



Fairgrounds Advisory Board Minutes

Monday, April 20, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 5:02pm with the following Fairgrounds Advisory Board members in attendance:

Board Members Present: Monique Brigham, Gery Cardenas, Hank Davies, Dorothy Elsner, Gin Learned
Not Present: Robert Desmarais, Kristen Keltz

Staff Members and Representatives: Ken Hansen, Aric Gaither, Frances Negranza

Introduction:

Ken Hansen had a brief introduction in his new role as Director of Parks & Facilities.

A motion was made to approve the March 2026 minutes and seconded. The motion was approved and passed unanimously.

Board Discussion:

State Fair Trainings

Fair Manager Aric attended the WSDA Management Conference on March 27 at the San Juan County Fairgrounds, the next day was Superintendent School in which seven volunteers attended: 6 superintendents and board member Gin Learned. On Monday, March 30th, staff, volunteers and 2 board members attended the “You Make a Difference Tour” at the Evergreen Fairgrounds, a national program, made free by the WSDA, which provides fair boards and volunteers with practical tools, training and inspiration to address today’s challenges in the industry.

Spring Garage Sale

Event took place on April 10-11, went very well and had great press coverage. Fair staff has created an effective template to be able to put on a smooth and organized event. Some rainy weather on Saturday, but overall had good attendance. On Saturday hosted special programs: Free kid’s activities and Skagit EMS handed out free kids bicycle helmets.

Rentals

Rental season has kicked off, recent events include the SICBA Home Show, Veterans Stand Down, Spring Garage Sale and Skagit Wood Expo. Skagit Farmers Supply has a new workshop coordinator who has been in communication with the Fairgrounds looking to book workshops at the Fairgrounds, with one already on the calendar and a potential large event to be scheduled in June. Other grounds usage successes and challenges were discussed.

Partnerships & Entertainment

Currently working with the Children’s Museum of Skagit County and WECU to put together a new free interactive kid’s zone during the Fair. This initiative and creative thinking continues to be part of Fair Staff priorities of providing to most ‘value per hour’ and what is included in the price of general admission to the Fair.



Fairgrounds Fees

Fairgrounds fees will begin going through commissioner approval starting in the 2027 budget season including rental rates, event and admission fees. Fair staff to make proposals to commissioners for rate decisions and approvals. Rate approvals need to be submitted in July/August along with the full budget for hearing in September. 2026 Fair Admission pricing to be set by end of June advisory board meeting and staff looking to Advisory Board for guidance.

Capital Projects/WSDA Grants

New cat and poultry cages have been purchased with a mix of WSDA grant funds, Fairgrounds Foundation contribution and small animal department fundraiser monies. Will purchasing new pig pens and safety signage in time for the 2026 Fair. North fairgrounds paving project will begin in October. Fairgrounds purchased a new (used) golf cart for use around grounds. Remaining projects will be executed in late 2026/ early 2027; electricity and PA upgrades, purchasing of ADA bleachers and safety barriers.

Fundraising

Horse department obtained funds to fully cover cost of horse tent. Goat barn is contributing to cost of the sheep/goat show tent. SPI Foundation has agreed to sponsor/fund two loads of shavings for the Fair. \$2,800 of expected impact so far for very broad community outreach due to tough budget times. There is a continued need for fundraising ahead of the 2026 Fair.

Budget

Discussion over 2026 budgets and 2027 budget preparation season which is coming up soon. Staff discussed shortfalls in 2026 budget and some concern about 2027 budget and how some gaps are to be made up. Rates are on high end of market rate for many Fairgrounds goods, services and experiences and staff does not feel can be raised more than 5-10% in most instances without losing business in future. Fair admission prices were discussed as one option where future large increases might need to happen to produce balanced year-round budget. Some board members expressed concern, from consumer perspective, of people choosing other local events for their summer-time experience if prices were raised too high. Group discussed an ongoing need for continued advocacy as well as public awareness of the high experience value, once inside the gate, of the Fair admission ticket

Vice Chair

Table Vice Chair position vote to May meeting.

Adjourn 6:40pm