



NEBRASKA STATE FAIR BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Friday, July 17, 2026

The meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was held on Friday, July 17, 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 July 9th, 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, Chairman; Tom Schellpeper, Vice Chair; Lanna Hubbard, Treasurer (Zoom); John McKeever, Secretary; Alan Kahle; Dawn Caldwell; Kathleen Lodl; Kevin Havlovic (Zoom); Mark Hesser; Ryan Hassebrook; Scott Russman; and Tom Dinsdale. Absent: Anna Castner Wightman.

Others in attendance: Megan Boyd, HR Specialist; Karli Bartz, Entertainment & Events Director; Courtney Glock, Marketing Director; Vaughn Sievers, Agriculture Director; Tina Thuernagle, Operations Director; Lindsey Koepke, 1868 Foundation Executive Director (Zoom); Joe Stump, AMGL; and public guests.

The July 17th meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was called to order by Chairman Boyd Strobe at 1:00 pm.

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

The June 19, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes were amended to correct the following: [On page 2, change Tom Dinsdale to Tom Schellpeper].

Motion to approve the June 19, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes, as amended, was made by John McKeever. Second by Tom Dinsdale.

Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Financial Report by Joe Stump, AMGL

Dawn Caldwell moved to approve the June 2026 Financials as presented.

Second by Alan Kahle

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve passed unanimously.

Committee & Staff Reports

Events Report by Karli Bartz

- Karli Bartz reported. Anna Castner Wightman was absent.
- Reported strong advance ticket sales, including:
 - Over 8,500 carnival wristbands sold.
 - Over 8,500 advance gate admissions sold.
 - More than 15,000 concert tickets sold, approximately 96% ahead of the previous year at the same point.
 - More than 1,000 motorsports tickets sold.

- More than 7,500 students and teachers from approximately 200 Nebraska schools are expected to participate in educational programming.
- Six Grand Marshals were announced.
- Volunteer training is scheduled for August 11 and 13.
- Board members were reminded to submit ticket requests.

Facilities Planning & Operations Report by Tom Schellpeper and Tina Thuernagle

- Tom deferred reporting to Tina Thuernagle.
- Tina reported that fair preparation is well underway.
- Seasonal hiring is progressing well with strong applicant numbers.
- Facility setups have begun.
- ARPA construction projects continue schedule, including:
 - Festoon lighting installation.
 - Storm pipe and grading.
 - Concrete replacements where work is complete.
- Staff continue coordinating closely with GI Expo during the GILCA transition.
- Beyond the Budget progress continues, with current project savings exceeding expectations.
- Board members were encouraged to identify improvements for the 2027 Fair while attending the 2026 event.

Agriculture Report by Dawn Caldwell and Vaughn Sievers

- Dawn deferred to reporting to Vaughn Sievers.
- Ag Team offices will transition into event locations beginning August 1.
- Planning discussions have begun for the 2027 Fair.
- Additional Aksarben revenue opportunities are expected through entry fees, online sales, VIP parking, tie-outs, as well as continuing to identify potential cost savings.
- State Veterinarian guidance regarding Vesicular Stomatitis was reviewed, including new health certificate requirements for livestock arriving from affected states.
- Kourtney Lingeman will be recognized for receiving a Hall County Outstanding 4-H Alumni award this coming Saturday during the Hall County Fair.

FFA Report by Ryan Hassebrook

- FFA entries close on August 10.

4-H Report by Kathleen Lodi

- County fair season is underway statewide.
- State shooting sports and horse events have concluded successfully.
- Preparations continue for the State Fair livestock and youth programs.

Finance Report by Boyd Strobe

- Detailed financial reports.
- Karli presented a detailed ticket sales performance.
- Cindy shared an update on the joint fundraising activities.
- Joe shared ARPA reimbursement updates.
- Cindy shared GI Expo transition progress.
- Campground project funding.

HR Report by Lanna Hubbard

- The Board considered policies that had been under review since the previous meeting

- Motion to approve the Confidentiality & HIPPA Policy discussed.
- Alan Kahle moved to approve the Confidentiality & HIPPA Policy.
- Second by John McKeever
- Upon roll call vote, motion to approve passed unanimously.

Sales Report delivered by Courtney Glock

- Keaton Irwin was absent.
- Fair planning and coordination with local agencies continues.
- Strong commercial vendor interest has resulted in exploring additional vendor locations.
- Approximately 175 Nebraska-based vendors and concessionaires will participate.
- Website and mobile app updates will allow guests to search Nebraska-based vendors and new food offerings.
- New pull-through campground sites are sold out, with limited primitive sites remaining.

