

**MINUTES**  
**LANCASTER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**LANCASTER COUNTY PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FY 2000-2001**  
**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CHAMBERS, ROOM112**  
**TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2000**  
**7 P.M.**

Commissioners Present: Kathy Campbell, Chair  
Larry Hudkins, Vice Chair  
Bernie Heier  
Linda Steinman  
Bob Workman

Others Present: Norm Agena, County Assessor  
Kerry Eagan, Chief Administrative Officer  
Dave Kroeker, Budget and Fiscal Director  
Gwen Thorpe, Deputy County Clerk

**RURAL LIBRARIES**

Carol Connor, Director of Lincoln City Libraries, appeared and stated they are requesting \$456,572 for the library service contract. She explained the request would fund the bookmobile service, home outreach service, the summer reading programs and would also provide access to all the public libraries. Connor added that the bookmobile service stops in Hickman, Sprague, Martell, Cheney, Bennet, Hallam, Firth, Rokeby, Malcolm and Waverly. In addition, she stated, they provide the Summer County Outreach Program which encourages children to read. The service is provided to Davey, Denton, Emerald, Holland, Panama and Raymond.

Hudkins asked when the new library at 14<sup>th</sup> and Superior Streets would open.

Connor responded that both new branches would open in February, 2002.

Campbell asked if anyone wished to provide testimony regarding the Library budget.

No one appeared.

## **COUNTY BUDGET**

Campbell asked if anyone wished to provide testimony regarding the County budget.

John Boehm, representing the Lincoln Independent Business Association (LIBA), appeared and commended the County's methods used in the budgeting process. He indicated that LIBA is not enthusiastic about the increase in the budget, however, they recognize that the County has held the line over the past four years. Boehm also stated they recognize that the County has worked very hard to pare down the budget in order to deal with unexpected contingencies which they have encountered.

Boehm expressed concern regarding the increase of seven full-time employees in the Families First and Foremost program and overall expenditures of \$950,000. He stated LIBA understands that the money comes from a grant, but noted that in approximately five years the grant money would discontinue. Boehm encouraged the Board to plan for the eventuality that the grant money would discontinue so that the taxpayers don't bear the burden.

He also urged the County Board to continue to review and conduct further study on the proposed merger of the County Assessor's office and the Register of Deeds office.

Steinman noted there are three employees associated with the Families First and Foremost program and not seven.

Campbell asked if anyone else wished to testify.

No one appeared.

## **AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY**

Brian Harrifeld, 8600 East Avon, appeared in opposition. He stated he couldn't understand how they could build a facility different from what was originally proposed. He added that \$12,000,000 is for Phase I only. Harrifeld stated that livestock isn't a growth industry in the County, however, acreages and subdivisions are. He urged the County Board not to give the Agricultural Society any more money.

Richard Halvorsen, 6311 Inverness, appeared in opposition and questioned whether the center would be self-sustaining.

Mark Hunzeker, 4645 Union Hill Road, also appeared in opposition and questioned why no feasibility study had been completed as promised.

Hudkins stated a business plan was distributed to the County Board.

Hunzeker stated that in 1997 the cost for the Event Center was to be approximately \$6.5 million, however, in a letter to the Board, dated June 30, it was noted that the bids, including the land, came in at \$8.6 million. According to the June 30, 2000 correspondence, Hunzeker stated, the cost of the project is now \$10.1 million and the Ag Society is requesting an additional \$3.8 million from the Board to complete Phase I. He added that sometime between the June 30<sup>th</sup> correspondence and the public hearing the request increased from \$3.8 million to \$5 million.

Hunzeker asked if the County is prepared to subsidize the operation. He urged the County Board to not approve the additional monies for the Event Center and demand explanations.

Hunzeker stated that he is concerned about the money which has already been spent, but that he is more concerned about the money which is about to be spent.

Alan Wood, legal counsel for the Agricultural Society, appeared and stated the project has had a history of feasibility study, noting that many months of study have been done by members of the Ag Society Board of Directors and Building Committee members regarding other facilities and what would best fit the community.

