



ARAPAHOE COUNTY

2024 Legislative Issues Guide

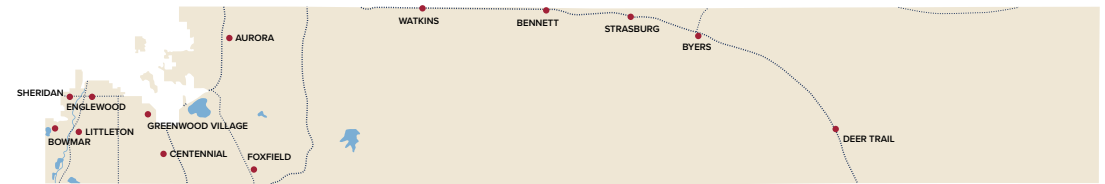
ARAPAHOE COUNTY

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Arapahoe County

About Us



Whether you've been here for a couple months of your entire life, Arapahoe County residents realize that their community provides the best of everything Colorado has to offer. From babies to boomers and beyond, our residents put down roots, raise families, start and run businesses and embrace the endless opportunities and amenities that make Colorado so unique.

Arapahoe County is the third largest in the State with over 650,000 residents, 13 cities and towns, nine school districts, and more than 514 special districts, many of which provide water and sewer services, public safety, and recreational facilities.

As a statutory county, Arapahoe County functions as an extension of the State and can only exercise powers clearly defined in state statute or the Colorado Constitution. The County is often tasked with implementing programs on behalf of the state and is responsible for law enforcement, including the court system, district attorney and one of the state's largest detention centers; the provision of social services, including food assistance, child and adult protective services, and workforce training; the construction, maintenance, and repair of roads and bridges; the management of a new public health department; and general control of land use in unincorporated areas.

The Board of County Commissioners is the primary policy-making body for the County and is responsible for the County's administrative and budgetary functions. Other County elected officers include the Clerk and Recorder, Assessor, District Attorney, Treasurer, Sheriff, and Coroner, all of whom are elected to four-year terms under the state constitution. These officials have specific powers and duties prescribed by law, and they function independently from each other and from the Board of County Commissioners. However, the Board of County Commissioners approves the budgets for all County departments and offices.

In addition to property tax, counties rely on state and federal funding sources to provide required services. For example, A/DWorks!, the County’s workforce center, is reliant on federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds to provide critical job training and employment opportunities to our residents.

2024 Budget Snapshot

Despite a long record of responsible budget management and sound fiscal stewardship, the County’s current revenues coupled with projected growth will make it challenging to continue meeting the needs of our growing community. The largest source of revenue for the County is property taxes; however, its growth is limited by provisions in the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights. The County’s 2024 Recommended Budget totals \$543.1 million. Forty-five percent of this total comes from the General Fund, which is used to fund staffing and critical services, such as law enforcement. While many services are funded using property taxes, there are notable exceptions, such as the Open Spaces program, which is funded by a 0.25 percent sales and use tax. Outside of taxes, the County’s second largest funding source comes from intergovernmental revenue and grants from the State and Federal governments, such as the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which helps fund our workforce development programs.



Strategic Plan

Mission

Enhancing your quality of life through exceptional delivery of services and efficient use of public funds.

Vision

A diverse and vibrant County where residents and businesses thrive.

Strategic Focus Areas

1. Good Governance

- Provide mandated and essential services.
- Plan for future service and fiscal needs.
- Understand and respond to community needs, interests, and values.
- Foster community safety and security.
- Increase collaboration to decrease silos and maximize resources.
- Operate in a transparent, inclusive, and communicative manner.

2. Increase Revenue. Increase revenue to maintain existing programs and services, reducing the backlog of deferred maintenance, while planning for the future.

- Evaluate whether to refer potential ballot measure(s) for voter consideration.
- Ensure fees for service accurately reflect county costs.
- Increase County’s ability to secure grant funding and other innovative ideas for existing assets and programs.
- Consider consolidating county facilities and leveraging under utilized assets.



3. Sustainable Development. Advance sustainable development strategies to protect human and environmental health and combat climate change.

- Implement smart growth policies and regulations to foster healthy communities and preserve our natural environment.
- Expand the number of charging stations across the county and diversify the county fleet.
- Increase access to transit services within the County.
- Implement bicycle and pedestrian master plan.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as improve energy and water efficiency within county operations and across the county.

