

# Board of Directors Retreat Minutes

Ventura County Fairgrounds  
31st District Agricultural Association - 10 W. Harbor Blvd. - Ventura, CA 93001 - (805) 648-3376  
Website: venturacountyfair.org Contact: Jennifer McGuire, Acting CEO

**Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 12:00 p.m.**

**Ventura County Community Foundation**

**4001 Mission Oaks Boulevard, Suite A, Camarillo, CA 93012**

## **I. Call to Order**

### **Roll Call**

The meeting convened at 12:10 p.m. and called to order by President Lacayo.

**Directors present:** President, Leah Lacayo, Vice President, Daniel Long, Guillermo Rodriguez Ceja, Betsy Chess, Leslie Cornejo, Miriam Mack and Shanté Morgan-Carter.

**Absent:** M. Cecilia Cuevas

**Staff present:** Jen McGuire, CEO, Madalyn Johnson, Concessions & Commercial Manager and Heidi Ortiz, Executive Secretary.

**Guests Present:** Mike Silacci and Burt Handy.

There were no conflicts of interest with any of the Board members that were present.

## **II. Welcome and invite public to introduce themselves (not mandatory) and make public comments (limited to five (5) minutes).**

## **III. Ventura County Fair Board of Directors Retreat - Information Only**

The Board of Directors along with key management staff of the Ventura County Fairgrounds met on November 14, 2023, at the Ventura County Community Foundation Community Room to engage in strategic discussion and planning for the organization.

Becky Bailey-Findley was introduced and began with a review of why strategic planning is important to an organization.

### **1. Welcome & Introduction**

#### **A. Why Strategic Planning?**

- The future is not what it used to be. Uncertainty, unpredictability, and the impacts of indecision are what we can count on.
- Cannot rely on what we have done in past to know how to survive in the future.
- The cavalry is NOT coming! We must save ourselves.
- Strategic planning is a series of well thought out, researched and systematic decisions for the future, updated on a regular basis.
- It includes a process of assessing every aspect of operations, every asset, every relationship, every program to determine capacity to contribute toward Ventura County Fairgrounds achieving its goals.
- It is an opportunity to plan for the future as the Ventura County Fairgrounds recovers from pandemic related challenges and significant change.

- Amid crisis lies opportunity.

#### B. Introductions

Those present introduced themselves, including the number of years involved with the Ventura County Fairgrounds. In total, the group represented over 350 years of experience with the Fairgrounds.

#### C. Expectations for the Board Retreat and Strategic Planning Discussion

The board members and staff shared with they hoped to accomplish in the board retreat and strategic planning meeting. Their responses were:

- To gain a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of the board.
- To learn more about the Ventura County Fairgrounds.
- To get to know each other better and become comfortable working together.
- To discuss how to manage change.
- To gain a clear understanding of the organization's long-term direction and short-term plans.
- The organization has been through tremendous challenge and change over the past three years. In this context, an expectation of this meeting is to clearly articulate the big picture items for the organization and set direction.
- To engage in a team building experience and develop trusting relationships.
- To learn more about the operations, activities, and programs of the organization.
- To set priorities in addressing our challenges and to manage the change that is necessary to achieve our priorities.
- To build a strong team of senior and new board members partnered with executive and management staff.
- To set direction as a team.
- To learn the priorities and direction set by the board and be able to communicate this to key organization partners and stakeholders.
- To create a Vision Statement for the Ventura County Fairgrounds.
- To develop the foundation for trust amongst the board.

## 2. Welcome to the Fair Industry – “The Blue Ribbon Spirit of the Ventura County Fairgrounds.

Bailey-Findley lead a discussion on the contribution the Ventura County Fairgrounds makes to the social, economic, mental, and civic health of its community. She presented the concept of the Ventura County Fairgrounds as a Sacred Place in the community. The following summary highlights the concepts presented.

### **The Ventura County Fairgrounds as the Community's Sacred Place**

Since the beginning of time, humans have a universal need to organize themselves. There is a universal longing for community, belonging, joy, beauty, connection with our past and meaning.

Humankind's greatest creation has always been its cities. Since its early origins, cities have performed three separate, critical functions for its inhabitants and the health of a city is determined by the success of these functions:

- 1) The inclusion of sacred place.
- 2) The ability to provide security and project power.

### 3) The host for a commercial market.

Sacred places in our cities are those treasured places that evoke a sense of memory, connectivity, and wisdom. For many cities or collection of cities such as a county or region, the fair or fairgrounds serves as a sacred place. Think of your local fairgrounds as you read the following description of sacred places.

A Place is considered sacred if it is:

A Place of Status

- ✚ A place of importance and significance to the people. It must be a meaningful gathering place.

A Place that is Foundational to the Community.

