

Jefferson County Fairgrounds Advisory Committee Meeting, January 28, 2020
Green Mountain Conference Room, Jefferson County Fairgrounds, 6:00 PM
Notes by Frank J. Blaha, Jefferson County Horse Council Board Member

Summary

This was a meeting which was originally structured to be between Don Davis - the Jefferson County (Jeffco) Manager - and the Fairgrounds Advisory Committee. No public comment was going to be taken. It was follow-up from a meeting the previous week (Tuesday, January 21) where the possibility of closing the Fairground had been discussed, and this new meeting was billed as a "brainstorming session." Mr. Davis was the moderator of this new meeting, and he took notes on whiteboards at the front of the room. The Advisory Committee and some selection of the Fairgrounds users were located at a "head table" so to speak. I never heard any explanation of who had been chosen to sit at the head table or why, but it seemed to be the Advisory Committee and representatives of some of the main groups using the Fairgrounds for agricultural (ag) or equine activities. There were probably 100 to 125 members of the public at the start of the meeting. Once again, the room was full and people had to stand around the edges and in the hallways. There was no sign-in sheet at this meeting. Announcements of the meeting had indicated no public comment would be taken. However, as had occurred at the previous meeting, public comment and questions posed to Don Davis were taken from the public at this meeting. The meeting ended with Mr. Davis stating that he would recommend as an option, possibly the most viable/strong option, the idea of the ag and equine-critical areas, being taken over by Jeffco Open Space. It appeared that his thinking was that other parts of the Fairgrounds, especially the buildings, would be used for other county purposes. This meeting ran from 6:00 PM to approximately 8:40 PM.

Opening of the Meeting

Mr. Davis started the meeting by again stating that the County is looking at \$12.5 million shortfall in 2021 funding, and that the Fairgrounds are projected to cost the County \$1.8 million in 2021. The previous week he felt that there were three options before him:

1. Status quo
2. Running the Fairgrounds as an Enterprise Zone
3. Shut-down/elimination of the Fairgrounds

Based on input from that meeting, he dismissed the idea of an Enterprise Zone as simply unworkable for the full Fairgrounds, the status quo unacceptable to him due to budget concerns, and shutdown of the Fairgrounds unacceptable to much of the public. He stated that he was hoping in this meeting to identify other options. He hoped to establish as chief outcomes of this meeting:

1. The main stakeholders in ag/equine activities at the Fairgrounds
2. Facilities critical for good ag and equine activities, and
3. Optional Facilities for good ag/equine activities.

He wanted to identify a workable solution to the situation that would minimize unhappiness.

Budget Numbers

Budget numbers were mentioned at various times during the meeting. For instance, Mr. Davis early-on stated that the cost to run ag/equine activities at the Fairgrounds was \$180,000 per year. He did not cite how he had developed this number. I tried but could not develop or verify this number from the existing Fairgrounds budget information available on the web. I present below various budget numbers discussed at the meeting. Sometimes one person would cite a number, and another person – often Mr. Davis – would correct and give a slightly different number. I generally defer to Mr. Davis’ numbers below.

1. \$12.5 million county budget shortfall for 2021, this is in particular out of the General Fund
2. The General Fund budget for 2021 is \$215 million for the county
3. Cost to run the Fairgrounds: \$1.8 million
4. Ag/Equine operational cost \$180,000 (Mr. Davis’ number)
5. Cost to maintain the “Buildings” on the Fairgrounds is \$550,000 per year (Mr. Davis’ number).
6. Fairgrounds budget is currently 77% personnel and intergovernmental changes

Stakeholder Identification in Ag/Equine Activities.

