



Fairgrounds Advisory Board Minutes

JOINT FAIR ADVISORY AND FAIR FOUNDATION MEETING

Monday, May 18, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 5:06pm with the following members in attendance:

Board Members Present: Monique Brigham, Gery Cardenas, Hank Davies, Robert Desmarais, Dorothy Elsner, Kristen Keltz, Virginia Learned

Foundation Members Present: Bekki Cox, Ayla Holboy, Liz Holtcamp, Rob Johnson, Wendy Couch

Staff Present: Ken Hansen, Aric Gaither, Frances Negranza

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

Board Discussion:

Fairgrounds Foundation

Foundation placed order for all bricks that were purchased from recent campaign for installation on the Fairgrounds before the 2026 Fair. They have also agreed to fund fertilizer for flower beds and plants around the grounds, and will be hosting a multi-day quilting event in September “the Fairgrounds Stitch A-Fair” as a fundraiser which hopes to grow into two plus events per year.

Advisory Board

A motion was made to elect Dorothy Elsner as Vice-Chair of the Fairgrounds Advisory Board. The motion was approved and passed unanimously.

At the beginning of April the Parks, Recreation and Fair Department merged with the Facilities Department under Director Ken Hansen with the proposed new name of “Parks and Facilities”. The Advisory Board had previously shown concern about the exclusion of “Fair” from the name. Ken asked the board to share thoughts and concerns about the name change both during the meeting and/or after by contacting him directly.

Fairgrounds Updates:

Events at the Fairgrounds

WSU Master Gardener Plant Fair took place on May 9, bringing in over 4,100 guests in attendance a 24% increase from 2025. The plant sale is another great example of how the Fairgrounds can fit the unique needs of various community and public events.

The fairgrounds is excited to welcome a new Renaissance Fair in June, two new Brewfests and a multi-day homesteading convention in 2027 to be put on by a local business. Additionally the Fairgrounds will play host to the County Employee and Family Picnic taking place on July 15 between the Highland Games and major set up for the Fair.



Partnerships & Entertainment

The Fair is committed to providing wholesome family entertainment at the Fair. New in 2026 is an additional stage to host 9 shows daily: the Cutest Show on Earth, Kid's Pedal Tractor Pulls and the Magic Bean Ag Show. Plus a free Kids Activity Zone with the Children's Museum of Skagit County and WECU. Both are located by Vuelta La Luna Circus creating a high energy fun entertainment zone at the Fair.

Fair Sponsors & Funding

The Fair is continuing to work hard to establish partnerships and recruit sponsors and has also added donate buttons to all payment pages. The existing volunteer base is working hard to cover costs as well. The Barns themselves are fundraising: Dog covering judge fees, Horse covering extra tent, clubs hosting fundraisers throughout the year for improvements within their barns.

Future Budget Discussions

The County will continue to face a general fund shortfall in the near future. The new merged department (Parks, Rec, Fair & Facilities) as a whole sustained staff layoffs consisting of 6 full-time, 3 part-time plus 2 vacancies are expected this summer which are potentially to go unfilled this summer due to a hiring freeze. There will be the likelihood of a trickle down effect of department staff who normally work at Fairgrounds in/around Fair time being around less this year and devoted more heavily to other areas such as parks.

The Fairgrounds has not received general fund monies since 2009 and will continue to operate as a self-sustaining unit with no intention to ask for general fund support in the near future given the general financial forecast. Fairgrounds fees will begin going through commissioner approval starting in the 2027 budget preparation season, including rental rates, event and admission fees. 2026 Fair Admission pricing to be set at June 15 advisory board meeting and staff looking to Advisory Board for guidance to finalize pricing for 2026.

Board Outreach

Encourage both boards to help with public outreach, promote, share and help get our marketing materials and messaging out in the community.

Adjourn 7:07pm