

This letter is to formally voice my strong opposition to the proposal to turn the vacant agriculturally-zoned 83+ acres of land on Judge Orr and Elbert into a BOCES trade school, community water system, campus/low-income housing, and future home of the Colorado School of Excellence - File number U241.

Moving the Colorado School of Excellence from an area of significant need in Southern Colorado Springs to the proposed location off of Elbert and Judge Orr poses a 40 – 50-minute commute, creating a significant barrier to entry and inequity of access for the special education school. School districts already struggle to staff bus drivers, and this commute will add more strain to that process. It will cost school districts more to transport students, or the families will spend more in fuel to commute out east.

Furthermore, the original Ranchland Herald News article mentioned erecting a water tower on the campus, which highlights how out of touch the BOCES developers are as that does not fit the facade of the area, and most people living in this area are on a well and will not be purchasing water from this school. The Colorado BOCES association asserts that a successful BOCES is to “Embrace local control...in the services they provide” and local services do not include water towers or a school selling water to residents. Additionally, a school uses significantly more water than a home, and this proposal is for not only a trade school, a school for special education needs, but also 120+ dwellings for low-income/campus housing – where will all of this water come from?

Covering up 83+ acres of what is currently undisturbed prairie land that provides habitat to prairie dogs, ground squirrels, owls, and the slowly dying pronghorn with concrete and asphalt makes me question if consideration and planning has been done regarding drainage and water runoff. What is the plan for managing the waste/sewer water runoff that will be created by this, and how will storm water be safely managed so as not to impact neighboring properties?

Moreover, Calhan School District just opened a brand new school building to improve the Career and Technical Education Facilities (CTE) that will have nine welding bays, woodworking and metal shops, a fully staffed kitchen, and several new classrooms – why can't this building be utilized to offer the trades/services the BOCES is proposing to offer these same educational opportunities where students do not need to be bussed or drive to this campus, taking time away from their regularly scheduled classes? This half day program at the BOCES campus does not take into consideration the commute time as well, compromising the regularly scheduled educational classes for these students.

In the original Gazette article, Mr. Bershinsky further highlighted how out of touch the BOCES is with this area and the people that chose to live here before this vacant land was bought, by disrespectfully stating that this parcel of land was purchased to be altered into a school as it is “in the middle of nowhere.” Not only is this factually untrue with this parcel being just 5 miles to the Falcon Safeway, but this shows that the BOCES does not understand, respect, or recognize why people such as myself move out to the “country” for the peace and quiet. We did not purchase our land 6 years ago to have the adjoining land purchased by a profit-hungry school

district that has already acknowledged that funding is an issue and that they need to create a non-profit to apply for grants to pay for this to work. Cramming 120 homes onto 20 acres of this land is not only glaringly out of touch with average lot sizes and acreage in the area, but the residents of these homes will not own their dwelling, which means there is no positive impact on the local residences or community, and fosters a lack of commitment and investment to the community that comes with being a homeowner.

There are many more overt reasons for opposing this proposal, including the traffic strain on Judge Orr which is already stretched thin with people using it as a thoroughfare to the remote eastern cities. Speeding well above the posted 55 mph speed limit on Judge Orr, or over 40 on Elbert is a chronic issue, putting these kids at risk for motor vehicle or pedestrian collisions. Additionally, our police and fire will now be responsible for additional coverage of this school and the proposed 120 additional campus housing units - there is no mention of the capacity these homes can handle or how many new residents will be adding strain to our EMS and police ratios.

The proposed community water system in which Mr. Bershinsky hopes “future homeowners in the area could pay to tap in, providing a vital financial pipeline for the project” also highlights many concerns. All residences in my neighborhood, including those touching the fence line of this parcel, and those in the surrounding area, are on a well and will not be buying water from this school. A flawed business model, the BOCES is going to be relying on the already underpaid employees to purchase water to fund their venture.

Moreover, there is no detail about the School of Excellence proposal being moved to this parcel of land on the yellow notice mailed to me. There was also no information about how many low-income/campus housing units that are proposed to be built on the land for campus housing - this information had to be intentionally sought online. How many people live in each of these 120 homes dictates the water demand. Are these employees living on campus year-round, or only during the school year? What sound and light ordinances will be in place to preserve why people like myself move out to the country? Is there a variance on this land that if the school closes, this now sets a precedent to put more low-income housing units on the rest of this land?

The BOCES has built low-income tiny homes in the mountain communities like Aspen for their teachers, where the cost of living is exceptionally high. However, this model does not seem pragmatic in Peyton where we are purportedly in the “middle of nowhere.” Low-income housing can also pose psychological trauma to those dwelling within due to the stigma and reality that they are not able to afford their own real estate. Are the teachers paying rent to the BOCES for these homes, in addition to paying the school for the “community water”?

An additional opposition is that the school districts proposed for this BOCES will not have the same equity of access to this parcel given the wide geographic disparity of where these 8 districts are located. Calhan School District recently invested in a new building for a similar purpose, and D49 has commented that there has been no discussion as to if they would use this BOCES campus. For the money spent to buy this parcel – and considering the significant

decrease in cost paid versus the asking price – the BOCES could buy significantly more land for this campus out east or use the savings to start construction and not rely on grants to fund this venture. A novel idea would be using the savings from buying the land out east instead of in Peyton to pay teachers and employees a livable wage that does not require them to live on campus/low-income housing.

I believe that this school also poses a threat to my second amendment, as I have a shooting range on my property near the shared fence line. This school means I will likely need to move my shooting range, which is not readily naturally available on my property without tearing up land to erect a berm. An additional consideration is that many nearby residences have shooting ranges and routinely discharge firearms throughout the day. Some of these students in the School of Excellence with diverse social needs may have trauma related to gun-related violence, and there is a potential to trigger trauma and cause an acute stress disorder reaction.

I also maintain strong reservations and concerns about the security of my property, young and growing family, assets, and farm animals due to having multiple campus houses on the property, multiple persons coming and going for the schools, and eventually special education students and services. The School of Excellence application asks about elopement behaviors and consent for restraint – how can the BOCES guarantee the safety of myself, my family, my property, my farm animals, and my assets from students with these behaviors?

A trade school is certainly needed for high schoolers, with more and more students seeking an alternate path to avoid college debt. If the BOCES claims to “Maximize the impact of available dollars through collaborative funding” and “Contribute to equalizing educational opportunities for pupils in diverse schools” then moving the School of Excellence out to Peyton and poorly selecting a location for a parcel of land that is intended to serve students much further east does not align with the BOCES’ intended successes.

It is inevitable that this land will be developed. As a homeowner, I would much rather see a developer turn this parcel into homes that are in alignment with the average lot size for the area and will allow for homeownership. Homeownership not only will help with surrounding property values, but it causes the owner to be invested in the community and respect where they live, which cannot be said for the employees living in the proposed low-income housing units.

I strongly urge the planning commission to deny this request and demand the BOCES find a parcel of land that truly provides equal access to the students and does not clearly disregard the property size standards and norms of the area. The BOCES should be fiscally responsible with the money they received from the sale of the Calhan building and purchase a less costly parcel of land to develop in a location that is more pragmatic for their intended purpose and mission.