*Expo Idaho Citizen’s Advisory Committee Meeting #1 Minutes*

*February 26, 2020; 5:30p.m.; Expo Idaho Western Town*

Attendees: Commissioner Visser; Commissioner Lachiondo; Sheldon Barker; Allen Taggart; Bill Connors; Matthew Wordell; Matthew Wilde; Kent Rock; Ed Lodge; Scott Ki; Andrea Fogleman; Mark Lavin; Brad Hoaglun; Kelsey Holder; Jennifer Salmonsen; Clay Carley; Nichoel Baird Spencer; Saydee Henning; Ian Malepeai; Bob Batista; Meg Leatherman, Brianna Bustos; Kelly Woodworth; Ellen Campfield Nelson

Meg Leatherman:

Meg welcomed everyone and introduced Commissioner Lachiondo and Commissioner Visser.

Commissioner Lachiondo:

Commissioner Lachiondo thanked the Committee members for agreeing to serve on the committee. She indicated that they consider this property to be an important asset to Ada County and rather than the Commissioners deciding what the next steps are with the racetrack they felt it was important to open it up and engage the public. She wants to continue to dispel rumors and to be transparent and open about this process.

Commissioner Visser:

Thanked everyone for serving in this capacity. He furthered that advisory Boards and Committees have been vital components for decisions the Board face and he looks forward to their participation.

Meg Leatherman:

Meg congratulated the Committee members on their appointments. She introduced the four members that were not at the last meeting: Scott Ki, Saydee Henning, Ian Malepeai, Nichoel Baird Spencer. She gave a brief background on the committee formation. There was a resolution adopted by the County Commissioners in 2019 to start this advisory committee. The Committee members were all officially appointed last Tuesday, February 18th and Ed Lodge and Andrea Fogleman were nominated as co-chairs. She said that the Board indicated that the Committee could reassign co-chairs if desired as the bylaws have not yet been adopted by the Board. She furthered that due to the vote that no longer allowed horse racing the Commissioners were going to have to look at that 60 acres and they wanted to look at the whole property from a larger perspective and make sure that they are considering the entire 240 acres. Meg finished by stating that the bylaws would need a recommendation to the Board during this meeting.

Brianna Bustos:

Brianna addressed the public and thanked them for coming. She indicated that we wanted to make sure that the public that came to the meeting, even though they’re not sitting on the committee, felt that it was useful for them to be there and that they could participate to some degree. Brianna invited the public to share their thoughts by writing them down on the paper sheets on the walls. She furthered that the last half hour of the meeting would be open for them to talk to the Committee members.

Meg Leatherman:

Meg briefly touched on Phase I and Phase II of the process. She indicated that this Committee will be helping us create the Phase II process.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen discussed the agenda and outlined the meeting. She indicated that the first part of the meeting would be a lot of welcome and orientation and some housekeeping. We would like everyone to re-introduce themselves and then we’ll walk you through the project binder. The bylaws will need a recommendation from the Committee and Ed and Andrea will walk us through that. Then we’ll review the objectives and deliverables and have a group discussion about the process. She indicated that we do have a framework, but we want to make sure that the meetings and topics follow what the Committee wants to talk about. She continued that Bob would give a more in-depth tour of the property than what is in the binders including a picture of the activities that happen year-round and insight into the finances. She indicated that we’ll discuss key informants who they would like to hear from to have an informed discussion about the fairgrounds. Then we’ll talk about what comes next and reserve the last half hour for the Committee to have informal conversations with the public. With that, Ellen asked for introductions from the Committee members and staff.

The committee Members and staff introduced themselves.

Kelly Woodworth:

Kelly went through the binder table of contents and discussed the information contained.

Ed Lodge:

Ed told the Committee that they would like to have a conversation about the by-laws and asked for questions or concerns about the draft.

Bill Connors:

Bill asked if someone couldn’t make a meeting if they could send a sub.

Meg Leatherman:

Meg indicated that yes, they could send a sub, but we would ideally like you to be here.

Ed Lodge:

Ed asked if there was a motion to approve the by-laws.

Bill Connors:

Bill moved to approve.

Clay Carley:

Clay seconded.