Mr. Davis took input from the room at large on stakeholders, giving primary attention to the people at the “head” table. Identified stakeholders noted by Mr. Davis were:

1. High School Rodeo
2. 4H
3. Westernaires
4. Equine Clubs (Lakewood Riding Club, Buffalo Bill Saddle Club, Jefferson County Horse Council, etc.)
5. Colorado State University (CSU) Extension
6. Public/local homeowners
7. Ag/Equine businesses
8. Animal Evacuation groups
9. Cultural History (Mr. Davis was reluctant to put this down)
10. Foothills Animal Shelter (Mr. Davis was reluctant to put this down since the land is separately owned, but people pointed out that the Shelter uses some of the Fairgrounds land for exercising their animals)
11. Tourism.

Options to Run the Fairgrounds and Reduce County Budget Deficit

Similar to the stakeholder discussion Mr. Davis took input from the room at large but gave preference to the people at the head table. He wanted to develop options beyond the original 3 noted at the meeting of the previous week, options “4” and up. He was less consistent in putting these ideas down. I put a number of options down that were suggested at the meeting that he had not noted on the whiteboard. Often an idea would be suggested, he would make a few comments with some discussion, and we would move on to another comment/question with no notes made but also no explicit rejection of the idea. Options were (these are numbered for convenience, no special meaning to any of these numbers, and some of these ideas were not noted by Mr. Davis):

(Continued from Mr. Davis' three starting options on page 1)

4. Affiliate the Fairgrounds with the National Western Center which is going through a big re-vamp and where the National Western Stock Show is held and where those operations are not subject to TABOR limits.
5. Enterprise zone for only Ag/Equine Activities (Mr. Davis noted that this option would need to show less than a 10% need for tax support, and a viable plan for 5 years – he commented again the idea of an Enterprise Zone for the full fairgrounds was unworkable).
6. Fairgrounds operations moved to be under Jeffco Open Space (It was noted that Open Space has a sales tax funding program approved in 1972 that is not subject to TABOR limits).
7. An itemized ballot initiative to get the Fairgrounds out from under TABOR limits (Mr. Davis stated that this could not be the only option put forward since the ballot initiative might be unsuccessful).
8. Partnerships, particularly public-private partnerships with corporations.

Critical Facilities for Ag/Equine Activities

Similar to the stakeholder discussion Mr. Davis took input from the room at large but gave preference to the people at the head table.

1. Outdoor arenas, especially those in the “upper part of the Fairgrounds” (The area further to the south from the 6th Avenue Frontage Road, and including the Rodeo Arena)
2. The Events Center – the indoor arena that is on the upper part of the Fairgrounds near the Rodeo Arena (Jeffco Horse Council does Ring Ride Monitor in this arena some January evenings)
3. Livestock barns (Mr. Davis was reluctant to put this down. In discussions on the need, or not, for these facilities, animal evacuations in wildfire and other emergencies was noted as a driver, as well as for some of the 4H/FFA etc. type activities.)

More Development of the Open Space Option

Tom Hoby, the Director of Jefferson County Open Space, was present at the meeting. There were extensive discussions of how the Open Space option to run some or all of the Fairgrounds might work. Some issues/observations:

1. Open Space funding is through a ballot resolution that was passed by Jeffco voters on November 7, 1972. These funds are not subject to TABOR restrictions.
2. The 1972 ballot identified those operations and activities acceptable for Open Space (OS) to engage in. This is frequently referred to as the “OS Charter” but is an “Enabling Resolution.” This resolution is on the Jeffco Website, but it would limit acceptable activities at any OS facility, including any Fairgrounds land if taken over by OS. For instance, Tom Hoby did not believe the Friends of the Jefferson County Library “Whale of a Used Book Sale” could take place at OS facilities. Similarly, a for-profit rodeo could probably not take place on OS facilities.
3. Open Space is averse to having buildings in its operations, so while outdoor areas, and outdoor arenas, pens, and stalls, are something OS can work with, buildings under control of OS are a concern to Tom Hoby. It appeared that Mr. Hoby would be opposed to OS running any buildings whatsoever. The specific buildings under discussion were never enumerated. Mr. Davis thought the Events Center – basically a big indoor arena with some bathrooms and indoor bleachers (a

building by most people's definition) near the Rodeo Arena would easily be acceptable for OS operations. However, I never saw Mr. Hoby agree with this suggestion/idea, he just did not react in any way.

