

Commissioner's Corner

2012 proved to be a financial challenge for the County Commissioner's and staff just as it has been for the citizens, businesses, and municipalities of the county. Because of the uncertainties that exist with county revenues, the commissioners and staff work closely with the State and Federal agencies to assure our current level of funding is either maintained or we continue to reduce spending throughout 2013. Staff and the commissioners are constantly monitoring this threshold to react quickly and make any necessary changes to maintain the stability of the county finances.

An update on a few of the things that happened in 2012: (1) The County re-applied for a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant to build a multi-use pavilion at Ski Hi Park next to the McMullen Building. The grant application has been approved for this project, and the materials are on-site. (2) The County received a grant from the Colorado Department of Transportation for installation of runway lights and an AWOS system. (3) The County received a grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board for a hydro-geological study in the vicinity of the proposed oil/gas wells. (4) The County completed an energy audit and obtained financing for the upgrades. (5) The County is working with the other five counties, municipalities, the SLV Council of Governments, and State and Federal agencies on revising the 1996 SLV Trails and Recreation Master Plan.

The County Commissioners, with recommendations from staff at the Department of Social Services, implemented a program in January called "Employment First". Employment First is designed to ensure all able-bodied food assistance participants are engaged in activities that will improve their employability. All individuals who apply for food assistance in Rio Grande County and who do not meet federal exemption criteria must participate in Employment First activities. These activities include: work fairs, adult basic education, GED preparation, literacy, college, vocational training, vocational rehabilitation, job search classes, and part-time work.

The County approved an Oil and Gas permit by First Liberty Oil with numerous conditions, and the drilling company should be close to completion. The County is constantly reviewing and monitoring its code book for oil and gas regulations and updates. The Commissioners have listened to both negative and positive comments for the drilling of these gas and oil wells and will consider each permit on a case-by-case basis. They weigh the financial consequences of each decision and determine what risk the County may or may not want to incur.

The Commissioners are also hearing a lot of comments in relation to our Second Amendment rights because of the numerous gun control bills being considered at the State and Federal levels. The commissioners want to assure everyone they are paying attention and unanimously agree to support Second Amendment rights.

For 2013, the Commissioners and staff have set numerous goals and objectives that we feel with the proper road map and no major financial surprises, we will be able to achieve. One of the goals is to complete the Astronaut Rominger Airport by installing taxi-way reflectors, completing the certified weather station "AWOS", augment and move an agricultural well from other county property to the airport to provide a future water source, and to make fuel available to airplane customers.

Recently the County completed a draft Emergency Operating Plan involving county municipalities, special districts such as the county fire and ambulance districts, State and Federal agencies, and private businesses who might have services and assets available for emergency preparedness. An Airport and Jail Emergency Plan is also being included in the project scope.

A great concern for Commissioners and other community leaders is the impact of Sub-districts to not only our agricultural community, but to the whole Valley. We all know that the Valley economy is tied to agriculture. When the agriculture base decreases, then our other local economy is affected. Sub-districts are going to change agriculture as we know it in the San Luis Valley and will have a direct impact on county government as well. The continued drought is also having tremendous impact and right now the Valley is behind snow pack levels of 2012.

The current economic times are burdensome and the County Commissioners are doing the best we can in these challenging times. The Commissioners gladly welcome your comments and suggestions. Last year the commissioners visited several county businesses throughout the year and felt this to be very beneficial. If you would like for us to meet with you and/or your business leadership team, please call our office at 657-2744.