Ed Lodge:

Ed asked if there was any discussion on the motion. There being none the Committee held a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Andrea Fogleman:

Andrea indicated that they would like to talk about the procedural structure and the working operation of the Committee. We want to keep it really casual; we want everyone to feel like they can speak their mind. Andrea asked if there were any suggestion for the ground rules from the Committee. The Committee suggested that only one person speak at a time.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen discussed draft committee objectives and deliverables with the Committee. She wanted to discuss what is it that this Committee will be working towards. She said that it comes down to three things: lets make sure to do a good job collecting information to make relevant decisions; explore options of what could happen on the site, and to recommend aspects of a public engagement process for Phase II. She reminded that this Committee is not tasked with making a decision about the property but rather evaluating the options and opportunities for the site and making a recommendation about scenarios to consider. The Board will ultimately decide what happens with this property. The final deliverable should be some kind of short summary about what you have learned and what you recommend to the Board moving forward.

Matt Wilde:

Matt asked if anything had changed in terms of deviation of the plan moving forward.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen said that as far as the schedule goes it will be for the Committee to decide how many meetings to have and how long the meetings go. The one thing that remains consistent is that by the end of April we would still like to keep that as a timeframe for having some kind of initial finding or set of recommendations.

Clay Carley:

Clay asked if during this process there would be any current feedback from the public on what they think or hear.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen indicated that there are the 150ish comments that have come through the website already. But this Committee could choose who else it would be valuable to hear from for the Committees process and we can devise ways to make that happen efficiently.

Ian Malepeai:

Ian asked that with the diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, there are areas that he would feel comfortable providing a recommendation and areas he wouldn’t. Is the expectation to collectively gather enough information to make a comprehensive recommendation or will it be focused on the areas where we think we have expertise or add value?

Andrea Fogleman:

Andrea said that she thinks its an open dialog for any information you get. She is getting feedback from her neighbors in her subdivision. She doesn’t think there are any formal guidelines as to how you collect the information or do your research.

Allen Taggart:

Allen asked if there were strategies or best practices for engaging the public.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen indicated that there are a lot of processes around engagement and a lot of different tools. She furthered that the county has folks that specialize in that and her firm focuses on public outreach and engagement and so we can bring some of than information into the conversation. Ellen furthered that there was a question on the agenda that asks, “what activates would you suggest to help us meet these objectives.” She would like to hear and record the Committee’s thoughts about what are some of the things you imagine doing over the next several meetings. What are some of the ideas you have or what has worked for you in other processes.

Allen Taggart:

Allen indicated that he loves starting these processes with the need or problem that needs to be solved. In general, what needs do the public have for this property. From his perspective, kids particularly in Ada County are dealing with more physical and mental health challenges then ever before so what can be utilized from this property to develop those protective factors or skills to be able to combat that.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen clarified that Allen is talking about what is going on in the county at large that maybe could be addressed through this property and Allen agreed.

Kent Rock:

Kent thinks we need to identify workable solutions that we can give to the County Commissioners at the end of the day. That’s the outcome he sees us working towards.

Nichoel Baird Spencer:

Nichoel stated that this property sits on the corner of two state highways and it’s really important that as part of this process we engage ITD so we understand both how they are going to let us access the highway or what restrictions they’ll place on the property. It’s a current issue with the property as it’s managed today and it will be a future issue.

Clay Carley:

Clay indicated that the property is owned by the county but surrounded by two municipalities, so understanding what the county feels that it’s needs are of the community are crucial and likewise, the two surrounding communities, or having some parameters of what they feel they need or want from this process or the property and some effort on our part to try and prioritize those.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen clarified to take care of the needs of certain jurisdictions, meaning Garden City and Boise, and Clay agreed.

Allen Taggart:

Allen added that you could go as far as Ontario with our reach of people coming to utilize the property. Just being aware that there are more than locals and more than the Treasure Valley being invested in this property.

Brad Hoaglun:

Brad said that because it’s in Garden City’s Comprehensive Plan, in particularly we need to be aware of what their plans are.

Andrea Fogleman:

Andrea said that we need to engage the users of the property like the Little League that uses the park.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen asked if this is something that everyone thinks; will it be hard for you to make informed decisions without having the perspective of people that use the property or do you think that’s represented in large part by this Committee already?

