

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

December 3, 2025 5:30 PM

Meeting Convened: 5:40 PM

I. Call to Order/Introductions

In Attendance

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

Key Volunteers: Rebecca Kauffman

Staff: Chip Bury, Denise Clark, Sarah Coutley, Kelli Weese

Guests: Jill and Scott Ingalls

II. **Public Comments-** None

III. **Approval of 11/5/25 Meeting Summary Notes-** Greg made motion to approve the notes; Dana seconded. Motion passed.

IV. **Approval of 2026 Fair Board Proposed Budget-** Denise

Denise explained the new format of having an "Undefined" section of the 2026 budget document. The Undefined section will hold those items that are not specific to a fair year but are more administrative items such as county administrative charges, website maintenance, office supplies, and more. It will show both expenditures and revenue, the latter being state subsidy and investment earnings. This will give a clearer picture of how a particular fair year did.

The fair board agreed to the format change of separating out a section for undefined items.

Denise indicated that she made all of the changes to the 2026 proposed budget that that fair board discussed at the recent retreat. She also added in \$110 for paying for Comcast internet in the log cabin, a charge that came up for the first time at the 2025 fair; previously it had been donated.

With this proposed budget, the 2026 fair balance will end in a projected deficit of \$257,100. Adding in the undefined, and with the previous fair carryover, the fair board will have approximately \$537,540 in the bank.

It was suggested to change the figure in the concert merchandise revenue line item from \$1,000 to \$550 as we won't have two big name acts this year and so less merchandise will be sold.

Amy made a motion to accept the proposed 2026 budget with the change of reducing the amount in the concert merchandise revenue line from \$1,000 to \$550; Shannon seconded the motion. Motion passed.

V. 4H/FFA Reports

4H- Shannon reported for Melanie

There are now new record books for the students to fill out about their livestock projects. (Horses have always had to complete a record book.) This is helpful for obtaining scholarships and if a person wants to go on to show at state.

FFA- Amy said that she had heard there was nothing new to report.

VI. Items of Special Interest

Fair Days/Special Pricing- Jill

In looking at the Afton scanned gate reports, the data for Thursday indicates that around 8-10% of the total fairgoers for the day, come in between 10 and 2.

When the daily temperature is hot, there is higher attendance in the morning. This past year on Friday, 15%-21% attended in the morning. On Saturday, 1/4 of the people came in in the morning.

We need to position the fair to be able to compete with the new events that are happening around us. The general admission fee of \$9 is aggressive with all of the other events occurring.

We have done on-line tier pricing in the past such as March 1 – April 1 get tickets for \$4, May 1 they go up to \$7, etc. Trends show people aren't buying this way anymore.

We absorbed the convenience fee last year, not passing it on to the customer; it didn't "drive sales."

She said that they try and "drive sales" on the quiet days such as Thursday.

How do we make our event more valuable, and have a higher demand?

Jill presented a document of possible suggestions for increasing attendance at the coming fair. Some of those items included:

- Have two tiers of pre-sales on-line.
- Friday have a fair themed hat contest in which you get in for free if wearing a hat. The gate person would have to determine if it's fair themed.
- Support a food drive, get a dollar off the ticket price when bringing in a can of food.
- Have a Three Dollar Thursday.
- Implement season passes, get in all four days for one price.

Scott said that the carnival has agreed to an incentive for the 2026 fair. They said they lost money last year.

What is the long-term sustainability for the carnival? We need to get more people through the gates to make them successful.

It was suggested that every 100th person through the gate gets a prize.

There are lots of ways to get into the fair for free. On Sunday those 12 and under get in free. Participating in public competitions, volunteer, enter the pie contest, etc. allow a person to get in for free. Talk more about this on social media. "If you get involved, you get in for free." Have a section on the website as to how to get in for free.

How do we differentiate our event from the state fair?

Encourage the food vendors to have a family-friendly priced item that is under \$5 such as a kids' PB&J, or a pudding cup. Jill cautioned that we don't want to spend too much time on the minutia.

At AgFest have a laminated page that says ways to get in free to the fair.

