



NEBRASKA STATE FAIR BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 20, 2025

The Annual meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was held on Friday, June 20, 2025 at 1:00 pm at Nebraska State Fair Administrative Offices in Grand Island, NE. Public notice of this meeting was published in the Grand Island Independent newspaper on June 13 & 14, 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, via Zoom; Dawn Caldwell; Anna Castner Wightman, via Zoom; Kevin Havlovic; Kevin Jorgensen; Alan Kahle; Kathleen Lodi, and Beth Smith. Absent: Tom Dinsdale, Ryan Hassebrook.

Others in attendance:

Jaime Parr, Executive Director; Breanna Fanta, Executive Administrator; Tammy Baker, Business Administrator; Lindsey Koepke, 1868 Foundation; Joe Stump, AMGL; Nicki Stoltenberg, Sponsorship Director; Tina Thuernagle, Operations Director; Kourtney Lingeman, Competitive Exhibits Manager; Karli Schulz, Entertainment & Events Director; Keaton Irwin, Sales Director; Carla Warneke, Box Office and Volunteer; and R.J. Post, Grand Island Independent.

The June meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was called to order by Chairman, Boyd Strope. Boyd 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.

Chairman, Boyd Strope recognized a former Board member in the audience, Bob Haag.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion made by Kevin Havlovic for Approval of Consent Agenda, which included Regular Meeting Minutes of May 16, 2025.

Second by Alan Kahle.

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

Financial Report by Joe Stump

John McKeever moved to approve May Financials as presented.

Second by Dawn Caldwell.

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve passed unanimously.

Presentation of the Ronnie Miller Ambassador of Agriculture Award by Vaughn Sievers, Agriculture Director.

Surrounded by family, Janelle Stelk accepted the award.

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

- No report

FFA Report by Ryan Hassebrook (absent)

- No report

4-H Report by Kathleen Lodi

- Big Red Camps on campus a week ago (150 kids)
- Premiere Animal Science event – Nebraska State Fair in attendance
 - Livestock Judging Contest
 - Skill-a-thon
 - Meat Identification Contest
 - Poultry Contest
 - Quiz Bowl
 - Companion Animal Contest
 - Animal Welfare Contest (new)
- Shooting Sports National Events (today, tomorrow and Monday)
- Prepping now for County Fairs that start in a few weeks.
- Raising Nebraska Open House (next Friday, 11 – 1:00)

Executive Report by Boyd Strope

- No report

HR Report by Beth Smith

- No report

Staff Department Reports

Events Report by Karli Schulz

- Two interns joined Events team.
- Olivia is leaving next week for another opportunity.
- Ticket sales doing well. Top 3 sellers:
 - Righteous Brothers
 - Matthew West w/Josiah Queen
 - Skillet and Theory of a Dead Man
- Fun concert update to be released next week.
- Grand Marshalls selected with the help of the Events Committee
 - Jeff Kliment: Grand Marshall on County Fair Day
 - Others confirmed so far (4 of 5):
 - Doyle Wolverton of Lancaster County
 - David Ferentz of Valley County
 - Scott Russman of Dawson County
 - Major General Craig Strong for Veterans Day, Adjunct General of Nebraska National Guard
- 3,200 students and teachers registered for Nebraska's Largest Classroom
- 61 marching bands registered
- 60 different performing groups from 29 different cities, towns and villages across the state

- 325 registered marathon runners so far across 23 states (including Massachusetts and Rhode Island)
- Bobbie the Barker has a new home this year (being placed as we speak).

Operations by Tina Thuernagle

- Where Bobbie's tent used to be, her new house is there now.
- GILCA update
 - Shorthorn staff is on campus and some Nebraska exhibitors.
 - The rest of the shorthorns will load tomorrow starting at 5 pm.
- ARPA 2 moving along smoothly.
- Capital Purchases: completing list according to procurement and purchase improvement policy that Board approved.
- Focus for June and July: State Fair & GILCA
 - Mowing
 - New sidewalk edger purchased.
 - GILCA setup – expecting over 2,000 dairy goats
- ARPA, Director and weekly staff meetings

Agriculture Report by Vaughn Sievers

- Thanked Board for the time to present the Ronnie Miller Ambassador Award.
- Received award Saturday in Valentine, Nebraska at State High School Finals Rodeo, High School Rodeo of the Year. Secretary and Stock Contractor accepted the Award on behalf of the Nebraska State Fair.
- DNA – intern, Gabby working with Tyler.
- Scale SOP – thanks to Dawn and John for helping with this.
- All Aksarben DNA and nominations are due July 1.
- Broilers for Aksarben due July 15.

Sales Report by Keaton Irwin

- Community Outreach hours update
 - Staff – 158 hours to date (this year)
 - County Fair Tour update
- Space contract update, going well - many payments received.
- New & Unique Food Contest – evolving
 - Elephant Ears
 - Santa Maria Tri-Tip Pizza
 - Lobster Mac 'n Cheese
 - Donut Grilled Cheese with Bacon
 - Peanut Butter & Jelly Wings
 - So much more
 - Expanded from 6 to 9 each (savory and sweet)
 - Emphasis on awards (WWE Championship belt)
- Thanked Jaime and Board for support and leadership.

