

Fairgrounds Task Force
Monday, January 18, 2022 - 9:00 pm
Held Virtually

Roy Holzer - Chairman

Chairman Holzer called this Fairgrounds Task Force to order at 9:30 with the following in attendance: Clayton Barber, Stephanie DeZalia, Derek Coty, Shaun Gilliland, Roy Holzer, Ken Hughes, Jim Monty, Matt Stanley, Ike Tyler, Davina Winemiller, Meg Wood, Jim Dougan, Mike Mascarenas and Holly Aquino.

Also Present: Dina Garvey and Dennie Westover (9:15).

HOLZER: Thank you for all attending, you all went all out. The only ones that really travelled today is Jim Dougan and Holly, so your dedication is noted.

AQUINO: Do I have a choice?

HOLZER: Unfortunately, not. Okay, so let's get this underway.
Holly, has the Ag Society assigned an actually member to be on this Task Force?

AQUINO: Not that I am aware of, no.

HOLZER: Okay, could you reach out to them? They should have 1 or 2 alternates, at least to, you know, to be part of this conversation a little bit more with the actual Task Force Committee.

AQUINO: Sure

HOLZER: I think that's important.
So, we're going to start off, Holly, with your report, if you want to just highlight it? And then, for any members of the committee or even if you're not on the committee, feel free to interject and ask questions. We're kind of low key on this Task Force, so go ahead Holly.

AQUINO: Okay, so the fairgrounds calendar, we do have a couple of new events that have come up. We've got five dates for some new horse shows. Some of them we've had in the past was the Northern Adirondack Equestrian Club. They're going to have events on a Saturday and then following on Sunday, there's a new event, the National Barrel Horse Association. They're going to have an event following that. So, there's five weekends where there's a Saturday/Sunday event and those are all on the calendar.

If you go on the Essex County website, the fairgrounds page on the calendar they're all in there. So, you can always see the events that are currently booked there.
And then, you know, if there's no questions about that, I'm just going to go on to some of the things I've been working on.

I've updated all the permit forms that are required for people to request a permit to rent the fairgrounds. I did submit everything to Dan Manning on January 6th for his approval. I haven't really heard back yet. I think I may go ahead and put them up on the website anyway, because they really have not changed. I'm asking for a little bit more information on the application forms, but the rules and regulations have all stayed the same. The fees are staying the same. I've just reformatted them to make them look a little bit nicer. So, they're basically all ready to go and some of these events that are already on the calendar, they do need to start filling out those new forms. For the fairgrounds webpage on the County site, I do now have some control over that. So, I can actually put up these forms myself. I don't have to wait for anybody else to do that. If there's any text that needs to be changed, I can do that myself. I can do any major stuff, which I don't want to do major stuff, but these little maintenance things, I can now do myself.

And then there's a couple of housekeeping things we need to discuss. For those new horse shows, I need a little bit of direction from the Committee, because I think we've touched on this before. There is sand in the horse arena, right now, that the equestrian club has used this past year, but they have complained that it's extremely rocky. They took out buckets and buckets and buckets of rocks to make it a bit safer, but it's still not to their liking. They are more than willing to help with getting suitable sand into the arena, but what's currently there, they are suggesting, if we could just rake out the rocks that would be a tremendous help. They don't have to be, you know, pulled out and put anywhere. They just need to be out of the horse arena. So, if the Committee wants to kind of deal with that, and let us know if we can somehow do that for them, please let me know.

HOLZER: Okay, Holly, stop right there for a sec. How big is the area they're looking to break down and what kind of an event do they actually hold out there? What do they have for attendance? How much are they kicking into our coffers for the use of those facilities? And what group?

AQUINO: So, it's sort of an overlapping group. It's the Northern Adirondack Equestrian Club, which has used our arena in the past. Moreen Roy is managing that club and she's also on the Fair Board. So, they are now designated a National Barrel Horse Association. So, this is a new event that is going to happen. They have booked five weekends and they anticipate between 25 and 30 horses every weekend, so 25-30 riders, plus their families and friends attending. Their biggest concern is that it is dangerous for the horses when they, we're only talking about the area inside the horse ring. They said, you know, when the horses run around, it's just dangerous for the kids, if a horse turns an ankle, it's dangerous and so all they're recommending is that right now, that whatever rocks are in there, if there's some way they can be raked out that would be helpful. If they determine that they need additional sand put in, they would take care of that.

