



Arapahoe County

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Board Summary Report

File #: 25-592

Agenda Date: 10/27/2025

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To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces

Prepared By:

Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces; Matt Bixenman, Fairground Site Manager, Open Spaces

Presenter: Matt Bixenman, Fairground Site Manager, Open Spaces

Subject:

1:15 PM *2026 Annual County Fair Plan

Purpose and Request:

Open Spaces Fairgrounds staff will present recommendations for key operational changes to the 2026 Fair and request Board approval to implement staff recommended changes.

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

Background and Discussion: The Arapahoe County Fair attracts over 25,000 visitors around the region each year. The event showcases the County's agricultural and Western heritage through 4-H programming, traditional farming and educational activities, and entertainment for the whole family. Gate entry tickets include event parking, unlimited carnival rides, Colorado Pro Rodeo Association sanctioned rodeos, firework displays (weather and fire restrictions permitting), live entertainment, National Sled Pullers Association truck & tractor pulls, Canine Stars Stunt Dog Show, mutton bustin', public competitions, petting farm, 4-H livestock shows, Kids Corral and more.

The County Fair is financially supported through annual Fair operations and supplemented, when necessary, by the Fairgrounds Event Center Revenue Net Income fund. Open Spaces Sales and Use Tax collections are not allowed to support the Fair per the Open Space Resolution. The only Non-Sales and Use Tax Revenue available to help the Fair is the Fairgrounds Event Center rental revenue. In 2025, there was a transfer of \$101,656 from the Fairgrounds Event Center Rental Revenue fund to cover the anticipated financial losses for that year's Fair. The estimated ending Fair Fund Balance for 2025 is \$49,236. This balance will act as the financial cushion to support potential operational losses for the 2026 Fair.

For the last several years, the annual County Fair revenues have fallen short of covering Fair operational expenses to the tune of \$50,000-\$83,000 per year. To limit the Fair's annual revenue shortfall, the following recommendations were developed collectively by Open Spaces and Commissioner Office's staff. Staff will elaborate on the pros and cons of each during the presentation. The recommendations are as follows:

Gate Model & Fair Pricing Recommendation

Staff jointly explored the pros and cons of two options:

- A. Sustain the historic pay one price model and increase gate entry ticket to \$30 per person or
- B. Separate gate entry ticket (> \$12.50) & Carnival fee (upwards of \$40/person). For background, fairgoers currently pay \$25 for a gate entry ticket, this amount has been in place since the 2023 Fair.

Ultimately, staff recommends maintaining the pay one price model and increasing the gate entry ticket to \$30 per person. (It is important to note that with credit card processing fees, a \$30 Fair ticket will be roughly \$34 at the point of sale.)

There were differing opinions about a \$5 dollar ticket price increase (ie increasing from \$25 to \$30). Some expressed an interest in potentially phasing in the increase. For every \$1 increase in ticket price, the county will receive \$12,627 in additional revenue to apply to our annual shortfall. An increase of \$5 results in \$63,135 in revenue. Considering the 2025 County Fair shortfall of roughly \$82,988, a \$5 increase in ticket prices would still result in a short fall of \$19,865. Based on past revenue and expenditure trends, staff is projecting a revenue shortfall of \$122,722 for the 2026 Fair. Given the dynamic nature of an event like the county fair, this shortfall estimate reflects a variety of assumptions that will be outlined during the presentation.

Fair Days/Hours Recommendation

Staff explored the pros and cons of modifying the Fair's operational duration. Consideration was given to both removing and adding days to the Fair and modifying hours of operation.

Although the consensus recommendation was to modify the start times on Friday, Saturday and Sunday to 2:00pm (versus the 2025 approach of starting at 11:00am), further reflection over the last few days led to revised thinking. Specifically, the risk of losing roughly 4,000-5,000 fairgoers and not recouping those lost visitors later in the day seemed too great. Therefore, the revised recommendation before you is to maintain the current 2025 Fair schedule (i.e. no change to the days or hours of fair from the 2025 approach). For reference, the 2025 Fair hours were: Thursday 4pm-12am, Friday 11am-12am, Saturday 11am-12am and Sunday 11am-10:30pm.

Pours on the Plains Recommendation

Staff explored the pros and cons of no longer offering the Pours on the Plains event as a component of the annual County Fair. This event occurs on Friday evening of Fair week and has been held since 2013. Based on changing visitor preferences and declining event attendance, staff are recommending eliminating the event and creating a new entertainment activation (like a roller-skating event).

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

Fiscal Impact: Currently, the County splits (50/50) Fair ticket revenue with the carnival provider. Setting the ticket price at \$30/person will mean \$15/person will go back to the County and \$15/person will go to the carnival operator. Retaining \$15 per ticket allows the County to cover roughly 75% of this year's \$82,988 shortfall. Changing the Friday evening event is both responsive to changing visitor preferences and has the potential to reduce operational costs.

In the absence of ticket price and operational changes, staff will need to rely on transfers from the event rental fund to address the 2026 Fair's shortfall. The ripple effect of that could place fiscal pressures on staff salaries, limit the county's ability to provide signature events, limit ongoing service contracts the event center needs to operate and limit equipment purchases needed to support the event center.

Alignment with Strategic Implementation Strategies: The attached framework helps Arapahoe County institutionalize values-based, transparent decision-making, documenting how we make decisions and carry out actions to achieve the county's strategic plan.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends the BOCC approve the proposed recommendations for the 2026 Fair.

Concurrence: Communications Services within the Commissioner's Office.