

## Community Services Committee Meeting

### Douglas County, Nebraska

Tuesday, September 20, 2016

The meeting convened at 10:48 A. M. in Room 903 of the Omaha-Douglas Civic Center, 1819 Farnam Street, Omaha, NE 68183. A copy of the Open Meetings Act is located on the wall near the entrance of the room. A notice of the meeting was published in the September 13, 2016, issue of *The Daily Record*. County Commissioners present at the meeting were Mary Ann Borgeson, Jim Cavanaugh, Chris Rodgers, Marc Kraft, Clare Duda, and Mike Boyle. Others present at the meeting were Patrick Bloomingdale, Joe Lorenz, Diane Carlson, and Catherine Hall, County Administration; Kent Holm, Environmental Services; Deborah Ward and Keith Backsen, Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau; Rita Clark, Chris Chappelle and Scott Olander, County Fair Board; and Constance Mierendorf, Douglas County Clerk/Comptroller's office. Commissioner Kraft chairs the Committee.

A video recording of the meeting is available on the Douglas County Website:

<http://commissioners.douglascounty-ne.gov/board-meetings/videos>

### **Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau Partnership**

- Keith Backsen presented an update on the Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau (OCVB). He came to discuss a partnership with OCVB and La Vista and to share information from OCVB's most recent trade show activity.
- Over the past year the OCVB has been more regionally focused. The practice has always been to market strictly Omaha/Douglas County properties to meeting planners. Recently, when a planner asked for a venue like the La Vista Embassy Suites, Mr. Backsen realized he would lose the good will of the planner if he did not cooperate and provide them information even though the property is outside of Douglas County.
- The question became how the OCVB could work with La Vista properties and still be fair to Omaha/Douglas County hotels and venues. He talked with Omaha meeting hotels and they were supportive of a cooperative model. Mr. Backsen has also discussed the idea of a cooperative model with the City.
- In the next 2 weeks, a proposal with La Vista will be ready that will be in effect for 3 years. OCVB will provide leads to La Vista when a customer in the meeting and group tour market is interested specifically in what La Vista has to offer and La Vista will pay a commission to OCVB.
- Douglas County is OCVB's biggest funder. It wants to make certain that the agreement does not take away business from Douglas County. The Bureau can always pull back if the agreement is not working.
- Commissioner Boyle said he believes in regionalism and that he would favor going even further: Ralston, Mid America, Baxter, etc. Aksarben also has a lot to offer.

- Transportation support makes a big difference for these destinations. He would like to see support from Metro Area Transit.
- Mr. Backsen said he attended a focus group of meeting planners about second tier markets in Washington, D.C. The findings were that the planners didn't consider any place the "Midwest" except Chicago. The focus group also believed Denver is a "cow town."
- Commissioner Cavanaugh agreed that these economies are integrated. The La Vista retail commercial corridor as well as the Ralston arena all benefit the 72<sup>nd</sup> St. corridor.
- Mr. Backsen said the OCVB represents Ralston to meeting planners, but it is somewhat difficult to put meetings together for the Ralston area since there aren't a number of hotels in the immediate area. He does show Baxter and Ralston when Century Link is too big or too expensive for a client. Transportation is a factor that could help bring business to these venues.
- Mr. Backsen said he has participated in the 262 granting process and incentives could be offered to help book Baxter or Ralston. Perhaps the cost of transportation could be offered as an incentive to potential clients. They usually have money to promote their events, which is where a lot of 262 money goes. What would really help them is to cut down some of their actual costs—bus costs, for example.
- The OCVB continues to receive matching funds from the City.
- It would be helpful to have a transportation discussion and plan with Metro Area Transit to facilitate tourism.
- Commissioner Boyle said it is good to be less competitive with Sarpy County and asked if OCVB could have some input into the river front development.
- Commissioner Kraft asked where the commissions for the La Vista lead agreement would go.
- Mr. Backsen said they would go into their reserve/incentive account they use to assist clients who qualify.
- OCVB has very strict criteria to qualify for the funds.

