



NEBRASKA STATE FAIR BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Friday, January 23, 2026

The meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was held on Friday, January 23, 2026, at 2:00 pm at the Crowne Plaza in Kearney, NE. Public notice of this meeting was published in the Grand Island Independent newspaper on January 15, 2026; 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 Strobe, Chair; Tom Schellpeper, Vice Chair; John McKeever, Secretary; Lanna Hubbard, Treasurer; Dawn Caldwell; Anna Castner Wightman (via Zoom); Ryan Hassebrook; Kevin Havlovic; Kevin Jorgensen; Alan Kahle; and Kathleen Lodl. Absent: Tom Dinsdale.

Others in attendance: Jaime Parr, Executive Director; Karli Bartz, Entertainment & Events Director; Eileen Dawes, Office Administrator; Courtney Glock, Marketing Director; Keaton Irwin, Sales Director; Breanna Kozisek, Business Administrator; Nicki Stoltenberg, Sponsorship Director; Tina Thuernagle, Operations Director; Karlyn Anderson, Gates Manager; Cindy Johnson, Consultant; Lindsey Koepke, 1868 Foundation Executive Director (via Zoom); Joe Stump, AMGL; and County Fair representatives attending the Nebraska Association of Fair Managers Convention (NAFM).

The January 23 meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was called to order by Chairman, Boyd Strobe. Strobe announced the meeting had been properly advertised as an open meeting and informed those in attendance of the on-site 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 December 19, 2025.

Second by Kevin Havlovic.

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

Financial Report by Joe Stump, AMGL

Lanna Hubbard moved to approve the December 2025 Financials as presented.

Second by Alan Kahle.

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve passed unanimously.

Committee & Staff Reports

Events Report by John McKeever and Karli Schulz

- No action items to present.
- Committee meeting went well with conversations about new events, and the tractor pull with its different classes.
- The Fair is two events away from having a full ticket lineup, including three motor sport events, two dirt events, and five concerts.
- Applications are open for the 2026 Fair's free stage performances.
 - Forty-five people have applied so far, about five ahead of last year.
- Contracts are still in progress for the over 20 strolling grounds attractions.

- As of this morning, only one more attraction is needed.
- Some confirmed attractions include robots and trapeze.
- Registration for the Fair marathon will open in February.
- Planning will continue for the 2026 Fair, including some new events.
 - New additions include Arm Wrestling, Chicken Calling, Morning Yoga, and an updated Puzzle Contest format which will include a State Fair Championship competition with nine qualifying participants from state-wide contests.

Facilities Planning & Operations Report by Tom Schellpeper and Tina Thuernagle

- The committee met this morning.
- **Tom Schellpeper moved to give Jaime Parr approval to sign an easement with the City of Grand Island to access the Fair's side of Stolley Park Road.**
 - **Second by John McKeever.**
 - All in favor. Motion carried.
 - The city will do construction on the south side of the grounds.
 - The road will widen and get six feet closer to the gates entering Fonner Park campus.
 - Illustrations show the entry gates pulled into the property more so there will be room to stop a car, park, and open gates without hanging over the road.
- ARPA projects continue with the west parking lot dirt work.
- The northwest parking lot is primarily a Fonner Park and Elite Casino project that the Fair will have access to use primarily for public parking during our 60-day event season.
 - Work is in progress as long as weather holds.
 - Sanitary sewer is being laid, and fresh water will be available for carnival bunk houses.
- The operations team has created a winter project list that's shared with Jaime Parr every week.
 - The list is reviewed every Monday within the operations team to assign tasks, track progress, see how long each task takes, and ensure everything is completed.
 - Brent Shaw, Operations, repaired and painted offices. He cleaned grout and replaced damaged ceiling tiles in the Nebraska Building.
 - Brian Hoffman, Operations, completed the upgrade of filing cabinets, taken inventory of hand tools and supplies, and repaired lawn mowers.
- Tina has participated in meetings for the 2026 Fair layout and America 250 ideas.
- Meetings have also taken place with extended staff to discuss their needs.
- Excitement is shared about the 2026 Fair and making "It All Happen Here."

Agriculture Report by Dawn Caldwell

- The Ag committee met January 12 via Zoom.
- Vaughn Sievers, the Ag staff reporter, is absent.
 - The National Western Stock Show sends staff to the Nebraska State Fair to help. Vaughn is reciprocating that right now and helping with their draft show. It's hard work, exhausting, but great contacts, great things to see, maybe something we can bring here. The trade for labor is also invaluable.
- A couple items were discussed during the Ag Committee meeting requiring the consideration of the full board. Both items are related to Aksarben.
 - Dawn Caldwell, Vaughn Sievers, and Jaime Parr met with the Aksarben Advisory Committee in addition to the State Fair Board Ag Committee.
 - **Dawn Caldwell moved to approve the Aksarben Stock Show Scholarship and Premium split, becoming strictly premium in 2026.**
 - **Second by Lanna Hubbard.**
 - All in favor. Motion carried.
 - **Dawn Caldwell also moved to approve the Livestock Entry Fees for the 2026 Aksarben Stock Show.**

- The Advisory Committee made recommendation, based on other shows they attend around the country, that our entry fees were comfortably low for exhibitors and fees could be more typical.
- Entry fees for Aksarben would be set at \$125 per beef animal; \$60 for sheep, goat, and swine; \$50 for broilers and rabbits; and \$15 for showmanship.
- Second by Kevin Havlovic.
- All in favor. Motion carried.

