



**NEBRASKA STATE FAIR BOARD**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Friday, March 20, 2026**

The meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was held on Friday, March 20, 2026 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 March 12, 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 Strope, Chair; Tom Schellpeper, Vice Chair (via Zoom); Lanna Hubbard, Treasurer (via Zoom); Dawn Caldwell; Anna Castner Wightman (via Zoom); Tom Dinsdale (via Zoom); Ryan Hassebrook (via Zoom); Kevin Havlovic; Mark Hesser (via Zoom); Alan Kahle; Kathleen Lodl (via Zoom); and Scott Russman. Absent: John McKeever, Secretary (McKeever joined the meeting via Zoom during the financial report).

Others in attendance: Jaime Parr, Executive Director; Karli Bartz, Entertainment & Events Director; Hayley Eriksen, Marketing & Hospitality Manager; Courtney Glock, Marketing Director; Keaton Irwin, Sales Director; Breanna Kozisek, Business Administrator; Vaughn Sievers, Agriculture Director; Nicki Stoltenberg, Sponsorship Director; Tina Thuernagle, Operations Director; Cindy Johnson, Consultant; Lindsey Koepke, 1868 Foundation Executive Director (via Zoom); RJ Post, Grand Island Independent; Joe Stump, AMGL; and public guests.

Strope 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.

The March 20 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 on-site posting location of the Open Meetings Act.

Chairman Boyd Strope welcomed new board members Mark Hesser and Scott Russman to the meeting.

Strope asked for prayers with the ongoing Nebraska fires.

Strope made verbal amendment to the agenda by opening the floor to public comment, to which there was none.

**Approval of Consent Agenda**

**Motion made by Kevin Havlovic for Approval of Consent Agenda, which included Regular Meeting Minutes of February 20, 2026.**

**Second by Alan Kahle.**

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

**Financial Report by Joe Stump, AMGL**

**Dawn Caldwell moved to approve the February 2026 Financials as presented.**

**Second by Tom Schellpeper.**

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve passed unanimously.

### **Committee Assignments & Annual Board Agreements**

- Strope announced that the 2026 committee assignments were sent out and provided in the board member packets present.
- Strope also announced that annual board member agreements were delivered for review and need signed by all board members. The agreements included the Nebraska State Fair Board of Director's Code of Conduct, Code of Communications, and Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form.

### **Committee & Staff Reports**

#### **Events Report by Anna Castner Wightman and Karli Bartz**

- The committee met that morning to review events and highlight how the board is involved in those events.
  - The timing of certain events was discussed, such as the Board Reunion, County Fair Day, and Grand Marshal Reception, on the first Saturday.
- Tickets went on sale this week for the first announcement of the 2026 State Fair concert series.
  - The Christian concert was announced headlining Phil Wickham with Jamie MacDonald.
  - More tickets were sold in the first two and half days than any other concert in the first four weeks since Karli Bartz started working at the Fair.
  - It was a very good introduction to the concert lineup.
- Excitement was shared for the rest of the shows as they are announced.
- Anna Castner Wightman shared how Karli continues to work on 2026 Fair events. There are a couple ideas for a keynote speaker on Veterans Day, but anyone with ideas were encouraged to let Karli or Anna know.

#### **Facilities Planning & Operations Report by Tom Schellpeper and Tina Thuernagle**

- The committee met that morning.
- Discussions were had about the ARPA projects, including the west lot. Everything is going as planned in that area.
- GILCA was also discussed as the team has worked with Fonner Park for their Fair needs with the 2026 shows.
  - The two groups worked together on the load-in and load-out process.
- The committee talked about securing items for this year's Fair from the Beyond the Budget proposal and following the State Fair's procurement policy.
- Last year the Board was challenged to take photos on the jumping pillow. This year's challenge is for the Board to take photos with the new photo-ops that will be on grounds.
  - Be sure to tag the State Fair when posting to socials.
- There will be an extended longhorn cattle display in 2026. While their show completes in the first weekend, there will be a portion of longhorns on display all 11-days of Fair in 2026.
- The llamas and alpacas will have a new location at the 2026 Fair. Work is underway on those pen changes and details.
- The internal operations team meets weekly to align priorities and set goals. These meetings keep everyone on the same page and give opportunity to address any challenges.
  - Appreciation was extended to Brent Shaw and Brian Hoffman – both on the internal operations team – for their consistent effort in making those meetings productive.
- Shout-out was given to everyone on the Fair team for sharing feedback and insights during one-on-one meetings. The input is helpful for planning, layouts, and set-ups which are key for operations department.
- Thanks were given to everyone for their effort and support.
- Thuernagle looks forward to making "It All Happen Here."