Bill Connors:

Bill said that you need to know the current users or uses and how are you going to solve the problem if it’s not here. You have the Hawks and Expo Idaho which is a huge asset to the County. He indicated that yes, he thinks that is job number one. The County has specific needs; the County needs office space. This is a big piece of property that could solve a lot of problems.

Kent Rock:

Kent said that in addition to engaging the user we need to engage the people that are affected by it whether they use it or not. He used to live nearby and there were times that the concerts would get loud. Whatever we do, we need to know traffic, noise, etc.

Sheldon Barker:

Sheldon indicated that he has started reading all of the uses and comments and he realized there are a thousand different alternatives that we may look at. From a process perspective, he’s not sure how we’ll narrow it all down efficiently and quickly because we don’t have that much time to get this done.

Scott Ki:

Scott said that we should consider sustainability. Not just conservation sustainability but also economics. He also mentioned that users, birds, fish and wildlife, don’t necessarily have a voice.

Nichoel Baird Spencer:

Nichoel stated that there are some issues on the property. She mentioned the floodway versus the floodplain and deed restrictions on Lady Bird Park. So, there are somethings that we really need to understand very quickly of what can and cannot occur and really start talking about what’s the usable space.

Saydee Henning:

Saydee stated that we need to identify more of what the youth use the property for because it’s so much a part of how they grow up. She furthered that she didn’t play sports when she was little and 4-H filled that void. She thinks we need to hear from more than just her as a youth and that these types of programs make them better members of the community.

Ian Malepeai:

Ian stated that understanding the needs is great and then building on that on a foundation that we agree on. Also the fiftieth anniversary of the greenbelt and perhaps looking at other communities case studies and trying to look long term, not just at tax revenue today. What do we want Ada County to look like a hundred years from now. We’re already a very popular area; do we want to be that in a hundred years. What can we do to do that.

Matt Wordell:

Matt said he thinks that along those same lines we can look at park spaces along the greenbelt. Community and arts and culture opportunities for people to engage through fairs and markets. Seeing how that has affected those areas and see the potential for here.

Jennifer Salmonsen:

Jennifer stated that she’s a very hands on learner and said we might do a tour.

Matt Wilde:

Matt said that he’s curious about what kind of analysis has been done on assets. The sky ride for example is still being appreciated. We might say that’s a building that doesn’t have much value and we won’t worry about keeping that and what should we be focused on keeping.

Mark Lavin:

Mark said he understands that the property funds itself and we’re not relying on tax payers and is that the baseline moving forward. What is the baseline objective from the county’s perspective. Is there a financial expectation.

Kelsey Holder:

Kelsey said that its important as we come to realize key assets and we utilize those and whether we keep it the way it is. He goes back to the general comments that were submitted and really there is a broad range of people that would like to see it the way it is. Identifying the assets of what is green space or what could create green space is an initial focus based on an all or nothing scenarios. We need to narrow it down so it doesn’t turn into competing interests.

Ed Lodge:

Ed said that he appreciates everyone that has spoken and they’re spot on. He’s seen the aspects of this property and the importance of the property and having a greenspace and its value for people to be educated.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen said that many of the things that the Committee has listed are things that in this process can be addressed. A couple of other pieces can be included. She’ll take all of the ideas about process and put them into a proposal. What are the activities that we are going to go through and what’s the information that we’ll bring in. And then bring that back to you all at our next meeting.

Nichoel Baird Spencer:

Nichoel asked Bob Batista if we had an idea of the maintenance and operational cost of the facilities and major improvements that need to be done.

Bob Batista:

Bob indicated no. They have an idea of deferred maintenance costs and improvements that they need to make. They are an enterprise fund and until they raise enough money for improvements they can’t do anything.

Kent Rock:

Kent agreed with Nichoel that that would be interesting information to have.

Bob Batista:

Bob said that he could get them his operating budget so they can see what those costs are.

Clay Carley:

Clay asked if there were any known environmental hazards or potential hazards on the property.

Bob Batista:

Bob said that he couldn’t think of any environmental hazards there. He feels pretty confident that they don’t have any issues. He’s been here 20 years, but 20 years prior to that he couldn’t tell you.

Andrea Fogleman:

Andrea indicated that we would move on to Bob and the virtual property tour.

