



A nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to growing community through events like yours, and the Super Fair.

## Lancaster County Agricultural Society, Inc.

*A Nebraska non-profit corporation, designated as 501(c)(3) by the IRS  
and separate county-level political subdivision  
created under Nebraska law in 1870 to promote agriculture & youth*

### MONTHLY BOARD PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, January 19, 2023 at 7 pm  
Lancaster Room (enter Business Center in Pavilion 1)  
Lancaster Event Center Fairgrounds  
4100 N. 84<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln NE 68507

**President Ronnau** called the monthly meeting of the Lancaster County Agricultural Society board to order at 7:11pm.

**Proof of due notice** was given in the Lincoln Journal Star and the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was displayed in the room.

**Roll Call** - Board members present in person were Ron Dowding, Kendra Ronnau, Ron Suing, Karen Rutt, and John Cooper. Board members not present were Hagan, Hardesty, and Cusick-Rawlinson. Also present in person were LEC staff Amy Dickerson, Kim Bowen, Jason Rief, Bill Donahue, Nikki Long, and Nate Dowding. LEC Staff attending via zoom were Lois Harrison and Justy Hagan. Members of the public in attendance were Jeff Maul and Barry Froistad. Also attending was Karen Wobig for Lancaster County Extension.

**Agenda Adjustment** - Suing made a motion to adjust the agenda to move up the Other Business agenda item to hear from the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce about a proposed convention center coming to Lincoln. Rutt seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed without objection.

Jeff Maul with Lincoln Chamber of Commerce & Visit Lincoln (CVB) talked to the board about a convention center bill proposed in this state legislative session that would raise half of the funds needed to build a new convention center in downtown Lincoln. Maul stated that downtown Lincoln would like to add a 2-story convention center as Lincoln is not able to meet the demand

from state/regional association conventions due to lack of meeting space compared to like-size cities across the USA. Lincoln would also like to be in the rotation for state/regional conventions along with Kearney (Younes Convention Center) and Omaha (CHI Center).

Maul stated that these conventions would be different than the types of events held at the Lancaster Event Center Fairgrounds. Maul shared the information about potential identified building site locations and specifics about the type of meeting spaces that are planned to be included in this type of convention center. The largest space would be a 30-35K square foot exhibit hall within the 130K sq foot of space built on 2 stories for \$111-120 million. Ronnau commented that she worries that while many of the events held in a facility like this would be different, it may still take some events away from LEC. Ronnau said she wants to be sure that the LEC is protected from losing their current events, in the same way that the LEC has agreed not to host concerts because that would take away from the Pinnacle Bank Arena. Cooper stated that the LEC has worked hard to create solid economic impact to the community and yet funding to support LEC is scarce.

7:15pm Cusick-Rawlinson arrived.

Cooper said that he worries that a new convention center will create competition for the few funds that are available. Ronnau stated that the lack of the long-planned ag coliseum at LEC continues to affect the LEC's ability to bring larger shows to Lincoln. Harrison stated that the LEC is known as one of the largest places to hold a banquet and that her concern would be that this new facility would draw those banquets away. Suing asked if increased bussing options would be available with the creation of this new facility. Maul stated that he did not know the answers to many of these questions, but that he appreciated the board's input and would share these questions and concerns.

In answering a question from Dickerson, he said the goal was to drive 25K additional room nights with the events booked. He acknowledged it was important to stay connected with the Lancaster County Ag Society as planning continued for the new Lincoln convention center. He mentioned he was glad to see \$7 million included in the Convention & Event Center Construction Center bill designated for Lancaster Event Center Fairgrounds capital improvements to acknowledge LEC's importance and uniqueness as a "dirt & belt buckles" venue while Lincoln adds more "carpet & chandeliers" space downtown.

7:20pm Hardesty arrived.

**Approval of minutes** - The minutes from the December 2022 Annual meeting were presented. No additions or corrections were noted. Rutt moved to accept the minutes from the 2022 December Annual Meeting. Cusick-Rawlinson seconded. The minutes were approved without objection.

The minutes from the December monthly board meeting was presented. No additions or corrections were noted. Dowding moved to accept the minutes; Suing seconded the motion. The minutes were approved without objection.