#### **Agriculture Report by Dawn Caldwell and Vaughn Sievers**

- **The Ag committee held three meetings – Monday night (review the 2026 Rules), Thursday night (review SOP), and this morning (general Ag Committee meeting).**
  - **Sievers extended thanks to the whole Ag committee for their commitment and participation in those meetings.**
  - **Thanks were extended to Dawn Caldwell for their work on the SOP and Boyd Strobe for extra work on Rules review.**
  - **Thanks were extended to Kathleen for the extra time devoted to putting on the birthing pavilion, P/L conversations, and funding ideas.**
  - **Thanks were extended to John McKeever for helping with the SOP and Scales as well.**
  - **Thanks were extended to Lanna Hubbard for extra time spent creating an idea of plan to close the barns overnight, as being considered by the Ag committee.**
- **Reminder was given on some upcoming dates worth the board’s attention.**
  - **FFA Convention is March 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> in Lincoln, where the board is welcome to attend and join the Fair team at the State Fair booth / Quiz Bowl contest.**
  - **The Historic Aksarben Boosters Sale goes live on Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup> where various items will be up for sale from livestock materials, indoor football & rodeo tickets, livestock reproduction, and more.**
    - **Board is welcome to bid on items, if they choose, and are encouraged to share the sale with those they know.**
    - **Caldwell also mentioned a cash donation option as well.**
- **Meetings have also been held recently regarding the Champion and Reserve Champion livestock from the 2025 State Fair and Aksarben Stock Show. Caldwell shared that the board’s consideration would be needed on the recommended sanctions produced by the State Fair’s Ag committee.**
  - **The Nebraska State Fair and Aksarben Stock Show have livestock exhibitor rules and regulations intended to foster fair competition, to provide a level playing field among exhibitors, to promote animal welfare, and to protect the integrity of our nation’s food supply system. Certain animals, winners as well as some randoms, are tested each year after they are exhibited.**
  - **The 2025 Nebraska State Fair and 2025 Aksarben Stock Show unfortunately had several animals test positive for various prohibited substances and/or had carcass abnormalities that indicated actions contrary to animal welfare and YQCA (Youth for Quality Care of Animals) protocols.**
  - **Under the Fair’s current rules, the Ag subcommittee makes an initial determination, and the exhibitor has the right to appeal that determination in a full hearing before the Ag subcommittee, which hears the testimony and reviews the evidence before making a recommendation to this full State Fair Board.**
  - **Caldwell announced that the recommendations would be shared with respect to four animals and exhibitors at the 2025 Nebraska State Fair and another four animals and exhibitors at the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show. A motion would be made at the end to accept the Ag subcommittee’s recommendations on all eight animals.**
  - **Caldwell started with the 2025 Nebraska State Fair animals and exhibitors.**
    - **Animal identification number ending in 167 was at the 2025 Nebraska State Fair.**
      - **Urine testing conducted by Texas A&M showed the animal tested positive for Flunixin, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug. The animal’s carcass was condemned as a result.**
      - **The Ag subcommittee held a hearing on Monday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026, on the appeal filed by the exhibitor. After considering the evidence, the Ag committee found the exhibitor provided sufficient evidence that the Flunixin was not at a level where showroom performance could have been enhanced.**
      - **The Ag subcommittee recommended the following.**