### **Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau Update**

- Mr. Backsen said this past year, the OCVB has made a significant investment in their group business sales team; they have added new staff and filled positions that have been vacant for a time. This is showing positive results.
- During the first 8 months of this year, occupancy county-wide has been 59.7%--flat with last year. However, the average daily rate has gone up. Revenue is up 8.2%.
- Hotel room supply has increased 3.8% and demand has increased 4.5%. The market has finally made the swing to where demand growth exceeds supply. OCVB is still projecting an increase of 2-3% in occupancy and revenues for this next year.
- Commissioner Rodgers asked if there is anything the Board can do to help get OCVB involved in the river front development discussion.

- Mr. Backsen replied that the visitor voice needs to get to the river front discussion. There hasn't been a lot of attention paid to what brings people to Omaha and what they do when they get here. OCVB has spent money on research to answer these questions by the end of January.
- Mr. Backsen said OCVB is working with a consultant to identify "attractiveness factors": 20 things that are significant in bringing visitors to Omaha. OCVB will be presenting their goals later this week based on some of this data.
- Commissioner Boyle said the County gave away \$3,750,000 of 262 money in 2016-17. He would like to see some of that money shifted to the riverfront development.
- Mr. Backsen said his staff has generated 294 leads for possible groups coming to Omaha this year. This represents 357,000 hotel nights that have been booked, which is an increase of 143% over last year at this time. Hiring staff has paid off and the OCVB is beginning to see results. 114 definite group bookings have been scheduled this year; over 50% of those bookings are already in. The goal is 110,000 room nights, so the OCVB will hit their goal for the year.
- On the leisure side, the OCVB is looking at ways to get people to weekend getaways and also looking at attracting people during the down seasons.
- Mr. Backsen said they attended the American Society of Association Executives annual convention, the largest convention they attend during the year, where all of the executive directors are in attendance. This year the convention was held in Salt Lake City. 679 booths were on display at the convention center: hotel corporations, cities, countries, etc.
- The Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau booth was awarded Best Booth. It recreated the Old Market and offered 4 different experiences including grilled Omaha steaks, craft root beer, and Benson handmade soap.
- The booth had traffic of 800 people in 2 days; the usual traffic is 300 visitors in 2 days. They were able to do 350 pieces of business.
- Mr. Backsen said the main objective is to build relationships at the convention and to give them a glimpse of what kind of experience they would have in Omaha.

#### Environmental Services Update

- Kent Holm presented an update on Environmental Services. About 1 ½ months ago, the Board approved the interlocal agreement between the County, Sarpy County and the City of Omaha for the operation of Under the Sink special waste facility. That agreement has been finalized for a 5-year term with the potential for another 5-year term. There may be some improvements in the grant funding process (which funds Under the Sink) with NDEQ (Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality) that would not require filing for a grant every year.
- The Integrated Solid Waste Management Task Force met on August 10. There was discussion about the ability of SIDs to hire their own solid waste collection companies, the Omaha Yard Waste Study, and MAPA 2050.

- There will be a follow-up on the City of Omaha's SCS Engineers' yard waste study and results should be available next month.
- Discussion also occurred regarding how Keep Omaha Beautiful could be involved in education and outreach activities. An update letter was discussed to inform SIDs about solid waste disposal. The next Integrated Solid Waste Management Task Force meeting is November 16.
- The County is currently spending on its Phase 2, 2014 storm water grant. It has received its 2016 grant and the State has cut funding by \$80,000. The previous grant was \$150,00-\$146,000; now it is \$65,000. Mr. Holm is asking what the State is doing with those funds, if this was an across-the-board cut, and how the decision was made. He needs to find answers to whether or not the expectations from the State will also be reduced. Environmental Services may look at trimming program costs and may appeal to the general fund for additional money to make up the shortfall. The impact will not be felt until 2018, so there is time to make adjustments.
- Mr. Holm said there is an erosion project on the eastern slope of the Health Center campus where he is also making some storm water improvements to keep the storm water out of the combined sewer system.
- Environmental Services is involved with an educational outreach project with the Millard Public Schools in the elementary schools. This will potentially extend to the secondary schools and a volunteer stream monitoring project that will happen on Thomas Creek.
- The RFP process is complete and Environmental Services is recommending RDG Planning and Design for their comprehensive plan that is updated every 10 years. Hopefully, the plan will be updated in 9-10 months with public input.
- Commissioner Duda asked if Environmental Services has been approached by SCS as they have been researching what to do with yard waste. Has anyone asked if the County is going to take yard waste in the County landfill?
- Mr. Holm said he has had general discussions with the City. SCS approached him in Indianapolis where he was attending a solid waste and storm water convention and they suggested that the County be more involved in the process. This was the initiative of the consultant. To date there has not been much direct contact from the City on this.
- Commissioner Duda noted that the City is conducting a study without consulting the County about using its facility.
- Commissioner Boyle suggested that Under the Sink post a sign to advertise its hours. He also said he would like to see MAPA 2050 focus on improved public transportation.
- Commissioner Boyle said County agencies should not be using the David City dump. There could be questions of liability if County agencies are using sites other than Pheasant Point.
- Mr. Holm said that Papillion Sanitation has a clause in its contract that states that solid waste must go to Pheasant Point. They cannot substitute tonnage; all waste picked up from County facilities must to go Pheasant Point. All pick-up contracts have the Pheasant Point clause included.