**Financial Report** - Harrison presented the November 2022 unaudited financials. Cusick-Rawlinson moved to accept as presented. Dowding seconded. A roll call vote was taken and the November 2022 unaudited financials were accepted on a 7-0 vote.

Information about the December 2022 P&L statement was presented. Cusick-Rawlinson moved to accept; Hardesty seconded. A roll call vote was taken and the December 2022 P&L statement was accepted on a 7-0 vote. Harrison reported that the total amount of checks paid in December totaled \$219,429.79. Dowding moved to approve the December 2022 checks, Cusick-Rawlinson seconded. A roll call vote was taken and the motion to approve December 2022 checks passed 7-0.

**ARPA Funds** - Harrison updated the board on Accounts Payable and the status of the expected State ARPA \$5M grant to partially replace lost revenues from the pandemic approved by the legislature in April 2022. After some conversation, Ronnau asked for board approval to release the first \$1,000,289.03 from the State ARPA grant funds when disbursed as expected before next board meeting to pay a list of specific LEC suppliers as presented by Harrison. Hardesty asked for clarification on when the monies might be released. Ronnau stated that the end of February is the current expected date, however funds were last announced by the State to be released in September of 2022 and that disbursement is still pending so there is ongoing uncertainty on timing. Cusick-Rawlinson moved to use State ARPA grant funds to pay the list presented by Harrison totaling \$1,000,289.03 as soon as the ARPA funds are accessible. Cooper seconded the motion. All in favor, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed 7-0.

**Officer and Committee Reports** - President Ronnau welcomed Amy back from her vacation and commended the LEC staff on their work keeping the LEC running smoothly during her absence. Discussion was had regarding the open board seat with a year remaining on Tom Messick's term after he moved out of state at the end of 2022. This open board seat term ends December 2023. Ronnau stated there were 3 people interested in filling the position. Ronnau shared information about the Ag Society with those present. One candidate, Barry Froistad, was in attendance. He introduced himself to the board and talked about his background, experience, and interest in filling the position. Ronnau stated that the other interested parties will attend the February board meeting and will have an opportunity to introduce themselves. Each candidate will be asked to submit a candidate statement with a picture as done for annual Ag Society elections as well to share with current board members before the February meeting. The board will vote on a replacement at that time. No additional officer or committee reports were presented.

**Election of Officers** - The officer positions for the 2023 board were discussed. All positions will serve one year starting January 2023. Suing moved to maintain the slate of officers from the previous year. This slate includes: President - Kendra Ronnau, Vice President - Ron Dowding, Secretary - John Cooper and Treasurer - Karen Rutt. Cusick-Rawlinson seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. The motion to maintain the same slate of board officers from the 2022 Lancaster Ag Society Board for the year of 2023 passed 7-0.

**JPA Representative Election** - The election of 3 Lancaster County Ag Society representatives to serve on Lancaster Event Center Fairgrounds JPA was held. JPA representatives will serve one

year beginning January 2023. 2022 LEC Fairgrounds JPA representatives were Ronnau, Hagan, and Suing. Cooper moved to continue the 2022 Ag Society slate of Fairgrounds JPA representatives for 2023. Rutt seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, motion approved 7-0.

**Introduction of new LEC staff** - Nikki Long, Guest Services Manager & Assistant Food and Beverage Manager was introduced by Ronnau. Harrison stated that Nikki was brought on to work as a counterpart with Lisa Bunch who will continue to lead Food and Beverage as Manager but Nikki will also lead out on Guest Services delivery such as LEC ticketing services, General Store horse show check-in services and other facility services that vary widely on what & where is needed by event such as the Exhibitor Services Desk that opens during the NE Ag Expo setup to handle electric, wireless, café gift certificate sales & questions. Lois discussed Nikki's background and previous experience with a BS in animal science and work experience in hospitality as well. Nikki stated that she likes her position at LEC already and feels right at home. Dickerson shared that she has already received compliments from members of the public regarding Nikki's performance at recent events.