- **Should the exhibitor have animals or exhibit animals at future Nebraska State Fairs, such animals shall be subject to periodic and random testing. The exhibitor shall reimburse the Nebraska State Fair for the charge the Fair was assessed for the disposal of the condemned carcass.**
- **Animal identification number ending in 116 was at the 2025 Nebraska State Fair.**
  - **Testing conducted by Texas A&M revealed the animal serum tested positive for Zilpaterol and Procaine.**
  - **The exhibitor denied administering those substances to the animal, but in lieu of an appeal, the exhibitor agreed to the following as part of a stipulated agreement.**
    - **The animal be disqualified for the 2025 Nebraska State Fair. The exhibitor shall forfeit all premium and carcass monies for the animal. The exhibitor shall return to the Nebraska State Fair the banner and awards issued to the exhibitor for the animal. The exhibitor shall not, from the date of this agreement forward, publish, declare, or infer in any way, whether in writing, orally, electronically, such as social media or a website, or otherwise, that the exhibitor exhibited the Lamb at the 2025 State Fair. Photographs of the animal and the exhibitor's exhibition of the animal shall be removed from Nebraska State Fair and Legacy Photography's website and gallery. The exhibitor is banned from exhibiting at the 2026 Nebraska State Fair. Should the exhibitor exhibit animals after the 2026 Nebraska State Fair, such animals shall be subject to periodic and random testing. The exhibitor shall reimburse the Nebraska State Fair for the charge the Fair was assessed for disposal of the animal's condemned carcass.**
- **Animal identification number ending in 072 was at the 2025 Nebraska State Fair.**
  - **Testing conducted by Texas A&M revealed the animal serum tested positive for Zilpaterol. Moreover, upon harvest, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Meat Lab and Diagnostic Lab discovered evenly spaced injection needle marks along the loin edge and around the dock on both sides of the carcass and the carcass was therefore disposed.**
  - **The exhibitor denied administering Zilpaterol to the animal, but in lieu of an appeal, the exhibitor agreed to the following as part of a stipulated settlement.**
    - **The animal be disqualified for the 2025 Nebraska State Fair. The exhibitor shall forfeit all premium and carcass monies for the animal. The exhibitor shall return to the Nebraska State Fair the banner and awards issued to the exhibitor for the animal. The exhibitor shall not, from the date of this agreement forward, publish, declare, or infer in any way, whether in writing, orally, electronically, or otherwise, that the exhibitor exhibited the Lamb at the 2025 Nebraska State Fair. Photographs of the animal and exhibitor's exhibition of the animal shall be removed from the Nebraska State Fair and Legacy Photography website and gallery. The exhibitor is banned from exhibiting at the 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, and 2030 Nebraska State Fairs. Should the exhibitor exhibit animals after the 2030 Nebraska State Fair, such animals shall be subject to periodic and random testing. The exhibitor shall reimburse the Nebraska State Fair for the charge the State Fair was assessed for disposal of the animal's condemned carcass.**
- **Animal identification number ending in 068 was at the 2025 Nebraska State Fair.**

