Public Engagement for Rural Communities in Larimer County, Colorado

Alyssa Martin
Prepared for Larimer County

Introduction

In the future, Larimer County aims to create subarea plans for the rural communities in the county. This capstone aims to provide a Community Engagement Plan for the rural centers and subareas of Larimer County during the initial engagement phase. The goal of this phase is to obtain input from the public regarding the communities’ future and needs.

Methodology

Based on demographic data, land use, and tophography/geography of each area, communities were divided into four groups: Northern Mountain, Southern Mountain, Plains, and Suburbs.

- **HOA and Community Newsletters**
  - Red Feather Lakes Community Association and the Soda Creek View Homeowners Association can provide updates in their newsletters regarding meeting dates, online surveys, and comment period deadlines. Other smaller HOAs should be included.

- **Mail-In Comment Cards**
  - Because many residents in the subarea do not reside locally full-time, comment cards can be mailed to their permanent addresses. This encourages homeowners to offer input for the subarea plans even when they are residing elsewhere. A link to the online survey should be provided on the card.

- **Community Liaisons**
  - Some communities have their own officers that participate in other Larimer County planning functions and have provided a valuable role to the county during previous community engagement processes. These liaisons could potentially take on the role of encouraging participation in the current process.

- **Board Meetings**
  - The Red Feather Lakes Advisory Board should be given the opportunity to participate and provide valuable input. Although the Board meets once a month, additional dates can be added specifically for the subarea plan creation.

Recommendations

Rural communities in Larimer County have various challenges for community engagement efforts, including but not limited to, lack of cell/internet service, transient population, distance from the larger cities, and small populations. With these hurdles in mind, engagement strategies are suggested for each grouping. Some strategies are applicable to all groups and are indicated as such. Others are tailored to each group, with some strategies pertaining to multiple groups.

- **HOA Newsletters**
  - Chatfield Springs, Pinewood Springs Property Owners Association, and Cedar Springs Improvement Association can provide updates in their newsletters regarding meeting dates, online surveys, and comment period deadlines. Other smaller HOAs should be included.

- **Mail-In Comment Cards**
  - Because many residents in the subarea do not reside locally full-time, comment cards can be mailed to their permanent addresses. This encourages homeowners to offer input for the subarea plans even when they are residing elsewhere. A link to the online survey should be provided on the card.

- **Flash Drive Requests**
  - For larger documents, instead of printing hard copies to distribute, flash drives can be made available both by request and at publicly available community locations. Due to the reliable interconnectivity, flash drives can provide access to documents that would otherwise be difficult to download.

- **Community Liaisons**
  - Some communities have their own officers that participate in other Larimer County planning functions and have provided a valuable role to the county during previous community engagement processes. These liaisons could potentially take on the role of encouraging participation in the current process.

- **Board Meetings**
  - The Red Feather Lakes Advisory Board should be given the opportunity to participate and provide valuable input. Although the Board meets once a month, additional dates can be added specifically for the subarea plan creation.

- **Online Surveys**
  - An online survey should be available for each stage of the planning process on the Larimer County website. A follow-up will be provided, inviting community members to share their comments and concerns for the subarea plans. This survey should be advertised in the other mentioned channels as an online survey.

- **Website and Social Media Updates**
  - A separate landing page for the subarea plan should be created on the Larimer County website. An online platform providing details on the plan should be available in people who wish to sign up. Social media outlets used by Larimer County, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, can be used as the plan progresses. Updates and other digital options for open house events should be available, with surveys or comment cards provided after presentations. Public meetings should be strategically placed throughout each subarea.

- **Partnerships**
  - Larimer County can engage with local partners to expand their reach. North Point Range Planning Organization, school districts, the Northern Colorado Forest Service, and other partners can be included to provide additional input on the subareas.

- **Focus Groups**
  - Each subarea can invite specific meetings geared toward relevant topics and provide more targeted information. For example, a focus group can be created for mountain residences and an agriculture-focused group with the Agricultural Advisory Board to invite山民.

- **OPEN HOUSES**
  - Due to the mountain setting and the desire for involvement by both homeowners and larger groups for public gatherings, open houses for the public should be held. These meetings should be held during various times of day to give citizens flexibility to attend. A brief presentation by staff can be included, but the meetings should be a more open format, allowing residents and community members to ask questions during the initial engagement phase.

- **Board Meetings**
  - The Agricultural Advisory Board should be given the opportunity to participate and provide valuable input. Although the Board meets once a month, additional dates can be added specifically for the subarea plan creation.

- **News Releases**
  - Larimer County already has a working relationship with local newspapers for public notices regarding land use changes. Notice in the papers should be repeated and provide an additional notification channel for a broader media format.