- ✚ A place upon which a community is built. All elements of meaning to the community can be found at this place:
  - Social well-being
  - Safety and Security
  - Learning and Growth
  - Tradition and Ritual
  - Economic Sharing
  - Equal-Opportunity Interaction

A Place that Provides Identity to the Community

- ✚ A place that shares and creates stories and vision that shape who we are in the community.

A Place with a Wisdom Tradition

- ✚ A place where stories and experiences help us answer the questions:
  - What is real?
  - How should we live?

Fairs and fairgrounds serve as sacred places for the community, in very human ways. We are endowed with a stewardship to ensure that they remain treasured and sustain the health and well being of community life.

Reference: *The City*, by Joel Kotkin

Included in the presentation was key information and background about the fair industry in California.

### 3. Where Are We Now?

Bailey-Findley shared basic governance information about the 31<sup>st</sup> District Agricultural Association, Ventura County Fairgrounds and its relationship with the State, County, and local governance.

And Bailey-Findley provided a brief overview of the business of the Ventura County Fairgrounds.



### A. A Five- Year Financial Overview

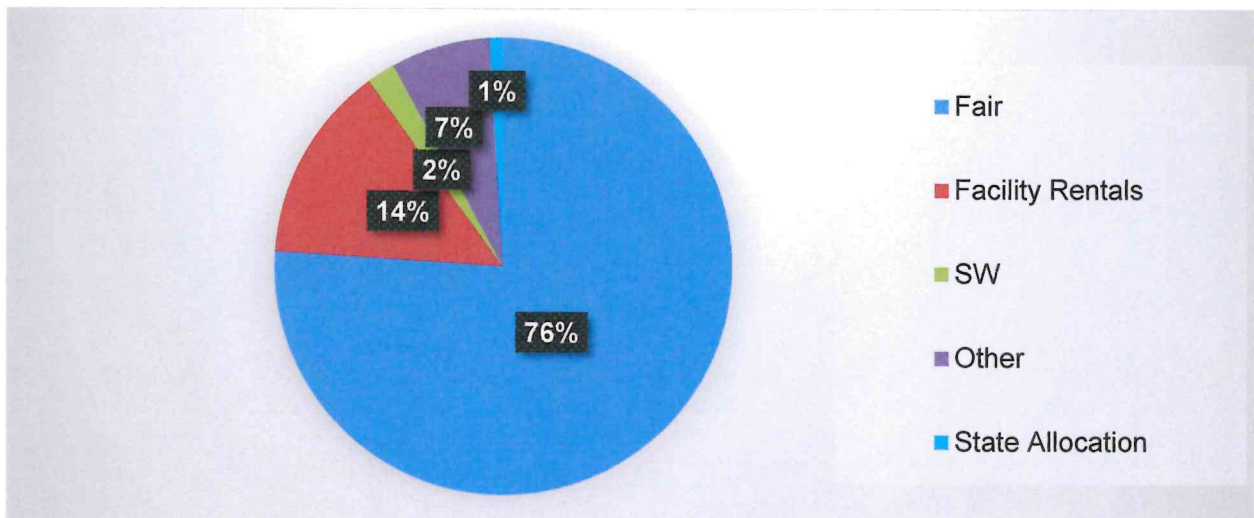
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Total Revenue	7,672,868	1,399,720	2,329,901	9,238,060	9,066,563
Total Expense	7,612,029	2,468,457	1,210,274	7,415,296	5,655,479
Net Proceeds	60,840	(1,068,737)	1,119,628	1,822,763	3,411,084

\*2023 is through August

### B. Five-Year Revenue Detail

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Annual Fair	5,394,586	1,258	186,487	7,027,915	6,373,134
Facility Rentals	1,008,898	660,886	1,142,585	1,306,009	1,845,921
Satellite Wagering	1,162,780	636,213	820,048	214,940	229,836
Other	103,174	100,319	180,739	685,030	
State Allocation	0	962,915	1,538,023	61,000	0

### C. 2022 Revenue by Percentage

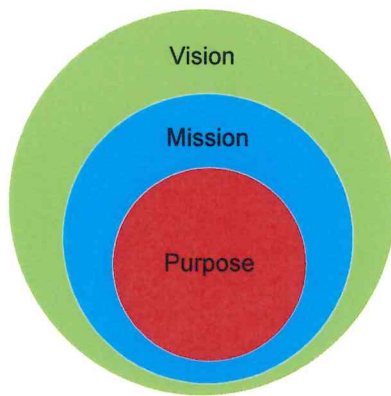


#### D. Business Units Contribution to Net Proceeds 2022

	Revenue	Expense	Net
Annual Fair	7,027,915	3,766,154	3,261,761
Facility Rentals	1,306,009		1,306,009
Satellite Wagering	214,940	79,542	135,398
Other	685,030	551,603	133,427
Administration		1,076,193	(1,076,193)
Maintenance		1,941,803	(1,941,803)
State Allocation	61,000		
TOTAL From Operations			\$1,818,599

#### 4. Where Do We Want to Go?

Bailey-Findley facilitated the board and staff discussion regarding the Purpose, Mission, and Vision of the Ventura County Fairgrounds.



