

Arts supporters hustle for Larimer tax question

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The third time's a charm — or so hope supporters of establishing a county-wide, arts tax district.

After years of trying to place a scientific and cultural facilities district (SCFD) tax proposal on Larimer County ballots — including formal attempts in 2008 and 2009 — organizers of the campaign now have

eight weeks to gather enough petition signatures to bring the issue to voters this November.

The SCFD tax, modeled after a proposal passed in Denver in the late 1980s, would dedicate a 0.1 percent sales tax, or one penny on every \$10 spent in Larimer County, to programming at scientific and cultural facilities within the county.

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"It's really about creating that dedicated revenue stream, which allows agencies (to provide) the series we all know and love," said OpenStage Theatre & Co. founder Bruce Freestone, who's led the charge for an SCFD tax in Northern Colorado for years. "(We're) looking for an expansion of free days, discounted admissions, after-school programs, new audience development,"

"And the way the SCFD works (is) you can't spend any money on capital construction, it's all on operations, more programs, programs held in more cities, collaborations..."

According to projections calculated with 2014 data, Freestone said the tax could bring in an anticipated \$6.6 million in 2017.

Supporters of the tax proposal are shooting for 14,000 signatures, Freestone added, essentially twice the number of signatures needed to help account for any invalid signatures.

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In 2008, the group brought petitions on the street, but started too late and barely met the signature requirement, so they decided to suspend the campaign and not submit the signatures, Freestone said. In 2009, they repeated the same campaign, but again suspended it. In 2010, they didn't want to compete with the city's Keep Fort Collins Great tax question, a 0.85 percent tax increase voters passed that November.

After that, supporters lost steam and didn't regroup until last year.

A public [launch event for the Larimer SCFD petition signing campaign](#) is set for Saturday from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Community Creative Center, 200 Mathews St. in Fort Collins. There will be a presentation on the funding district as well as volunteer training, volunteer sign-up and opportunities to donate to the campaign.

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