HOLZER: So, Ike, do you have a Parks Department, Ike?

TYLER: Do you have a rake that you can put behind a tractor or truck or whatever that can go around that? I wonder, if Jim, if you thought that would be suitable, just to go around that, just to get the rocks. That is what they used on the main track.

DOUGAN: Yeah, we borrowed a York Rake in the past, actually I think the Town of Westport helped us do that. Part of the reason I wanted to have the discussion is and they're, they're, this group is working with us in the past, they're said, we want five loads of new screened sand and they're just saying rake it out, so I know that's the kind of thing we probably can do, but as we move forward, similar to talking about cleaning last month, I just want this Committee to be aware of the expenses and the requests that are coming. So, raking this out, that's a little bit of time and borrowing a York Rake, I think, as I said before, we got it through a little bit of help from, from Ike's people over at the Highway Department, but five loads of screened sand would probably cost us \$1,500.00; okay? For an event, and I think we charge them \$25.00 a weekend or a day a weekend. Alright, so you know, so we're going to spend \$1,500.00, not in this case, this year it sounds like they're willing to bring that in, if they need to, but I just want this Committee, as we try and make this fairgrounds get used more, aware of those kinds of decisions and you should be part of it, rather than, you know, I don't want to be the guy that just says no to these people, but I also don't wanna put us in the red over things like that, that we're only going to make \$125.00 over those five weekends.

HOLZER: Agreed, agreed. I think as a Committee, as a County, rather, we actually owe it to that, those facilities to have actual budgeted seed money that we can, we can take care of things like this, so hopefully grow the events out to the area. So, I think it's a, it's a two prong issue. It's one, getting the event there, but it's two, having a little bit of seed money from the County to invest in stuff like you just mentioned, Jim.

TYLER: The money that they get from the Sire Stakes, because you know the woman who's running this is also on the Ag Board, maybe we could mention to her that they get this money from the Sire Stakes, because they could use it for that sort of thing.

HOLZER: That's why I think it's important to have a representative from the Ag Society at our Task Force meetings to keep that communication.

AQUINO: I would just keep in mind that, that just because Moreen is on the Ag Society, this has nothing to do with the Ag Society right now. This is a totally separate organization who does not have access to Sire Stakes money.

TYLER: Well, I know, but the Sire Stakes money is used for the fairgrounds, not just the track, so they could use it.

AQUINO: They could, I believe in the past it has been up to the Ag Society to decide what to do at the fairgrounds with their money. So, if they wanted to discuss that, you know, that's totally fine.

But, if we want other horse shows in there that are not directly tied to the Ag Society, this is something I think we need to, you know, keep in mind and talk about.

DOTY: Just a suggestion, Jim, when you get ready, or we get ready as committee members or whatever to rake that ring, you might consider a Johnson Rank, you know landscapers use them

and unlike a York Rake, the rocks actually stay in the back of that Johnson Rake and they're up and gone, whereas, a York Rake, you've got to kind of keep funneling them on the angle that you're pulling at and you miss some of them. So, I think a Johnson Rake would clean it up well and you might not even need five loads to put a nice, soft, sifted layer on the top.

DOUGAN: Yup, that's a good idea, just haven't had one of those immediately available for free to borrow in the past, but understood and I just want to remind everybody that our lease agreement to rent to fairgrounds says, as is. So, there's some leeway that I'm gonna, I'm really wanting the Committee to help me to decide what "as is" means; okay? So, as is, I understand the horse safety concern, you know, again, \$1,500.00 in cost for \$125.00 in revenue and I realize we're not running the fairgrounds like a business, hopefully, someday we will.

HOLZER: Well, Jim, my only response to that is, I think, the County and this again, was before my tenure on the Board, I think the narrative changed, when the County Board of Supervisors created this fairgrounds position. I think we're only part way there, though, because I really think we need an operating budget to do some of the things that you're, you're mentioning, it shouldn't just be absorbed by the DPW. That in order to make a real good decision down the road, whether the County should even be in this business, we have to make an investment, see what that investment actually creates and then make a decision based on whether we want to continue funding this on behalf of the taxpayers or have it standalone or give it to the Town of Westport. That's just my thoughts.

