

Mission- To promote the diverse agricultural and cultural heritage of Marion County through active participation of its citizens.

Marion County Fair Board Monthly Meeting

Board of Commissioners' Board Room

March 4, 2026 5:30 PM

Meeting Convened: 5:30 PM

I. Introductions/Attendance

Members: Joe Billington, Dana Castano, Brandi Crandall, Amy Goulter-Allen, Shannon Gubbels, Greg Martin, Pam Zielinski

Key Volunteers: Jeff Simons

Staff: Chip Bury, Denise Clark, Eric Mason, Laura McClellen, Kelli Weese

Guests: Jill & Scott Ingalls, Ingalls & Associates; Melanie McCabe, 4H

II. Public Comments- None

Jill asked to add items to the agenda- the Intercept Survey and Gate Pricing. The chair agreed to add them as the last items under Special Interests.

III. Approval of February 4, 2026 Summary Notes. The question was raised as to whether the AI chat notes should be included in the summary notes as they do not have context to them. It was decided not to include them going forward. Greg made a motion to approve the meeting summary notes; Joe seconded. Motion passed.

IV. Financial Report- Dana Castano

The changes made to the budget document in the past month are highlighted in yellow; additional commercial vendor revenue has been received. It was asked whether the administrative charges are now accurate following the projections. Eric answered that yes, they are as expected. Pam made a motion to accept the Financial Report as presented; Amy seconded. Motion passed.

V. 4H/FFA Reports

4H- Melanie

At the recent large animal weigh-in there were 28 kids and 38 animals. She is still working on their video project. The 4H Superintendents have an upcoming March meeting.

FFA- Melanie reported for Monica

FFA is holding leadership contests (public speaking) and determining who will be going on to the state convention during spring break. She indicated that Monica had sent a list of current FFA Advisors, and their schools, to Denise. *(Denise forwarded to everyone.)*

Amy said that per the BOC's request, she provided them FFA advisors' contact information as the BOC is interested in having the presidents of the chapters possibly participate in the upcoming state of the county address.

Will Polk County fair kids participate in our fair if their fair is cancelled? A- There will be a lot of things to work out. There might be higher participation fees for out-of-county participants.

IP 28 (Animal Cruelty Act) bill is currently being addressed in the legislature. People don't realize that it's not just about being cruel to animals, but not being allowed to kill animals. It's very global and states that no animal can be "slaughtered." This could affect many things, from fair market animals to fishing and hunting enthusiasts. If it gets on the ballot, it could be problematic.

Fair Budget Financial Trajectory- Eric Mason

Chip introduced Eric as the department's Financial Specialist who has access to the financials in the county system and can view the fair board's funds. What Eric is about to present is his interpretation of the numbers for the fair board to make decisions regarding long-term planning.

Eric said that the graphs are projections and include the current finances and the trajectory of where we are headed. These are intended to provide a clear picture of, "where we are right now." This shows how fast a financial decline could happen at the current trajectory. He said that there are "outlier years", and that he is working with a "non-finite data set."

Operating revenues are declining at 1% per year. Operating costs are increasing at 7%. At this rate all revenues will be exhausted by the 2029 fair.

Brandi said we shouldn't assume that the 2025 deficit year is our new norm. Instead, 2025 was an anomaly; the 2026 fair won't necessarily be the same as 2025.

Jill noted that there is such a thing as "a 7-year itch" that fair's experience. We need to consider the "pre-covid" years in the equation, she thinks it's too low of a revenue projection going forward.

Scott suggested that the 7% cost increase will be going down as suppliers are finding out people can't afford the current costs; they'll adjust their prices accordingly.

Eric showed a second slide that shows what a 3% cost increase would do. (This is the standard cost of living rate.) Even reducing to 3%, we are still headed in a downward projection. Factoring in the state fair's rent increase projection of at least 103k, puts the fair budget into a deficit.

Shannon said we need to ask the BOC for assistance to help us with the state fair and the upcoming costs they are projecting. She feels that the fair board doesn't have any power to make a difference with the state fair.

Brandi asked Eric why the projections didn't include the last 10 years of data instead of just the last 5 years. Eric answered that he made that decision because fair year's 2020 (no fair) and 2021 (a rebound after Covid) were anomalies.

Scott suggested that it would "average things out" to include 2020 and 2021.

Brandi would like to see the projections include detail on the percentage of loss compared to the increased revenue over those past years. She doesn't want folks to have a "knee jerk reaction to a bad year." She also doesn't support going to the BOC with a request for general fund money.

It was agreed that the fair board has been conservative in its approach to budgeting until the BOC encouraged the fair board to spend more and not keep so much in reserve.

Jill agrees with Brandi that it was just one bad year. She says we can make the fair healthy by "adding value." She feels that it was a "one-off" having a free day on Thursday. She said, "We had 8,000 people on the ground on a Thursday." She said we'll make adjustments. Her frustration is that we've purposely built the reserve, and now, "We are in a scary position."

Kelli noted that the reason for Eric's presentation is for starting the conversation on what the state fair's costs are going to do to the budget in the long term.

The state fair is no longer interested in doing trades for rent; we will have to pay full commercial rates.

Denise noted that there is a current bill in the legislature that would direct more lottery money to fairs. Jill added that the 1% cap on the amount fairs could receive would be removed. One of the reasons behind the bill is to provide more money for fairs using their fairgrounds as a potential emergency evacuation site. The bill has been steadily moving through the committees.

Chip said that the BOC reached out to departments asking what was of interest to them that they should get behind on the legislative floor for debate and discussion. So, as these things come along, to please bring them to Chip's attention.

The board directed Eric to edit his document to include a 10-year projection looking at the average revenue. The "extenuating circumstances" could be explained. He will bring it back to next month's meeting.