- **The animal was harvested and fabricated at the University of Nebraska Meat Lab, which discovered abnormalities in both legs in similar locations and separation of muscle seams and the appearance of “pockets” in the muscle tissue.**
- **The exhibitor denied injecting the animal prior to the show to improve show ring performance but was cooperative throughout the investigation. Further investigation revealed that a third-party administered calcium gluconate without the exhibitor’s knowledge or consent. In lieu of an appeal, the exhibitor agreed to the following as part of a stipulated settlement.**
  - **The animal has been disqualified for the 2025 Nebraska State Fair. The exhibitor shall forfeit all premium and carcass monies for the animal. The exhibitor shall return to Nebraska State Fair the banner and awards issued for the animal. The exhibitor shall not publish or infer in any way, whether in writing, orally, electronically, or otherwise, that the exhibitor exhibited the Goat at the 2025 Nebraska State Fair. Photographs of the animal and exhibitor’s exhibition of the show animal shall be removed from the Nebraska State Fair and Legacy Photography website and gallery. The exhibitor is banned from exhibiting at the 2026 Nebraska State Fair. Should the exhibitor bring animals after the 2026 Nebraska State Fair, such animals shall be subject to periodic and random testing. The exhibitor shall reimburse the Nebraska State Fair for the charge the State Fair was assessed for disposal of the animal’s condemned carcass.**
- **Caldwell moved onto the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show animals and exhibitors next.**
  - **Animal identification number ending in 134 was at the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show.**
    - **Testing by the UNL Meat Lab and Veterinary Diagnostic Center revealed significant carcass abnormalities, including yellowish bruising and lesions resulting from injections administered within four to seven days of slaughter.**
    - **The initial determination by the Ag subcommittee was not appealed by the exhibitor, and which were recommended be approved by this board as follows.**
      - **The animal has been disqualified for the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show. That includes the photos from the official photographer to be removed from the website and no champion recognition in the Row of Champions and website. The exhibitor shall forfeit all premium monies and carcass monies for the animal. The exhibitor shall reimburse the Aksarben Stock Show/Nebraska State Fair for the charge assessed for disposal of the animal’s carcass. The exhibitor is banned from exhibiting at the 2026, 2027, and 2028 Aksarben Stock Shows. Should the exhibitor exhibit animals after the 2028 Aksarben Stock Show, such animals shall be subject to periodic and random testing. Finally, all banners and awards received for exhibiting the animal at Aksarben must be returned.**
  - **Animal identification number ending in 42 was at the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show.**
    - **Testing revealed the animal’s eyeball tested positive for Clenbuterol and Zilpaterol and the animal’s carcass showed extensive bruising in the lower left leg and bruising and/or injection lesions in the loin and dock.**

- **The exhibitor denied administering those substances to the animal and any knowledge of the carcass conditions but, in lieu of an appeal, the exhibitor agreed to the following as part of a stipulated agreement.**
  - **The animal has been disqualified for the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show. The exhibitor shall forfeit all premium monies and carcass monies for the animal. The exhibitor shall return to Aksarben Stock Show/Nebraska State Fair the banner and ribbon issued to the exhibitor for the animal. The exhibitor shall not, going forward, publish, declare, or infer in any way, whether in writing, orally, electronically, or otherwise, that the exhibitor exhibited the Lamb at the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show. Photographs of the animal and exhibitor's exhibition of the animal shall be removed from the AksarbenStockShow.org website and Legacy Photography website and gallery. The exhibitor is banned from exhibiting at the Aksarben Stock Show indefinitely. The exhibitor shall reimburse the Aksarben Stock Show/Nebraska State Fair for the charge that was assessed for disposal of the animal's condemned carcass.**
- **Animal identification number ending in 93 was at the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show.**
  - **Serum testing conducted by Texas A&M showed the animal tested positive for Meloxicam. Meloxicam is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug. In the United States, Meloxicam is not approved by the FDA for use in any food-producing species and the carcass was condemned. In addition, the UNL Meat Lab discovered abnormal tissue with yellow-tinted fluid in the hind legs and a bruise on the lower right leg.**
  - **The exhibitor appealed the Ag subcommittee's initial recommendation, and an appeal hearing was held on Monday, March 2, 2026. After considering the evidence, the Ag subcommittee found that the exhibitor did not meet their burden of proof and recommends to the State Fair Board that the following sanctions be implemented.**
    - **The animal be disqualified along with all privileges that go along with the recognition. Exhibitor premium monies and carcass monies be withheld. The exhibitor will reimburse for the carcass disposal fee. A three-year ban be implemented on exhibiting at the Aksarben Stock Show. Any animals exhibited after 2028 would be subject to periodic and random testing. Banners and all awards received be returned.**
- **Animal identification number ending in 016 was at the 2025 Aksarben Stock Show.**
  - **The animal's carcass had significant abnormalities, including yellow-tinted weepy serum-y abnormalities and bruising and lesions in the mid loin region and right leg.**
  - **The exhibitor did not appeal the initial determination of the Ag subcommittee and the committee recommends the full board approve the following sanctions.**
    - **The animal be disqualified along with all privileges that go along with recognition. The exhibitor premium monies and carcass monies be withheld. The exhibitor reimburses the Aksarben Stock Show/Nebraska State Fair for the carcass disposal fee. A three-year ban be implemented on exhibiting at the Aksarben Stock Show. Any animals exhibited after 2028 would be subject to periodic and random testing. Banners and all awards received be returned.**
- **Dawn Caldwell moved to approve these recommendations of the Ag subcommittee.**

