



Arapahoe County

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Board Summary Report

File #: 25-471

Agenda Date: 9/8/2025

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To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces

Prepared By:
Michele Frishman, Grants and Acquisitions Manager, Open Spaces

Presenter: Sandra Bottoms, Grants and Acquisitions Administrator, Open Spaces

Subject:
2:15 PM *Approval of Total Available Funding for 2026 Open Space Grants

Purpose and Request:

Open Spaces staff will present recommendations for total funding allocation available for the 2026 Open Space Grants cycle and request approval of the funding by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). This will represent the total amount of funding available for eligible applicants to pursue as part of the 2026 grants cycle.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: Good Governance - Understand and respond to community needs, interests, and values.

Background and Discussion: Since 2005, the Open Space grants program has awarded more than \$67 million to agencies across the County for park, trail, and open space projects. Grant categories, funding caps, and application criteria have evolved over time to encourage competitive, high-quality projects and to meet the needs of our partner agencies. Open Spaces staff uses grantee outreach and recent grant cycle trends to make recommendations for upcoming grant cycles.

Open Spaces staff recommends keeping the total allocation for 2026 at \$5.5 million and keeping maximum award amounts at \$600,000 (standard grants) and \$150,000 (small and planning grants). These amounts were first introduced in 2023 in response to grantee feedback about rising costs. Keeping the total allocation at \$5.5 million will ensure we can fund an adequate number of projects while maintaining the higher maximum award amounts.

Staff would allocate the \$5.5 million in total funding for three grant categories:

- \$4,000,000 for Standard Grants: \$150,001 to \$600,000, 25% minimum cash match
- Up to \$750,000 for Small Grants: \$1,000 to \$150,000, 10% minimum cash match
- Up to \$750,000 for Planning Grants: \$1,000 to \$150,000, 10% minimum cash match

Minimum match amounts are calculated based on total project cost. Depending on the application pool, funds may be moved between categories (e.g., unawarded funds from the small and planning grant categories could support additional standard grants).

Grant awards will support Arapahoe County's funding priorities for outdoor recreation: park, trail, and open space improvements; land acquisition; planning; and environmental/cultural education.

Grant Training Workshops: We anticipate offering at least one training session for grant applicants in early 2026. Training sessions are required for new applicants and strongly encouraged for new agency staff involved in the grant submittal and administration process. Training materials will be posted on the Open Spaces website for all applicants to reference.

Evaluation of Proposals: In spring 2026, an evaluation team consisting of County staff and OSTAB members will review applications, conduct site visits, and rank proposals based on the merits of each project. Considerations include scope, need, urgency, impact, leveraging funds, budget, timeline, partnerships, and the capacity of the applicant to complete and maintain the project. Proposals will be funded in order of rank until allocated funds are exhausted.

Alternatives: Approve, approve with changes, or deny the staff recommendation.

Fiscal Impact: Twelve percent of revenue from the Arapahoe County Open Space Sales and Use Tax is dedicated to the grants program. The grants fund balance is expected to exceed the \$5.5 million recommendation for 2026, with close to \$9 million in unencumbered grant funds projected for the 2026 budget.

Alignment with Strategic Implementation Strategies: N/A.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that the BOCC approve the proposed funding for the 2026 Open Space Grants Program.

Concurrence: The Open Space and Trails Advisory Board concurred with the staff recommendation at its meeting on August 25, 2025.