

Southwestern Fair Commission, Inc.  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
October 30, 2025

The Meeting of the Board of Directors/Members of the Southwestern Fair Commission, Inc (SWFC), a nonprofit corporation, was duly called and held at the Pima County Fairground's Green Room on Thursday, October 30, 2025.

**Directors Present:** Garrett Ham, President; Judy Patrick, Secretary; Mark Cowley, Treasurer; Jim Murphy, Director; Alan Levin, Director; Marian LaLonde, Director; Sheena Conner, Director and Marvin Selke, Emeritus Member.

**Staff Present:** Jon Baker, SWFC Executive Director; Julia Casillas, SWFC Operations Manager; Launa Rabago, SWFC Marketing Manager; Amilia Gruber, SWFC Vendor Coordinator; John Osterhout, SWFC Maintenance Manager and Ralieg Garcia, SWFC Maintenance Manager.

**Others in Attendance:** Susan Vos, RCM CPAS; Joey Schwanz, Pima County's Operations Program Manager; Betsy Checchia, United States Hunter Jumper Association; Patty Novakowski, Tucson Dressage Club; Sherman Scurry, M.D. and Equestrian participant; Jen Baltrus, Freedom Run Horse Shows; Lauren Schroeder, Steady Strides Riding Center and Zach Levin; Levin and Sons.

- a. **Call to Order:** Garrett Ham called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. followed by the pledge of allegiance.
- b. **Roll Call:** Marion LaLonde, Director, joined via internet conference.
- c. **Call to the Public:** Betsy Checchia, past president of the United States Hunter Jumper Association and current Zone Committee member, spoke to the Board about the importance of the Pima County Fairgrounds to the regional horse show circuit. She noted that while the facility is well-regarded, some areas—especially the horse stalls—are outdated and would benefit from upgrades to stay competitive with other venues in the region.

Jen Baltrus, Manager of the Tucson Fall Festival and Tucson Fall Classic horse shows, invited the Board to visit the ongoing event, which has attracted approximately 200 horses over its two-week run. She highlighted the strong involvement of sponsors and the improvements made to the shows, noting that her efforts have brought renewed energy and excitement to the Fairgrounds. She also reflected on the progress made in recent years, explaining that while the future of the horse shows was once uncertain, attendance has now doubled over the past three years. She expressed her continued commitment to growing the events and shared her vision for further enhancing the success of both the shows and the Fairgrounds overall.

Lauren Schroeder with Steady Strides Riding Center, addressed the Board and invited members to attend the ongoing show as well. She noted that participants have traveled from several states to compete and commended the improvements made at the Fairgrounds. She stated that, "if you build it, they will come," expressing optimism about the Fairground's continued upward progress and thanked everyone for their efforts to keep the momentum going.

## **5. New Business:**

### **a. Discussion and possible action regarding the Audit Reports for the fiscal year.**

Susan Vos presented the audit report for the fiscal year. She reviewed the financial statements and discussed overall revenue, cash controls, and financial position and reported that there were no findings or difficulties noted during the audit. She highlighted a decrease in assets, cash, and revenue across all categories, primarily attributed to lower Fair revenue. She also noted the change in accounting for compensated absences in accordance with updated reporting standards.

Mark Cowley moved to approve the Audit Reports for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. Alan Levin seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Susan Vos left at 9:55 a.m.

## **2. Staff Reports:**

### **a. Executive Director**

#### **i. Goals and Updates**

Jon Baker reviewed the seven goals previously established by the Board and provided updates on the progress toward each. He emphasized the continued focus on managing overhead and operating expenses to strengthen the organization's financial position. He shared that a new security plan is being developed in preparation for the upcoming Fair and discussed ongoing efforts to increase facility rental utilization. He commended Launa Rabago for her success in expanding room rentals and bringing in new business opportunities. He highlighted several event updates, including the return of Jurassic Quest and the Gem and Jam Festival, the addition of two new team penning events, three more-barrel races compared to the previous fiscal year, and a new music festival. He concluded by noting that staff are continuing to update Monday.com and are working with the IT team to implement a password management system.

#### **ii. Interim Events**

Jon Baker provided an update on interim events as part of his Goals and Updates report.

#### **iii. Projects**

Jon Baker reported that work continues on the new Master Plan project, including the storage building near Thurber Hall, though some permitting delays related to flood control have occurred, which he noted are typical for such projects. He provided the Board with a detailed list of planned facility improvements categorized by Equestrian, Main Fairgrounds, and RV Park areas. The equestrian section includes upgrades to support the growing number of horse events. He noted that additional equipment purchases have also been necessary to meet event demands. He also expressed appreciation to Raleigh Garcia and John Osterhout for their continued hard work and dedication within limited budgets, and he thanked Joey Schwanz for his assistance in securing ARPA funds, which have helped support several of the projects mentioned.

**iv. Pima County Fair 2026**

Jon Baker reported that while this year's Fair experienced a downturn, the 2026 Fair is expected to be strong, noting that it will not coincide with Easter, which should positively impact attendance. He shared that Launa Rabago has several concerts booked, though details cannot be released until contracts are finalized. He commended Julia Casillas for introducing new ideas to boost Fair entries and noted that she will be taking on expanded responsibilities this year, including working more closely with security, parking, and admissions to gain additional operational experience. Mica Campos will assist Julia and manage Old Pueblo Hall during the Fair.

