



NEBRASKA STATE FAIR BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 21, 2025

The meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was held on Friday, November 21, 2025, at 1:00 pm at the Nebraska State Fair Administrative Offices in Grand Island, NE. Public notice of this meeting was published in the Grand Island Independent newspaper on November 13, 2025; posted to the Nebraska Public meeting calendar website; and on the Nebraska State Fair website. The public was invited to attend in person.

Roll call was read with the following Board members present: Boyd Strope, Chair; Tom Schellpeper, Vice Chair; John McKeever, Secretary; Lanna Hubbard, Treasurer; Dawn Caldwell; Anna Castner Wightman; Tom Dinsdale; Ryan Hassebrook; Kevin Havlovic; Kevin Jorgensen; Alan Kahle; Kathleen Lodl; and Beth Smith. No absences.

Others in Attendance: Jaime Parr, Executive Director; Courtney Glock, Marketing Director; Tyler Griffith, Livestock Manager; Keaton Irwin, Sales Director; Breanna Kozisek, Business Administrator; Kourtney Lingeman, Competitive Exhibits Manager; Karli Schulz, Entertainment & Events Director; Vaughn Sievers, Agriculture Director; Tina Thuernagle, Operations Director; Cindy Johnson, Consultant; Lindsey Koepke, 1868 Foundation Executive Director; RJ Post, Grand Island Independent; Joe Stump, AMGL; Carla Warneke, Seasonal Fair Employee.

The November 21 meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was called to order by Chairman, Boyd Strope. Strope announced the meeting had been properly advertised as an open meeting and informed those in attendance of the posting location of the Open Meetings Act.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion made by Dawn Caldwell for Approval of Consent Agenda, which included Regular Meeting Minutes of October 17, 2025.

Second by Kevin Havlovic.

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve consent agenda passed unanimously.

Financial Report by Joe Stump

Tom Dinsdale moved to approve the October 2025 Financials as presented.

Second by John McKeever.

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve passed unanimously.

Board Committee Reports

Events Report by John McKeever

- No report.

Facilities Report by Tom Schellpeper

- No report.

Agriculture Report by Dawn Caldwell

- No report.

Finance Report by Lanna Hubbard

- Hubbard requested the Board's consideration in accepting Aksarben Foundation scholarship funds to establish future funding administration and distribution.
- Strobe explained how the premiums awarded during the Aksarben Stock Show (AKSS) are only partially paid upfront. The other portion is held for a scholarship administered by the Aksarben Foundation for when a student attends higher education. Expected changes with the Aksarben Foundation and AKSS give reason for the AKSS to assume management of the funds and establish future administration.
 - Lanna Hubbard moved to approve this action.
 - Second by Beth Smith.
 - All in favor. Motion carried.

FFA Report by Ryan Hassebrook

- No report.

4-H Report by Kathleen Lodl

- Lodl shared excitement over the 2% increase in 4-H enrollment so far, indicating a strong presence in the state. Some of the 4-H enrollment is due to after-school programs.

Executive Report by Boyd Strobe

- No report.

Staff Department Reports

Event Report by Karli Schulz

- The events team saw some restructuring this year.
 - Lindsey Foushee, Entertainment & Events Manager, joined the team full-time.
 - Haley Roush, Volunteer Coordinator & Box Office Manager, also joined the events team as many responsibilities intersect throughout the year.
- The 2026 Nebraska State Fair concert line-up is in the works.
 - No names are shared but one concert has been confirmed for Older Nebraskan's Day. One offer is out and close to being finalized. Two offers have been turned down but other opportunities are being explored.
 - The goal is to have a lineup decided by Christmas.
- Motorsports in 2026 are in the works with dirt events switching up for next Fair.
- The 2025 Puzzle Contest is being developed for 2026 with the goal of state-wide competitions establishing qualifiers for a state championship at Fair.
- New contests are underway for the 2026 Fair, including arm wrestling, chicken crowing, human chicken crowing and a celebrity eating contest.
- The Fair Marathon is being developed more as it's proven to be a great event and that other states don't have.

