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Advocates seek science, cultural facilities tax

Larimer County clerk approves petition wording; group to launch initiative at event Saturday

By *Saja Hindi*

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Dave Brodie takes a closer look at a painting Thursday while checking out the Colorado Governor's Art Show at the Loveland Museum Gallery in downtown Loveland. The museum is an example of one of the facilities that could benefit from a county-wide scientific and cultural facilities district tax if passed by voters in November. (Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

Larimer County voters might see a one-tenth of a cent sales tax to fund a science and cultural facilities district on the 2016 ballot if the third attempt to get it to voters is successful.

A group of county volunteers pushing the issue forward had their petition approved to form last week by the Larimer County Clerk's Office and are hosting a launch party at 4 p.m. Saturday at the Community Creative Center in Fort Collins, 200 Mathews St.

The penny on every \$10 sales tax will go toward funding local and regional scientific and cultural organizations.

Larimer's initiative is based on the successes and lessons learned from Denver's scientific and cultural facilities district, which voters first approved in 1988.

"It is a revenue stream for those cultural and scientific institutions that contribute so much to what the quality of life is for our communities," said Bruce Freestone, Fort Collins resident and one of the Larimer group advocates.

In Larimer County, the number of agencies, nonprofits and local government, that meet the

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The proposal would include two funding streams from the tax if passed, Freestone said. The first would be the sustainability fund, which would be composed of agencies that the SCFD's board decided are eligible for funding. Every agency will receive an equal percentage of its revenues, so "the very large agencies don't walk away with everything in the basket, and it allows the smaller ... to feel like they're getting an equitable share," he said.



The second fund called the innovation fund would be split funding among agencies through a competitive grant process, focusing on collaborations, regional initiatives and new audiences.

Freestone said he and others in the group have been discussing the tax initiative since the early 2000s and even started petition initiatives in 2008 and 2009 but then didn't submit because of technical issues, he said.

This time, they plan to see it through to the end.

Freestone said the group is hoping to get more

volunteers to pass around the petitions at Saturday's event.

If passed, the tax will become an economic driver and quality of life indicator for the county, according to Freestone.

"Northern Colorado is going to continue expanding, and we just want to make sure that we're expanding opportunities to citizens and people visiting the area that are comparable to the Denver Metro area," he said.

The tax is an investment in residents' future quality of life, Freestone added.

"We want to keep these agencies alive. We want to make sure they have stability and integrity and they're able to grow and able to continue to offer services," he said.

Loveland City Manager Bill Cahill said the tax would benefit the entire county, including Loveland, in providing a revenue stream for its cultural institutions.

County Clerk Angela Myers said the group has until June 21 to submit 7,252 verified signatures of Larimer County registered voters — which means volunteers will need to submit even more than that.

The ballot certification will take place in September, and Myers said so far, this is the only initiative that has submitted a petition form for approval.

However, there have been discussions of others, including a county mental health tax initiative.

Voters can also expect to see several statewide initiatives on the Nov. 8 ballot.

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