

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE STARK COUNTY COMMISSION**  
**February 27, 2024**

Chairman Franchuk called the joint special meeting of the Stark County Board of Commissioners to order at 8:01 a.m. Commissioners Present: Dean Franchuk, Paul Clarys, Bernie Marsh, Cory White, and Neal Messer (via Zoom). Other Board Members Present: (County Park) Courtney Presthus, (Stark County Fair Association) Dustin Elkins, Melissa Chruszch, (4-H Council) Bridget Bullinger, Klint Sickler (Roughrider Commission) Duane Wolf, Kevin Stockert (Stark County SA) Amanda Engelstad, (Stark County Auditor) Karen Richard.

**PROPOSED STARK COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS FACILITY**

Lisa Heiser (County Park Director) presented the multifunction event-plex at the fairgrounds proposal. Use of an event building for many other events/activities other than just livestock. Obstacles currently encountering are terms like "arena" misleading non-livestock people, confusion with other building initiatives, the public has heard taxes would go up, and the misconception that no events are happening at the fairgrounds or very few. The multifunction event complex presented is 200' by 400' with an entrance that is 140' by 50'. Building cost estimates: \$4,850,000 for building materials, construction labor, concrete foundation wall with footing, dirt floors, doors, and insulation with white liner panels. Additional costs not included: plumbing, heating, electrical (estimate \$420,000), and arena interior (estimate \$161,500). The potential layout includes space for multipurpose events. Events that the multi-complex would accommodate: Livestock events – 4-H Achievement days, pro rodeo, bull riding, roping, barrel racing, petting zoos, equine riding and lessons, mounted shooting, cutting, and polocrosse. Non-livestock events – archery, Go-Kart races, concerts, birthday parties, weddings, kids fair, photography classes, judges/timers clinics, antique & gun shows, and reunions. Programs & Special Events – horse club, fundraiser events, therapeutic riding, riding lessons, community potlucks, dances, and circus. Outdoor Activities Using Indoor – snow treks, snow tubing, camping, and playground. The current outdoor Arnie Binek Memorial Arena books solid from May 1<sup>st</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>. There are only 3 weekends left for 2024 and the facility has consistent annual events.

Implementing the master plan phases has been put on hold since 2015.

Phase 1 – Hill leveling (collectively donated \$1.3 Million) from multiple contractors.

Phase 2 – Restrooms at the outdoor arena started construction in 2023, completion date of April 2024.

Phase 3 – Multifunctional Indoor Building (Event-Plex).

Phase 4 – Indoor shooting and archery range.

Phase 5 – Connectivity of trails.

**BUILDING & OPERATIONAL EXPENSE INFORMATION**

Estimated annual building expenses include heating \$30,000 and maintenance \$10,000. Lisa researched 10 other "like" facilities to get estimated costs. Estimated annual building income includes sponsorship banners totaling \$100,000 which would include 100 banners at \$1,000 each.

**STARK COUNTY FAIR ASSOCIATION**

Melissa Chruszch presented the history/information of the fairgrounds and Stark County Fair Association. The official Fair Association was started in 2020, with the goal of building a state-of-the-art facility, and hosting a full county fair. Starting in 2008 public input meetings were held in Belfield, Dickinson, and Richardton. Preliminary site plans were developed. The Stark County Commission and Park Board voted to approve funding, then a project manager was hired in 2009. In 2009 feasibility studies were done, statistical data was gathered, a groundbreaking ceremony was held, and a letter of support was issued from the Stark County Commission. Later in 2009, the Stark County Park Board reported there were no funds to commit to allow the Fair Association the ability to apply for Federal Programs and Grants. In 2010 Stark County declared the Fair Association was no longer first in line for funding and the City of Dickinson withdrew its pledge of funding.

Things re-started again when a land swap occurred in 2012 and 58 acres were sold to a developer. The \$3.2 million in funds from the land swap brought together major stakeholders to negotiate an MOU: Fair Association, Stark County Park Board, Stark County Commission, DSU Foundation, DSU, 4-H Council, and the Roughrider Commission. Each stakeholder had responsibilities stated in the MOU (1 year trial period) to develop the fairgrounds and contribute to moving the project forward. The Stark County Park Board secured the land from the Meyer family and the Fair Board used the land swap funds to erect the above-ground facilities, phase 1 of the MOU. The outdoor new facility hosted its first event in 2017.

The Stark County Fair Board currently has members who are full of passion and enthusiasm for the next phases of this project. Fundraising for the indoor events center can start once there is support and commitment from both the Stark County Commission and Stark County Park Board.

Dustin Elkins, Chairman of the Stark County Fair Association spoke about how this building process/planning has been going on for too long. The costs have risen significantly, and this new building is a scaled-down version but comes in at a much more reasonable cost to residents of Stark County. The event complex is needed for multiple groups and uses. Having year-round facility access will draw in people from around the state, bringing in additional revenue for the area.