For bringing a can of food, partner with another organization to make this happen like the Marion Polk Food Share. They already work with the auction committee on Saturday.

Have contests to win things via social media such as share the post and your name goes into a drawing. Jill said that Facebook doesn't like contests such as tag a friend, or share to win something, but you can do it with hashtags.

Social media influencers have a better following now with AI being unknowable; a person doesn't know if the material they are reading is fake or not.

Build a media kit that any of our vendors can post on their own pages.

State fair is trying to obtain revenue wherever they can thus they implemented parking fees. Kevin said last year that they would not be increasing our parking fees for the coming fair.

It would be helpful if the BOC would "step up" and talk to the state fair as it's a state to county contract. The BOC would need a draft of an agreement for them to have talking points.

From the state fair we need good communication. We need to identify what we need to know and by what date, and what is not going to change. It's a bigger conversation than just parking. For example, we pay for a plumber, via state fair, and then there are plumbing issues when we arrive. What are we paying for?

Ingalls are willing to draft a document of requests to present to state fair.

Our intergovernmental agreement is over by the 2027 fair; we need to have a new agreement before then.

Of the items on Ingalls' list of suggestions, it was decided not to have a hat contest and no season passes.

VII. Ingalls' Report-

Jill noted that the turkey races are on hold because of the Avian flu. The turkeys cost \$1200 a day. It costs \$1500 a day for the petting zoo which is free to the fairgoer. Pony rides would be priced at \$10 a ride. The fair board gave consensus for Jill to move forward on this.

Amy asked for a big name entertainment update. Answer- Pat has submitted an offer to Casey Donahew; he hasn't gotten a response back yet. *(We have since heard that Casey is confirmed to perform at our fair for \$30,000.)*

VIII. December Strategic Plan Items

1.2.1 Reminder to members to pursue recruiting new vendors and sponsors for the upcoming fair.- *On-going.*

1.2.2 Review pricing structure for vendors- *Jill looked at Linn and Benton County's price structure. Linn county has a little higher attendance than our fair, Benton has a lower attendance.*

To be in line with these two fairs, Jill suggested that we increase the fee for in-door booth spaces and have outdoor booth spaces fees remain the same.

Dana made a motion to increase in-door commercial vendor booth spacing to an in-line booth being \$350 and a corner space being \$400; Greg seconded. Motion passed.

Food vendor prices will remain the same.

2.1.5 Reminder to be ready to pick a fair theme in January if applicable. *Not needed.*

3.2.3 Identify carnival vendor as needed- *The carnival vendor RFQ just went out.*

3.2.4 Identify security and ticket taking agency as needed. *Security RFP just went out.*

5.2.2 Make BOC work session presentation- *Moved to February.*

IX. Other

Denise indicated that she has reached out to Cody Waltermann, our Legal Counsel, regarding the fair board investing their own funds. She presented an email response from Cody that basically says the fair board would need to change the Management Agreement that they have with the county if they wanted to manage their own funds.

Treasurer Position

Denise presented a copy of the fair board's bylaws that indicate the fair board must fill the office of Treasurer.

Denise said that Eric Mason, the department's Financial Specialist, will now be responsible for putting the fair budget document together each month; she will no longer be doing it. Someone will need to be prepared to present the budget document at the fair board's regular monthly meetings.

If the fair board chooses to pay someone to do the cash handling at fair time, there will still need to be a fair board member who oversees it.

Shannon asked that filling the treasurer position be put on next month's agenda.

Jill asked that an intercept survey be put on the next month's agenda. Ingalls will come prepared with a quote.

Greg said that the Marion County Sherrif's Office has agreed to provide the honor guard for the 2026 fair. Marion County Sherrif Hunter will be the speaker.

As this is Rebecca's last meeting, Sarah acknowledged all of the work Rebbeca has done with Public Competitions. She thanked her and gave her some swag items.

Sherry Lintner, County Volunteer Coordinator, produced a press release and flyer for the recruitment of new fair board key volunteers and posted it. Jill said that she also sent out the flyer via Constant Contact. Jill suggests that it be sent out to the small chambers; Sarah indicated she could do that.

X. **Meeting adjourned:** 7:08 PM