

Marion County Fair Board

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

Fair Board Retreat

November 14, 2020 10:00 AM

Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Meeting Convened: 10:11 AM

I. Call to Order/Introductions

In Attendance

Members: Mike Adams, Mark Banick, Joel Conder, Brandi Crandall, Shannon Gubbels, Ken Outfleet, Pam Zielinski

Key Volunteers: Colleen Busch, Amy Goulter-Allen, Lesley Johnson, Rebecca Turner

Guests: Jill & Scott Ingalls, Ingalls & Associates

Staff: Denise Clark, Tamra Goettsch, Department Director

II. Goals of the Day

Make decisions on the 2021 fair to present to the board of commissioners (BOC) at the work session on December 15 at 1:30 PM.

III. Adoption of Fair Board Procurement/Contracting Rules- Tamra Goettsch

The question has been raised in the past as to where the document includes information regarding a “non-responsive” bidder. Tamra indicated that this is addressed in the RFP (Request for Proposals) which defines responsive and non-responsive proposers. This was satisfactory to all. Ken made a motion to accept and adopt the Marion County Fair Board Public Contracting Rules as they are now written; Mark seconded the motion. Motion passed.

IV. Key Volunteer Survey Responses- Denise Clark

A Fair Key Volunteer Survey was conducted in August to gather feedback from key volunteers regarding their participation with the fair board. Of the six key volunteers, five participated in the survey. Survey Monkey’s results were displayed in graphic form. Denise typed up the comments received and added this to the document for everyone to review.

Tamra noted that some responders indicated that they were “somewhat satisfied” as to being engaged in the fair board process. She suggests that the board try some new approaches such as once a motion is made, ask everyone to “put their thoughts on the table;” that the board should “hear people out,” giving them more opportunity to be engaged. She’d like to see key volunteers more engaged in the discussion on a motion.

- Amy (the longest serving key volunteer) expressed that she has always felt she had a voice in the process.
- Jill said that she appreciated receiving the survey feedback.
- Leslie expressed that she has felt welcomed by the board.
- Colleen noted that she appreciates receiving the meeting documents ahead of the board meeting. She also feels that everyone is allowed to give input.

- Rebecca said that she appreciates meetings being held by Zoom which provides flexibility for participants.

V. Elections of Board Officers- Denise Clark

Denise indicated that she heard back from board members that they would like the officers to remain the same for the coming year since there was not a regular fair last year. Brandi expressed that she is willing to commit to one more year even though her term is expiring this December 31. Tamra said that Brandi can agree to serve another 3-year term at this point in time and can always choose to resign before the term ends. Mark made a motion to retain officers- Mike Adams as Chair, Shannon Gubbels as Vice Chair; and Brandi Crandall as Treasurer; Ken seconded the motion. Motioned passed.

VI. Fair Planning

Scott indicated that he has been participating virtually with groups across the country; he said that the “target” changes daily with COVID 19. He suggests we need to have good safety measures in place and look at it from a cost perspective. Everything can be changed if needed; even the footprint such as putting the whole fair into one parking lot. Our fairgoers’ expectations for the 2021 fair won’t be the same as in the past.

Jill noted that she has been leaning heavily on the *Event Safety Alliance*, a national group that puts on large events. We can use those models, scaling them that down to our event size.

Future Fair Considerations:

- “Cliff dates”, have planning tools in place and know when to “pivot.” If we pair down the expectations in our planning now, we can always ramp back up, not down, later.
- Shannon would like to know “the decision points.” Scott said that we need to determine what elements to pursue, then can associate dates with them.
- Shannon feels that the kids need an outlet, they want to participate in live activities, not virtual as they have plenty of that.
- The minimalist fair would be just a 4H/FFA fair.
- To enable big name entertainment, there is mass gathering concerns such as seating and traffic patterns. We would need to have areas where you can seat ten people at a time; like seating in every other bench and only sitting in family groups. Free concerts would require pre-registration so you have some control over the number of attendees.
- Local entertainment is easier because you have less numbers to manage.
- The rodeo is a \$20,000 investment. The arena is not conducive to accommodating COVID. There are issues with traffic flow in/out and bathroom controls.
- The question was raised would the board of commissioners be willing to hold a fair that possibly loses money?

Budget Implications:

Tamra noted that last year there were expenditures for the virtual fair and for the Ingall’s contract. The fair received \$59,000 in revenue last year; expenditures were \$54,000. There were some savings on the Administration side. There is no place we can recoup money as we don’t own our own fairgrounds to generate revenue; we only the state subsidy revenue.

The county is spending over \$1,000,000 on the wild fires; so the county is “in a tough position.” We need to tread carefully in what the fair requests of the commissioners. We usually approach them with a base budget request; they may ask for a reduction. Budgeting starts in January.

We need to project our revenue sources for the coming fair. We need to consider whether we have a free gate or a paid gate and do we shorten the days of the fair? With the latter, our costs in rent would decrease.

Scott indicated that sponsors are still supportive of youth activities but they don’t want to have their names associated with an event that might have some liability. They don’t want to be associated with a COVID “super spreader” or have no return on their investment.

Jill said that the carnival is planning on participating in the upcoming fair. They have operational practices in place that are COVID safe. However, the costs may go up to have them. Food booths are going to be harder to find and will be more expensive; some may not have survived COVID. Sales may go down so we’ll have to adjust our projected revenue. There will also be a shift in commercial vendors.