- **Second by Kevin Havlovic.**
- **Discussion was shared between the board members.**
  - Anna Castner Wightman asked if it was normal to have these many infractions in one event season.
  - Dawn Caldwell shared that this was the most amount of infractions since their service on the State Fair Board, but there is usually something every year.
- **Upon roll call vote, motion was carried.**
- **Boyd Strobe shared that it was an unfortunate year that these exhibitors put the Board in this position. Strobe further shared the hope that there are not this many next year, but if there is, the enforcement and sanction process will continue.**
- **Strobe extended thanks to Vaughn Sievers for the work put into these tests and communication. Kudos were also extended to Dawn Caldwell for handling the appeal meetings very professionally.**
- **Caldwell shared that it was very tough sometimes but that Fair and Aksarben Stock Show must continue doing the right things for the right reasons.**
- **Kevin Havlovic shared hope that with the Fair communicating with other shows everyone will be on the same page and exhibitors will discover these infractions to not be worth it.**
- **The Ag committee had also put a lot of time into rules and regulations.**
  - **Discussion was had about the amount of weight put on these rules and regulations with respect to 4-H and FFA as well.**
  - **All the board members were given copies of the updated livestock rules and regulations for the Nebraska State Fair and Aksarben Stock Show.**
  - **Caldwell gave kudos to Boyd's work in this effort to update the livestock rules and regulations.**
  - **Caldwell moved to approve the updated Nebraska State Fair and Aksarben Stock Show Livestock Rules and Regulations.**
  - **Second by John McKeever.**
  - **Alan Kahle asked if anything had changed from year to year.**
    - **Caldwell explained the language in the rules and regulations changed. There were also changes made to the internal guidelines through updating the standard operating procedures. While the livestock rules and regulations exist, there is an internal process to executing those rules and regulations. Changes were made to both the rules and regulations and that internal process.**
    - **Strobe mentioned that one of the year-to-year changes included the separation of DNA submissions for Nebraska State Fair and the Aksarben Stock Show – exhibitors must supply two separate DNA submissions even if they attend both events.**
    - **Sievers expanded further to explain how entry fees have increased for the Aksarben Stock Show, changes**
    - **Sievers expanded further to explain how some changes have specifically been made to the Aksarben Stock Show. Entry fees have increased for the show, pen panels will be sold to interested exhibitors and potentially adding YQCA to the stock show to improve quality assurance.**
  - **Upon roll call vote, motion was carried.**

#### **FFA Report by Ryan Hassebrook**

- **Thanks were extended, on behalf of FFA, to the Ag committee and full board for standing for youth and working to ensure fair competition.**
- **The Nebraska State FFA Convention was highlighted again encouraging board members to celebrate youth, agriculture, and FFA as it collides in Lincoln.**

- Programming for the 2026 Nebraska State Fair continues so more details will come after the FFA State Convention completes.

#### 4-H Report by Kathleen Lodi

- Thanks were extended to the Ag committee and full board for supporting to development of young people. It's displeasing that so many exhibitors chose not to follow the rules. The 4-H organization will continue to work on that, and quality assurance will remain a high point of the organization.
- Everyone was invited to "Tater Tales" at Raising Nebraska the upcoming Monday. It's one of the organization's monthly events running from 4 pm to 6 pm.
- Mention was also made about the Huskers winning [basketball] game the night before – Go Big Red!