FFA Report by Ryan Hassebrook

- State FFA Convention is coming up!
 - Anyone interested and willing to volunteer can sign up online.
 - State FFA Convention is March 25 – 27.

4-H Report by Kathleen Lodi

- Last Fall a 4-H committee was created with stakeholders and staff to look at the process by which young people enroll in livestock projects and improve the process.
 - Things are being done to make the process smoother in terms of consistency and clarity across counties. The challenge has been the varying county fair dates.
 - An idea is to utilize the 4-H app, which people use to view programs and results.
- Raising Nebraska has a new person in the director seat – Emily Martindale.
 - Martindale was a State FFA Officer and excited to start this position.
 - February 2 is Ground Hog Day, and all are welcome to join for a Pork Pop-up at Raising Nebraska from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, co-sponsored by the Pork Producers.

Finance Report by Lanna Hubbard

- A meeting was held with Jaime Parr and Joe Stump with one action item request produced from that meeting.
- Lanna Hubbard moved to consider the Capital Expenditures Budget to \$700,000 and include the ARPA project.
 - Second by Tom Schellpeper.
 - A document was distributed to all board members regarding the high priority project and capital investment list.
 - This budget would allow staff to do extra things for the Nebraska State Fair and Aksarben Stock Show for the next year. It would also contribute to our infrastructure, including ADA lifts, Nebraska Building improvements, event shade and seating, State Fair Historical Exhibit phase, improvements in the Five Points Arena, and IEG valuations for our sponsorship assets.
 - The flat amount considered would also include any ARPA gaps remaining.
 - The staff remains diligent in their estimates and will seek exact quotes before projects progress.

Sales Report by Keaton Irwin

- Returning vendor applications were sent and the Fair received slightly over 52% back so far.
- Conversations with partners continue with ideas being shared. Returning vendors also express their booth space preferences.
 - Spaces have been reviewed with few spaces becoming available, so non-traditional spaces are explored.
 - Conversations are great as people are interested in coming back and want to make areas good for guests.

- **Irwin attended The National Western Stock Show two weeks ago and worked in the Nebraska Tourism booth. It was a fun opportunity to eat and celebrate with current vendors and concessionaires.**
 - **It's fun to see them outside of the Nebraska State Fair and enjoy a meal but also see how they gear up for event season and check out products.**
 - **It's also an opportunity to connect with current and potential new vendors and concessionaires.**
 - **Excitement is shared about Fair time.**
- **Applications for new vendors have been outstanding so far, making it hard to send some rejection letters. The new applications are very cool and include unique products.**
- **One noticeable trend is the increased interest in outdoor spaces.**
 - **Outdoor spaces last year were filled before indoor spaces, spearheading this trend.**
 - **While people assume this interest is due to cheaper prices, vendors must invest in professionally installed tents and other items which can be costly.**
 - **The ARPA projects and other Fair improvements done last year are believed to be large contributors to this continued interest trend.**
- **Boyd Strobe gave kudos to Irwin for building good relationships with people and putting in extra effort.**

Marketing Report by Courtney Glock

- **Reminders were given about the upcoming Senator Social on February 19 in Lincoln.**
- **Glock worked with Nicki Stoltenberg and Lindsey Koepke on a 2025 Nebraska Tourism Grant.**
 - **That grant awarded the Fair \$24,500 in marketing funds with a 100% match which was used for out-of-state tourism.**
 - **Statistics after the Fair, validated by Nebraska Tourism, indicate an impact on State Fair attendance in 2025.**
 - **The app showed 33% of its users were registered out of state with most coming from Kansas, Iowa, South Dakota, Colorado, Missouri, and Illinois. This were places where out-of-state advertising was utilized.**
- **The advertising agency RFP is live but will close February 6.**
 - **The Fair hosted a Q&A with some interested agencies.**
 - **The contract will be awarded March 1 with an announcement made later.**
- **The Marketing Manager position is still open, if anyone knows someone with design experience relating to graphic design and/or has a background in journalism.**
- **Our theme for the 2026 Nebraska State Fair is "It All Happens Here."**
 - **A patriotic iteration of the logo has been made to nod at the America 250 celebration.**
- **Counting down 216 days until the State Fair!**

