



County Commissioners establish priorities for 2017

August 7, 2017

The three of us that serve the La Plata County Board of County Commissioners take our work on behalf of county citizens very seriously - and we recognize that there is a long and varied list of things that are important to our constituents. I wanted to give some updates about what we are hearing, and what we are doing as commissioners.

First, though, it might be useful to have a bit of context. Every year, the commissioners establish priorities for the next year. Usually this happens in late spring or early summer, the reason being that these priorities inform the budgeting process, which begins in July each year - long before most people are thinking about the following January!

For 2017, we commissioners have identified the following priorities, and these directly reflect what we hear from our citizens:

Promote public and environmental health through improved water quality quantity, air quality and prevention/mitigation

- Develop options for the long-term financial sustainability of La Plata County
- Develop and improve water quality and availability throughout the County
- Improve land use code and Comprehensive Plan
- Improve operational efficiency and effectiveness
- Promote intergovernmental coordination and collaboration at federal, tribal, state and local levels
- Address barking dog nuisance issue

As you can see, these priorities range from big picture to very specific, and we appreciate your input in helping identify where we need to focus as a county, and as commissioners. Many of these priorities are shaped by the fact that La Plata County's financial picture has changed over the past several years. This is because gas and oil production and price have fallen nationally and locally - a decline that is compounded here in La Plata County because our gas field is beyond its peak, and it is consequently yielding less than in its younger years. For a county that has historically - for the last several decades anyway - enjoyed an abundance of property taxes derived from gas and oil production, this is a big change, a big challenge and one for which there are no easy answers.

Still, we are looking for those answers every day and the 2017 budget will certainly respond to the fiscal challenges we face. We encourage your feedback on this process and offer a number of ways to get involved. Learn more about the 2017 budget process and priorities and provide feedback at <http://bit.ly/2awrTuJ>.

Now, down to more specific issues. The complaints we hear most consistently from La Plata County residents involve the complicated nature of the Land Use Code, and nuisance dogs in the county. We recognize that both of these issues can affect daily life for residents and are working to address your concerns effectively.

The county's Land Use Code should provide residents and developers with clear expectations and guidance as to what can be built or developed and where - and clearly articulate the requirements associated with a project. While we have been working to address known problem areas with the code a big-picture overhaul might be the best strategy for aligning the Land Use Code with where the county is today and where it is heading.

We working with staff to address this community concern and are committed to moving the county's Land Use Code in a better direction that supports a timely and cost-effective path to obtaining a land use permit, while also integrating community values and vision.

We are hearing from many of you about barking dogs in your neighborhoods and are working on an ordinance that both addresses the issue and takes into account the diverse character of our rural county. We will be holding an open house in the next several weeks to get your input on the proposed ordinance and are eager to hear what you have to say about this important issue. Stay tuned to the county's website for details.

I hope this update provides a useful snapshot of what we county commissioners are up to, and I look forward to the opportunity to give you monthly updates on La Plata County's business. Please feel free to contact any of the commissioners with questions, comments or concerns. Call our office at (970)382-6219 or email us: I can be reached at brad.blake@co.laplata.co.us; Vice Chair Julie Westendorff at julie.westendorff@co.laplata.co.us, and Commissioner Gwen Lachelt at gwen.lachelt@co.laplata.co.us.

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