- In 2020 the City will have to move its composting operation. They are scheduled to expand their sewage treatment plant. Some discussion should occur about whether the private sector can be involved in some of the composting—nurseries, for example, can take yard waste from lawn companies and compost.
- Joe Lorenz asked about revenues and expenses running ahead of budget and asked what is driving that trend in the first quarter.
- Mr. Holm answered that landfill revenues are a little ahead of budget and that expenses reflect purchasing policies that were put in place last year. Environmental Services is requisitioning for the entire year and applying invoices against those requisitions, so the entire amounts are not yet spent.
- Commissioner Kraft asked about the State Street Gas Recovery Project.
- Mr. Holm said he did not have much to report. The operation is going well; there were some flow adjustments on certain wells. It is an aging system, so there are some costs. Some of those costs are incurred by Environmental Services and some are to third party vendors.
- Commissioner Kraft asked what Environmental Services will do with the reduction in state funding for its storm water permit. What will be cut and what is funded by the grant?
- Mr. Holm said he wants to find out answers to a number of questions before he can answer that question. Whether expectations will be cut and whether the cuts were across the board are two of the questions he needs to find answers to. Currently, a storm water assistant is on board; the department has a number of different contracts for monitoring stream assessments, volunteer stream monitoring, and it also co-sponsors educational web casts.

#### Fair Board

- Rita Clark said her primary goal is to explore how the Fair can become a non-profit, 501c3 that will enable it to raise private funds and reduce its reliability on County funding. The Fair's experience this year was that donors would like to contribute to the Fair but they did not want to contribute to a County entity. The Fair would still like to partner with the County, but be able to raise private funds.
- Several events are upcoming. On October 8 the High School Rodeo will be held; they anticipate 100% participation from all 6 states in the central region. The Fair Board has also been approached by Professional Roughstock to hold a youth rodeo school next year for youth throughout the central states region.
- Commissioner Boyle asked why the Fair does not partner with Aksarben.
- Ms. Clark said they were aligned with Aksarben but that was dissolved last October. The current Aksarben management is taking the rodeo in a different direction. They are having a 2-day rough stock only rodeo and won't have a PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association) rodeo.

- Commissioner Borgeson said 262 funds are appropriate for the rodeo. She has no problem with the tourism fund being used to support bringing people to the County for the rodeo. This is an appropriate use of funds.
- Ms. Clark said that this summer's fair, which was held at the Crossroads, was limited. They were not allowed to have a liquor license, which could have been a money maker. 15,000 people attended, but the Fair Board would like to take the fair to the next level. They want to be able to raise funds to have their own land and facility and an event even bigger than the State Fair.
- Commissioner Duda said the Douglas County Fair outgrew its relationship with Aksarben and it makes sense to have a non-profit organization.
- Ms. Clark said she would like to take the current Fair Board, add the 2 new applicants and apply for non-profit status.
- Diane Carlson said the process of obtaining non-profit status is lengthy. There might not be a need for a Douglas County Fair Board.
- Scott Olander said the residency requirements for the Fair Board members are restrictive and affect Douglas and Lancaster Counties. The Fair Board is in contact with the Nebraska Association of Fair Managers whose attorney will be in contact with Shakil Malik to resolve the residency requirement.
- Commissioner Boyle asked how the budget for the Fair was determined and who heard it.
- Ms. Clark responded that the process began in October and it was presented at Finance Committee on April 5. The Board voted to give \$125,000 of 262 money to the Fair on April 12.
- Commissioner Boyle said the Board doesn't give money to anyone and there are urgent needs that must be met like mental health.
- Mr. Lorenz said the Fair Board is a County department. It was awarded 262 funding upfront in last year's budget. Everything but salary was encumbered; salary cannot be encumbered.
- Commissioner Rodgers asked if the Fair Board would still exist according to statute even if it had non-profit status.
- Ms. Carlson said the 501c3 would be its own entity and the Douglas County Fair Board could possibly be dissolved.
- Chris Chappellear said it was their intention to dissolve the current board.
- Commissioner Borgeson said they could create a non-profit fundraising arm of the Fair and keep the current Fair Board intact.
- Mr. Lorenz asked Ms. Clark to send him a final accounting of the 2016 Fair.
- Commissioner Borgeson said that Jim Moore put together an architectural rendering of an events center that all counties could use. His was a phenomenal vision of what a facility could be.
- Ms. Clark said she has that rendering. The Fair Board is in contact with Chance Ridge, which has an arena and 15-17 acres. The Children's Museum may also want to partner with the Fair Board in 2017.