Marketing Report by Courtney Glock

- Courtney Glock reported.
- Continued rollout of Fair promotional content and new food announcements.
- A Nebraska artist will create an America 250 mural near Gate 10 during the opening weekend.
- Improvements are being made to Gate 10 and the east entrance experience.
- Website and mobile app enhancements improve mobile usability and vendor search functions.
- The digital Gate Book is available online.
- Staff continue promoting county fairs throughout Nebraska.
- Board members were encouraged to nominate individuals for the Ed Meedle Award.
- 41 days until the Nebraska State Fair.

Sponsorship Report by Courtney Glock

- Nicki Stoltenberg was absent.
- Board members were invited to accompany Nicki and Janet during sponsor visits throughout the Fair to personally thank sponsors and strengthen relationships.

Executive Report by Boyd Strobe

- The Executive Committee met informally to discuss current Fair preparations and future planning initiatives.

1868 Foundation Report by Lindsey Koepke

- Lindsey Koepke reported.
- Lindsey shared condolences regarding the passing of Bob Beener, a longtime Fair vendor. The Foundation continues to perform well financially, with revenue currently exceeding \$550,000 compared to approximately \$270,000 at the same time last year. Much of the increase is attributed to the 250th Anniversary Initiative and bronze sculpture project, which has received significant support. The foundation is poured, and installation of the sculpture is anticipated for mid-to-late August.
- Lindsey reported on upcoming Foundation events during the Fair, including the Blue Ribbon Kickoff – Great Steak Debate, which will serve as the opening night fundraiser. The event will move to the Big Iron Event Center and is expected to have record attendance, with approximately 400 guests. Entertainment will be provided by Exit 312, and Phil Wieck will serve as an auctioneer. Celebrity chefs and sponsors participating include Chef Rhett Peterson, Chef Logan Kent, Jamie Simmons of The Q food truck, Certified Piedmontese, Cargill, JBS, and

other partners. Lindsey encouraged Board members to attend and participate and consider donating auction items.

- The Foundation's Annual Meeting of Trustees will be moved from May to the Fair and held during the VIP Donor Reception on Sunday at 4:00 p.m. in the Loft. Approximately 250 trustees are expected to attend. Awards to be presented include:
 - Lifetime Friend of the Fair Award
 - Excellence in 1868 Society Award
 - Recognition for donors contributing \$10,000 or more
 - Legacy Patriots recognition for supporters of the Ferris wheel and America's Great Gathering Place initiatives
- Lindsey announced upcoming changes to the Foundation Board of Directors, including three new members replacing outgoing members. Confirmed additions include:
 - Bill Olten, President of Fonner Park
 - Michelle Bosch of Bosch Welding
 - She noted that Bosch Welding is a Diamond Level contributor (\$25,000 giving level) and expressed appreciation for their continued support.
- Lindsey encouraged continued participation in Foundation events, support through auction donations, and visits to the State Fair gift shop.

Executive Director Report delivered by Courtney Glock

- Jaime Parr was absent.
- Jaime Parr provided a detailed report for the Board to review in advance of this meeting.
- The Board acknowledged that Executive Director Jamie Parr was attending an industry exchange in Bozeman, Montana, to share ideas and learn best practices with Big Sky Country State Fair.
- Lifetime pass nominees, deadline to submit is Aug 1st, 2026.
- Board participation schedule
- Board meeting schedule changes
- The Nebraska State Fair will provide an updated presentation to the Grand Island City Council on July 28. Board members are invited to attend.
- Upcoming meeting schedule:
 - Opening Day – Friday, August 28 at 9:00 a.m. (Boardroom; no committee meetings)
 - Tuesday, September 1 at 11:00 a.m. (Boardroom)
 - Closing Day – Monday, September 7 at 11:30 a.m. (Boardroom)
 - No Fair Board meeting on September 18
 - October 16 meeting – Fair wrap-up discussion
 - November 20 meeting – Board retreat at the new Chief Industries building in Grand Island
 - ♣ Focus areas will include long-term planning, threats and opportunities, growth opportunities, and future direction of the Nebraska State Fair.
- December 18 meeting – Final-monthly meeting for 2026.

Adjournment

Motion made by Tom Schellpeper to adjourn.

Second by John McKeever.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 1:47 pm.

Nebraska State Fair Approved:
Date: August 28, 2026

By: _____
John McKeever, Board Secretary

UNAPPROVED