



Legislation Text

File #: 21-610, **Version:** 1

To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Shannon Carter, Director, Open Spaces and Intergovernmental Relations

Prepared By:

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Subject:

2022 Open Space Grant Program Allocations

Purpose and Request:

Open Spaces staff will present the OSTAB/staff joint recommendation regarding allocations and structure for the 2022 Open Space Grants Program and request approval to move forward with the proposed allocations for 2022.

Background and Discussion: Since 2005, the Open Space grants program has awarded more than \$48 million to agencies across the County for park, trail, and open space projects. Grant categories, funding caps, and application criteria have evolved to encourage competitive, high quality projects and to meet the needs of our partner agencies. Open Spaces staff have evaluated the success of recent grant cycles and considered feedback from grantees to develop recommended funding allocations for the grants program for 2022. Staff recommends replicating the 2021 grant cycle structure for 2022, with an increase in the total allocation from \$4 million to \$4.5 million.

We believe that we can provide the greatest benefits to Arapahoe County's communities and citizens by offering the following grant opportunities in 2022:

Staff recommends allocating \$4.5 million for a single grant round in 2022, to be awarded in three categories as

follows:

- \$3,500,000 for Standard Grants: \$100,001 to \$500,000, 25% total project cost minimum cash match
- Up to \$500,000 for Small Grants: \$1,000 to \$100,000, 10% total project cost minimum cash match (unawarded funds may support additional Standard Grants)
- Up to \$500,000 for Planning Grants: \$1,000 to \$100,000, 10% total project cost minimum cash match (unawarded funds may support additional Standard Grants)

Awards should support Arapahoe County's funding priorities for outdoor recreation: park, trail, or open space improvements; land acquisition; planning; or environmental/cultural education.

Based on recent trends in Open Space Sales and Use Tax Revenues, the Grants Program fund is projected to have a balance of approximately \$5.5 million available for calendar year 2022. Staff recommends rolling a portion of the projected fund balance forward so that grant rounds remain competitive, which increases project quality and accountability. The fund balance will be reevaluated in 2022 and adjustments will be recommended for future grant cycles as appropriate.

Grant Training Workshops:

We anticipate offering one to two grant training classes for potential applicants. Training material, including a video tutorial for using the online grant portal, will be posted online for applicants to reference.

Evaluation of Proposals:

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 will include scope, need, urgency, 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.

Fiscal Impact: 12% of annual revenue from the Arapahoe County Open Space Sales and Use Tax is dedicated to the grants program pursuant to the County Open Space Resolution. The fund balance is projected to exceed the recommended allocation for the 2022 grant cycle.

Alternatives: Approval, approval with changes, or denial of recommendation.

Alignment with Strategic Plan:

- ☐ Be fiscally sustainable
- ☐ Provide essential and mandated service

☒ Be community focused

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of the proposed \$4.5 million allocation for the 2022 Open Space Grants Program.

Concurrence: On August 23, 2021, the Open Space and Trails Advisory Board (OSTAB) and Open Spaces staff made a joint recommendation to the BoCC to allocate \$4.5 million for the 2022 Open Space grant cycle (attached).