**v. History Update**

Jon Baker noted that Marvin Selke has been actively leading the effort to maintain and expand the Fairground's history records for years. Marvin reported that he worked on updating the history, gathering information from Jon, Launa, and Julia, and recently collaborated with Launa to update the online history report. He shared that the report has grown from 53 to 70 pages, now including sections on awards, recognitions, and accomplishments, with new input provided by staff. Marvin expressed his desire to continue overseeing the history project for the foreseeable future but noted he would eventually like to transition it to someone else to ensure its continuation.

**vi. Master Plan Update**

Jon Baker reminded the Board that the Master Plan is reviewed and approved to identify key priorities for attracting events and improving facilities. He noted that as new projects are discussed and prioritized, their locations or scope may change, which is part of the plan's purpose and flexibility.

He also discussed Project Blue, noting that he had contacted the County Administrator by letter to outline the potential impacts the project could have on the Fairgrounds and its facilities. He explained that this communication was intended to ensure the County is fully informed of the Fairground's position and concerns if Project Blue proceeds.

**b. C.F.O.**

**i. Financial Report**

Jon Baker acknowledged that Julia Casillas has stepped in to fulfill many of CFO's responsibilities during her maternity leave. He reminded the Board that Julia recently transitioned into a new position and is truly experiencing a "trial by fire." But that she was doing an excellent job managing the financial side of operations, ensuring bills are paid on time, and keeping the office running smoothly.

The financial report was tabled to the next Board meeting due to Courtney's absence while on maternity leave.

Garrett Ham asked for the item f. be pulled from the Consent Agenda for an individual decision.

**3. Consent Agenda:**

**f. Discussion and possible action regarding setting the date for the Annual Meeting for January 29, 2026, and tentative regular dates March 19, 2026, June 25, 2026, August 20, 2026, and October 29, 2026, for the calendar year.** Garrett Ham informed everyone that he would be unavailable for the meeting on March 19, 2026. He contacted the staff to find a suitable alternative, and they agreed that March 12, 2026, worked best for both him and the staff. The Board also agreed to change the meeting date.

Judy Patrick moved to approve the Consent Agenda item f. with the revised date. Sheena Conner seconded the motion. The motion passed.

**3. Consent Agenda:**

- a. Discussion and possible action regarding minutes of the 8/21/2025 Board meeting.**
- b. Discussion and possible action regarding the annual sublease with the Pima County Junior Livestock Sales, Inc.**
- c. Discussion and possible action regarding the annual sublease with the Tucson Kart Club, Inc.**
- d. Discussion and possible action regarding the annual reporting to Pima County.**
- e. Discussion and possible action regarding the Federal & State Tax returns for the fiscal year 2024/2025.**

Jim Murphy moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Alan Levin seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Marian LaLonde left the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

**4. Old Business:**

- a. Discussion and possible action regarding negotiations with current electric provider, Tucson Electric Power (TEP).**

Jon Baker reported that he had reached out to Pima County for guidance on collaborating with TEP and was connected with Eric Wilson, the County's Energy Conservation Consultant. Through TEP's Business Energy Solutions Program, Jon, Eric, and a TEP representative conducted a comprehensive site visit approximately three weeks ago to assess all Fairgrounds buildings and lighting systems. He noted that this has been a highly productive partnership. As a result of staff efforts to transition to LED lighting, the Fairgrounds have already reduced lighting costs by approximately \$50,000 over the past six months. He thanked Sheena Conner and Alan Levin for their leadership in initiating and advancing these connections. He also shared that TEP will be providing the Fairgrounds—at no cost—with 72 power strips, 100 LED lights, 60 reflector LEDs, and 20 coil cleaning brushes to further support energy efficiency efforts.

Garrett Ham asked Julia Casillas to add to the January agenda a discussion to allocate additional funds in the budget for new LED projects.

- b. Discussion and possible action regarding revisions to the Employee Handbook, including the addition of the new policies and updates to the overall policy manual.**  
It was agreed to table this item to the January Board meeting to allow time for Courtney Danloe's return from maternity leave and completion of the new policy formatting work.

**5. New Business:**

- b. Discussion and possible action regarding the County Administrator's appointment to the Pima County Fair Commission.**

Garrett Ham drafted a letter to the County Administrator requesting the reappointment of Marian LaLonde to the Pima County Fair Commission. The letter received Board support and was revised to include the support of the Pima County Fair Commission and updated for both Board Presidents from each Commission to sign.

Mark Cowley made a motion to send the letter to the County Administrator. Judy Patrick seconded the motion. The motion passed.

**6. Closing Matters:**

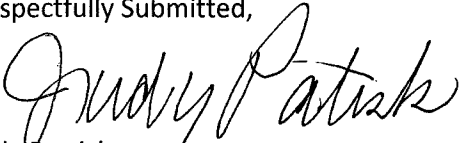
- a. Announcements**

Garrett Ham shared that he, Jon Baker, Jim Murphy, and Sheena Conner met with Supervisor Andrés Cano from District 5. The meeting included an overview of the Fairgrounds operations and a tour of the facility. Garrett noted it was a very positive and productive meeting. Launa Rabago announced the passing of Lorraine Lewis, mother of Jody, Kim, and Christopher Levitt of Ray Cammack Shows, and shared that she and Jon Baker would be attending the services on behalf of the organization. Jon Baker reported that he and Launa also met with representatives from Ray Cammack Shows (RCS). Charlene Levitt asked that staff and the Board be informed that Chris Lopez is no longer with RCS. Launa Rabago concluded by congratulating Garrett Ham on the birth of his first grandchild, who arrived the same day as the Board meeting.

- b. Adjournment**

Mark Cowley moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:45 a.m. Judy Patrick seconded the motion. The motion carried. A meeting of the Pima County Fair Commission was not conducted.

Respectfully Submitted,



Judy Patrick  
SWFC Secretary