#### Finance Report by Boyd Strobe

- A committee meeting was held that morning.
- Discussion was had about moving a family scholarship with Aksarben away from the Fair.
  - Appreciation was shared for the family stepping up and giving that scholarship award, but it doesn't fit into the Fair's financial capacity.
- A business/LLC transition with GILCA continues.
- The committee also discussed the State Fair's birthing pavilion as it is unique compared to other fairs.
  - UNL is not able to fund to the same capacity in 2026. They have been funding about \$35,000 and in 2026, they will be able to support about \$4,500.00.
  - The finance committee agreed that it would be in our best interest to try doing everything possible to maintain the birthing pavilion through finding funding for it. Recognizing that the Fair will need to absorb any not-covered fees in 2026 and re-evaluate the level of the experience again before 2027.
- Improvements will be made to the US Foods Arena with increased seating options.
  - Thanks were extended to Tom Schellpeper and Tina Thuernagle in the operations committee for their work on that project.
  - The 1868 Foundation is very interested in helping fund the addition of two permanent bleachers (flanking the existing).

#### Sales Report by Keaton Irwin

- Irwin shared a Happy March Madness, making points toward the strong Husker fans in the room.
- Update was shared on the campground area.
  - During the 2025 Nebraska State Fair there were 600 campers who stayed at the campground during the 11 days of Fair. Those campers come from 28 different states.
    - Set Your Sites – a campground management software – has made it easy to track some of these numbers which has been a nice benefit.
  - Reservations for this year have been open for about 14 days, starting March 6th, and numbers have already appeared eye-staggering.
    - Compared to 2024, revenue is up 266% in the month of March alone so far.
    - Compared to 2025, revenue is up 64%.
  - These numbers indicate that people are excited about the State Fair even if it's the beginning of the year and Fair is months away.

- Appreciation was extended to Dustin and Stacy with Set Your Sites for getting the campground set up and in a good place.
- An update was shared about vendor spaces.
  - About 82 front feet of space were added in the Pinnacle Bank Expo. The vendor layout on the north wall will be mirrored on the south side.
    - All the spaces that were created with that addition have already been assigned.
  - Food pod eight along in the Grand District will shift to the east one section, allowing for a transition into additional shopping pod.
    - Twelve new 20x20 vendor spaces will be placed in that area with three spaces already sold.
  - People are buying into the vision, and we are excited for the expansion.
- Some 2026 Nebraska State Fair teasers were also shared.
  - Moo U Guided Livestock Tours will be back in 2026. They weren't at the Fair in 2025.
  - Two new vendor concessionaires will be attending the 2026 Fair.
    - Wonder Lobster is a marine cuisine vendor that will have items like lobster tails to crawfish and cheesy loaded fries.
    - Taste of Germany is another new vendor that will offer fried sauerkraut balls, brats, and more.
  - The Fair is sitting at a really good spot with vendors and more will be shared in the coming months.

#### Marketing Report by Courtney Glock

- The 2026 Nebraska State Fair concerts are being announced on a five-week roll-out. A new show is announced every Tuesday.
  - Information about the roll-out is shared in the Fair Fans newsletter and announcements are being made via radio ads.
- Update was shared about some fair friends.
  - Glock touched on how many great relationships are made through the State Fair.
  - Last year Glock met Kendri, an 11-year-old from Sargent, NE with osteosarcoma. Staff made it possible for Kendri to meet her favorite band backstage, Skillet, ahead of their concert. It was a great show, and Kendri had the best time.
    - Kendri was put on hospice last fall around the holiday season and passed away last month.
    - There are many cool people that we get to meet at the Nebraska State Fair. Meeting Kendri and her family was one of the coolest experiences last year.
  - Sterling, another fair friend, is from Cairo, NE and saw himself on the billboard outside of Phillips, NE.
    - Sterling asked his parents to pull over and take a photo of him, dubbing himself the "Corndog King," and offering a teacher an autograph.
    - The Fair sent a food voucher to him, so his next State Fair corndog is on the Fair.
  - A new Fair Friend has also joined the team – Haley Eriksen is the new Marketing & Hospitality Manager for the State Fair.
    - Eriksen shared excitement with working at the Fair, especially having grown up in Grand Island attending the Fair.
- Countdown continues with 160 days until the 2026 Nebraska State Fair.