Bob Batista:

Bob passed out a map and a list of events for 2020. He explained that the Western Idaho Fair is a division of Ada County and they are managed by three County Commissioners who ultimately make decisions and authorize what’s done on the campus. They also have the Western Idaho Fair Advisory Board. Their goal is to help Bob and his staff make recommendations to the County Commissioners. They pay for all of their own bills. They use mostly County services such as IT and the attorney’s office and they pay for all of those as an enterprise fund. He went on to say that he’s been the director for 20 years and discussed his background. He indicated that staffing is 13.5 people and described his staff. He mentioned that they are an enterprise fund and discussed rental rates which are right in the middle; not high end or low end. He explained that because they are county government they can only contract out one year in advance. He discussed his business model and that their busiest times are Thursday through Monday when they have a lot of events going on. He further talked about the events and the location of those events.

Nichoel Baird Spencer:

Nichoel asked about the ACHD property on the map.

Allen Taggart:

Allen asked about water rights and storm drains.

Bob Batista:

Bob explained the ACHD property and the water run-off on the property.

Ed Lodge:

Ed asked about the parking and if it was free during the fair.

Bob Batista:

Bob agreed. He continued that the fair is the most prestigious, profitable fairs in the northwest. And, about 250k people attend the fair on an annual basis.

Matt Wilde:

Matt asked what sets our fair apart from other fairs.

Bob Batista:

Bob responded that it’s very clean and very safe and the parking is handy for a lot of folks. He went on to discuss fair participation and attendance rates. They employee 600 employees during fair time. He discussed the economic impact during fair time. He further discussed their different types of vendors and indicated that the carnival grossed over 2 million. He wrapped up by discussing revenues and expenses.

Meg Leatherman:

Meg clarified that there was an attachment in the binder that discussed restrictions in more detail.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen said that if there were any questions, they could note them on the evaluation sheet or email them into the county. She defined key informants and asked for brain storming ideas about them.

Clay Carley:

Clay indicated neighboring property jurisdictions with influence. ITD anybody related to the river or the greenbelt and adjacent neighborhoods.

Matt Wordell:

Matt said that it would be interesting to hear from the folks who implemented White Water Park.

Kent Rock:

Said that generally what people think could be developed here if that was the direction to go. He furthered that thoughts about what alternatives there are.

Kelsey Holder:

Kelsey indicated that we really need to consider COMPASS for population and growth projections.

Saydee Henning:

Saydee indicated that we should speak with more leaders in livestock.

Nichoel Baird Spencer:

Nichoel explained that she would really like to understand the floodplain and the floodway a little better.

Matt Wilde:

Matt said that the Foundation of Parks and Lands owns the island adjacent.

Brad Hoaglun:

Brad indicated that people are asking about expanding the baseball field, adding soccer fields or multipurpose stadium. He said that we have the Hawks, but he doesn’t know who speaks to the multipurpose, soccer field type of facility.

Sheldon Barker:

Sheldon said that we all want to protect some of the things that happen here. If we went radical and thought to move some of those things, how hard is that. Are there other locations, along I-84 perhaps, that are feasible. It’s hard to think about something radical if there’s no real alternative.

Jennifer Salmonsen:

Jennifer mentioned the vendors and getting a spokesperson to speak on their behalf.

Scott Ki:

Scott indicated that it would be great to know about any hazardous materials on site. And also, wildlife experts.

Allen Taggart:

Allen said that he’d also be interested in soil quality.

Ian Malepeai:

Ian had a thought about transportation and if there are considerations that we need to be thinking about.

Bill Conner:

Bill said that there are other fairs out there. Are there best practices.

Nichoel Baird Spencer:

Nichoel said that she’d like to hear from Bob. He said that we’re the best in the northwest but what are some of the other fairgrounds that he wants to emulate or does he see ideas or thoughts about challenges, etc.

Matt Wordell:

Matt indicated that we could talk to someone that could tell us how these buildings could be reimagined or repurposed.

Ellen Campfield Nelson:

Ellen said that we should think about different priorities and different ways to bring this information into the conversation. And then we can think of strategies, like maybe some of the committee will interview people and bring that information back. Maybe we can survey some folks or have people submit some information to us. So probably a mix of things. Ellen finished up by talking about some housekeeping items and scheduling a site tour. She indicated that we would come back with a more refined process next time and start getting into more activities.