

Chase County Commissioners

January 18, 2024

The Chase County Commissioners attended the Chase County Fair Board meeting on January 18, 2024 in the Fair Board Office at the Chase County Fair Grounds. The meeting was called to order by Fair Board President Ryan Stromberger at 6:31pm. Present were Commissioners Billie Muehlenkamp, Jacci Brown and Kurt Bernhardt, County Clerk Wendy Moe, Scott Way, Ryan Stromberger, Russ Pankonin, Deputy Mike Dukes, Duane Dinnel, Austin Bernhardt, Caitlyn Pollmann, Janiel Kimble, Traci Space and Lori Beard. The Open Meetings Act was posted and copies of the Fair Board meeting agenda was available. Commissioners had no agenda in place as they were present to answer questions from the Fair Board and discuss any concerns that they had.

Ryan Stromberger stated that the purpose for the Commissioner's attendance was to use this as an informal opportunity to have a question-and-answer forum to clarify points between each Board in a polite and civil manner.

First question brought up by Ryan was that of ground maintenance, specifically what amount is budgeted for that and where do the responsibilities fall? Is it the responsibility of the Fair Board as "tenants" of the Fair Grounds? Commissioner Brown answered to say that the Fair Board is not considered "tenants", they are part of the County. As per the 2023-2024 County Budget document, the Fair Fund has \$80,500 and an additional \$80,000 for Electrical Upgrades. They also get \$500/month to go towards maintenance and upkeep of the Expo Building, this was established to help keep the rental rates of the building reasonable.

As far as the groundskeeping, that is to be budgeted out of the \$80,500 that is in the Fair Fund. Fair Board indicated that this is a paid position, Jacci spoke to Auditor Don Wilson prior to the meeting and Don said his preference that anyone being paid for groundskeeping be an employee and not contract labor. Historically individuals paid for groundskeeping and trash duties have been contract labor and paid out of the Fair Fund. Commissioners and Fair Board may look into making these positions W2 employees rather than 1099 contract labor in future budget years. The Fair Board would need to budget accordingly for these positions.

The next question posed was to ask if money raised to put on the fair through sponsorships should be used for Grounds upkeep. Commissioner Brown answered, stating her personal opinion, would be that she would like to see sponsorship money used to further the fair and help to put on better shows than tax dollars would allow. Tax dollars allocated through the county should be used for Grounds maintenance and upkeep, not sponsorship money.

Traci Space asked for clarification on the recent changes to the rental agreement for the Expo Building as all of the Fair Board was not present at the Commissioner meetings when this was put in place. Commissioner Brown explained that this came about because NIRMA wants liability policies in place for all renters of the Expo Building. This is a low-cost liability agreement that should be purchased through NIRMA by any individuals renting the Expo Building. Commissioners recently learned that no liability policies have been issued for the rental of the Expo Building, in an effort to protect the County and all parties involved, Commissioners decided to change the way rentals of the building happen to ensure that a liability policy is in place. Renters of the building will come to the courthouse road office and get the liability policy through NIRMA with the help of the road secretary who will then collect rental fees and damage deposit and then keys will be issued. After the rental is complete, a member of the Fair Board will inspect the building and notify road secretary of whether or not the damage deposit should be returned. Rental fees for the building will go to the Fair Board.

Fair Board brought up the group who plays Pickleball that uses a building at the Fair Grounds. Should there be an agreement in place for them to use the facility? Commissioners indicated that yes, there should probably be an agreement of some sort in place. County will reach out to NIRMA for guidance on this issue.

The issue of re-keying the buildings at the Fair Grounds was addressed. This is being done so Dispatch will have keys to all buildings. Dispatch has keys to all City and County buildings for instances of emergency. However, they do not have keys to all buildings at the Fair Grounds. Commissioners determined that a good solution to this problem is to have everything re-keyed and then issue master keys and keep record of individuals who have a key. At this time the locks will not be changed on the Expo Building as the entire door will need to be replaced so the old locks will remain on that building for the time being. The County will pay for the re-keying out of the Building & Grounds fund.

Commissioner Brown wanted to address the issue of the Fair Board possibly creating a Foundation. Jacci reached out to Auditor Don Wilson and he indicated that this was not allowable as foundations require "clean" donations, meaning nothing may be given in return. If the Fair Board were to create a Foundation, and continue to give sponsor packages in exchange for sponsorships, as is the current practice, the donations would not be "clean". The idea of creating a Foundation and then using county assets to incentivize people to give donations with the money then being put into an account that the county would have no control over is not acceptable.

Commissioner Bernhardt stated that he wants to encourage all members of the Fair Board to reach out to Commissioners with any questions or concerns. He very much appreciates all Fair Board members and the hard work that they do to put on a great fair each year. He believes that communication between Boards will allow the success of the fair to continue.

Traci Space indicated that the recent appointments and reappointments of Fair Board positions to correctly align district representation seem to have left some hurt feeling and disgruntled people. Commissioners said that as all districts are equally represented and on the correct term cycle now, this will open positions to other potential members when they come available. To clarify terms, there will be one seat up for reappointment in each district each year.

Fair Board members indicated that they would like to have other members attend Commissioner meetings when their presence is requested or required as they feel that not everyone is in the loop by usually having the same people attend meetings. Commissioner said any Fair Board members are welcome to attend meetings, it doesn't have to be only Fair Board officers.

Clarification of the bidding process for county purposes was provided. For purchases less than \$10,000 no County Board approval or bidding is necessary. For amounts from \$10,000-\$50,000 three informal bids are required. Amount over \$50,000 require formal bids to be sought and opened by the County Board of Commissioners.

With no further questions or comments for the Board of Commissioners, Commissioners and County Clerk left the meeting at 7:40pm.

Wendy Moe, Chase County Clerk