#### Sponsorship Report by Nicki Stoltenberg

- Work continues with sponsorship deals.
  - Fair has done well and hopes to continue the trend of securing multi-year deals.

- **Update was shared about IEG, the consulting firm that the Fair and 1868 Foundation are jointly working with.**
  - **The Fair was tasked with putting together an annual estimated attendance for 85 unique events at the Nebraska State Fair. They also requested numbers and information about vendor booths.**
  - **Progress is on track for the Fair to receive a preliminary sponsorship package report from IEG at the end of March. A sponsorship asset evaluation analysis and rate card will be available at the of April with final completion set as end of May.**
- **State Fair staff met with Brunning Bank as a new branch opens in Grand Island.**
  - **Dave Richardson, the local branch president, is considered a fair friend to many.**
  - **Sponsorship looks forward to a partnership opportunity with Brunning Bank.**
- **Tesla is another organization looking at attending the 2026 Nebraska State Fair.**
  - **Sponsorship shared excitement about potentially bringing Tesla to this year's Fair.**
- **Shout out was given to Anna Castner Wightman for sharing some contacts.**
  - **Anna shared some valuable contacts that sponsorship was able to reach out to and already make some connections with. Appreciation was shared for Anna.**
  - **Reminders were given to those present that if there are contacts to be shared, be sure to send an email or phone contact to Nicki Stoltenberg.**

#### **Executive Report by Boyd Strobe**

- **No report.**

#### **1868 Foundation Report by Lindsey Koepke**

- **The 1868 Foundation Board met the day before and had a nice meeting.**
  - **Jaime Parr attended the board meeting with the request of funding to make improvements to the US Foods Arena. The funding was approved through the life sponsor giving program.**
- **Reminder was given that the naming rights contract for the US Foods Arena is available next year, which sits under the 1868 Foundation.**
- **An update was given on some donation commitments.**
  - **A commitment of \$80,000+ is out for the 2026 livestock premiums.**
  - **A commitment of \$25,000 is out in support of the volunteer program.**
  - **A donation was given for improvements to "Nana's Garden," by the Welcome Center.**
  - **An additional \$150,000 was added into budget goals to help net zero the AKSS.**
- **About \$400,000 in funds have been committed toward the State Fair and AKSS.**
- **Update was given on the America 250 installment to honor America's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Nebraska State Fair.**
  - **As of the day before, several renderings have been compiled for the sculpture design.**
  - **The goal is to raise money from 25 donors contributing \$10,000 each.**
    - **So far \$40,000 has been committed with an ask for a \$250,000 match with permanent name placement and recognition on the bronze sculpture.**
    - **Money raised will be set aside separately to support youth livestock exhibitors and other funding for Nebraska State Fair and AKSS.**
  - **The sculpture will celebrate America's milestone while giving those who donate the opportunity to leave a legacy.**
- **Work continues with securing grants.**
  - **Thanks were given to Jaime, Nicki, and Courtney for their involvement.**

- **Donor development continues as well.**
  - **Another member has joined the 1868 society with a one-time gift of \$1,868 and an annual renewal to maintain the membership.**
  - **The membership is becoming quite the group and widely attending the events at the Nebraska State Fair and hosted by the Foundation.**
  - **The room was invited to become members of the Foundation. Go Big Give, an upcoming event, is one opportunity that those interested can join the Foundation.**
    - **Gifts given through Go Big Give will be returned to donors through incentives of the same giving power.**
- **Announcement was made that the Foundation's annual meeting of the trustees will be held June 18<sup>th</sup> at the casino. The meeting is a great way for people to see how their dollars are making a difference at the Nebraska State Fair.**