AQUINO: Yeah, and there's, there's other things beyond just rocks in the horse arena. You know, there's also a question that, you know, the Equestrian Club came to me to find out if we can help them with manure management. I think for the fair we have provided a dumpster and then they just put it all in that dumpster and I think that DPW takes it away. But, when there's a horse show there, manure management is a huge thing and how do we do that? I'll just let you know in the past, when the 4H Club, when they have horse events there, what they do is they put it in a pile and then somebody takes it to a farm, you know, for fertilizer, which is great, but the horse shows don't have the ability to do that.

GILLILLAND: Roy, this is Shaun, can I say a couple of things?

HOLZER: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman.

GILLILLAND: One, I think, maybe Holly, when I horse event is there, we got to put something in there, what is their manure management plan, because I don't think, you know, taking it to farms and I know there are plenty of farms that will take it back, you know for me, you know, there are large ones that do composting and stuff, but they ought to be able to provide a manure management plan.

AQUINO: And that's, that's totally fine. I just wanted to get direction from the Committee, because in the past we have been providing assistance with that.

GILLILLAND: I understand and then the second thing to, you know, Roy, on the Ag Society, what's happened in the past is this Board, because the Ag Society exists and there was not a lot of other stuff going on there at the fairgrounds over the year, you know, we just kind of, in the past the Board just kind of advocated responsibility of the fairgrounds to the Ag Society and then we kind of ended up where we were and we had to grab the reins and take the management of it back and I'm just, I'm just, you know, cautious in allowing them too far back into the decision making proposition of this thing, because, you know, they, they basically are a tenant once a year.

HOLZER: Yes, yes, your point's well taken, Shaun, but I just feel from a standpoint of keeping communication going with them, I think it's important that they at least have someone regularly attending our Task Force meetings. Make no mistake about it, I know that the direction of the fairgrounds, in my mind, anyways, representing you guys, has changed that we want more events out there and I do recognize that the Ag Society is only one part of that, but we're just talking about adding, adding a \$1,500.00 expense to the horse ring there, that certainly, they may have the funding mechanism to take care of that. That's why I wanted someone from their group on our Committee.

GILLILLAND: Understand and if they're investing and using these Sire Stakes money and stuff like that than we, the communication should be there, how it's being done and it should be approved by your committee.

HOLZER: And by everyone else, sure.

GILLILLAND: And then the other thought on this, is you know, if we're going to run this thing, we ought to and I agree with you, we should have an operating budget in order to maintain a minimum standard for the various events that we're going to cater for. So, above and beyond that minimum standard, you know, we should decide on then there it would be up to the tenant to add to that. That's my belief.

HOLZER: Agreed, agreed. Holly, so we don't run out of time, what else do you have for the report?

AQUINO: So, we had spoken about cleaning fees, as well, to maybe pass this on so people wouldn't have to stock their own toilet paper and clean the restrooms, if they didn't want to. We did have a discussion about this. In order to put that on our current cleaning crew, it's going to be very expensive. So, my thought is to perhaps keep it the way it is, where everybody's going to just have to be responsible for stocking their own restrooms and cleaning the restrooms, because it's going to be 10x more expensive to do a cleaning fee than it is to actually rent that facility.

HOLZER: Okay, for the time being, we can just keep it that way.

AQUINO: Okay. The other thing is, and Jim can probably talk a little bit more about this is the water situation, the strict requirements by the Department of Health. We have to make these signs for the water, because of what the Department of Health makes us do for every single event to make it potable. It's just kind of restrictive.

DOUGAN: Yeah, I'll jump in here. At the pre-fair inspection last year, we had a different Department of Health representative that we've seen in the past. That gentlemen felt that every event that we have there should meet the requirements of a fair. That is not exactly how the Department of Health has dealt with events in the past. The fair, an agricultural fair requires a very high chlorine level because of the potential for contamination with hoses running across the ground and plenty of manure and, you know, the possibility of everything from salmonella to E. Coli because of the animals on site and so they've always required a higher level of water testing and treatment just prior to and throughout the fair. The inspector that was here, this past year, as I said, feels that we need to do that for every event. That means taking two samples, within two days ahead of time, taking those samples up to an independent lab, testing the water every day and that very high, like I said, .2 chlorine limit, .2 residual chlorine limit at the farthest point on the fairgrounds. So, it takes quite a bit of time. I feel it's more than what most events that we have, or do, however, know that it is Department of Health regulations. So, one way around that is for small events to have those non portable water signs up in the bathrooms and any place where water could be made available. The other option is to perform all of that testing. So, you know, I really don't have a good answer, I don't know what this Committee thinks about this.

