

Preliminary History of the Fairfield Center

Charitable origins management history and transfer to Rio Blanco County

The Fairfield Center began as a charitable community project financed through the Freeman E. Fairfield Charitable Trust. It was intended to serve several local needs in one complex: affordable housing for senior citizens, a public library, meeting and activity space, and other community uses. Over time, ownership and responsibility moved from the nonprofit corporation that developed and operated the complex to Rio Blanco County. This memorandum summarizes that history from the records located and reviewed to date.

The Freeman Fairfield bequest and the original project

Freeman Fairfield established the charitable trust through his will dated February 1, 1965. The trust was created primarily for the benefit of people living in Meeker and the surrounding area, and its income was to be used for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, and educational purposes.

In the early 1970s, the Fairfield Trust Committee considered how the trust could meet important community needs. Historical records describe three needs that shaped the project: a proper public library, community meeting space, and affordable housing for senior citizens. The resulting plan combined those uses on one campus. The apartments were also expected to generate income that would help support the community portion of the complex.

The Trust financed construction through bonds and used trust income to repay the debt. The Fairfield Center opened and was dedicated on June 22, 1974. Contemporary and later records describe 24 senior apartments along with the library, a main hall, meeting rooms, and activity space.

Creation of MCCIC

The Meeker Colorado Civic Improvement Corporation, commonly called MCCIC, was incorporated on July 30, 1973, as a nonprofit corporation to hold title to the property and manage the complex while the construction debt was being repaid. The original corporate documents contemplated that, once the debt was retired, the property would be transferred to the Town of Meeker.

That transfer did not occur. By the time the bonds had been paid, the complex had continuing operating and maintenance costs, and apartment income was not sufficient to support every part of the property as originally envisioned. Historical accounts state that the Town declined to accept ownership. MCCIC's January 9, 1991 minutes document approval of a resolution to amend its Articles of Incorporation and consultation with the Fairfield Trust Board. Other records identify a related court proceeding that removed the requirement for transfer to the Town. MCCIC therefore continued to own and operate the complex while other arrangements were considered.

Transfer to Rio Blanco County

By 2000, the parties were discussing a transfer of ownership to Rio Blanco County. Minutes of the Fairfield Trust Committee show that the County proposed accepting title while leasing the apartments back to MCCIC for continued operation. This structure preserved MCCIC's role in managing the senior housing while placing ownership and broader responsibility for the complex with the County.

The Trust agreed in principle to help support the transition. In a June 10, 2000 letter, the Trust offered to pay two-thirds of any operating shortfall, up to \$50,000 annually, if the Town and County supplied the remaining one-third. Later in 2000, the anticipated funding plan called for annual contributions of

\$30,000 from apartment operations through MCCIC, \$30,000 from the Trust, and \$7,500 each from the Town and County.

MCCIC executed a quitclaim deed transferring the Fairfield property to Rio Blanco County on January 5, 2001. The Board of County Commissioners formally entered the deed into its record on January 9, 2001. The County then leased the Fairfield Apartments back to MCCIC for a ten-year term beginning January 1, 2001. MCCIC agreed to pay the County \$30,000 annually in two installments, retain income above that amount, provide annual financial accounting, pay apartment utilities, and manage day-to-day operations. The County assumed responsibility for major capital repairs and agreed to provide labor for apartment maintenance, lawn care, and snow removal. The agreement also provided that MCCIC membership would be limited to the Board of County Commissioners and that MCCIC directors would serve staggered terms.

The shared support arrangement changed

The transfer to the County was initially understood as a shared community arrangement rather than a County-only obligation. The Trust, Town, County, and MCCIC all participated in supporting the property in different ways. Records from the mid-2000s refer to joint funding by the County, the Trust, and the Town. The Trust continued contributing funds for a period, although its role later shifted away from unrestricted operating support and toward grants for specific capital projects.

The Town also provided annual financial support, but the amount was not consistently fixed. County correspondence shows that the Town paid \$15,000 in each of 2007, 2008, and 2009. In 2010, the Town reduced its contribution to \$5,000. The Town explained that County offices were moving into the Fairfield Center and that it could no longer maintain the higher contribution. County officials calculated at that time that the reduced Town payment, combined with the Trust's decision to limit funding to capital projects, left the County covering approximately \$40,000 per year in additional operating costs that others had previously supported.

The records reviewed for this summary establish the Town's substantial reduction in support, but they do not yet identify the precise date of its final payment. At some point after that reduction, the Town ceased providing continuing financial support. The practical result was that the County, as owner, was left carrying the ongoing public responsibility for operations, maintenance, and capital needs, while MCCIC continued in its role managing the senior apartments under agreements with the County.

The present arrangement

The Fairfield property was created with charitable funds for several connected public purposes, placed under a nonprofit corporation for management, and later transferred to the County after the anticipated transfer to the Town did not occur. The County accepted the property in the context of an arrangement involving financial or operational participation by the Trust, the Town, MCCIC, and the County. As those contributions changed over time, the County's share of the financial and operational responsibility increased.

Rio Blanco County owns the Fairfield property, and MCCIC manages the 24 senior apartment units under an agreement with the County. The community portion currently houses County offices, a community center, and the senior meal center. The public library, which was part of the original project, is no longer located in the Fairfield Center.

Scope and additional research

This memorandum was prepared by the County Administrator based on an administrative review of records located to date. It is intended solely to provide a general historical summary for informational purposes. It was not prepared by legal counsel, does not constitute legal research or a legal opinion, and should not be relied upon to establish any party's legal rights, obligations, ownership interests, or position in a legal proceeding. Any legal conclusions concerning the Fairfield property, the governing agreements, or the respective rights and obligations of the County, MCCIC, the Town of Meeker, or the Freeman E. Fairfield Charitable Trust should be reviewed and provided by qualified legal counsel.

The records reviewed are sufficient to establish the general sequence of construction, nonprofit management, transfer to the County, and changes in financial support. Additional historical research may be necessary to confirm or supplement particular events described in this memorandum. Some details remain unresolved, including the documentary basis for the Town's original anticipated ownership, the circumstances of its decision not to accept the property, and the date and manner in which its continuing financial support ended. If requested by the Board of County Commissioners, additional research could include the Town of Meeker's historical minutes, resolutions, agreements, budgets, and payment records; the complete court file and amended MCCIC corporate documents; and subsequent lease renewals or amendments.

Sources reviewed

- Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Fairfield Center, 2009 draft, including its historical summary and proposed funding terms.
- Freeman E. Fairfield Charitable Trust letter and meeting minutes dated June 8 and June 10, 2000.
- Rio Blanco County Board of County Commissioners minutes dated January 9, 2001.
- Executed 2001 lease agreement between Rio Blanco County and MCCIC and the January 5, 2001 quitclaim deed.
- MCCIC minutes and financial materials from 1991 through 1993, including records of Trust operating and capital support.
- MCCIC Board minutes dated March 14, 2012, and later MCCIC historical summaries.
- Compiled Fairfield correspondence, including Town and County emails concerning the 2010 contribution.
- Fairfield chronology and historical memoranda, used as secondary guides and checked against available primary records where possible.