Should we hold a free fair but charge for entertainment? Denise said that she has learned from the Oregon Fairs Association (OFA) convention that fairs that have gone to a free fair have noted that it is hard to go back to a gate entrance fee in subsequent years as customers expect it to still be free.

Perhaps we consider selected free days.

Jill indicated that the fair will no longer be a \$9 value when it is paired down. Going to a lower rate, or even free entrance, will drive up the percentages on the backend (vendors and activities.)

Folks would like to see a reduced gate admission versus free.

Thought on events to keep:

- Barnyard adventures can put into place safe COVID practices and costs \$4500
- Pirates Parrots costs \$6,000, has a good separation between the audience and stage, can monitor seating, and sanitize before and after each show.
- The racing pigs would be harder to keep safe due to crowding issues as folks try to see the pigs race.
- These activities provide “value for the kids.”
- The car show doesn’t cost very much to put on and we can cordon off the cars so people don’t get too close.
- If we bring in local and free acts on the stages, we won’t have expended a lot of money.

Hold a competition/public vote on what acts to have at the fair; a kind of “Hometown Idol” activity.

Capitalize on nostalgia in marketing; suggestions included:

- The Best Gig in Town (Tie-in gig economy and local gigs.)
- Old Fashioned Fair
- Bringing it Back Home
- Going Back to Our Roots
- Starting Over

- The No Faire, Fair

Other Ideas:

- Associate the Real Heroes with the fire recovery and rebuilding.
- Offer reduced vendor fees; call it the “market place.”
- Public Competitions (PC)- market to home schooling parents- submit a project completed at home; people are cooking more at home.
- Fun costume contests.

Carnival:

- The carnival folks will want to see a 4-day fair; they won’t be as responsive to a Friday, Saturday, Sunday only fair.
- The carnival is one of the best fair products we have to offer. We’ve made between \$13-17,000 in past fairs. We’d probably make \$7-10,000 in a best case scenario in 2021.
- In currently “open states,” carnival ridership has gone down 25%.

The question was raised as to whether we will even be able to hold a fair by next July.

- We can establish “drop dead dates.” Sponsorship/marketing starts in February or March. There will be a strong social media push with “Save the date” and “There’s going to be a fair” messages.
- We need to work with the BOC to ensure they will dedicate funds to a 2021 fair.
- The purchase of animals and breeding is going on right now for 4h/FFA students; they need to have something to look forward to and work towards.
- We can start making plans and always “pivot,” reviewing at certain points in time.
- If we do only have virtual activities, how do we improve on that from last year so we get more participation? Answer- there are new on-line options being developed all of the time; options such as concert series; websites; platforms; Event Hub for commercial use for the industry. It’s good to be aware of these options. Ingalls will monitor those and bring anything forward that makes sense for the fair.
- Shannon feels that the kids won’t want to participate in any more “virtual stuff;” she said that they are “burnt out.” This impacts the mental health of the kids of our county.
- Could we display the kids showing animals live? Answer- no, showing kids on the internet is risky. Amy said that there are liability issues with 4H/FFA student. She doesn’t feel it can be done.

Ingalls are willing to put together a budget which includes activities, vendors, “Made in Marion”, and a “support locals who have lost because of wildfires” message. They will put together a “bare minimums” fair package.

Jill will work with the PC committee to discuss how to get public activities for kids organized and scheduled.

Jill suggests keeping the attractions of Puzzle Mania, Barnyard Adventures, and Pirates’ Parrots Show. This will provide fairgoers with activities and something to do at the fair. That would keep those budgeted items in the \$16,000 range.

It was decided not to have a rodeo due to the difficulties with using the arena and keeping people COVID safe.

Ingalls will put together a Plan A (minimalist fair) Plan B (what can we add back in) and Plan C (a “full blown fair.”) Jill indicated that the challenges will be the suppliers- who will be there, and available, and who won’t. The primary goal of the fair is to give kids an opportunity to showcase their projects. (This would be a minimalist fair.)

Other outside fairgoer activities could be duck herding; 9v car demolition derby/race; pine box derby race; and lawn mower races. We will be looking for safe activities that invite the public in to participate.

It was suggested possibly holding a co-event with an already existing event like AgFest or the St. Paul rodeo. Response- this isn’t very feasible as they are held on different dates than our event. Our fair date is driven by when 4H/FFA projects are ready. Also, suppliers’ availability would be limited as they pre-schedule their commitments based on all of the county fairs’ dates across the state.

Would Agfest be interested in joining in on our fair date? Brandi said that Agfest has been held in the month of April for 30 years. Their mission is very specific and their goals may not align with the fair’s goals.

It was agreed to hold a December 2 regular fair board meeting.

The December 15 BOC Work session will have in-person, phone in, and Zoom participation options. This year’s work session will include discussion around COVID precautions. Tamra said she would like to see as many fair board personnel as possible participate.

VII. Other:

The OFA annual meeting will be held virtually January 15. It will be held on just one day and will be a free event. Jill encouraged everyone to participate and to go on-line to register. She feels that this board hasn’t turned out “in force” yet with that organization. Jill said that OFA has been working hard on the fair’s behalf with the legislature on funding issues. Denise agreed; she feels our increase in membership fees has been well worth the price.

Strategic Plan- Denise indicated that she is willing to make the changes to the fair’s strategic plan layout per last month’s meeting suggestion. However, she is looking for help in designing it in order to meet all of the needs. For instance it is difficult to color code it by goals and their associated strategies and tasks and at the same time color code by calendar time frames. Amy and Jill offered to assist Denise with it.

Meeting Adjourned: 12:19 PM.