**Purpose:** Why do we exist?

**Mission:** How will we act on our purpose?

**Vision:** What will the world look like when we've completed our mission?

#### A. Purpose Statement

In State code, the purposes of a District Agricultural Association are dictated.

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL CODE - FAC**

**DIVISION 3. EXPOSITIONS AND FAIRS [3001 - 4703]**

*( Division 3 enacted by Stats. 1967, Ch. 15. )*

**PART 3. DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS [3801 - 4363]**

*( Part 3 enacted by Stats. 1967, Ch. 15. )*

**CHAPTER 3. Organization and Administration [3951 - 3968]**

*( Chapter 3 enacted by Stats. 1967, Ch. 15. )*

**3951.**

Fifty or more persons, who are residents of a district, may form an association to be known as and designated as the \_\_\_\_\_ District Agricultural Association, for the following purposes:

(a) Holding fairs, expositions and exhibitions for the purpose of exhibiting all of the industries and industrial enterprises, resources and products of every kind or nature of the state with a view toward improving, exploiting, encouraging, and stimulating them.

(b) Constructing, maintaining, and operating recreational and cultural facilities of general public interest.

*(Enacted by Stats. 1967, Ch. 15.)*

The group went beyond what is dictated by California law to articulate the Purpose of the Ventura County Fairgrounds. A Purpose Statement should describe:

- The reason the Ventura County Fairgrounds exists.
- The reason for personal involvement. Why are you doing this work?
- What is the cause uniting the organization?
- What is the fairgrounds championing through its contributions, service, good works?
- The purpose statement directs how to Lead with purpose – how the organization's values are lived.

Through an exercise in which those in attendance shared a personal experience at the Ventura County Fairgrounds that was inspirational, motivating, exciting and soul-feeding. From these shared experiences, the Purpose Statement of the Ventura County Fairgrounds began to take shape.

Shared "Best Moments"

- Inspired by watching youngsters performing daring, athletic, talented feats with my granddaughter and knowing that she was being exposed to excellence and mastery. Providing a platform where others can shine and be encouraged.
- I was introduced to a new interest at a young age at the fairgrounds and it continued as a life-long interest.
- Witnessed a child being recognized for their achievement and comprehending the importance of that moment in the child's development.
- Being in a welcoming, fun environment that allowed me to engage in friendly competition and camaraderie with my friends.
- Witnessed the many examples of personal achievement and the power of public recognition of excellence, talent, accomplishment, and creativity has on the individual and the community.



- At Fair opening, watching guests arrive with enthusiasm, ready for celebration, excitement, and joy. Being able to offer this experience to many.
- The Fairgrounds served as a place of refuge and safety in times of emergency and crisis in the community. Felt the pride and contribution of being a first responder. Being a part of a generous community and honorable civic response in caring for one another at a time of great need.
- Was empowered to include a community with special needs that had in the past been excluded from the total fair experience. Opening the fair experience to a broader, diverse community and witnessed the joy it produced.
- Being a part of community history and family heritage. Belonging to generational community experiences and stories.
- Shepherded and assisted a vendor resulting in life-changing business opportunities that changed the trajectory for his family.

#### DRAFT Purpose Statement

The group suggested concepts for a Purpose Statement

- Where tradition meets tomorrow.
- The community's gathering place.
- The thrill of being together more than once a year.
- Incorporate "fairgrounds" into the statement rather than just "fair."
- The place where our community shines and connects with each other meaningfully.
- Our place where the extraordinary happens.
- Where everyday people can achieve and excel.
- House proud.
- Growing along with our community.

#### **Proposed DRAFT Purpose Statement**

The Ventura County Fairgrounds is the community's keystone where we gather to experience our remarkable diversity and commonalities in celebration and pride.

#### **B. Mission Statement of the Ventura County Fairgrounds.**

The Mission Statement is expressed in the present, describing how we act on our purpose. The current Mission Statement of the Ventura County Fairgrounds is:

The mission of the 31<sup>st</sup> District Agricultural Association, otherwise known as the Ventura County Fairgrounds, is to promote, support, educate, celebrate and preserve the diverse culture and traditions of our County and to make certain that the Ventura County Fairgrounds be an exemplary multi-use community resource.

The board and staff members worked on creating a revised, DRAFT Mission Statement.

### Proposed DRAFT Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Ventura County Fairgrounds to provide a beautiful, accommodating year-round place by the sea where the community gathers to celebrate and preserve the diverse cultures and traditions of our county.

### C. Vision Statement of the Ventura County Fairgrounds

The Vision Statement for the organization depicts what will the world look like when we've completed our Mission.

