

Fairgrounds Task Force
Monday, April 19, 2021 - 9:00 pm

Roy Holzer - Chairman

Chairman Holzer called this Task Force to order at 9:00 pm with the following in attendance: Clayton Barber, Robin DeLoria, Archie Depo, Stephanie DeZalia, Shaun Gilliland, Charlie Harrington, Roy Holzer, Ken Hughes, Steve McNally, Jim Monty, Jeff Subra, Ike Tyler, Joe Pete Wilson, Davina Winemiller, Jim Dougan, and Mike Mascarenas. Dan Manning was absent

Also Present: Lynn Donaldson, and Dina Garvey

HOLZER: We'll call this task force meeting to order. Good morning, okay, so I wanted to get going on the Fairgrounds Task Force Committee.

Just a little update for our members. I did attend an Essex County Agricultural Society meeting, Monday, they are attempting to take care of some of the issues that they have with past creditors; which I was encouraged by that. Making payments to everyone, maybe not as much as they would like, but they are making payments to everyone. They are taking care of some tax issues from last year. They still have some issues to take care of there. They're like everyone else, trying to get some kind of guidance from the State; whether, what our fair would look like this year. So, we'll know in the days ahead what that is going to entail. They're still hoping for some kind of event out there, time will tell. But, you know it was an interesting meeting. One thing that came up in the meeting and Jim I spoke to you, but we'll talk about it here at the Committee meeting is reopening the facilities, in terms of getting the water back on and you know, cleaning up the grounds and stuff. Where do we stand with the water being back on?

DOUGAN: We're going to turn the water on the last week of this month, we coordinate that with the Town of Westport to start it up. We found one lead valve leaking, so we ordered the parts already and then we've got to flush it real well, chlorinate it and then take samples a few days in a row, get them approved by an independent lab and then we can turn the water on. That is scheduled for the last week of this month.

HOLZER: Okay and what about the, the damage on the track that was done due to the hurricane?

DOUGAN: Yeah, FEMA came and investigated it and determined it wasn't going to meet their minimum threshold of \$3,300.00. So, now that the frost is pretty much out of the ground our crews will be doing that. I expect that to be done in the next two to three weeks, at the most, that will be getting done and Soil and Water had said that they would hydroseed that for us.

HOLZER: Perfect and what is going to be your approach just in case we can't get inmate labor for the grounds, this year?

DOUGAN: Well, last year we performed the mowing with our Public Safety Building, Building and Grounds staff. They found time to be able to go over and do that. I know it wasn't probably as good as we've seen in previous years when we've had the extra labor, so knowing that we're coming out of COVID and we'll have to be a little proactive on that. But, right now, the plan is the Public Safety Building, Buildings and Grounds staff until we get any prisoners.

HOLZER: Okay, thank you.

Lynn, I asked you awhile back to do an analysis of what other fairgrounds, counties, and private companies who are charging for storage for their grounds, what did you come up with?

DONALDSON: Well, Clinton County is \$12.00 a foot for theirs, plus tax. Westport Self-Storage, which is right next door to us is \$30.00 a month and that comes up to just about what we're charging. Willsboro is a private entity, so they're \$37.00 a month, they're a little higher and all those places are outside storage, so you have to do the shrink wrap, which is \$12.00 to \$25.00 a square foot.

HOLZER: So, my personal opinion, of course it's up to the Board and stuff, is I don't think as a county government we should ever be cheaper than private enterprise for the taxpayers throughout the county. So, that being said, how would we go about adjusting our storage rates out there, at those grounds?

DONALDSON: We would up it by the foot.

HOLZER: Now, do we do it just as a Task Force or does it need a Board of Supervisors resolution?

MASCARENAS: Both

HOLZER: Both?

MASCARENAS: Yeah, so a recommendation from this Task Force that would then go through the Board for approval?