#### **4-H COUNCIL & LEADERS**

Bridget Bullinger the Stark-Billings County 4-H Council President presented the 4-H youth program information including her long-time history with 4-H and what 4-H brings to the community. As of 2023, there are 224 Stark County 4-H members, 677 static exhibits, and 256 animals participating in achievement days. Historical accounting of the 4-H achievement days locations. 4-H youth exhibitors show beef cattle, sheep, swine, goats, horses, dairy cattle, poultry, rabbits, and small animals. The minimum ideal setup for 4-H would provide a permanent, dedicated home, in Stark County, with unrestricted access to host 4-H Achievement Days. Also, the possibility of year-round use, to expand and improve youth educational opportunities.

Needed in a 4-H Facility:

40' by 60' show ring, high capacity electrical, airflow, water, "clean" static exhibit space, demonstration area, meeting space for clubs, and penning space for livestock. The penning space must allow hay, straw, wood chips, out of direct sun, and durable ties. A sample livestock building and static exhibit building were shown. Other 4-H programs that are put on hold due to lack of space: 4-H shooting sports, local producer use, livestock shows, and livestock contests.

#### **ROUGH RIDER COMMISSION**

Nicole Kilwein, Vice President of the Roughrider Commission spoke for the needs of the RR Commission. Most events are held outside, but having an indoor usage option would bring more weather flexibility. The indoor event space would need ample seating, concessions, and bathroom access. Roughrider Commission is in support of an event space to provide a true county fair and expo.

#### **STARK COUNTY PARK BOARD**

Courtney Presthus, President of the Park Board started with needing to attract more people to the area. Quality of life is needed to attract new people and this event building would contribute to that. The event plex is not rodeo specific and brings in a broad audience, even just visiting/stopping in Dickinson. This would be an investment in our community and way of life.

#### **STARK COUNTY COMMISSION**

Dean Franchuk, Chairman commented on this being an ongoing conversation for the last 8 years he has been on the commission.

#### **PUBLIC INFORMATION & INPUT**

Brad Hartigan – Runs the speedway in Dickinson and recently hosted an event in the Watford City facility. He wants an even bigger/better facility than being presented.

Katie Handy – Worked in the fair industry for about 13 years in New Mexico and South Dakota. Three things need to be understood: Run by volunteers (need to evaluate the strength of the volunteer base), rarely do these facilities make money but it is about the quality of life, people will support these facilities with the right amount of information given. The operating expenses are quite a bit higher than estimated, based on her experience. Operating expense numbers presented from a NM facility. When a facility plan goes bad it gives a bad perception of the county and she would like everyone to be aware of that when moving forward.

Klint Sickler (4-H Representative) - presented information on the Event Complex idea. Klint stated the current multi-purpose event complex being presented is very equine-focused. The current event center being presented does not offer the livestock penning solutions needed. The overall list of activities that were presented was mainly equine and that does not work well for 4-H. The event complex presented is much larger than is needed by 4-H. Would rather have a more dedicated 4-H space. Bridgette Bullinger agreed with Klint Sickler and added emphasis to a more 4-H-focused facility set-up.

Rochelle Wyler - Would like all the groups to build the fairgrounds together. She brought up how booked the Bowman County Fairgrounds arena is currently. Live in Dickinson but is investing once a month in going to Bowman to use their facility.

Commissioner Bernie Marsh presented some information sent to him by residents:

Bobby Kubas – Strongly against it or raising taxes.

Kurt Huschka – Would be amazing to have a facility to use year-round.

Commissioner Neal Messer - commented that the intent of this meeting was for listening and gathering information.

Megan Dollinger - Would be in support of a facility that can be used for many different events, including dog competitions. Travels to Denver and Minneapolis to show dogs.

Dave Beaudoin - Wants to have a priority for a list of events. Brought up the weather change problems in history. Wants priority in our spending with all the alarming things coming forward in the next 5 years in global weather change.

Lynn Hastings - Wants to bring up how being in an oil community a facility with different events would bring more families to ND. It would be a draw for people to move to the area.

Carla Arthaud - Brought up concerns with the last Park Board meeting. There are many volunteers in our community, and it isn't right to use numbers from New Mexico to estimate costs. The facility would be successful in Stark County and needs to be built.

#### **FUNDING & VIABILITY DISCUSSION**

Commissioner Marsh suggested making a recommendation to move forward with the facility plans in the next meeting. Chairman Franchuk suggested that it could be put on the ballot and let the residents vote on wanting a facility. The vote would be only for advisory purposes.

Sandra Kuntz – (Local Attorney) drafted the last MOU between the entities, and because of conflicts, it ended the MOU. The facility cannot be built too small, and everyone needs to get on the same page with a multi-purpose facility. It has been talked about since 1974. Sandra would like the leaders and Commissioners to come together on one project and move forward.

Al Heiser - (Road Superintendent) asked the commissioners to get on board with this building and support the project. He will continue to give his time and energy to the project.

Benny Paulson - Wants to know what the commission needs to help make a decision and what the community needs to do to help move forward.

Chairman Dean Franchuk said he is here to know what the public input is and if this is something the community wants to move forward with. The next commission meeting should be able to determine the next steps.

Commissioner Marsh made a **MOTION** to adjourn at 9:18 a.m., Commissioner Messer **SECONDED**, Adjourned.

  
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Karen Richard, Auditor

  
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Dean Franchuk, Chairman