



# Work Session Summary Minutes

OREGON

## 2024 Marion County Fair

December 12, 2024. 9:30 AM

Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Salem  
5th Floor, Suite 5232, Commissioners Board Room

### ATTENDANCE:

**Commissioners:** Kevin Cameron, and Colm Willis.

**Board's Office:** Matt Lawyer, Chris Eppley, Trevor Lane, Shawnnell Fuentes, and Toni Whitler.

**Legal Counsel:** Steve Elzinga.

**Community Services:** Denise Clark, Kellie Weese, and Dominique Magallon

**Marion County Fair Board:** Dana Castano, Shannon Gubbels, Pam Zielinski, Greg Martin,

**Fair Event Coordinator:** Jill Ingalls

Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

### **Summary**

The Marion County Board of Commissioners discussed the 2024 Marion County Fair. Attendance declined slightly due to high temperatures and economic factors, with a slight drop in gate receipts. Public competition participation also decreased post-COVID. Sponsorships were down, partly due to economic struggles in the agriculture sector. Food vendor revenue increased with new vendors, but traditional fair food remained popular. The fair's financial health is strong, with a \$880,600 reserve. Challenges with the State Fair's customer service and pricing were noted, and efforts are underway to improve the intergovernmental agreement (IGA). Future plans include enhancing Thursday's activities to boost engagement. The Fair Board discussed strategies to enhance community engagement and support for the fair, particularly on Honor Day, traditionally Senior Day. They proposed renaming it to attract a broader audience, including teens, and suggested activities like free hot dogs, a community photo, or breaking a world record. They also considered partnering with local organizations like the Marion County Sheriff's Office and the Extension Service to showcase agricultural activities and engage urban residents. Ideas included a 4-H camp day, law enforcement activities, and leveraging local sponsors to subsidize costs. The board emphasized the importance of youth education and leadership development through 4-H and FFA programs.

### **Overview of the 2024 Fair**

- Discussed the history and growth of the Marion County Fair since 1983, when it was a small event at the State Fairgrounds.
- Attendance was slightly down in 2024, attributed to factors like high temperatures, economic struggles, and competition from a Fourth of July event held by the State Fair.

- Reviewed the fair's financial performance:
  - A 75% increase in overall revenue from 2015 to 2024.
  - The fair's healthy financial position, with a significant reserve and carryover.
- Challenges:
  - Maintaining participation in public competitions, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Negotiating state fair rent and parking fees, which have been an ongoing issue.
- Slight decline in sponsorship due to economic struggles and reduced support from businesses.
- Increase in food revenue because of new vendors and higher process:
  - Need to maintain affordable options.
- Need to balance indoor and outdoor vendor spaces and manage foot traffic better.
- Sold out all booths and positive feedback from vendors:
  - May increase vendor fees based on current success.
- Need to support food vendors during hot weather so they can stay open.

### **Plans for the 2025 Fair**

- Focused on ideas to re-engage the community and make Thursdays a more significant day at the fair:
  - Proposed renaming "Senior Day" to "Honor Day" to attract a broader audience, including teens.
  - Discussed hosting a big celebration or party on Thursdays, with suggestions like free hot dogs, community photo events, or breaking a world record.
  - Involve Extension and 4-H programs more prominently.
- Explored ways to connect with urban and new resident communities:
  - Discussed potential partnerships with organizations like the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, and Kroc Center to facilitate activities and transportation.
  - Considered integrating paid youth internships to engage young people and provide them with valuable work experience.
- Upcoming end of the current IGA with the state fair.
- Involve all chambers of commerce in greeters breakfast to increase participation.
- Coordinate with the Marion County Sheriff's Office for the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration on Honor Day.

### **Next Steps**

- Provide comparison of gate receipts from 2014 to 2024.
- Reach out to the Extension, 4-H, and community organizations to collaborate on Thursday activities and events.
- Investigate the possibility of incorporating a paid internship program for youth at the fair.
- Provide a summary of the issues with the State Fair's billing and customer service to the commissioners for potential public comment.
- Schedule a meeting with the Extension board on January 8th to discuss potential fair involvement and funding opportunities.

**Adjourned** – time: 11:15 a.m.

**Minutes by:** Mary Vityukova

**Minutes by:** Gary White

**Reviewed by:**  
**Reviewed by:**  
**Reviewed by:**

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