HOLZER: Okay, so what we'll do, because we're almost done with the storage for this season anyway, we'll come up with actual language. But, Lynn if you could continue to work on that and again, I would like to be a little bit higher than the highest private company that's out there. Again, we've not in the business, we're not in the storage business, as a county government and if anyone disagrees with me, just speak up, but my feeling is, I don't think the County should be in competition with private enterprise.

TYLER: Yeah, I think it's a good idea. I think basically you can just go to Westport Storage and just a little more than what they charge.

HOLZER: Well, you guys were about the same, but then Willsboro has one that was higher than us, so again, we're going to keep up, we're going to continue to do our survey and then we'll go

from there. Because, I just want to make sure that we're a little higher, if we're going to continue the storage business we should be higher than the surrounding communities. Any other comments on that before we move on?

DOUGAN: Roy, just so, our public transportation, they will pay certain storage for units that we aren't using during the winter months, for example, like the trolleys that are in the Lake Placid Express. So, Lynn and I are working on that a little bit. So, you would be charging, you'd be charging a different department than the fairgrounds for that, as part of a, it would be reimbursable through the transportation program. So, we may try to do a little bit more of that out at the fairgrounds in the future, especially if you raise the rates and that pushes anybody away.

HOLZER: Well, that would be perfect, because I think down the road, Jim, we're going to have to look at the county fairgrounds as like a better, right now I get the feeling that if something needs to be done, we were just talking about you working on the grounds themselves, you just send personnel over there, it gets done and there's no real fiscal accounting of how much we're investing into those grounds versus what those grounds are generating and look, if we're going to take a loss, we're going to take a loss, but I do think that general repairs, maintenance, things like that should have something we can point to and say, okay, fairgrounds costs Essex County Taxpayers this much money. So, if we can get some additional revenue from those bus rentals that could be used to offset the other expenses that would be awesome.

DOUGAN: Okay, then we'll get to work on that.

HOLZER: Any other questions on that?

So, let's move right back to this event position, Jim. You and I spoke about it a week and a half ago, where are we right now with the position?

DOUGAN: We received five new applications, along with, we contacted the applications from last spring, before COVID hit that did come in and of the 10 overall, 7 individuals were still interested and I did interview those candidates in the last couple of weeks. I brought that list down to 2 that I have asked Mike to assist me in the second interview, partially because of Mike being in charge of the overall youth program. I think that's a nice easy lift to try and coordinate some of that and Mike being the Deputy County Manager and so I have to coordinate with him, but right now I am hoping for later this week or the very beginning of next week that we will interview those two and make a decision shortly thereafter.

HOLZER: So, it's conceivable by next Task Force meeting we might have that position filled and that individual here?

DOUGAN: Yeah, I'd like to have a decision, I would like to notify somebody, obviously before the end of this month, April, to give them their time that they need to get through our pre-employment physical and notice to their employer, that way in May we've got somebody.

HOLZER: Okay, any questions for Jim from the Committee?

Okay, getting back to the testing of the water. When do you think that those facilities would be available to just reopen to the general public, if we get requests for events?

DOUGAN: Based on doing that, we get our lab results 2-3 days later, the first week in May. The first week of May we'll have water on.

HOLZER: Okay and what kind of work do you think, I've been out there a few times, but what kind of work do you think it's going to take to get the grounds ready to be safe to wander on and things like that?

DOUGAN: Well, we should probably, if we haven't fixed that sloped barrier from the Halloween Storm then we want to at least have some kind of protection, orange construction fence or something around it. I think that's the biggest safety issue other than turning the water on that I see.

TYLER: Is that the one around the track, Jim?

DOUGAN: Yup, yup, not far from where the Midway Diner used to be.

TYLER: Yeah, I know.

DOUGAN: So, we're planning to do that in the next two to three weeks. So, as far as safety goes that would be my only safety concern. Obviously, lawn mowing and cleaning and raking and things like that, you know, a little bit of that is still weather dependent. They're calling for more snow again on Wednesday. But, May 1st is when we tell people they're supposed get anything they stored out of there, correct, Lynn? And so, we'll be coordinating a little bit of that. I think people have been using the track all winter to walk; correct?

