

**LINCOLN COUNTY**  
**Fairgrounds Marketing & Usage Meeting**  
**Wednesday, August 21, 6:30 p.m.**  
**Lincoln County Service Center, Room 243**  
**Merrill, Wisconsin 54452**

**NOTES**

1. Call meeting to order

Art Lersch called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. finding the following people in attendance: David Fox, Bill Zeitz, Graham Rankin, Pete Annis, Gene Bebel, Jeff Hetfeld, Brad Becker, and Dale Christiansen.

2. Fairgrounds Updates

Dale Christiansen reported that the Fair Association had not heard any reaction regarding the letter it sent to the county outlining complaints made by some of this year's fair patrons about what they deemed is the poor overall condition of the fairgrounds.

Dale mentioned that over 400 people had signed a petition stating that they support the building of an Expo Center on the fairgrounds. He also said that many people who signed were older citizens, a reflection he asserted on how broad support is for the concept. He reminded those in attendance that the petition is still being circulated throughout the community.

Dale also said that Fair Association members believe they are at a crossroads. They have discussed organizing and administering a Junior Fair, one that includes only animal contests and 4-H exhibits (i.e. no carnival, midway, shows, etc.). If seating was not provided in some form on the fairgrounds, then it would no longer pay to have a carnival and other entertainment. He acknowledged that Fair Association members have heard from fair patrons that they want grandstand type shows to be part of the fair. The danger of conducting only a Junior Fair, he asserted, is that current fair sponsors would pull their support as soon as the decision was made to go that route. If the Association wanted to go back to the type of fair the county has held in the past, it would take years to re-cultivate the sponsorships. Despite this talk, however, Dale reported that Fair Association members agreed to continue for now to pursue a carnival contract for next year's fair.

Jeff Hetfeld stated that he withdrew his letter during the August 20 County Board meeting asking that a formal fairgrounds discussion item be placed soon on a Board meeting agenda. He indicated that he did so because he felt that the letter would prompt unprepared, more informal debate on the subject that evening. He mentioned that he did not think that this would have been productive.

Bill Zeitz stated that the Public Property Committee during its August 19 meeting directed Randy Scholz to do more research on berm system construction. They suggested he contact Marathon County Park and DC Everest for information about their berm seating projects.

### 3. Options for User Group/County Collaboration

The group discussed the following options:

- Have user group representatives make presentation to County Board about what are the current problems they face when hosting events at the fairgrounds (other than the lack of seating)

Those in attendance agreed that such a presentation should take place as soon as possible. Bill Zeitz stated that he would call a reconvening of the September 5 Public Property Committee meeting following the completion of maintenance director interviews (likely at 1:00 p.m.) to discuss with committee members how it should forward a request for such a presentation to the County Board chair. He also mentioned that the issue of building new bathrooms would be placed on that September 5 agenda.

- Work on persuading the county to answer whether it is going to put funding toward improving the grounds (aside from grandstand)
- Revise the rules and procedures for using the fairgrounds so that event organizers and the county are more in collaboration with one another.
- Continue educating the public about fairgrounds issues using local media.
- Use Langlade County Fairgrounds as an example of how a successful fairgrounds is marketed and managed.
- Get back to the basics with the county; How can the group work with the county to replace the bathrooms, make other fairgrounds improvements?
- Develop a possible advisory referendum asking citizens if they want an Expo Center.

4. Expo Center Organization Business Plan

The group discussed the need for creating a narrative business plan based on the information in its PowerPoint presentation. Part of doing this would be to conduct a more formal market analysis. Results of the petition could be used to help form the basis of such an analysis. It was also mentioned that it might be time to ask the state fair manager to help refine the plan. No recent changes to the plan were reported.

5. Expo Center Organization By-Laws; Board Membership

No recent changes to the by-laws were reported. The group discussed the possibility of reducing the proposed size of the Expo Center Authority Board of Directors. Several group members are concerned that 15 may be too many to run an efficient and effective operation.

6. Expo Center Marketing Materials

Pete Annis distributed new materials outlining the Expo Center building and authority concepts. He mentioned that the materials are already being disbursed throughout the community.

7. Next Meeting Date

The group decided to wait to schedule the next meeting. The meeting date and time will be communicated through the UW-Extension facilitator and regular county posting procedures.

8. Adjourn

Motion was made by Dale and seconded by Brad Becker to adjourn. All ayes. The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Notes respectfully submitted by Art Lersch, UW-Extension, Lincoln County.