4. Mr. Hoby specifically mentioned that many of the activities and events at the Fairgrounds buildings do not fall within the OS enabling resolution.
5. The OS option was frequently tied /associated with a 501c3 non-profit "Friends" or "Foundation" group in the discussions. I believe that different people had different ideas of what this adjunct organization might do. At times it was suggested this group could run "the buildings." At other times it was suggested this group could, perhaps, allow other events not allowed under the OS enabling resolution. In some instances it seemed this adjunct group would be a long-term co-participant at the Fairgrounds. In general it seemed that the adjunct group would become the long-term operator of the Fairgrounds or whatever part of it might be saved, with OS playing a temporary role early on in saving/operating the Fairgrounds. Once a strong Friends/Foundation group was created, that organization could take over Fairgrounds operations. It was pointed out that it would be impossible to create such an organization this calendar year.
6. Further details associated with the OS option would be worked out between the County Manager and the Open Space Director.

Some Miscellaneous Observations

1. There are a number of stakeholders interested in the Fairgrounds for activities beyond Ag and Equine and beyond what OS can allow. Tractor pulls, wrestling, etc., were mentioned a number of times at both meetings.
2. There are people upset by the low usage of the Fairgrounds in recent years.
3. Recent low usage of Fairgrounds facilities are often tied to high charges associated with use of the facilities and/or very restrictive rules associated with use of the facilities.
4. The RV park at the Fairgrounds was mentioned a few times and apparently usage of this area has also significantly decreased. There appeared to be many details associated with this park that got little attention at these meetings, but the RV park would be important to address in long-term Fairgrounds planning.
5. Animal Evacuations: Mr. Davis, consistent with comments at the previous meeting, feels all evacuation needs can be arranged for by contract with "many available facilities," that there is "much infrastructure," and "many options available." Contracts would be set-up so that no costs would be incurred by the county until an evacuation was actually needed. Animal evacuations are a non-issue in Mr. Davis' mind.
6. It was stated that Prospect Park District is now running (bought?) the Applewood Golf Course and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) funding was part of that.
7. GOCO funding was mentioned as a possible source for Fairgrounds support, but Mr. Davis opined that GOCO funding was hard to get – very competitive.
8. Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) funding, which is used at Dinosaur Ridge, was brought up as a possible source of funding associated with the Fairgrounds and future options in its operation.
9. The CSU extension operations are a partnership between CSU and the County, and apparently both organizations are involved in support of the CSU Extension and the associated staff.

10. At this meeting and the January 21 meeting Mr. Davis brought up using the “Buildings” at the Fairgrounds for other county operations – like consolidating what is currently two separate Jeffco Department of Motor Vehicle offices into one at the Fairgrounds, as well as other county operations/offices. It appears that moving county operations like this to the current Fairgrounds is an integral part of his thinking.

Next Steps

1. Mr. Davis will brief the County Commissioners on Tuesday, February 4, 2020, at 8 AM. This will take place at the Jefferson County Courthouse and will include information on the Fairgrounds/Jeffco Budget situation. At this briefing Mr. Davis specifically stated he would “include the Open Space option” for the Fairgrounds. I would assume this would be a fourth option to the original three regarding Fairground operations (status quo, enterprise fund, and closing). However, he specifically stated the OS option cannot include “the whole fairgrounds.”
2. Mr. Davis assumes the Open Space option will be of interest and possibly preferred by the Commissioners and anticipates follow-up discussions with Mr. Hoby to work through details.
3. Public comment, limited to 3 minutes, will be allowed at the meeting on February 4. It would seem that anyone wanting to preserve the Fairgrounds should consider speaking at this meeting and/or communicating with the County Commissioners and others about their concerns.
4. Once again, it was cited that a firm direction/decision for the Fairgrounds must be established by October.

The meeting adjourned about 8:40 PM.