Marketing Report by Courtney Glock

- NSF still relevant as demonstrated on new and social media recently.
- Working with Jaime and Executive Committee to make sure that the messages coming out on behalf of Nebraska State Fair are timely and accurate, and respectful of all our partners on campus; ARPA is a TEAM effort. False narratives and some posts are being taken out of context. Doing our best to make sure public is well-informed and make sure everyone knows where to find information if they want to learn more.

- **Video shared with City Council regarding ARPA project (worked with Spencer Schubert to produce). Press release has been shared out to media.**
 - Additional shade, permanent seating, green space
 - Shows Baracuda system (underground drainage) will soon be covered with concrete.
 - Interviews with Jaime, Chris Kotulak (Fonner Park), and Brian (Olsson)
- **Public relations in the past week. Thanked staff for positive response to some potential negativity.**
- **Fair is 63 days away!**
 - **Social media advertising: free entertainment, foods**
 - **Big push of sponsored advertising will start about 6 weeks before Fair.**
 - Concerts
 - Ag – Livestock, Competitive Exhibits
- **Sea Lions featured on our social media today**
- **Signage updates around grounds**
- **Survey investments – giveaways available for the longer surveys**
- **Capital improvements – signage**
- **Nebraska Tourism match grant for out of state marketing**
- **Multi-year project (Capital improvements): foyer downstairs in Nebraska Building**

Sponsorship Report by Nichole Stoltenberg

- **Welcome Center and campus permanent lighting by Trimlight**
- **New leads and potential sponsors for Nebraska State Fair and Aksarben Stock Show**
- **Secured \$870,000 collected and invoiced. \$605,000 in In-Kind donations**
- **Stock Show donations \$234,000 secured so far.**

1868 Foundation by Lindsey Koepke

- **Financial update**
- **Annual meeting of Trustees last week**
 - Tom Middleton was reappointed for another 3-year term
 - Appointed new Board member, Kevin Cook.
 - Honored Jeff and Sue Koch with the Excellence in 1868 Society Award
 - Honored Steve White with Lifetime Friend of the Fair Award.
- **Fundraising, grant writing,**
- **Blue Ribbon Cookoff – Silent and Live Auction**
- **Thanked Jaime for speaking to their group last week.**
- **Handed out 1868 Foundation fundraising packets.**

Executive Director's Report by Jaime Parr

- **Spoke of Steve White and the Award he received at 1868 Foundation Annual meeting of Trustees.**
- **Continuing regular weekly staff meetings (share all financial information, specifically accounts payable), encourage feedback and input from full staff team.**
- **Many changes in the Fair's business model/financial processes in the last six years. Policies, procedures and practices have evolved.**
 - **Board Minutes, Financials, Annual Audits are posted on our website**
 - **Invested in 3rd party payroll, accounting and bookkeeping firm**
 - **RFP policy and practice**
 - **Financial controls in place**
 - **Procurement policy for staff team**
 - **Extended financial accountability and budget participation process to each department**
 - **Weekly staff and Board review of payables before payments are made**
 - **Positive Pay Program through 5 Points Bank**
 - **Monthly in-depth finance review**
 - **Utilizing actual reports pulled from our bookkeeping program**

- Internship and work swap programs
- Flower Planting Day and maintenance program
- Stakeholders meeting held once monthly
 - Shorthorns on campus now
 - 4-H Shooting Sports next week
 - Dairy Goat Show coming up
 - Hall County Fair
 - Nebraska State Fair
 - Casino doing sectional repaving
 - Casino spa is open
 - 4th of July Show
 - Working through RFP for wayfinding signage on campus
- County Fair Tour (11 Fairs on Tour sheet)
 - Bertrand Days
 - Clay County Fair
 - Boone County Fair
 - Madison County Fair
 - Kearney County Fair
 - Lincoln County Fair
 - Hall County Fair
 - Scott's Bluff County Fair
 - Saunders County Fair
 - Holt County Fair
 - Nemaha County Fair
- Staff Volunteerism (today at Heartland United Way)
- Staff well-prepared for 2025 Fair
- ARPA construction update
 - Presented at City Council on June 10th
 - Asked City to support improvements to the campus that benefit the City's owned assets (Heartland Events Center is owned by the City)
 - The projects we presented are those that are not eligible for ARPA grant funds.
 - The memorandum of September 2023 suggests that the City would consider and evaluate any projects not eligible for ARPA.
 - 2.6 million gap is reduced from 7.5 million (65%)
 - NSF Finance Committee is considering how we could cover gap if funds don't come through or are not timely; but allowing time for City to consider their support. Work is taking place now.
- Reminders
 - Next meeting July 18, 2025
 - Board Participation Schedules provided
- Thank yous
 - Breanna Fanta – Executive Administrator
 - State Fair Board – Ag Committee
 - Courtney Glock – significant communications success this week
 - Whole State Fair Staff Team

Other Business

- None

Kevin Havlovic moved to adjourn.

Second by Tom Schellpeper.

All in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Minutes of June 20, 2025
Nebraska State Fair Approved:
Date: July 18, 2025

By: John R McKeever
John McKeever, Board Secretary