Operations Report by Tina Thuernagle

- The operations committee meeting in the morning was good with discussions of an operations "wish list" and Grand Island Livestock Complex Authority (GILCA) shows.
- The team is preparing for 2026, including some needed maintenance repairs.
 - Brent Shaw, Operations, is helping with repairs while leading operations for the Wood River FFA Prospect Show and upcoming GILCA show in December.
- ARPA progress continues with cattle ties being removed for drainage installation. The north and south lots are simultaneous projects, which means less mud during Fair.
- Thuernagle looks forward to the 2026 Nebraska State Fair, where it all happens here.
- Strobe asked if the operations team runs the television screens during livestock shows and if multiple species could be featured.

- Thuernagle offered to forward the request to the department responsible.

Agriculture Report by Vaughn Sievers

- The Ag committee met that morning.
- Sievers addressed Strobe's earlier question.
 - The AKSS advisory committee suggested that screens be arranged differently but it didn't come to fruition the first weekend of Fair. The intent is to ensure all shows are streamed on the screens, so people know what's going on in other barns.
- The Ag budget was discussed in the committee meeting.
 - Kudos were given to Tyler Griffeth and Kourtney Lingeman for crunching those numbers.
- Griffeth, Livestock Manager, and Lingeman, Competitive Exhibits Manager, are following up with superintendents to gain their input.
 - Some new contracts have been sent out, good people are joining the superintendent team and proposals will be moving forward.
- Sievers provided an AKSS update with some applications coming in but slowly, for beef animals specifically.
 - The addition of a rabbit show for 2026 has brought excitement with new partnerships.
- Strobe gave kudos to Sievers and staff for the hard work put into animal drug testing.

Sales Report by Keaton Irwin

- Over the last several weeks Irwin has been in communication vendors attending a conference in Florida. Nine vendors went and sent ideas for the 2026 Nebraska State Fair.
 - Irwin is proud of the comradery shared between his vendors, even outside the State Fair.
- The 2026 Vendor Agreements are being sent out. Goal is to have all agreements done by the second week of December.
 - New vendor applications are opening on the website.
 - Conversations were had with other Fairs and events to make sure what we have is acceptable and up to par with what people are doing.

Marketing Report by Courtney Glock

- It's an important time in marketing!
- Focuses have been budgeting and launching the 2026 theme.
 - "It All Happens Here" is transitioning in while old theme items are phased out.
- Flash sales are coming!
 - Last year included a 12-day holiday sale in December for gate admission and ride tickets.
 - This year, Fair Fans subscribed to the newsletter get a Black Friday Sale offering first grabs on 2026 items. A follow-up sale will come in December with a small price bump in sales.
- We are 279 days from the 2026 Nebraska State Fair.

Sponsorship Report by Courtney Glock for Nicki Stoltenberg

- Flyers were handed out representing revenue for the Nebraska State Fair and AKSS.
 - Gives a high-level look at events under our organization.
- Recent work is being done on the AKSS Purple Banner Knight in streamlining the event and best using dollars beyond the show ring.
 - Kudos were given to Karli, Kourtney and Tyler for their efforts in the project.
- The 2026 revenue secured has not been invoiced but based off multi-year agreements.

1868 Foundation Report by Lindsey Koepke

- The Foundation is doing good and secured \$100k commitment from the visitor improvement fund for the 2026 AKSS. It was a very generous gift for the Foundation and supports the AKSS efforts.

- The 1868 Foundation was the governor's non-profit choice at the Nebraska vs Michigan volleyball game. It was nice to be acknowledged by the governor and have a good group, quite a few donors and board members, who attended. Thanks were given to all who went.
- New fundraising updates were highlighted.
 - The passing of Steve Wehrbein was acknowledged. He was a Foundation board member and formerly a State Fair board member.
 - Thanks were given to those who sent a memorial gift. Over \$2k was received in memorials and an additional \$10k was committed to the foundation by the Wehrbein family.
 - Other non-profit donations received recently include a \$15,000 and \$25,000 gift.
- Recognition was given to the State Fair for winning the Division IV In-Kind Trade Sponsor IAFE award for the 2025 Great Steak Debate, put on with the support of the 1868 Foundation.
- Koepke met with the Education Rights Council in Omaha and connected with the executive director for the Latino Council for the State of Nebraska.
 - The executive director is excited about the State Fair and would like to host their annual summit, including 800+ kids and their families at the State Fair.
 - Koepke is looking for ways to enhance that council and bring in partners.