- Commissioner Rodgers suggested the Fair reach out to No More Empty Pots and urban farmers.
- Commissioner Boyle said the Fair should go to rural areas like Springfield that has facilities. Perhaps this is just nostalgia and the County should be putting its resources elsewhere. County funds should go to needs like mental health. Partnering with Sarpy County would make sense.
- Ms. Clark said the Sarpy Fair receives \$750,000 from Sarpy County; a partnership would assume equal participation from Douglas County.
- Commissioner Rodgers said the Fair needs to change to maintain tradition and it is not just nostalgia. The idea of the Ralston arena may be good. The Douglas County Fair needs to adjust its model. There are many urban areas that have County fairs.
- Ms. Clark agreed and added that there is a thriving art and music community in the area that could be incorporated into the Fair.
- Commissioner Borgeson said there is still a rural piece to the Fair. The Fair Board is looking at Chance Ridge and they have come today to propose ways to get away from any reliance on property taxes. She agrees whole heartedly with the need to fund mental health, but the County also funds good things for its citizens.
- Commissioner Rodgers added that tourism and entertainment are good things for the County that can be supported without spending property tax dollars.
- Mr. Olander said the bigger the event becomes, the more hotel rooms are sold. This brings money to the 262 fund.
- When the Fair Board asked people what they wanted to see at the fair, they said “cows.” They were very enthusiastic about seeing livestock and the Board is working on that. They are looking at having a Progress Show that is open to 4H and FFA (Future Farmers of America). This is a practice show for all of the surrounding counties; young people can participate in it before they go to other shows. This has the potential to become a big event.
- Commissioner Kraft noted that the Fair did not have carnival rides, which are a big money maker, but also a huge liability. The Fair Board is working on a partnership with Metro Community College to raise awareness about food production, culinary arts, hydroponics, the resurgence in urban farming, etc. The Fair is a good opportunity to promote County awareness.
- This summer the Sheriff had a booth at the Fair that was well received.
- Ms. Clark said there was a huge increase in entries this year: in 2015 there were 9 quilt entries; in 2016 there were 164—more than the State Fair had.
- There were 50 visual arts entries last year as opposed to 90 this year. There were 383 rabbits from 5 states and they held a turkey trot through the Crossroads.
- The Douglas County 4 H Club came with chickens and rabbits and talked with families about their care and raising of the animals.

- The Fair Board also wants to get the schools involved in the Fair. This year they gave planting kits to Sherman Elementary School and hope to work with them and others next year to provide educational opportunities.
- The Fair Board members participated in County Day at the State Fair.
- Commissioner Borgeson said the Fair Board could begin on County Awareness efforts by reaching out to County departments to have booths next year. As far as mental health goes, the Health Department could have a booth addressing suicide, which is such a problem with veterans and young people.
- The dates are July 22-24, 2017 for next summer. These dates were chosen in order to avoid a conflict with other Fairs.
- Ms. Clark said part of the mission of the Fair is to inform and educate, especially to bring an awareness to citizens about their food and its processes. As schools are cutting back on programs like home economics, the Fairs are evolving into educational events.

The meeting adjourned at 12:29 P.M.