HOLZER: Well, I think you're, from my standpoint, I think your solution, right now with the signage makes more sense until we start having a lot more events there, and then we'll have to re-evaluate it.

DOUGAN: Does, you know, I mean, it's from Holly's standpoint, and I should let her talk for herself, but as somebody trying to market the facilities, I understand when they walk into a bathroom and it says, non-portable water. The fact of the matter is, the water comes from the Town of Westport and I'm 99.9% sure that it's always potable, during these events. However, it doesn't mean that it necessarily meets the requirements of a fair with that much higher chlorine level. I would tell everybody that the nutrition building is off of the same water source and is the spot just before the, the water lateral that goes to the nutrition building is where we currently boost the chlorine and so, I kind of wouldn't want to boost according to that high level and then have the nutrition program constantly be putting out food that has that much additional chlorine in it, when you know, most of the time the fairgrounds aren't occupied. So, that's all, I mean, it's something we'll need to continue to work on, and I'm hoping to have more conversations with the Department of Health, but as we're getting ready for events that are going to start, you know, in, at the very end of April, we have our first event, we just want to be prepared for whether or not we've got to do all that additional testing or not.

AQUINO: Yeah, because we may have events that, you know, for the 4H Club, even if it doesn't involve animals, you know, if kids can't fill up water bottles from a spigot, they just need to make sure that everybody arrives with their own filled water bottle ahead of time.

DOTY: Jim, is there a history of failed water reports or anything? I don't understand the daily mandate for testing. You know, like we have Craigwood Golf Course and we have well water, of course and we have ultraviolet system that protects the user's there that works very well and I

wonder if that's an option for whenever the horse shows are, are being held and again, it's a budgetary item, I get that.

DOUGAN: There was one issue a few years ago where the Town of Westport was having a little bit of trouble with their water system at the same time as the fair opened, but they were able to take care of it. The Department of Health did ask us to install a chlorine residual analyzer and a chlorine booster pump, which we did do and since that, I think it's been in operation for about three years, during the fair there have been no issues and you know the funny thing about a public water system is that, at your home, at the biggest hotel in Lake Placid, when if they do a chlorine residual, all they have to find is a trace, all they have to find is a trace, but for an agricultural fair, it needs to be this 0.2 parts per million, which is significantly more and I'm sure that some of those big hotels in North Elba have a lot more people that attend than a horse show, that is projecting to have 15-20 people. So, we really haven't had issues per se, with the water quality there. Westport does a good job to supply us, but because it's a fairgrounds, because it's called the fairgrounds, they're strictly reading this requirement.

HOLZER: Questions for you, Jim.

DOUGAN: So, an option is to have an operator that checks it and does these things, you know, before every event takes those tests.

HOLZER: Is the Department of Health, besides the fairgrounds terminology, is it also because of the seasonal aspect of the water being used there?

DOUGAN: There is a seasonal startup procedure that we do before every, you know, before it starts every year that it would still require the fairgrounds testing even if it was a permanent water system. There has been some talk of reconnecting that water system back to Sisco Street. Right now, the water enters the property at, up by the nutrition building off the Route 22 and then it could be connected back to the Sisco Street with like a three valve configuration, but, you know, if there was any contamination on the fairgrounds, you wouldn't want it to cycle back through that system. So, it's, there are probably some more permanent solutions, but it will come down to budget.

HOLZER: Okay, yeah, well, we definitely have some more to talk about in terms of the water system there. We got to get around whether we got to do this all the time or if it's just for the fairgrounds, because you keep bringing up that Department of Health is regulating that more so, because it's fairgrounds, but that's only a small part of what those facilities are used for. In the long term, it might be suggested that we have to look at those rental rates and whatever food service is going to be offered at those facilities.