4. Housing. Increase housing diversity, affordability, and accessibility.

- Increase number of affordable units by 3% annually.
- Understand county housing gaps and opportunities to influence outcomes.
- Advance regulatory changes to accelerate and incentivize housing projects that meet county needs.
- Proactively engage in legislative solutions.

5. Economic Mobility. Improve economic mobility for County residents.

- Secure technical assistance to identify county role, performance metrics, and opportunities to influence outcomes.
- Implement programs and policies that help break the cycle of poverty, address health-related barriers, and improve financial well-being for families.
- Utilize homeless coordinating committee plan and work with county partners to make homelessness brief, rare, and nonrecurring.
- Support the vibrancy of and create opportunities within our local and regional economies.

6. Workforce. Support a stable and diverse county workforce.

- Provide competitive wages and benefits as is financially sustainable.
- Effectively transition 18th Judicial District staff to single-county office.
- Establish workforce-centered procedures to implement collective bargaining.
- Create a more inclusive and equitable organization through knowledge and practice of DEI principles.



Values

Accountability

We demonstrate accountability by:

- Building trust with community through our decisions and actions.
- Holding ourselves to established clear standards, processes, and procedures.
- Adhering to a high standard of integrity.
- Sharing data and information to demonstrate fiscal responsibility, community responsiveness, and progress on County's strategic plan.

Accessibility

We demonstrate accessibility by:

- Providing services in multiple ways.
- Seeking and understanding community interests using a variety of approaches.
- Making it easy to contact and connect with the right elected official and staff members.
- Being timely in responding to community interests.
- Providing facility access to people with differing abilities.



Inclusivity

We demonstrate inclusivity by:

- Engaging community and cultural perspectives in decision-making.
- Striving for cross-county, cross-cultural representation on advisory boards, committees, task forces.
- Demonstrating inclusivity in our recruitment, development, and opportunities for advancement.
- Ensuring a welcoming, safe, and respectful environment by reflecting the diversity of Arapahoe County.

Integrity

We demonstrate integrity by:

- Doing what we say we will.
- Following up, being responsive.
- Sharing both the good and the bad.
- Willing to admit/own when there is a problem.
- Adhering to the County Code of Ethics.



Recent Strategic Plan Accomplishments

In 2022, Arapahoe County has:

- Leveraged \$44 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to upgrade and expand the County's Detention Center and its aging infrastructure.
- Bolstered law enforcement recruiting efforts by establishing the ACSO Training Academy, a new police academy for the Sheriff's Office.
- Secured \$22 million in federal funding to make upgrades to the Iliiff Avenue Corridor, leading to additional bike lanes, transit stop enhancements, sidewalk and multi-use paths, and overall quality of life transportation improvements.
- Maintained a structurally balanced budget in a landscape of limited revenue growth while being responsive to community needs and programmatic requirements.
- Distributed over \$23 million in emergency rental assistance to more than 3,800 families to keep neighbors in their homes.
- Utilized federal funding to hire 5 new housing navigators to perform intensive case management to address the complex needs of families experiencing homelessness.
- Facilitated 59 new planning cases that will bring 501 single-family/duplex units and 520 new apartments to the County.
- Implemented new building codes with the latest safety standards to help keep people safe in their homes and businesses.
- Broke ground on a \$2 million early childhood education center to help reverse the cycle of poverty and housing instability for families, and make childcare more accessible.
- Built and improved over 76 miles of new trails and support more than 180 park and trailhead projects to connect residents with nature.
- Continued planning for the 18th Judicial District transition and assume sole operation in a fiscally sustainable manner.
- Successfully operated a new health department throughout 2023, while maintaining fiscal sustainability.
- Launched the County's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan to promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement, and to create a place where all residents, employees, and businesses thrive.



Priorities and Principles

The Board of County Commissioners evaluates policy positions through the lens of fiscal and operational impacts to Arapahoe County, consistent with its stated strategic plan, and legal requirements.

The following legislative principles describe the County's underlying interest on specific issues. These principles serve as a consistent guide for the county in developing positions on federal and state legislation, rulemaking, and proactive issue advocacy.

The document also serves as a reference for elected representatives when considering legislation that may impact Arapahoe County. The Board of County Commissioners may revisit the County's legislative priorities throughout the year.