The group shared concepts to incorporate into a Vision Statement for the Ventura County Fairgrounds:

- Showcasing cutting edge agricultural innovation.
- Renowned facility that reflects its community.
- A first-choice space to experience life moments.
- Country fair with ocean air.
- County fairgrounds by the sea where the world gathers.
- An amazing place.

### Proposed DRAFT Vision Statement

It is envisioned that the Ventura County Fairgrounds will be the people's first choice gathering place where the world gathers to celebrate amazing beauty, innovation, diverse cultural richness, and a sense of belonging to an honorable community.

### D. Setting Direction

The group turned their discussion to highlighting the critical issues facing the Ventura County Fairgrounds. What are the life and death issues that must be addressed? Their list included:

- The fairgrounds is downstream from an EPA stie, the Mitilja Dam.
- Environmental issues and putting into place sustainability practices.
- Landlocked property along with limited parking space, erosion and managing the erosion retreat.
- Incorporate the ocean/beach into fairgrounds.
- Investing in and planning for capital projects.
- Understand the how to govern as a board, setting direction and creating policy.
- A business plan for satellite wagering.
- Becoming a horse show destination.
- Creating a capital plan for long-term use and improvement.
- Aging infrastructure.
- Long term plan to diversify and grow revenue.



- A comprehensive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion plan that is incorporated into all elements of the Fair and fairgrounds.
- Developing an organization structure and strategic plan for hiring.
- Improve perception of the Ventura County Fairgrounds in the county. Improve marketing, outreach, and public relations.
- Emergency preparedness of the fairgrounds.

The group then created four Direction statements to consider for Ventura County Fairgrounds' future.

### Proposed DRAFT Direction Statements

1. Be proactive in environmental stewardship, addressing the proximity of the fairgrounds to an EPA site, seeking alternatives to onsite parking of vehicles, manage erosion, and incorporate conservation and sustainability practices into fairgrounds operations.
2. Create a business plan that diversifies fairgrounds income long-term, addresses the decline in satellite wagering, and grows the facility rentals and events program, seeking new diverse events.
3. Address aging infrastructure, facility deficiencies and environmental issues by creating a capital improvements plan, including funding, scheduling, and implementing improvements in a systematic, accountable manner.
4. Build a system and organization of governance, including board development, staffing and strategic hiring, diversity, equity and inclusion planning, and clarity in roles in responsibilities reflecting a productive, effective team that manages and operates the Ventura County Fairgrounds.

## 5. Conclusion

### A. Next Steps

The board and staff identified next steps in the strategic planning process.

Action Step	By Whom	By When
1. Prepare the minutes of the 11/14/23 strategic planning meeting and distribute to the board for review and approval.	BBE to CEO & Heidi to edit and distribute.	11/20/23  Board Meeting 11/28/23
2. Adopt the proposed DRAFT Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Direction Statements	CEO & Board President	January 2024 Board Meeting
3. Add a capital improvement fund category to the 2024 Budget.	CEO & Finance Committee.	February 2024 Board Meeting.
4. Prepare the Revised Policy Manual for full board review and approval.	Board Committee	February 2024 Board Meeting.
5. Conduct a second strategic planning meeting with board and staff.	CEO & Board President	Target April 2024

B. Evaluation of Board Retreat and Strategic Planning Meeting

The group evaluated the day's meeting with suggestions for future strategic planning meetings.

What Worked Well?	What Could Have Been Better?
There are advantages having a facilitator who is experienced in the fair industry.	Take efforts to ensure that all board members and key staff are included.
Having prepared handouts and the power point was helpful.	Always include where we've been and where we are going in the planning process.
Today's meeting exceeded expectations.	
Ended the meeting with precise deliverables.	
The setting was wonderful. Thank you, Ventura County Community Foundation.	
Learning to trust the process.	
Discussion was open and everyone participated fully.	
We are learning to build trust in each other.	
We got to know each other better.	
Appreciated the flow of the planning process – how it built upon itself.	
Amount of time was good. Suggest keeping at 4 – 5 hours.	
Appreciated staff being included and involved.	

C. Final Thoughts

Remember, when you have money you have options.

**Public Comment**

Mr. Burt Handy explained that the point of him coming to the retreat was to learn more about the Ventura County Fair. He stated that this session was very interesting and there have been a lot of changes. He tipped his hat off to the new CEO for all the improvements to the grounds. He thinks there should be something included in regards to surfing because that is a big part of the fairgrounds operations.

**IV. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:48 p.m.

Submitted by: Heidi Ortiz  
Heidi Ortiz, Executive Secretary

Approved by: Jennifer McGuire  
Jennifer McGuire, CEO Ventura Fairgrounds

Approved by: Leah Lacayo  
Leah Lacayo, Board President