DOUGAN: It's State sanitary code regarding fairgrounds and I think it is set up, really, regarding agricultural events. However, like I said, this particular individual from the Department of Health who happens to be the boss of all the other individuals we were dealing with over the past few years, is taking a very strict line with it.

HOLZER: So, so, not to keep this conversation going too long, but your previous suggestion of hooking on the water to a different location on the Westport system, what would that do for us and what kind of a rough cost estimate would we be looking at?

DOUGAN: I'd want to make sure that the Town of Westport is okay with that connection, in the past, I've estimated it to be around \$20,000.00. It's not a lot of water main, we'd put a 3 valve configuration in so that it could be shut off, and then the mains going both directions into Sisco Street could also be shut off if they needed to be. What that does is a loop system now, so the water is constantly circulating and so in the fairgrounds, because it's a dead end system, what will happen, especially at the far end, is the chlorine will dissipate. So, over time it will dissipate, it will burn out versus in a loop system it's continually flowing. So, you're able to meet some of those requirements a little bit easier without boosting quite so much chlorine, but again, that would take a lot of coordination with the Town of Westport, as well. I wouldn't want to just dump more chlorine into their system and have any of their constituents complain.

HOLZER: Gotcha. Holly, do you have anything else, before we wrap up?

AQUINIO: Yeah, just one more thing, because you had mentioned a budget, we need a real budget in order to move forward and so how do we do that? I know this past year we've gotten a whole bunch more money with occupancy tax and that's been converted into grants to be handed to non-profit organizations. How do we apply for that money? I mean we have these two County owned facilities directly tied to tourism, the fairgrounds and the fish hatchery and we don't qualify for any of the funds. So, I would love to have a conversation on how we can get \$50,000.00 for holiday decorations, but we can't get \$50,000.00 for maintaining the structures at these facilities and that's a much longer conversation, but we did mention, we need some sort of seed money in an operating budget, and we can't let this slide too much longer, because, as all, these structures have been dilapidated and we're going to be scrambling for funds to try to fix them up. I mean, we're spending over \$70,000.00 painting Floral Hall this year and that's all money coming from taxpayer money. How do we use tourism money to help these tourism facilities?

HOLZER: So, that definitely is a much longer conversation. I don't know, it's a conversation we'll have to have with ROOST, they're already funding part of your position, as well, is my understanding. So, we'll definitely would have to take a look at it. In the meantime, though, I wouldn't mind you, you working with Jim and even myself and coming up with what, you know, a budget a three-year budget would look like and what kind of expenses versus revenue you project? As far as the Floral Hall painting, that's County facilities, the County has an obligation at this point, to keep them up and I think it's just the cost of doing business, doing government.

AQUINO: Yeah, keep in mind, Floral Hall is just one building. If you look at every structure out there, there are over 50 structures out there.

DOUGAN: Let me jump in if I can.

HOLZER: Sure

DOUGAN: Yeah, that was one of the goals when this Board created that position, we said in the first year that one of the things we're gonna do is work on a budget. So, I appreciate Holly's desire to get this done and it is something, everything takes time and so it's already one of the things that was one of our goals and so you're going to see better reports on what we're spending out there than you've seen in the past. You know, with all due respect, my job, I've always had, fairgrounds hasn't been my core responsibility. I always felt roads and bridges and snow coming down and the other buildings that people were occupying, good, bad or indifferent, I always looked at those as my first priority and I think that people before me did the same, but now that you've given me somebody who's going to spend their day on fish hatchery and fairgrounds, then I can provide you more data and more support. So, this is a work in progress and we'll get it to you.

HOLZER: Alright, thank you Jim, thank you everybody.

TYLER: Jim, are you planning on sending a snowplow out or do you want me to see if our guys can clear the track off?

DOUGAN: I already spoke with Kenny this morning and they're going to be there sometime today.

TYLER: Alright, let me know, anytime, alright?

DOUGAN: Alright, thanks.

HOLZER: Anything else, Ike?

TYLER: Nope, I'm good.

HOLZER: We're going to wrap up this Task Force and get ready for DPW.

**AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER DISCUSSION, THIS FAIRGROUNDS TASK FORCE WAS
ADJOURNED AT 9:31 AM.**

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors