

AC Decision Support Framework

What is the Decision Support Framework?

A structured guide to deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and foster strategic alignment in decision-making. This framework is meant to strengthen culture and decision-making capacity, not create more paperwork.

Use it to guide what matters—and make your thinking transparent. It supports the county in the development of a thinking discipline to guide and shape comprehensive discussions when decisions are needed. This is a lens, not a scorecard.

Purpose

This framework helps Arapahoe County institutionalize values-based, transparent decision-making. It is intended to assess strategies, initiatives, or decisions based on the County's Mission, Vision, and six strategic lenses (Sustainability, Data Informed, Community Engagement, Collaboration, Financial Implications, and Equity). In particular it intends to:

- Strengthen County operations and decision-making alignment with County strategic plan.
- Foster thoughtful discussion.
- Improve consistency and clarity in board-facing proposals.
- Serve as a thinking tool, not a mandatory pass/fail checklist.
- Cultivate analysis habits, not be a burdensome exercise.

When to Use the Framework

This tool is not required for every operational decision. It will be used:

- When preparing Board Summary Reports.
Not for drop-ins or third party presentations.
- When presenting initiatives, policy shifts, capital investments, or new programs for BOCC consideration.
- As a training tool for strategic thinking across leadership.

How to Use the Framework

Review the statements in each section (6 strategic lenses + mission/vision). Hover over links for additional guidance and/or definitions.

Mark alignment*:

High – Strong alignment with criteria

Medium – Moderate alignment

Low – Weak alignment

No – Misaligned

N/A – Not applicable-provide justification in notes

Use the Notes section for short explanations (2-3 sentences maximum), if necessary. (Examples: "One-time cost from ARPA," "Limited engagement due to timeline.") Notes should be used to explain how or why it aligns, or doesn't align.

**Do not overthink alignment. Honest responses (including "low" or "no") are valuable to the discussion. Tradeoffs and imperfection are part of the process. The Notes are where the insight lives.*

Name and Title

High Line Canal Stormwater Management Program Business Case

Department, Office, and/or Division

Open Spaces, Public Works and Development

Issue/Initiative for Discussion

Establish a stormwater management program for the canal portion of the High Line Canal.

Short Description of Issue/Initiative

The BOCC expressed interest in exploring the potential of utilizing the High Line Canal to convey more stormwater than what has historically been allowed. This business case is intended to provide the need for a program, how that need aligns with the County's strategic plan and scenarios for staffing/budgeting such a need.

Tips:

Hover your mouse over the links for more information.

Use the Notes field to describe the “why”—even if it seems obvious.

There are 6 categories, each with multiple questions.

Note there is a "Save and Continue Later" option at the bottom right of each page.

Mission & Vision Alignment

Vision: [Initiative](#) enhances quality of life through exceptional, responsible public service.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

The High Line Canal is a recent acquisition of 45-miles of trail with a canal that has been used to deliver irrigation waters. The trail and canal have become a cherished resource for the communities along the property. Now that the County owns this community asset, a program is needed to protect the canal from illicit discharges of stormwater while also mitigating potential risks related to flooding. In addition, establishing criteria and policy for allowing "new" stormwater flows into the canal and the permitting process for such is needed.

Mission: Initiative contributes to a diverse and vibrant county where everyone can thrive.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

The High Line Canal traverses a multitude of residential and commercial areas with access to the public along the majority of the portions owned by the County.

Sustainability

We analyze county activities through the lens of human, environmental, social, and economic sustainability, so our decisions lead the county toward meeting the needs of today while empowering current and future generations to thrive.

Hollistic. Initiative promotes long-term financial (including one-time and ongoing cost considerations), human, environmental, and social sustainability.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

The High Line Canal consists of infrastructure assets that are known to be lacking maintenance. This program would begin to identify ways to improve the canal cross-section and mitigate known areas of flooding. This is one of three programs that could be established manage the canal portion of this property and could be incorporated into other programs or developed as a stand alone division/work group.

Enduring. The initiative builds lasting, resilient [systems](#) rather than offering temporary fixes.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

The proposed High Line Canal Stormwater Management program is intended to grow as the vision of the canal changes through the years. At this moment, no new stormwater flows are allowed into the canal. Staff is aware that there was a vision for the canal to be utilized for additional stormwater flows and perhaps even a tool for meeting MS4 permit requirements. All of these concepts could be incorporated into future policy and criteria should the County choose to utilize the High Line Canal differently in the future.

Established. The systems and infrastructure are in place to support sustainability [over time](#).

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | | X | |

Notes

This business case seeks to establish systems and processes to support the sustainability of the High Line Canal.

Established. The people and culture are in place to support sustainability over time.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

There is already a group of interested partners called the "Canal Collaborative" that has planned and envisioned a future for the High Line Canal. A Conservation Easement has been executed with the High Line Canal Conservancy to protect the aesthetics and history of the canal.

[Data Informed](#)

We use varied data informed and [evidence-based best and promising practice](#) tools to inform how best to utilize resources to address challenges.

Quality. Initiative is supported by accurate, relevant, and timely [data](#).

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | | X | |

Notes

This is a brand new program so data is limited. Similarities can be linked to the current programs established in PWD through the land development review process and right-of-way permitting.

Accuracy. Data is [interpreted and validated](#) by appropriately [qualified professionals](#).

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | | | X |

Notes

Data is not available to be interpreted.