**2023 Fair Update** - Fair book deadlines were discussed. Sr. Operations Manager and Fair Manager N. Dowding stated that February 6 is the deadline for the fair book final set of changes from the LEC staff working on planning the fair for the Ag Society. N. Dowding shared that the BMX sports and the Sharks events have been booked as the main free attractions. N. Dowding said that they are working to get the Demo Derby and Figure 8 motorsports events getting locked in on dates. Ronnau asked if it will be hard to continue to get motor sports events with recent closing of I-80 Speedway. Rief said he was approached by vendors saying that they want to continue. Rief said he was told that vehicles and parts were hard to find during the covid years but they are becoming easier to get now.

N. Dowding gave an update on other possible Grandstand shows besides these two long-time motorsports. He talked to tractor pull people as a possibility, but the cost would be around \$20,000. Ronnau and Rutt stated they worry about an event that requires payment to enter as conflicting fairs could pull attendance with similar events they run as free due to their higher fair funding compared to Lancaster being the lowest per capita in the State. N. Dowding said that he was researching a bull ride option that would have a much lower cost, even with additional added money would need to be obtained. Ronnau asked if a bull ride would require too much turnaround time for the demo derby. Staff did not feel that turnaround after a bull ride would be difficult. The Board had conversation about how a bull riding would keep local spectators engaged & wanting to attend rodeo events with the NHSFR returning in 2026 & 2027. N. Dowding asking how board wants him to move forward with these events. Cusick-Rawlinson stated that she feels LEC staff has a better understanding of what is needed and feels comfortable having them make this decision. Rutt agreed. Ronnau asked if staff would notify the board once they have an idea of what might be chosen. Ronnau and Suing asked that the team consider dates and schedules at nearby fairs in order to minimize scheduling conflicts.

Conversation was had around the beer garden/live music area and how to change it to be fresh and new. Cooper would like to attract adults to see the fair as a fun night out without needing to be attracted to a specific fair activity. Ronnau stated that parents go where kids go and suggested

bringing in local high school choirs to perform. Hardesty talked about marching bands as a possibility. Discussion was had around the feeling of community that a marching band brings to county fairs. Ronnau stated that this could bring parents, grandparents, and families that may not normally otherwise attend. Suing asked about inviting several Lancaster County school bands to attend. Hardesty will move forward to obtain information on this possibility. Cusick-Rawlinson asked about holding a RibFest as it has a history in Lincoln and is such a great fit with our fair. Dickerson agreed and said the team was continuing to explore getting the Ribfest going but had faced challenges coming out of the pandemic which hit food vendors hard in terms of staff/travel costs.

N. Dowding shared that the Special Olympics horse show will be coming on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the fair in P4 and that Special Olympics Bochi Ball was still a possibility to be coming on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday in the MPA. The board expressed strong support to have this new group represented as part of the fair.

**Extension Update** - Karen Wobig was in attendance on behalf of the County Extension. Wobig stated that it is expected that the fair book will be about the same number of final pages as last year. Wobig said that Extension staff Calvin and Kate would like to have some later hours added for the general store. N. Dowding said this would be no problem. Cooper asked if there had been any progress for in replacing Calvin who leaves Lancaster Extension February 16 for a promotion out west. Wobig stated that they will be conducting interviews for the position next week. Wobig introduced new Lancaster Extension Board member Zainab Rida to the board.

**Communication from the public** - None.

**Nebraska Association of Fair Managers conference** - Attendance at the 2023 NAFM was discussed. It was determined that no board member would be available to attend this meeting as a voting representative to participate in the District 1 State Fair Board representative.

**Legislative Update** - Dickerson stated that the 2022 State ARPA grant with up to \$5M is disbursement pending. Dickerson said that a contract had been signed last week and that LEC has not been able to get specific information on how the disbursement process will work—one or multiple disbursements.

Dickerson said that LEC lobbyists have spoken with senators who just started the 2023 Nebraska legislative session about possible additional funding for LEC Fairgrounds this year as there is a budget surplus that is being allocated this year. Dickerson talked about LB709, a Convention and Event Center Capital Construction Program with \$7 million proposed for the LEC Fairgrounds as an “existing event center associated with a Ag Society in a city of primary class”. Dickerson said this is a bill proposed by Senator Anna Wishart. Ronnau stated that her concern is that the proposed \$7 million will get cut down to \$2-3 million as happened in last year’s session where \$7M was reduced to \$5M. Dickerson stated that the LEC needs not just one-time funding but a mechanism to provide ongoing support in recognition of LEC’s \$60-70M incremental economic impact from its shows that cause heavy wear & tear on the facility. Dickerson will be reaching out to key LEC show promoters to testify or submit support letters talking about the impact of

the LEC Fairgrounds and needed improvements they each see when the bill comes up for hearing soon.

