

FAIRGROUNDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Held via Zoom Meeting Service

Wednesday, August 16, 2023 at 5:30 pm

AGENDA

Join Zoom Meeting

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Meeting Agenda Approval

July 19, 2023 Meeting Minutes Approval

Port Update

Fairgrounds Update

General Discussion

- Other/Roundtable

Old Business

New Business

Action Items

- Review current list of concerns/action items/top priorities to Commissioners
- Any formal correspondence to Port Commissioners
- Other

Fairgrounds Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – August 16, 2023
5:30 pm Remote Zoom meeting

In attendance

Gary Gabelein South Whidbey Historical Society, Chair
Gwendy Hastings At-Large
Clayton Canfield At-Large
Amanda Ellis Port of South Whidbey – Fairgrounds Director
Angi Mozer Port of South Whidbey – Executive Director
Michael Hastings Fair Association
Sarah Bergquist, Island County WSU Extension
R-A Mazzola, 4-H Program Coordinator
Jason Kalk, Fair Association
Elise Gabelein, Fair Association

Not in attendance

Commissioner Bacon Island County
Loretta Strothman Martin Langley Chamber of Commerce
Alex Foode WWGA
Shannon Bly Tenants
Thomas Gill City of Langley

Agenda Approved: Approved.

Minutes Approved: Minutes from July 19, 2023 approved.

Port Update:

- Angi Mozer reported that her focus has been the event that happened on July 30th at the Fair. A car bearing large Port logos on it was smashed as part of the log show. As a result many Port staff members felt threatened and were fearful for their safety. Angi has asked the Fair Association for a response verbally the next day, and then followed up in writing, and now after two weeks nothing has been received. Angi expressed that there is a lot of accountability and explanations that could come from the Fair Association.

Fairgrounds Update:

- Amanda reported that she was not able to provide her normal report to the Commissioners at the last regular monthly Commissioners' meeting since Port staff was addressing other issues and the situation with the logging show
- The Fairgrounds hosted a number of events: Bits and Boots Gaming Show, Centaurs Gaming Show, Ragnar, WIFAS, Whidbey Island Fair, and Little Big Fest, a local festival that used to take place on a different property. This year is their first annual event since the COVID pandemic
- Fairgrounds staff is preparing for Shake and Bake Automotive Festival this weekend. It is a group from the Naval Base who already do automotive meetups
- Tenants moved back into their spaces after Fair, including Outcast and Bekah Bee music who vacated for the Fair
- The commercial kitchens are still at capacity. Typically the commercial kitchen spaces host businesses until they outgrow the need for the kitchens on the Fairgrounds, however at the moment the kitchens are at capacity including the food trucks that need to access commercial kitchen space in order to meet Island County requirements.
- Fairgrounds staff worked on 24-hour response times in response to needs Ragnar, Fair and Little Big Fest regarding the condition of the buildings and plumbing issues. The project list to get ready for these events includes: removing an unsecured sound booth that was not built to code; removal of stair access to the grandstand, repairs to Coffman alcove (still ongoing); continual restroom issues including fixing broken toilets (the toilets are not commercial grade; and in order to have commercial grade toilets, the water supply infrastructure would need to be upgraded); repairs to the Fiddle Faddle stage, barn structure, lighting, and cleaning; signage and fence repairs, filling bunny holes and responding to the bunny epidemic. Responding to the rabbit epidemic was a huge undertaking- over the course of 6 weeks, Fairgrounds staff removed anywhere from 5-20 deceased bunnies per day.
- The Fairgrounds finally got a WiFi upgrade thanks to Whidbey Telecom. Unfortunately the Port did not have access to the previous WiFi system- a system was installed to provide WiFi for the Fair, but that was not

available for other events. Therefore the Port had a new system installed that would provide WiFi for all Fairgrounds events. WiFi is now available in the Coffman building which is a new and welcome addition. WiFi is not yet available in the campground.

- An electrical assessment of the campground has been completed, so a first step has been completed to upgrade the electrical system in that location
- The new Maintenance Technician Owen has started identifying improvements that can be made as well as obvious safety hazards. Owen's experience initiated the decision to bring in a structural engineer to look at the structural integrity of buildings across the property. A structural engineer came to the Fairgrounds to conduct a wide-scope assessment of the structures of the buildings. Quite a number of the buildings will need to be addressed including the horse barns, Coffman alcove, and the food booths. The food booths are the main issue at this point- there are serious issues with their structure.
- Amanda echoed Angi's point that the car show crush on July 30th has created a lot of other things to deal with, including supporting Fairgrounds staff members, without any real answers or resolution regarding the incident.
- Gary asked about the car show. Amanda provided that it is this coming weekend. Typically it would be the weekend of the Whidbey Island car show, which received the first offer for hosting their event on the dates. The organizer of the Whidbey Island car show has retired and left the island, however the group felt that they would not be able to pull off the event this year; hopefully they will be able to return next year.

General Discussion/Roundtable:

Clayton: remarked that Angi's letter to the editor was very well done. Also he is surprised that the log show became such a big deal. He is surprised that Port staff did not make every effort to communicate ahead of time what was going on and then all of a sudden everyone was upset.