#### **Executive Director Report by Jaime Parr**

- **Thanks were extended to Lindsey Koepke and the entire 1868 Foundation for their support and intent to help by funding improvements.**
- **The Fair continues to maintain transparency as financials are shared on a weekly basis with the staff team and sent to the finance committee. Payables are reviewed weekly before checks are printed.**
- **ARPA is progressing.**
  - **Improvements in the west parking lots continue and are scheduled to be completed before August 01.**
  - **Discussions continue about which final projects will fit the ARPA requirements. The goal is to utilize the full grant of \$20 million, which the Fair is on track with.**
  - **All reimbursements must be completed before the end of the year so projects will largely be done before this year's Fair.**
- **Beyond the Budget projects are coming along.**
  - **Projects on this list were approved by the board outside of the budget.**
  - **Appreciate was extended to the board for their confidence in those special projects.**
- **The Fair's annual audit is nearing completion.**
  - **Praise was extended to Jennifer Stump with AMGL and Breanna Kozisek, Business Administrator, for their work toward that audit.**
  - **Forvis Mazars will present details to the full board at the April meeting.**
- **The Fair submitted its renewal for general liability insurance. The new plan coverage will take effect in June.**
- **Update was shared on the Fair's safety and security implementation.**
  - **Parr met with the State Patrol to secure the Omaha Police Department's vehicle barriers again for the 2026 Fair.**
  - **Discussions were also had with the State Patrol about extra monitoring during Fair.**
    - **There are almost 300 cameras on grounds but are often used for responsive action not preventative.**
    - **The State Patrol agreed to have someone watching the cameras ahead of time so the Fair can be more proactive.**
  - **Drones as first responders will be coming back to the Fair as well.**
  - **Appreciation was extended to the Nebraska State Patrol for all that they do to support the safety and well-being of the State Fair.**

- Parr presented on fair safety and security at the IAFE Zone 5 conference in Des Moines, Iowa as hosted by the Iowa State Fair.
  - It was great to meet with fair peers from Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois, and Missouri.
- The Nebraska Association of Farm Managers are beginning their district meetings.
  - Kevin Havlovic with the board will represent the State Fair at the District 2 meeting in Wahoo on Sunday. Thanks were extended to Kevin.
  - Courtney Glock and Keaton Irwin have also signed up to help with district meetings.
  - The goal is to attend all seven district meetings.
- Work progresses on the annual County Fair Tours.
  - The staff team volunteers at various county fairs during the summer.
- Reminders were given about upcoming board meetings.
  - The next board meeting will be April 17<sup>th</sup> in Grand Island.
    - There will be a blanket race at Fonner Park following the board meeting, so those available to stay after the meeting are encouraged to attend.
    - We host the celebration jointly with the 1868 Board, and the Fonner Board will also be invited to join for that special race day.
  - The Volunteer Banquet will be on April 23. All Board members have been invited and are encouraged to attend to support and show appreciation for those who volunteer their time at Fair and AKSS.
  - The following board meeting will be on May 15<sup>th</sup> also in Grand Island.
    - A grounds tour is scheduled for 3 pm the day before, which board members were invited to attend.
- Thanks were extended to the full State Fair Board for being a volunteer board.
  - Their participation is helpful for establishing the future of the Nebraska State Fair.
- Thanks were extended to the staff team as well for all their efforts.
- Boyd Strobe extended thanks to Tina Thuernagle, Operations, for getting the recipe for new dirt in the arena. That work is appreciated.
  - The dirt costs a lot of money but keeps huge associations coming to town and helps bring business to Grand Island. It's a way we contribute to Grand Island business.

#### **Executive Session**

- **Dawn Caldwell moved to enter executive session to protect the public interest so that the Fair Board can discuss negotiation strategy.**
  - **Second by Kevin Havlovic.**
  - **Upon roll call vote, motion was carried.**
  - **The State Fair Board entered executive session at 2:23 pm CST.**
- **Boyd Strobe entertained a motion to exit executive session.**
  - **Dawn Caldwell moved to exit executive session.**
  - **Second by Alan Kahle.**
  - **Upon roll call vote, motion was carried.**
  - **The State Fair Board exited executive session at 2:57 pm.**

#### **Adjournment**

**Motion made by Kevin Havlovic to adjourn.**  
**Second by Tom Schellpeper.**  
**All in favor. Motion carried.**

Minutes of March 20, 2026  
Nebraska State Fair Approved:  
Date: April 17, 2026

By: John R McKeever  
John McKeever, Board Secretary