**Operations Update** - N. Dowding updated the board on current operations. N. Dowding stated that General Dynamics held an employee banquet at the facility in December that served 500 people which went well. N. Dowding stated that the recent go kart event over New Year's was a success and promoter stated this was one of their largest attended events. N. Dowding reported that the January Arenacross event was nearly a sellout both Friday and Saturday nights with limited seating (mostly single seats) open. N. Dowding said that the promoter indicated they would consider live national TV broadcast of this event if the lighting in P4 was brighter. N. Dowding reports that the trade show season is starting soon and set up prep has already begun. N. Dowding said that Kawasaki has reached out for information about a December holiday banquet for 4500 people. Cooper suggested talking to Certified Piedmontese for support with a banquet of this size.

J. Hagan reported via online link that she is back to work after a medical leave and getting event contract production more caught up.

**Managing Director Report** - Managing Director Dickerson reports that the LEC has been working with half the level of office staff due to the pandemic with the priority to keep event staffing in Operations, Cleaning, Café teams for shows as close to normal as possible. Dickerson said that the core team has been working hard to keep everything on track and moving forward. Dickerson said she is proud of the team for all of their hard work and appreciates the board members reaching out to the team and supporting them while she was gone.

Dickerson said that preparations are underway for the annual LEC VIP Recognition banquet called "Blue Jean Gala" this year to be held on February 16. Dickerson said that this year, farm families, key staff members, and Hall of Fame members are all being recognized.

Dickerson provided an update on Joni Jones' role change. Dickerson said that Jones has been moved from event planning into the position of Fair Coordinator, Sponsorship & Event Sales, taking up some of the key roles that previous LEC staffers had done. Jones will be focused on fair planning and sponsorships initially working most directly with Fair Manager N. Dowding while Dickerson continues covering needs of LEC's few larger sponsors and working on filling open positions in marketing and business development after State ARPA funds arrive.

Dickerson stated that the team is working to gather information to answer a request for naming rights on certain parts of the facility and the board will have an opportunity to see any naming rights proposal before shared.

Dickerson reported that Harrison is working on the annual employee benefits renewal and enrollment for full-time staff on February 1.

Dickerson talked about the new City flood plain regulations that recently passed and how they may impact the LEC by increasing Phase 3 costs. The exact impact on LEC's current and future plans is not known.

**Meeting Date Change** - Ronnau suggested that the February meeting be moved due to LEC's Blue Jean Gala that will be held on Thursday, February 16<sup>th</sup>. Ronnau suggested the monthly LCAS board meeting be moved to Monday, February 13<sup>th</sup> with a run-through of the Gala to follow the board meeting for the board members acting as emcees on Thursday night. Hardesty stated that she will be out of town on this date but that she would be able to attend via online link. Suing made a motion to move the February monthly board meeting to February 13, 2023 at 7pm. Cusick-Rawlinson seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried without objection.

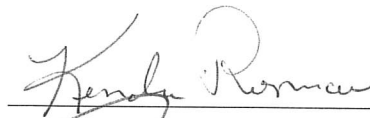
**Other Business** - Discussion was had around creating another bank account for State ARPA grant funds that required two signatures for all checks over five thousand dollars to create a stronger system of tracking use of these funds.

**Adjournment** – Cooper moved to adjourn the meeting. Dowding seconded. The motion carried without objection and the meeting was adjourned at 9:42pm.

**Next Ag Society Public Meeting:  
Thursday, March 16, 2023  
Lancaster Room (enter Business Center, Pavilion 1)  
Monthly Ag Society Board Meeting 7:00pm**  
(See final meeting timing/location at LancasterEventCenter.org, click on About Us, Public Notices)

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED as set forth herein on this 13 day of Feb., 2023 Submitted by the LANCASTER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY IN THE STATE OF NEBRASKA

President Kendra Ronnau



Secretary John Cooper

