclaimed water to the degree permitted under State statutes, and increase the use of permeable surfaces.

Goal: Protect historic and prehistoric sites and promote cultural preservation to enhance heritage tourism and increase restoration of these sites.

- a) Provide incentives to developers and property owners to voluntarily retain historic structures, trails, and ditches.
- b) Develop a County property tax incentive for preservation of cultural resources.
- c) Educate community about existing state and federal tax incentives available to property owners for historic preservation.

~~**Goal: Promote and encourage retention of agricultural lands, while allowing for other forms of development.**~~

~~Amend the development code for agriculture production by simplifying the building permit process for agricultural buildings, allowing agricultural businesses, exempting family/heir home sites from 35-acre minimum, and increasing height limits for agricultural structures such as barns and sheds.~~

Comment: The ag subcommittee spent a lot of time more specifically exploring the one goal/strategy from above. They instead created more specific goals/strategies below that more adequately address agricultural needs.

GOAL: Amend the development code to incentivize agriculture production remaining viable by providing clear and simple regulatory processes.

1. Amend the building permit process to simplify the process for agricultural buildings (e.g. definitions of ag uses and ag shed vs garage, restructure building permits so that price increases with footage instead of by types of uses.) (however, there was some discussion that this may not be necessary and that this is already allowed. So there may need to be an internal review to determine whether there is a gap in perception and reality. The height restriction may only apply to the Animas River Valley.)

2. Amend the land use code to exempt agricultural buildings from height limits that impair agricultural operations.
3. Develop an easier permitting process for temporary or seasonal agricultural worker housing.
4. Review La Plata County agricultural uses in current zoning and develop uses by right that supports agricultural production and provide agriculture an opportunity to incorporate alternative enterprises into agricultural operations.
5. Evaluate and amend residential and commercial use designations to remove barriers to agricultural operations (e.g. 4-H hog enterprises should not require commercial designations, etc.)
6. Develop regulations that support the use of localized renewable energy in agricultural production including wind, solar, and micro-hydrological power.
7. Support oil and gas development on agricultural lands as means to alternative income generation for agricultural producers.

GOAL: Develop land subdivision and zoning incentives for agriculture landowners that maintain integrity of productive agricultural lands by providing an alternative to the 35 acre exemption.

1. Develop expedited review options for agricultural land owners to subdivide land as alternative to 35 acres.
2. Adopt the Statutory Cluster Ordinance as an incentive and alternative to 35 acre exemption.
3. Streamline minor-exemption process to enable agricultural landowners to subdivide non-productive land by creating a small parcel incentive as an alternative to 35 acre exemption.
4. Develop a land use planning assistance program for agricultural land owners similar to Larimer County Design Center.
5. Reexamine the current exemption incentive for families and amend to allow denser family clusters.
6. Provide density bonuses for cluster developments.
7. Adopt a policy incentive for agriculture production that prevents eminent domain without landowner consent.
8. Develop a circumstantial offset incentive for agricultural properties subjected to inheritance tax.

GOAL: Promote coordination amongst agricultural organizations in La Plata County to assess county, federal and state policy impacts on La Plata County agriculture.

1. Create an Agricultural Advisory Group to maintain clarity and emphasis on pertinent concerns ~~in land use processes related to agriculture.~~
2. Work with ~~agricultural organizations~~ the Agricultural Advisory Group to assess the need for a coordinating ~~agency for~~ farming interests regarding federal and state policy.
3. Ensure La Plata County Commissioners ~~work with the Agricultural Advisory Group to~~ advocate for agricultural policy reforms at the state and federal level that benefit local producers.

~~Advocate for legislation which eliminates or reduces federal inheritance and capital gains tax which negatively impact agriculture.~~

~~Advocate for protection of federal land grazing leases tied to agricultural viability.~~

~~Promote collaboration amongst all agricultural organizations in La Plata County to better achieve agricultural viability (NRCS, Ft. Lewis College, CSU, Farm Services Agency, Farmers Market, Cattlemen's, Farm Bureau, etc.)~~

GOAL: Promote County tax policies that support or enhance agricultural production in La Plata County.

1. Continue the existing agricultural formula for property taxes on agricultural land and rReview La Plata County agricultural tax policy to determine possible tax reforms that would support agricultural viability.
2. Do not develop any new taxes on agricultural inputs.
- ~~3. Continue the productive agriculture formula for property taxes on agricultural land.~~
- 4.3. Designate a portion of city and county tax revenue to support farm and agricultural support organizations and land acquisitions projects. (MAYBE)

Comments: the last strategy was a maybe. There were not so sure on the tax to support agricultural organizations as they felt that support ought to come from them, however they possibly would consider land acquisition. However that strategy is already under “voter approved funding mechanism” elsewhere so this could possibly be removed. They feel the county fiscal health should be maintained given the property tax revenue will be decreasing.

Recommendation: Move goal and strategies to Natural Environment Element and rephrase. Goal: Support the enhancement of renewable natural resource systems (forest and range products, fisheries, wildlife).

~~Collaborate with landowners and the CO Dept of Wildlife on DOW purchase of development rights on lands valuable for wildlife habitat.~~

~~Promote forestry operations on private land that are economically and environmentally sustainable.~~

Comment: The committee was cool to both of these. They feel DOW already does this and that forestry is a use, not a strategy, and probably not economically viable.