

MINUTES
LANCASTER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2013
LANCASTER EVENT CENTER, NEBRASKA ROOM
4100 N. 84TH STREET
6:30 P.M.

Advance public notice of the Board of Commissioners meeting was posted on the County-City Building bulletin board and the Lancaster County, Nebraska, web site and emailed to the media on November 8, 2013.

Commissioners present: Larry Hudkins, Chair; Brent Smoyer, Vice Chair; Roma Amundson; Jane Raybould; Deb Schorr

Agricultural Society Board Members present: Ron Dowding, President; Jay Wilkinson, Vice President; Trudy Pedley, Secretary; Karen Rutt, Treasurer; Jim Swanson; Keith Schomerus; Kendra Ronnau; Tom Messick

Agricultural Society Board Members absent: Eric Mitchell

Others present: Kerry Eagan, County Chief Administrative Officer; Angela Zocholl, County Clerk's Office; Alan Wood, Agricultural Society Board Legal Counsel

The location announcement of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was given and the meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m.

1) **INTRODUCTIONS**

Those present introduced themselves.

2) **JOINT DISCUSSION WITH LANCASTER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY BOARD REGARDING SHORT AND LONG TERM PLANNING FOR THE LANCASTER EVENT CENTER**

Hudkins discussed the growth of the Lancaster Event Center and the need to plan for its future management. He felt the County Board should have a certain level of involvement.

Amundson said many constituents have expressed concern over putting more emphasis on 4-H and County Extension at the Event Center. She said the Board has a responsibility to constituents to retain the original goals of the Event Center.

Kendra Ronnau commended the Agricultural Society Board for the work they have done, noting the positions are volunteer. She felt the number one problem with management was communication and suggested forming a committee with Agricultural Society Board, County Board and County Extension members. She discussed the need for the Event Center to book paying events, but not at the cost of moving scheduled 4-H events.

Amundson asked how the County Board could help the Agricultural Society meet their goals. Trudy Pedley said proceeding with Phase III improvements would be the ultimate goal, which would provide

needed space and extra income. Amundson agreed more could happen with Phase III improvements; however, constituents need to see that the Event Center can do well as it is.

Ronnau questioned how to measure success. Schorr felt a long record of financial stability would be a good indicator.

Amundson said she attended the Agricultural Society Board's January meeting and felt there should be a better understanding of what really goes on at the Event Center. She suggested having a representative give the County Board a monthly update on events and financials. Karen Rutt agreed that financials may not be done as well as they should be. Smoyer suggested holding routine meetings to review financials and keep open communication. Ronnau said updates should be mandatory once new management is in place.

Jay Wilkinson entered the meeting at 6:57 p.m.

Schorr said timing is critical due to changes in the community. Pinnacle Bank Arena has opened and Pershing Arena is closing, which affects the area events. It is important to make sure these events still have a venue. The County Board oversees the lodging tax (4% hotel tax) and needs to be sure funds are reinvested to attract more events and more people.

Hudkins discussed growth around the Event Center area. He agreed that the closing of Pershing Center provides more need for a large venue.

Smoyer said funds could have been put toward more improvements if finances had been better. He felt proper management and oversight would allow forward movement.

Amundson said the Agricultural Society Board and County Board should collaborate. If something does not go well with management, the Agricultural Society Board should let the County Board know.

Vicki Jedlicka, County Extension Office, questioned scheduling 4-H events versus paying events. Ronnau said the County Extension Office should confirm the amount of time needed at the Event Center for the events.

Marty Cruickshank, County Extension Office, said her office could schedule a year in advance but she questioned what would happen if changes need to be made. Smoyer said dates need to be set in stone and changes need to be agreed upon by both parties.

Hudkins discussed the positive effect on kids involved with 4-H and FFA and the cost compared to processing kids through the juvenile justice system. He addressed traffic issues at the Event Center, noting a left turn lane on Havelock Avenue is needed in addition to having the stop light.

Smoyer said he would like to see 84th Street grow around the Event Center. Responsible management would be the cornerstone.

Jim Bauman, County Extension Board President, questioned receiving compensation for the Event Center when moneymaking events are passed up for other events. Schorr said property tax dollars are already supporting the Event Center so she would be reluctant to allocate more funds to replace lost revenue. She would rather see additional funds go toward capital improvements versus offsetting income.

Ronnau asked how everyone felt about a ten-day County fair, noting financials show a loss of money. Amundson questioned continuing the fair after 4-H exhibits are finished. Hudkins said the Agricultural Society should decide how long the fair needs to run.

Raybould said it was important that the Event Center have some financial stability and be a partner to Phase III expansion. She was concerned about putting another bond obligation on taxpayers without a substantial return on their investment. She discussed a possible partnership with University of Nebraska to create a world-class coliseum for agricultural events.

Julie Burton, Lancaster Event Center Assistant Manager, said the key is open communication with everyone involved. The Event center was created as a 4-H and equestrian facility and has grown to much more. There is a fine line to keeping 4-H the focus while making money. She discussed bringing in new events and juggling the current obligations.

Susan Bulling, Lancaster Event Center Administrative Assistant, said the 2014 contract for 4-H has already been done and questioned what type of contract would be needed at this point. Ronnau said even though 4-H events are set, they need to make sure the events are not bumped.

Marty Minchow, Extension Board Officer, questioned who is responsible for providing communication since the Agricultural Society Board is strictly advisory. Ronnau agreed it was difficult as a volunteer to devote enough time but it is important for everyone involved to communicate and make it work.

Amundson asked if there were policies in place for allocation of resources, communication, and setting of events. It was confirmed that there were not. Amundson and Hudkins discussed having management do this.

Ronnau questioned the process of hiring a manager and moving forward. Alan Wood suggested forming a working group of County Board, Agricultural Society and Extension representatives that meets quarterly. Dowding asked to wait until after the annual meeting. Wood agreed the annual meeting and management hiring should come first.

Monthly financials were discussed. Pedley noted that sometimes income or bills were recorded late, resulting in inaccurate financials. It was agreed that more accurate financials are needed.

Jedlicka wondered if the Agricultural Society Board has a policy on annually evaluating the manager. Dowding said they do but it has not been kept up well the last few years.

Wood felt there should be a joint annual meeting between the County Board and Agricultural Society Board.

Dowding announced a change of the Agricultural Society annual meeting to December 12, 2013.

Susie Weiler, Lancaster Event Center Food & Beverage Manager, discussed the Event Center's growth. She commended the Agricultural Society for their work and encouraged future growth.

3) **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:57 p.m.



Dan Nolte
Lancaster County Clerk