Specific 2024 Legislative Priorities

Arapahoe County has identified several specific policy priorities:

FEDERAL ITEMS

- Eliminate the federal Medicaid inmate exclusion policy.
- Secure adequate funding for the implementation of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act and ensure the passage of the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act.
- Maintain adequate funding levels of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to ensure workforce center sustainability.
- Ensure adequate funding for implementation of the Older Americans Act.
- Advocate for multiyear infrastructure reauthorization bills to secure funding to improve the County's transportation network, regional airport, stormwater, and wastewater facilities.
- Support legislation to prohibit the U.S. Department of Treasury from recouping previously awarded funds or projects and services as well as extend obligation and expenditure deadlines associated with American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.
- Champion policies that continue federal research of air and noise pollution caused by civilian and military aircraft, mitigate air and noise pollution, and enforce existing standards, rules and regulations, including enhancing opportunities for local control.

STATE ITEMS

- Secure adequate funding to support one-time transition costs associated with the split of the 18th Judicial District.
- Repeal obsolete section seven of C.R.S. 29-2-104 regarding calendar limitations on sales tax questions.
- Engage local community correction programs to ensure state funding can adequately support alternative sentencing and pre-trial programs.
- Ensure any land use solutions to the affordable housing crisis are balanced and coordinated between local governments and state priorities.
- Advance and refine access to funding programs that increase affordable housing and support programs for people experiencing homelessness.
- Increase services and treatment placements for the highest acuity children in partnership with the General Assembly; the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health; and the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing.

Guiding Legislative Principles

UNFUNDED MANDATES

To effectively serve the needs of our community, Arapahoe County officials must have the resources and authority commensurate with the responsibilities placed on them by state and federal laws, regulations, and court decisions.

Arapahoe County supports adequate funding for any future state or federally imposed mandates upon local government, including the need for technology improvements necessary to fulfill these mandates.

Arapahoe County strongly opposes cost shifting from the state and federal government to local governments. The state and federal government must exercise fiscal restraint and responsibility, refraining from solving budget shortfalls with county government resources.



LOCAL CONTROL AND FLEXIBILITY

County officials are elected officials closest and most responsive to our residents. Arapahoe County supports the concept of local control and authority to ensure programs and services reflect the unique needs of our community.

The County opposes any administrative effort to promulgate rules and regulations that interpret the law in a manner negatively impacting counties. County commissioners are important and necessary stakeholders in any rule-making process to ensure mandates are appropriately delivered to local constituents.

REVENUE PREDICTABILITY

Arapahoe County believes any tax policy reform should ensure that the powers granted to counties and the funding mechanisms available are sufficient to address county responsibilities. Tax policy reform should create a fair and equitable distribution of the property tax burden among all property, reduce uncertainty, and ensure local governments have adequate authority and funding to meet their statutory responsibilities and the expectations of residents. The County supports more flexibility and options to secure and enhance fiscal sustainability. Arapahoe County strongly supports prior county approval of programs that must be funded with county property taxes but are not controlled or generated at the county level.

The County supports requiring the state to reimburse local governments and districts for any loss in property tax revenues caused by constitutional or statutory changes in order to preserve its ability to fulfill statutory duties.

Arapahoe County supports county authority to approve the use and the amount of the county portion of revenues designated in a proposed urban renewal plan for tax increment financing and to establish mechanisms to ensure that counties have greater influence to ensure proposed urban renewal projects meet the current statutory requirement of ameliorating blight.



OUTCOME-BASED DECISION MAKING

Arapahoe County strongly believes the most effective governance results from local, state, and federal officials working in true partnership toward the development and implementation of programs and services. Proactively working together to understand the nexus between policy and implementation will help ensure shared goals, an understanding of the fiscal impacts, and outcomes can be collectively achieved.

State and federal governments should base decisions about laws and regulations affecting county governments on comprehensive data and measurable outcomes. Relying on these two standards to scrutinize existing and proposed laws and regulations will help reduce unnecessary, unfunded or underfunded mandates, streamline government, and utilize limited resources more efficiently. State and federal officials should also consider programmatic models that might exist as well as the possible limitations on local control that might result from new legislation, rules, or regulations.

WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Home to some of the nation's largest companies and innovative small businesses, Arapahoe County is committed to maintaining a strong economic and business climate. Arapahoe County supports a strong partnership among counties, the state, municipalities, and private business and industry to design and implement economic development incentives and programs. The County supports local organizations that specialize in growing our economy, particularly the high tech, communication, military, government, service, agricultural, and retail industries.

The County also operates Arapahoe/Douglas Works!, a publicly-funded workforce center consistent with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Wagner- Peyser, and various other state and federal grants. With locations in Centennial, Aurora, and Castle Rock, Arapahoe/Douglas Works! provides free services to both small and large businesses as well as job seekers to ensure Arapahoe and Douglas counties' workforce and economy remain strong. Arapahoe County supports continuing a local delivery model to implement WIOA requirements, ensuring decisions can be made at the local level.



HUMAN SERVICES

Arapahoe County supports local administration of the human services system to maximize the flexibility and responsiveness of the system to local needs. Arapahoe County has consistently achieved high rankings for service delivery, consistent with state and federal standards. The County supports a state supervised, county administered, human services system. The County also supports increased funding to provide these mandated services with the flexibility to best meet local needs without shifting costs locally, negatively impacting county government.

Arapahoe County supports policies that advance a two-generation (2Gen) approach, which simultaneously serves the whole family. The 2Gen approach helps children and families get education and workforce training, social supports like parenting skills, and health care needed to create a legacy of economic stability and overall well-being.

Arapahoe County supports local input into the state's budget management process to avoid supplemental appropriations requests for foreseeable circumstances. Arapahoe County supports maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements that allow flexible funding for social services programs to minimize, avoid increasing, or provide equitable distribution of fiscal responsibility of counties.

Arapahoe County continues to advocate for 100 percent reimbursement from the state to administer the food stamp, Medicaid, and other adult assistance programs.

SUSTAINABLE AND CONSISTENT FEDERAL FUNDING

The County relies on federal block and competitive grant programs from the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Infrastructure, Human Services, Public Health, and Veteran's Affairs to provide critical programs that enhance the safety net for vulnerable populations. The County supports maintaining these funding programs to support the community, distributing direct allocations to the County or through the state as appropriate.



JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Arapahoe County supports strong and efficient relationships between all levels of government with respect to the criminal justice system and public safety systems.

Arapahoe County supports a continuum of approaches to prevent violence, ranging from increased efforts to hold accountable criminal activities to designing effective prevention and early intervention programs for youth and families at risk. The County recognizes that focusing on and funding these preventative services saves money. The role of the Sheriff's Office is to enforce the law, recognizing both the statutory and judicial limitations of police authority and the constitutional rights of all persons. Where possible, the County supports legislation that enables local decision-making on public safety services to permit development of locally appropriate solutions.

Arapahoe County embraces the concept of specialty courts to divert mentally ill and drug using offenders away from the traditional court system.

Arapahoe County recognizes that our jail population is changing, with the number of individuals with mental and behavioral health issues as well as crime severity increasing. The County supports programs that deliver mental health and substance abuse programs for individuals within the criminal justice system, providing alternative sentencing and pre-trial programs to help keep nonviolent and first-time offenders out of jail, and expanding programs that reduce the likelihood of reoffending once inmates are released in the community.

Arapahoe County supports timely and accurate reimbursement for housing state inmates in county facilities as well as efforts to alleviate the existing backlog of state inmates in county facilities.

ELECTIONS

Arapahoe County is committed to implementing and coordinating elections in a nonpartisan manner, with utmost integrity. The County supports increasing voter access and education, while protecting voter privacy consistent with state statute.



LAND USE

Arapahoe County believes in sustainable and responsible growth. It supports local control over the various uses of land and their impacts; recognizing that activities relative to growth, development, agricultural and farming interests, natural resources, and environmental management are unique within each community. The County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan identifies six principles to help create a sustainable, resilient, and healthy community, including growth management, public facilities and services, economic health, transportation and mobility, natural and cultural resources, and environmental quality. The County also supports actions that ensure adequate water availability for future land use development.

The County supports maintaining mechanisms that facilitates reasonable costs of growth and redevelopment, such as impact fees, real estate transfer taxes, and other growth-financing tools. The County opposes any efforts to supersede, override, or preempt local land use authority.

HOUSING

Arapahoe County believes housing is a human right and the availability of attainable and affordable housing is of utmost concern. Arapahoe County supports developing an adequate supply of diverse housing options across income brackets, with a focus on mitigating displacement and those most vulnerable.