Executive Director Report by Jaime Parr

- Staff meetings continue weekly with the review of cash requirements before paying bills.
 - Finance committee gets a copy of the report, requirements, general ledger and bank account balances to continue transparency.
- Update on the ARPA storm water projects –
 - Concrete is curing between Heartland Event Center (HEC) and Pinnacle Bank. The area will open back up again before December.
 - Concrete is curing over the rooftop drains that ARPA installed between HEC and Fonner Park Grandstand.
 - Work will close on the east side of campus in early December and return after horse racing.
 - As Thuernagle mentioned, tie-outs are being removed, and dirt work is scheduled for the north and south lots of State Fair Boulevard.
- Campus partner updates -
 - The city is widening Stolley Park Rd with work beginning in the spring. A lane will remain open until live racing ends, when they will close a road segment.
 - The segment between Fair gate two and the business district will be under construction. Work will continue after Fair from gate two to gate one on the west.
 - Fonner Park and the Casino are coming together for construction on the parking lot northwest of campus, near Island Oasis.
 - VenuWorks has a busy event schedule from December to March, which will bring interest to campus numbers. In the last six months we've identified an annual campus attendance number and hope to see over two million people on campus in 2026.
 - Numbers were softer in 2025 with ARPA projects.
 - The Casino remains a significant and appreciated sponsor with 80% of their contribution going toward the State Fair and 20% toward AKSS.
 - Naming rights have been secured with Pinnacle Bank for another five years. We are grateful to work with those at Pinnacle Bank and thankful for their year-round support.
- Parr highlighted recent Nebraska State Fair outreach presentations given to Nebraska LEAD, the Country Club Book Club. Both went well and included good questions from the groups.
- The Nebraska State Fair will be featured in a six-story magazine series by Business View, a national magazine. The feature is on IAFE (International Association of Fairs and Expos) and what

fairs mean to local economics. It was a fun interview discussing the Fair's move to the area, what it means to Fonner Park and overall Fair fun.

- Parr attended a Nebraska Lottery presentation covering lottery forecasts for the next year.
 - The Fair is budgeting flat for lottery funds and feels assured that a flat budget will be met realistically this next year.
 - Bill LB60 would help the lottery as it would allow the sale of tickets at vending machines. About 30% to 35% of the Fair budget comes from the lottery fund and Nebraska is one of only two states that doesn't allow this form of ticket sales.
- Recognition was given to the Nebraska State Fair for winning several IAFE awards recently.
 - The Fair won seven first place awards, five second place awards and two third place awards. The staff put those together and competed against other Fairs of similar size.
 - IAFE convention is also coming up with a few staff members attending the five-day event full of workshops.
- Event planning for 2026 continues.
 - The budget, what is considered and approved in December will guide the Fair efforts.
 - Concerts and motorsports are in discussion for 2026 with some new shows and changes forecasted for as far out as 2027.
 - Marketing – It All Happens Here
 - Operations, Sponsorships, Sales, financial supports and all departments are coming together for Fair plans.
 - AKSS financial support is in the works with new sponsorships being explored for different operations and prizes.
- The next board meeting is December 19 with committee meetings scheduled that week, not that day. There is an Ag hearing on December 19th.
 - More Ag meetings will take place January 16 and the following board meeting will be January 23rd in Kearney during the NAFM convention.
 - The annual State Fair board meeting is February 20 in Lincoln.
- Thanks were given to the staff team for all their work.
- Thanks were given to the State Fair Board for all their reviews and guidance.
- Koepke added that Matt Gunderson, a Foundation board member, has put together a Nebraska State Fair sponsorship fundraising master plan for 2026 through 2030. A draft will be presented at the December meeting.
 - Kudos was given to Matt Gunderson for doing an incredible job.
- Strobe expressed appreciation for Jaime Parr and Chris Kotulak, Fonner Park's Chief Executive Officer, for continuing to work in partnership and bring Fair and Fonner small boards together on a regular basis.
- Strobe emphasized the importance of December's meeting as the budget and by laws will be considered for voting.
- Strobe wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Adjournment

Motion made by Tom Dinsdale to adjourn.

Second by Kevin Havlovic.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Minutes of November 21, 2025

Nebraska State Fair Approved:

Date: December 19, 2025

By: 
John McKeever, Board Secretary