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Centennial Hall, 200 S. Cascade

Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Board of County Commissioners

Holly Williams, District 1

Carrie Geitner, District 2

Bill Wysong, District 3

Cory Applegate, District 4

Lauren Nelson, District 5

**CITIZEN OUTREACH GROUP (COG)
MEETING MINUTES**

Meeting Date: **March 16, 2026**

Members Present

In Person and Via

Virtual/Teleconference

Meeting: Lanz Cook, Candi Boyer, Sarah Brittain Jack, Amber Campbell,
Ruble Henderson, Brenda Miller

Members Absent: Ed Dills (excused), Jim Godfrey (excused), Dale Warner (unexcused)

Commissioners Present: Commissioner Lauren Nelson

County Staff Present: Ryan Parsell, AmyJo Fields, Paula Linhares

Community Guest (Remote): Brad Hayes, Citizen College 2025 participant

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 9:30am by COG Chair Lanz Cook.

I. Administrative Items

- a. Motion was made by Sarah Brittain Jack to excuse absent Board members who notified staff in advance that they would not be in attendance. Candi Boyer seconded. Motion passed.
- b. Motion was made by Brenda Miller to accept the meeting minutes from January 26, 2026. Ruble Henderson seconded. Motion passed.

II. Review of 2025 Operations and Future Considerations

a. 2025 Recap

- Board reviewed 'Lesson Learned' notes from Citizen College 2025.
- Positives:
 - Registration and actual attendance exceeded goals – Registration goal: 50, Actual Registrants: 75. Attendee goal: 50, Actual Attendees: 62. Number of participants who attended all six sessions increased. Citizen College 2025 outperformed every metric.

- Graduation event at the close of the College -- nice celebratory atmosphere.
 - Fountain Valley Nature Center venue was good.
- Opportunities for improvement:
- Management of attendee lists for accurate tracking of participation for distribution of graduation certificates and recognition pins. Prepare one master attendance list with all the sessions on one sheet, instead of attendance lists for each session.
 - Need mechanism for printing nametags onsite for participants who forget to bring their pre-printed tags to each session, or who register last-minute.
 - Continue to build on existing strong marketing effort.
 - Program competed with Sheriff's Office (EPSO) Citizen Academy held during the same timeframe which might have contributed to the lower-than-expected attendance at the Sheriff's Office session on the last day of Citizen College. Better coordination is needed with EPSO Citizen Academy.

b. Citizen College – Future Considerations

- Board discussed the possibility of adjusting the structure of Citizen College to increase participation.
- It may be challenging to organize Citizen College during 2026 due to heightened activity around mid-term elections. Clerk & Recorder's Office, in particular, will likely not have the bandwidth to participate in the College this year.
- The County's State of the Region program will take place in the fall. Government Affairs staff will be working on this program and may not have the capacity to adequately support Citizen College this year.
- Citizen College during first quarter of 2027 would have to take place toward the latter part of Q1 or sometime during Q2 so that it does not interfere with the 2026 holiday season for planning, organizing, advertising, and receiving RSVPs.
- If the overall goal for Citizen College were to reach 1% of El Paso County residents with the current model and current population, it would take 100 Citizen Colleges to reach 7,500 residents. Need to consider if Citizen College, in its current form, is the right model to reach a larger audience.
- **Possible ideas:**
- Small sessions over multiple weeks vs. all sessions in one week.
 - Focused sessions targeting specific groups who may be interested in particular topics. Consider 'What's in it for me?' mentality of potential participants.
 - Explore virtual option for the sessions.
 - Increase focus on existing Commissioner public events, perhaps pairing them with the Assessor, Treasurer, Clerk & Recorder, Planning & Community Development leadership, et al.)
 - Meet people where they are – captive audience. Collaborate with existing community events (i.e., Chamber meetings, young business professionals networking events, real estate association meetings, etc.)
- Board refreshed on the stated mission of Citizen College: *"To empower citizens to better understand what the County offers, and to provide them with the tools to help strengthen our community."*
- Need to dispel the public's conflation of politics and governance. Many in the community see these as synonymous which might contribute to a sense of disenfranchisement/disengagement.

- Idea was discussed of partnering with homeschool, public school, and college communities -- not to create programming but to assist these entities in magnifying civics/local governance within the educational setting.
- Need to be mindful of branding for future events. 'Town Hall' may not be the right nomenclature – connotes political focus. Suggested terms – “Resource/Education Seminar”, “Resource Fair”.
- Discussion concluded with plan for further brainstorming during next month’s meeting. Goal is to develop a proposal or a suite of options for future programming and present these to the Commissioners for consideration.

III. **Communications and PIO Update – AmyJo Fields**

- a. Media relations guide – see attachment below
- b. Media training for volunteers will be scheduled during Q2 (date TBD)
- c. America’s 250th Colorado’s 150th Anniversary County webpage: <https://www.elpasoco.com/america250-colorado150/>
- d. Veterans Expo webpage: <https://www.elpasoco.com/veterans-expo> - **June 10, 2026 (9am-6pm) Pikes Peak Center for the Performing Arts**
- e. El Paso County Fair webpage: <https://www.elpasocountyfair.com/p/fair-information> - **July 11-18, 2026 (COG Board members will be asked to assist with staffing County booth and other Fair activities), EPC Fair & Events Center, Calhan**
- f. Bear Creek Nature Center 50th Anniversary webpage: <https://www.elpasoco.com/bcnc50/> - **August 22, 2026 (10am-3pm) 50th Anniversary Bear-thday Party, Bear Creek Nature Center**

IV. **Government Affairs Update – Ryan Parsell**

- a. Legislative Session is more than halfway to the end of session ‘sine die’ on May 13. Debates under the dome are expected to become more intense in the upcoming weeks regarding the budget. Government Affairs team is monitoring Human Services-related developments closely for potential County operations and budget impacts.

Meeting adjourned at 11:05am



Media Relations Guidelines

Citizen Outreach Group

Media Inquiries & Interview Requests

All media inquiries should be directed to the Communications Department to ensure timely, accurate, and consistent responses. The Communications Executive Director (or designee) oversees each request, determines the appropriate course of action, and coordinates interviews with subject-matter experts as needed to represent the County.

Steps to take if contacted by Media representatives:

- Direct all media inquiries immediately to the Communications Department
 - Email: epcpio@elpasoco.com
 - Phone: 719.992.0090
- Explain to the media representative that their request will be forwarded to the Communications Department.
 - An appropriate response to the media would be: *I will forward your request to the Communications Department. They will be in touch with you as soon as possible.*
- Ask the media representative the following information to be forwarded to the Communications Department:
 - Media representative name and news outlet
 - Contact phone number for media representative or news outlet.
 - Topic of the inquiry or interview and the deadline
- Notify the Communications Executive Director or their designee of the contact with a Media representative, providing as much detail as possible.
 - Email: epcpio@elpasoco.com
 - Phone: 719.992.0090