Counties are uniquely positioned to help address the housing crisis because we understand our communities' needs, implementing effective land use planning and associated infrastructure. The County supports advancing programs and services that augment local government's ability to facilitate access to affordable and attainable housing, including state programs that promote regional cooperation and provide technical assistance.



The County supports deepening existing public and private sector strategies as well as funding to ensure efficacy of existing programs, such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, Proposition 123, administration of voucher programs, and land banking. The County also supports additional legislation that promotes increased construction of entry-level home ownership.

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Arapahoe County believes the movement of goods and people are vital to the continued economic success of the state and Coloradans' quality of life. With several major highways, transit lines, 30% of Colorado's growing economy along the I-25 Corridor, and one of the nation's busiest regional airports, effective multimodal transportation is equally important to the success of the County's economy.

Arapahoe County has historically partnered on large-scale, regionally significant infrastructure projects, but is against efforts to pass along additional state roadway construction or maintenance responsibilities to local governments without increased and adequate funds to meet these additional responsibilities. The County also is supportive of continuing to provide access to state and federal grant funds to address increased multimodal infrastructure demands.

The County continues to support an equitable Highway User Trust Fund (HUTF) allocation formula and restrictions on the use of "off the top" diversions. The County opposes funding mechanisms which eliminate or reduce local shareback for transportation projects. Arapahoe County believes county commissioners should continue to have an enhanced role in prioritizing regional and statewide projects. The County also supports opportunities for counties to design their own transportation finance mechanisms to respond to local and regional transportation needs.



HOMELESSNESS

Arapahoe County recognizes that homelessness is a complex, interconnected issue and that people experience homelessness for a multitude of reasons. The County supports a multi-disciplinary Housing First approach to addressing homelessness by alleviating generational poverty, providing accessible workforce development opportunities for its most vulnerable populations, providing resource navigation, opportunities for transitional housing, and ensuring additional funding for safety net services, such as mental health and substance use treatment.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Arapahoe County is committed to providing public health services in a fiscally sound manner that are based on best practices and community input. Core public health programs such as immunizations, food safety, water quality, family planning, access to healthy and affordable foods, and community health education are crucial for creating healthy environments where all residents can thrive. The County supports increased state and federal funding for public health services that can be flexibly used to meet the unique needs of Arapahoe County. The County supports policy efforts that protect public health funding, provide funding flexibility to address emergent issues, and safeguard the work force. The County also supports the ability of counties to set fees for services, licenses, and permits.

ENVIRONMENT

Arapahoe County supports advancing policies and programs that conserve resources, protect the environment, and safeguard our climate in order to build a sustainable, just, and resilient community. The County supports programs that help communities adapt to the impacts of climate change. The County also supports collaboration between state and federal government agencies and local governments to advance local climate action.





Stay Informed

COMMISSIONER NEWS

Get updates from your County Commissioners about recent news and upcoming events in your district and throughout the County. Stay informed about how we work toward providing the best quality of life for our citizens.

SIGN UP

Visit arapahoeco.gov/commissionernews to sign up.

MEETINGS AND AGENDAS

Learn more about how your Arapahoe County government works by visiting our Legistar portal. This lets you follow our Commissioners' calendars and agendas, sit in (virtually) on live public meetings, and watch recordings of past sessions.

VIEW

The portal can be searched by days and times, departments, or topics; see all your options by visiting arapahoeco.gov/agendas



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Arapahoe County contracts with Bowditch & Cassell Public Affairs, a professional lobbyist, for state advocacy activities. The Director of the Commissioners' Office coordinates federal and state intergovernmental relations, in partnership with the Director of Human Services, the County Attorney, the Director of Community Resources, and the Director of Public Works & Development.

As a member of Colorado Counties, Inc., Colorado Counties Acting Together, and the National Association of Counties, Arapahoe County relies on those organization's advocacy team to provide reliable information on legislative issues and the impact on Colorado's counties and their residents. The county also relies on regional associations and other national organizations to advocate for specific issues of shared local interest.

The Board of County Commissioners relies on independently elected offices to monitor and advocate for legislation germane to their business operations, flagging items that may have an impact on the County's budget. The Board may engage in issues as requested by the elected official or if there is a significant budgetary impact to the organization.

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Notes

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