Scott noted that the costs of labor will increase significantly.

It was agreed not to show these slides at the upcoming fair board/BOC work session as this is just for the fair board's talking points.

Jill said she has written documentation tracking the history of when the state fair has not assisted us when needed.

We need to review the operation's costs and be conservative on the revenue side.

It was suggested that talking about the 4H numbers and the economic value might make a difference when talking to the BOC at the work session.

Further discussion was held on what is a reasonable state fair rent figure. We have recently been paying an equivalent of \$45k a year. An increase of 5% each year is reasonable. It was suggested we negotiate a figure of \$50k.

Shannon requested the fair board be provided with talking points for the work session. She suggested setting up a Zoom meeting the week of the 16th to the 20th, either at lunch time or after 5:30 PM. She asked members to let Denise know if they will be attending the work session.

Denise pointed out that the work session presentation draft document is in the packet. She pointed out where she highlighted the 4H numbers, the economic value of the fair, and the need for the BOC to show support of the county fair's position in relation to the state fair.

VI. Items of Special Interest

2025 Fair Superintendents' County Volunteer Award- Denise Clark

Denise said that she'd come across this page in a county bulletin. It is a photo of the superintendents at the fair and the nomination text. The county acknowledged all of the work the fair superintendents do and awarded them the *Mary Pearmine Award*. Sarah Coutley is responsible for writing, and submitting, the nomination.

Policy Review- Free Fair Entry Passes/Credentials- Denise Clark

Denise said she's bringing this back from last month's fair board meeting as she was requested she provide a track changes document for this meeting. The final document is shown with those changes accepted. Amy made a motion to approve the updated Fair Credentials policy with the edits Denise made; Greg seconded. Motion passed.

2026 Fair Pricing Strategy- Jill Ingalls

Jill discussed the document that she distributed. It included pro-rated pricing, a \$3 Thursday, and other promotional options. The fair board agreed with her proposal. Brandi made the motion to accept Jill's 2026 Admission Pricing Strategy; Amy seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Intercept Survey- Jill Ingalls

The purpose of the survey is to ask fairgoers what we are doing right and where we might improve. The last time a survey like this was done at our fair was in 2019.

Brandi feels that the survey is important as we need to determine what brings folks to our fair and also find a way to bring more value to the fair. This is a time in which we need direction; it's an investment that will benefit us in the future.

We will need to add a budget line item for a \$5500 survey.

Brandi made a motion to have an intercept survey done at the 2026 Marion County Fair at a cost of no more than \$5500 to be arranged for by Jill; Joe seconded the motion. Motion passed. Jill said that she'll need county staff direction as to how this can happen in conjunction with her contract.

Amy asked about the updated RFP security contract. Jill said she received an email update from Krista on the contracts.

- Security- waiting on Brandi and Dana to give input on the Treasurer's scope of work to be added. Brandi said she thought she had already responded to Krista. She will check with Krista tomorrow.
- First Aid/EMT Services- Krista said she was going to award it separately from security. Jill asked her to wait as she wants to discuss this with Krista.
- Portable toilets are executed.

VII. **Ingalls Report-** Jill Ingalls

A second act has been found for Saturday night; in addition to Casey Donahew we now have secured Justin Lawrence. We will have Radio Ready on the main stage on Thursday and Friday. She will "back-fill" the stage with local acts.

VIII. **March Strategic Plan Items**

3.2.10 *Arrange transportation for Big Name Entertainment-* On-going

4.1.1 *Respond to requests to participate (entertain) that come into the fair office; relay to Entertainment Coordinator for a response. (On-going.)* ***Hold meeting between the Event Coordinator and The Entertainment Coordinator to identify openings on the main stage.***

Denise proposed to remove the language in red font. Jill is currently coordinating the entertainment. The board said to remove the text for now as we don't have an Entertainment Coordinator.

Greg said that at fair time he would be available to assist with the stage to meet the bands' needs.

4.3.3 *Discuss any needed changes for 4H/FFA-* Ongoing

4.4.1 *Inventory ribbons, order exhibit tags, update dept. classes per superintendents' requests.* Denise will send the past ribbons' order to Amy for her to determine the ribbon needs for the coming fair. Amy said she'll check with the supers.

Shannon asked if she has all of the superintendents she needs. Amy said that yes, she thinks everyone is returning from last year. Shannon said to let everyone know if she needs help finding a superintendent and that we'll need job descriptions of exactly what she needs.

4.4.4 *Place Public Competitions application and information on the web site.* Amy and the supers are working on it. Jill asked that she be given a couple of days' notice when the handbook is ready to be posted. Amy asked when she'd like to receive it. Jill responded with March 20th.

Laura said she is working on Sign-up Genius to help with recruiting all the needed volunteers.

4.5.4 *Vendor issues- complaints; hand holding; sales (sell booth); vendor/fair expectations; improve inside/outside layouts-* On-going

IX. **Other**

Greg gave an OFEA conference update. He attended a session on bad weather preparation; don't rely on weather apps. He also attended one on active shooters. You are to run, hide, fight in that order. He also

attended one on OLCC and ID requirements and one on private security. He felt Jill did a good job presenting on parking at events. Regarding volunteers, it's important to call them by their name and let them know they are valued.

Jill noted that the difference in the OFA and the OFEA conference is the OFA targets board members and committees; OFEA targets fair managers.

Jeff Simons was officially approved as a Marion County Fair Board Key Volunteer in this morning's BOC board session. Welcome Jeff!

Denise noted that the department has moved from the first floor back to the third floor as the remodel has now been completed.

X. **Meeting Adjourned:** 7:38 PM