Application. Data is used to guide decisions rather than simply [justify them](#).

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | X | | |

Notes

Estimates have been provided to try and help guide decisions; however, much of the business case is related to policy decisions needed to protect this newly acquired asset.

Community Engagement

We want to understand and respond to [community values](#) in decision-making, meeting people where they are.

Inclusive. Specific communities affected by the initiative have been engaged, as appropriate, and in accessible ways.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | X | | | |

Notes

Many jurisdictions and interested partners have been meeting for over a decade to discuss how the High Line Canal could be utilized. Since the County took over the ownership of portions of the High Line Canal, these partners would appreciate more communication and collaboration with the County as we continue to learn how to manage this asset.

Open. We are transparent in sharing what we're doing and why, in a meaningful way.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | X | | |

Notes

Since taking ownership, the majority of staff's time has been to understand the processes that we will soon be taking over from Denver Water. Since staff does not have the existing expertise with how to manage a canal (we do for the trail system and the ecological aspects), it's been hard to share what we are learning and where we think the gaps are. It is anticipated that this business case will be a way of sharing the County's understanding of our new role and how we hope to work with these existing partner.

Responsive. Community input and feedback has been considered and reflected, where appropriate, based on genuine understanding.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

Again this business case has been developed as a framework on how the High Line Canal Stormwater Program can be developed with the High Line Canal communities' vision in mind of a future where portions of the canal could be used to convey more stormwater discharges. Additionally some of the organizational structures could be modified to have a diverse team either managing the canal or involved with the developing criteria and to some extent policies related to use within the canal.

Collaboration

We work within and across the county to implement outcomes, engaging key [internal and external partners](#) to maximize benefits and increase efficiency.

Strategic. Key partners have been identified and intentionally engaged in atimely manner to maximize benefit and increase efficiency.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | X | | | |

Notes

Key partners have been known for awhile; however, the ability of staff to engage them in a timely manner was a delayed with the amount of processes that needed to be learned or developed to fully take over management of all aspects of the canal. Future forward, staff believes with this business case and guidance from the BOCC, we can start to be more effective with the key partners.

Participatory. Collaboration is transparent, inclusive, and responsive to both internal and external stakeholders.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | X | | | |

Notes

The High Line Canal is considered a community amenity which comes with quite a bit of ideas from external stakeholders. It also very clear to staff that there is a desire from our external partners to be more transparent and inclusive, the opportunity for staff to be empowered to fully respond and include partners in the way they want to participate has not been clearly defined or agreed upon. The benefits of working on this business case as been to consider the ways that staff could actively promote more collaboration with all interested partners.

Defined. County’s role is clearly defined as lead, support, or defer.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | X | | |

Notes

With any new asset there can be some ambiguity with who is taking lead, who is supporting and who could defer. Open Spaces and PWD have worked together since before the transition of ownership and now is a great time to get the BOCC's guidance on these defined roles internally as well as with our external partners.

Financial Implications

We consider long-term and holistic financial implications in decision-making, prioritizing best overall value, responsible use of public funds, and sustainable financial health.

Prudent. Short- and long-term costs are understood, affordable, and balanced with current available resources (including non-monetary assets like equipment or facilities.)

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | | X | |

Notes

The long-term costs associated with the High Line Canal have not been well defined and the short-terms costs appear to have been manageable. This business case should be the beginning of a strategic discuss of the impacts of this new asset on the County's current financial standing.

Efficient. The initiative includes cost-saving measures, external funding, or partnerships where appropriate, and prioritizes best overall value.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

The proposed High Line Canal Stormwater Management program includes a variety of scenarios with estimated cost and resources needed to establish an effective program. Efficiencies will be experienced once some of the initial development phases are completed.

Accountable. Public funds are used responsibly, with trade-offs and non-monetary impacts clearly considered.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | X | | | |

Notes

Again, the proposed business case has laid out scenarios so that the BOCC can discuss and get clarity on the different ways a new permitting program can be established.

Disciplined. One-time and ongoing financial commitments are identified, justified, and planned for in alignment with long-term fiscal health.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

To the best of staff's ability, costs and staff time have been estimated. It's anticipated that refinement of these estimates will be needed before the final decision from the BOCC is made. Plus there is collaboration and communications needed with the interested partners to understand their role and involvement with the canal management in the long-term.

Equity

We work with communities impacted by county policies, behaviors, beliefs, practices, and decisions. We seek their voice, consider historical context, and understand intersectional impacts. We anticipate potential obstacles, consider unintended consequences, and work to remove barriers for the betterment of all.

Precautionary. Benefits, challenges, and impacts are understood and addressed, with care taken to avoid unintended harm.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | X | | | |

Notes

Staff have identified a variety of benefits, challenges and impacts; however, the High Line Canal is a new asset like none the County has ever owned. There will be unforeseen circumstances that the County will need to address should those come up in the future.

Equitable. The initiative acknowledges and addresses both historical and current inequities.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | | | | | X |

Notes

The interested parties have identified some historical inequities; however, this proposed program would not necessarily address those concerns.

Adaptive. The approach is [flexible](#) and inclusive, removing barriers and meeting diverse needs.

| | High | Med | Low | No | N/A |
|----------|------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Criteria | X | | | | |

Notes

The proposed business plan has several scenarios all of which have elements of including diverse input or removing barriers to use of the canal cross-section. Due to the numerous ways this program could be structured, the BOCC's guidance is needed.