Gwendy: Gwendy referred to Amanda's list a lot of repairs needed and asked if the Rural County Economic Funds grant from Island County could be used for the projects. Angi clarified that the funds expire Dec. 31 2023; the extension request hasn't quite been submitted but will be. Gwendy asked if the funds could be used for the Coffman building or the campground, and maybe the food booths? Angi responded that yes- for the Coffman building repairs could be executed. There is a 50% match required for that work. However the food booths would not be covered by that grant at all. Campground work is possible, but we used up our grant funds for the bathroom. We will need to ask for a re-allocation between projects to be able to use grant funds for further work on the campground.

R-A Mazzola: introduced himself. He is with Washington State University Extension, working as the new 4-H Coordinator for Island County.

Jason: Learned of the logging show incident as a result of social media messages, taking him by surprise on Sunday afternoon at the Fair. Jason touched base with Albert Gabelein to get his description of the event. Jason understands that Curt Gordon came to the logging show and attempted to have a discussion with Albert and JT Madsen. Jason understands the topic was covered at the monthly Port Commissioners' meeting and Albert offered an apology for the content of the logging show. Smashing a car is tradition of the Bunyan Buster logging show, not unlike the other acts, activities or contests that go on during Fair. The Fair Association does not scrutinize or look at script of participants of the Fair event. Albert described how the logging show takes hot topics to interject into their show. Jason cited how the Fair Association, 4-H, lawn mower racing have all been a target of the show in the past. Going forward, the Fair Association has not developed any policies to control all of the various entities that are at the Fair.

Gary: Requested the attendance of this year's fair as compared to last year's fair be sent to the FAC.

Sarah: Introduced herself as Interim County Director of WSU Extension, looking forward to becoming a bigger part of the group. Reiterated the request for attendance for this year's fair as compared to last year's fair, as well as entries into the fair this year, to see if there is a significant difference this year, and with the general trend, citing a seemingly general decrease in the number of entries. Sarah believes there is a real lack of understanding with the public of what has been done at the Fairgrounds. A visual or infographic of what has been done would be a good thing to create and distribute, as well as next tasks on the list.

Gwendy referred to work that Ben Criswell's company did to help the structure of the horse barns. General discussion of how the Port could collaborate with the community on work that the community wants to perform on the Fairgrounds.

Jason: asked if the FAC would move to in-person meetings. Will the group get back to the by-laws? Gwendy discussed that the group would like to get back to the by-laws, but the issue is that there is rarely a quorum present at the meetings. The group's main function is to provide recommendations to the Port Commissioners, and those

recommendations are approved by a vote. The group does not have the ability to vote due to a lack of quorum. The Committee has continued under this format to be able to continue to provide recommendations to the Port Commissioners. Angi agreed to have a ready summary for the group of what would be required to go back to the by-laws. Angi will work to have an in-person meeting for September. Gwendy requested that the meeting be held at 6:00 p.m.

Elise: was at the Port meeting and heard Albert apologize and the car incident should be a moot point now. Elise is not clear what the Port wants from the Fair Association. Elise requested an email describing what the Port wants at this point to move on. Amanda clarified that multiple public servants were impacted by the incident, and to move forward a written response on behalf of the Fair Association as a whole is needed, explaining to the Port and Port employees what the Fair Association plans to do in response to the incident. Amanda expressed that her understanding is that Albert was at the Port meeting to explain himself, but that is not the same as an apology and isn't enough for the Port to be able to move forward. A verbal response leaves a lot left to interpretation. Elise relayed that in 20 years there hasn't been a complaint about this event before. Elise indicated that the Fair Association would put something together. Elise referred to other situations during Fair that she could complain about. Amanda encouraged Elise to put those in writing as well so that we can discuss them. Angi reiterated that she is receiving the questions "what happened and what is the Port doing about it?" and it's much more appropriate for the answers to come from the Fair Association. Michael expressed understanding and clarified that the Fair Association has not had a meeting and the next one is planned for September 11. Until the Fair Association is able to discuss it, they cannot give an official response. Amanda explained that the ability to respond quickly is in a direct correlation with a good outcome. Michael clarified that the only thing they can say at this point is that the Fair Association is working on it, they will look into it, and they will discuss it. Gwendy suggested to Jason and Elise that they could have an Executive Session, which has been an option in the past when something needs to be discussed between meetings. Elise said they could try but they are volunteers and it is very difficult to meet. Elise referred to a different incident where a Fair vendor threatened Fair staff. She expressed that the Port wants a statement from the Fair Association for the incident; the Fair Association also wants a statement regarding what happened with the Port's tenant threatening Fair staff. Amanda clarified: the vendor was not at all the Port's tenant during the Fair. The vendor was strictly the Fair Association's tenant.

Ben: stated he is attending the meeting to be a character witness for his friends Albert Gabelein and JT Madsen, who are great family men, active in the community. Ben is astounded that the Port is talking about legal action for a comical stunt. If the Port wants the community to back our respective organizations, this cannot continue; the log show organizers did not mean harm. Ben has extended his hand in support. Angi clarified that the Port is not intending to take legal action. Ben suggested that maybe in the future the Port could be notified in advance regarding "whacky ideas" so that there is no shock on the Port's side. Getting rid of the shock value for the general audience would be a shame though.

Angi will do a hybrid meeting next time (in person and hybrid) and in the meantime will poll the group to see what time works best.

Old Business: None.

New Business: None.

Next Meeting: Scheduled for September 20, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. in person