TYLER: Yeah, there has been no problem there.

DOUGAN: If somebody notifies us that there's an event then we'll move even quicker.

HOLZER: Okay.

DOUGAN: You know, we'll step up our effort.

HOLZER: Just for my own knowledge, Jim, what is the history with the campground out there? Like what is the last time, I'm under the understanding that we used to lease that out to a private company.

DOUGAN: You used to lease that out to a private company, you were leasing that out prior to me arriving in Essex County, about five and half years ago. A year and half ago that company decided not to lease it anymore, does that sound right?

TYLER: They're not a company. They're two private individuals.

HOLZER: Okay

DOUGAN: And so it's only been used during the fair since they left, since they abandoned that lease or got out of the lease.

TYLER: There was an issue with the dumping, was used sporadically, year around no charge. That was kind of due to the previous owners, I believe were facilitating that.

HOLZER: So, how many years did they lease that from the County?

TYLER: I don't know, five years.

DOUGAN: They were leasing it before I got here.

TYLER: I would say at least five, maybe seven years.

HOLZER: And how many sites did they have?

TYLER: Now, less than they had before, but I don't know for sure, because of the new building took a few of them.

MASCARENAS: They're pretty close, Roy. They're right on top of each other. I don't know, maybe 9-12.

HOLZER: So, were they full hookups or were they just primitive sites?

MASCARENAS: They're hook ups.

DOUGAN: Hook ups.

HOLZER: Okay

MASCARENAS: But they are literally build for fair use. That was the original intent, so a lot of people in a small space; which doesn't make it real attractive to, you know what people want for a camping experience, necessarily. It's kind of behind the nutrition building.

HOLZER: Okay, okay

MASCARENAS: Right there and you'll see there's hook ups, probably just enough room to pull in an RV. A few years ago, Jim and I explored all the other property behind to see if there was opportunity for other camping there. There's lot of ledge, could probably do something primitive, if you wanted to, but any development of that property would be costly in terms of roads or

anything you tried to build throughout the whole thing. Like I said, you could do some sort of primitive back there.

HOLZER: So, definitely some higher priorities, okay, I just was curious.

MONTY: I was just going to reiterate what Mike said, I think the decision a year ago was the two gentlemen that were leasing it decided that they didn't want to lease it, was it just going to be used for that week of the fair when people brought their, workers and such brought their campers to stay in, so they would put them there for that.

HOLZER: So, that would just be part of our lease with the Ag Society?

MONTY: What was my impression from a year ago.

DOUGAN: Even when we had the separate, private lease, during the fair the Ag Society was given the use of the camp sites for use during the fair.

HOLZER: Okay

GILLILLAND: They kept the contract with the campground, the guys that rented the campground it was for the year, except for the two weeks, each side of the fair and then it went back to them afterwards.

HOLZER: Gotcha

TYLER: Yeah, I would think there is an opportunity there, because I know when the dog show's there there's campers and stuff down there. There's other things, now that we're going to have more stuff there I think there's an opportunity there and you know have 8-10 campers up there. I know it's kind of a nice spot, you know for people that come in that might want to hang out in Westport, the brewery's right there and I think if there's advertising a little bit I think you could get a response there. Just seeing some of the other campgrounds, I know going up the Northway and I look over by Bryant Lake on the right and you see how that's packed in there and next to the Northway and packed in there and I am thinking, you know.

HOLZER: Well, people are definitely looking for a lot more outdoor activities. I can tell you having three campgrounds in my town, last year was non-stop busy right up until Columbus Day.

TYLER: I know Barber Campground in Westport is filled year around down there.

HOLZER: That's something for the events position to take a look at.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, any event that needed to use the campground we would absolutely entertain that.

HOLZER: Okay, alright, good decision. Any other issues with the Task Force this month? Okay, we're adjourned.

**THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS TASK FORCE IT WAS
ADJOURNED AT 9:16 AM.**

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors