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## Scientific, cultural tax proposal moves forward

Larimer County groups planning to place scientific and cultural facilities district tax on 2016 ballot

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Jean Bendon looks at Quiet City Triptych, a painting by Aaron Copland, on display at the Loveland Museum/Gallery Thursday. (Trevor L. Davis / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

### Payment structure

The payment structure in Larimer County will work differently than it does for the metro-Denver Scientific and Cultural Facilities District.

The Denver district has a three-tier structure based on a formula of weighted metrics. In Larimer County, the tax will be distributed among three funds; general operations-type fund, innovation fund and administrative.

The division of money could tentatively be 68/25/7.

**Operations fund:** Every eligible organization will receive an equal percentage of the money in that fund

Representatives from various entities in Larimer County have started the process of placing a scientific and cultural facilities district tax proposal on the general election ballot in 2016.

Susan Ison, Cultural Services director for the city of Loveland, and Bruce Freestone, who founded OpenStage Theatre Co. with his wife Denise in 1973, started the process again in April by inviting interested parties to an informational meeting. It will be the third attempt at creating such a district.

Now, the exploratory committee of representatives from Loveland, Fort Collins, Estes Park and Berthoud meets twice a month to organize fundraising, plan the process of obtaining signatures to get on the ballot, write ballot language for the proposal and talk about running a campaign.

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based upon their qualifying revenue (not to exceed 25 percent).

**Innovation fund:** This will be a competitive grant process where agencies can apply for funds through their proposals of innovative projects or programs.

**Administrative:** This will be a small percentage of the money used for SCFD staffing, office and overhead.

**More info:** For details about the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District, call Susan Ison at 970-962-2411

The tax proposal must be put to a vote, and can only be put on the ballot through a signed petition, or through the Board of County Commissioners.

"We are having really good response from all the communities," Ison said on Tuesday. "The meetings have gotten larger. We're dividing into subcommittees and working on eligibility requirements, logos, legal issues. I think it's going really well."

Interested parties tried twice before in 2008 and 2009 to put the tax proposal on the election ballot in Larimer County but ran into technical difficulties each time.

Using the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District in the Denver metro area as its inspiration, organizers will ask voters in the 2016 election to create a taxing district to collect a 0.1 percent sales tax (one penny of every \$10 spent) for cultural facility operations and maintenance in Larimer County. It would amount to about \$14 per year per taxpayer, organizers say.

If approved, the sales tax would be collected within the county and be used for maintenance and operational support of eligible nonprofit organizations that provide services in the county. The tax would need to be renewed by



vote every 10 years.

"We need to reach out to the nonprofit organizations to give them information about what a SCFD could mean for their organizations," Ison said.

This was the topic of Wednesday's organizing meeting in Fort Collins, in which members discussed questions to ask area nonprofit organizations. Committee members hope to find out more about the agencies' impact on the local communities and what services those groups would like to expand or create.

Members agreed that the conversations with agencies will serve dual purposes of finding out how the sales tax money would be used by those organizations as well as to educate the entities about what the tax proposal is.

"We're selling a platform to build the future on," Freestone said during the meeting. "We want a foundation; we want these agencies to continue in perpetuity because we feel these agencies provide a benefit to the citizens of Larimer County."

Voters approved the Denver SCFD in 1988, which has since distributed more than \$2 billion to over 300 organizations in the seven counties in that facilities district. That SCFD is up for renewal in 2016.

Eligible organizations must be headquartered in the district and be in the realm of art, music, theater, dance, zoology, botany, anthropology or natural and cultural history.

Nonprofits will apply for funds from the tax district.

The committee will start shortly after the new year to finalize the ballot language, start raising money, finalize a logo and website design, among many other tasks. The group also needs to find out exactly how many signatures they need for a petition to place an item on the ballot. According to Larimer County's website ([www.co.larimer.co.us](http://www.co.larimer.co.us)), a petition may circulate for 180 days and must be signed by at least 5 percent of the registered voters of the county.

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