



Fairgrounds Advisory Board Minutes

Monday, March 16, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 5:03pm with the following Fairgrounds Advisory Board members in attendance:

Board Members Present: Gery Cardenas, Dorothy Elsner, Kristen Keltz, Gin Learned.

Not Present: Monique Brigham, Robert Desmarais, Hank Davies

Staff Members and Representatives: Aric Gaither, Frances Negranza

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

Board Discussion:

Bylaws

Revision to the bylaws to add vice-chair position were submitted approved by the county.

Upcoming Trainings

WSFA Super School is coming up the last weekend of March at the San Juan County Fairgrounds. Open to superintendents and Fair volunteers. Gin from the Fair board, along with six other superintendents will be attending. Dorothy, Aric and a few superintendents will attend the "You Make A Difference Tour" at the Evergreen Fairgrounds on March 30.

Foundation

Staff provided brief summary of Foundation meeting. The Foundation secured a 50/50 raffle date at the Skagit Speedway, approved to fund registrations for up to 8 attendees for WSFA Super School, obtained a grant to purchase more cat/poultry cages, continue a big fundraising push for their brick campaign, and working with a local FFA group who will donate unsold plants from their annual plant sale to the Fairgrounds.

Sponsorship

Fair staff gave brief update on sponsorships. New and increased sponsors include Skagit Valley College, United General 304, and trade partnerships with Skagit Speedway and Holboy Entertainment.

Event Calendar

Fair staff provided update about events at the Fairgrounds. The Fairgrounds has entered into the start of its busy season starting with the WSU Pesticide Trainings, Craft Fairs, Medieval Faire and upcoming the SICBA Home Show. MS Bike Ride will be returning back to the Fairgrounds, although have moved their dates from September to August which will be a squeeze on staff with major turn-around between the Fair and the beginning of their event.

Board discussion about how to find additional help for clean up after the Fair – different community groups or how Fair exhibitors could do more in barns.

Updated Board about rental rate increases for 2026 year-round rentals, including importance of staying up with market rates and parity across the board for all rentals.



Ticketing/Admission

Fair Staff provided update on proposed admission prices for 2026, which will be finalized at a later date. No online ticket sales this year, but have secured partnership with Skagit Farmers Supply to sell pre-sale tickets at their 3 locations in Mount Vernon, Burlington and Sedro-Woolley.

Thursday/Sunday reduced pricing, Friday/Saturday to tiered pricing. General Admission (16+) , Senior (65+)/Military, and Youth (5-12 year)

Staffing/Resources

Staff update about projected staff resources for this summer; one of management staff on medical leave during the Fair, loss of 2 full-time parks staff and 3 seasonal parks positions in 2025 layoff and expected staff turnover coming early summer. Parks maintenance staff play a critical role around Fair time

Department Head of Parks, Recreation and Fair will be retiring in early April and staff is preparing for leadership changes.

Budget

Similar to the County, Fair has been pulling out of its own dedicated cash reserves for expense/revenue deficit. While revenue increases every year, expenses have far outpaced. Staff is looking at how to decrease what is pulled from cash reserves each year. An initial thought is to decrease the deficit by \$10k each year in the next 5 years.

The County has not made any operational budget cuts to Fairgrounds as it has not been part of the general fund since 2009.

State Funding was expecting a 50% operational cut but recent allocation came out to be only 35%, a total of \$16k cut.

Public Outreach

“Let’s Wing It!” Stuffed chicken social media campaign for brand recognition and awareness. Advisory Board members are helping with this campaign to get them throughout the county. Plan to schedule presentations.

Board Fair/Summer Involvement

A list of tasks is being made for board members and other volunteers to help with intense operational task load placed on staff in summer.

Succession Planning

Board to consider how to help with succession planning to ensure future and longevity of the Fair.

Adjourn 6:43pm