Sponsorship Report by Nicki Stoltenberg

- **The Fair is hiring IEG, a consultant firm, to confirm the valuation of all State Fair and Aksarben assets, including the naming rights on buildings and events.**
 - **The 1868 Foundation will also be going in 50/50 on this endeavor with the Fair.**
- **The Fair is continuing to enhance partnerships, like with CHI St. Francis.**
 - **CHI St. Francis sponsored the health fair on Older Nebraskan's Day but will now be the day sponsor of Older Nebraskans Day.**
- **Sponsorship met with representatives from Nebraska Farm Bureau Financial Services who agreed to fill a sponsorship for the Aksarben Stock Show.**

- An application is underway for funds through the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad Foundation.
- Janet Enck, Sponsorship Manager, is continuing work on an online bill pay option.
 - Stoltenberg shared gratitude for Janet Enck's help in sponsorship progress.

Executive Report by Boyd Strobe

- The Executive Board Committee met.
- The leasing of the south lot property was proposed.
 - The leasing would include a reasonable rate, maintenance of the residential outdoor areas, general upkeep, and security walk-throughs from the tenant who must be an employee as required by the legal agreement.
 - **Boyd Strobe moved to approve the residential lease.**
 - **Second by Dawn Caldwell.**
 - All in favor. Motion carried.
- Boyd Strobe also proposed the ratification of by-law amendments in a two-third vote.
 - **Dawn Caldwell moved to approve the Consecutive Terms Amendment.**
 - **Second by John McKeever.**
 - All in favor. Motion carried.
 - **Kevin Havlovic moved to approve the Board Member Discipline Amendment.**
 - **Second by Dawn Caldwell.**
 - All in favor. Motion carried.
- Strobe extended thanks to the board for revisiting the Board Constitution and By-Laws.

1868 Foundation Report by Lindsey Koepke via Zoom

- Good things happened at the end of the year, including some new Foundation members.
- As Courtney Glock mentioned, there were some wonderful grant opportunities with Nebraska Tourism, the Nebraska Recycling Council, and the Hall County Visitor Improvement Fund.
 - Another grant from the Hall County Visitor Improvement Fund in the amount of \$100,000 will go toward the 2026 Aksarben Stock Show.
- There was about \$175,000 toward 2025 State Fair improvements, which doesn't include funding toward the Aksarben Stock Show.
- At the end of the year the Foundation was notified that a donor passed and left some funding in their estate to the tune of \$200,000. This was a very generous gift from a very wonderful member of the community.
- Koepke extends gratitude to all the Foundation's long-time donors who she would like to thank directly for their gifts and the legacy they leave with the State Fair.
- The IEG funding that Nicki Stoltenberg mentioned the Foundation going 50/50 on will also help the Foundation.
- Excitement was also shared about the capital improvement list as there are often things donors are fond of and willing to support that don't always come to mind. There's always something for somebody.
- Kudos was given to Selena Aguilar for the Foundation's social media engagement and presenting new ways to reach audiences.
- The Foundation looks forward to a great year!

Executive Director Report by Jaime Parr

- Thanks were given to the Board for their support in the meeting's voting items.
- Weekly staff meetings continue where payables are reviewed and shared to the Board Finance Committee, including bank balances, the balance sheet, and general ledger. Financial transparency remains intact.
- Update with ARPA – work is moving into the west lots now, up by Island Oasis and the Fire Station. This work also includes the south side of State Fair Boulevard.
 - The northwest lot work is part of a Fonner Park and Elite Casino project. ARPA projects remain in the southwest lot.
 - The work will be done well in advance of this year's Nebraska State Fair.
- Gratitude was given for the Board's support on the Capital Investment items.
 - Many of those tools will be put to good use for the State Fair and Aksarben Stock Show.
- Fair planning is well underway!
- Staff reports were great today. Gratitude was expressed to the dedicated staff who remain hard at work during the winter season.
- America 250 has been a subject of focus recently.
 - Parr joined Beth Smith on a call this past week, who is on the Planning Commission for that, and shared some ideas.
 - Red, white, and blue will be very apparent at this year's State Fair as the country celebrates the 250th anniversary of the United States.
- Recognition was also given to the County Fair peers who attended the board meeting.
 - Thanks were given to them for attending and taking the time to visit.
 - The Nebraska Association of Fair Managers Convention is underway. The staff team set up the State Fair trade show booth where county fairs can stop by and pick up an informational packet detailing how they can participate with the State Fair.
 - County Fair Day at the State Fair is in progress and the County Fair Tour will be coming up this summer.
- Upcoming meeting announcements –
 - February 19 will be the Senators Social in Lincoln.
 - February 20 will be the board meeting, also in Lincoln.
- Thanks were given again to the Board, Staff, and all who support the State Fair.

Adjournment

Motion made by Alan Kahle to adjourn.

Second by Lanna Hubbard.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Minutes of January 23, 2026

Nebraska State Fair Approved:

Date: February 20, 2026

By:



John McKeever, Board Secretary