Wood stated the market feasibility study shows that the facility will cash flow and will operate.

Wood urged the County Board to proceed with what was proposed and reminded everyone that the Ag Society is not asking for a \$5 million tax levy. He stated they plan to complete Phase I in total. The \$5 million bond which is being proposed, and is to be paid over a ten year period, at a proposed cost of \$650,000 per year, will complete the project.

The bookings, Wood said, beat the market feasibility study. He added that gun shows, quilting shows and those types of daily events will make the facility cash flow.

Brief discussion took place regarding other types of events such as BMX bike races and a 100 year celebration in relation to Cushman's.

In response to a question asked by Heier regarding economic impact to the City of Lincoln, Charles Willnerd, President of the Lancaster County Agricultural Society, stated economic impact to the City of Lincoln would be approximately \$75,000,000 to \$100,000,000 once the project is completed.

Workman inquired about how events are booked.

Willnerd stated the events are actually booked two to three years in advance and added that the "soft" bookings they have now are 90 to 95 percent committed.

Hudkins asked about the steps taken by the Ag Society to secure management.

Willnerd stated Leon Meyer was hired in January and has several years of experience with county fairs and managing facilities on a year round basis. He added that Meyer is a certified fair exhibitor which is a national accreditation.

Campbell stated one of the concerns is whether the County Board will have to continue to subsidize the project.

Willnerd stated they have spent a considerable amount of time studying other facilities around the country. He indicated they have made several changes in the way their financial information is handled so that they can achieve a clearer picture. He added they will have to do more sponsoring for the county fair, as well as finding sponsors for different events. More fund-raising will also be needed.

In response to a question asked by Campbell regarding a member of the community who offered to purchase all of the land for the Ag Society, Willnerd explained that the offer was made during a time when they had options on the property and before they purchased the first 43 acres. He stated the offer was turned down because they would lose the property and the County investment if they had any problems.

Workman inquired about donations.

Willnerd explained the Amy Countryman outdoor arena will cost approximately \$43,000 and will be paid for by the Countryman family. As a part of their fund-raising program, he said, an individual may purchase a stall. For a \$1,000 donation an individual's name will be recognized as a stall purchaser. He stated for \$100 there will be a brick wall which will have individual names or family names engraved on a brick. Willnerd added that many 4-H clubs are holding raffles to raise money for the center.

In response to a question asked by Campbell regarding a place for small animals, Willnerd explained that they have built and planned a multi-use facility which can be improved and upgraded. He said a portion of a maintenance building, which will be included, will be used for small animal displays.

Campbell asked about preferential treatment with regard to the wife of the attorney who represents the Ag Society and the activities she is engaged in.

Willnerd stated Mrs. Wood is the director of an equi-therapy riding school. He explained that they provide therapy to disabled youth through registered therapeutic instructors. He said it is a non-profit organization with a small budget.

Willnerd further stated that Julie Woods approached the Ag Society about housing the school on the Event Center property. He said they have approved an option to lease 20 acres, however, it is on ground which has not yet been purchased by the Ag Society. He added that the agreement stipulates that the Ag Society will use the building 30 days per year during the time the County fair is being held.

Wood stated that Sunrise Equi-Therapy is waiting for the Ag Society to purchase the land. If the Ag Society purchases the land and the program is successful in raising funds to construct the building, they anticipate constructing a building with an indoor riding arena, classrooms, restrooms and meeting rooms. He said they are anticipating construction costs to be approximately \$300,000 to \$500,000.

In response to a question asked by Steinman, Wood stated the fund-raising for the equi-therapy program would be separate from the Ag Society. He indicated the program is a 501C-3 organization and has a Board of Directors. Wood also explained that if the program fails, the Ag Society would be able to purchase the building at a depreciated value.

Randy Harre, President of the Lincoln Independent Business Association, appeared to support the facility and stated there are no facilities large enough to hold horse shows, rodeos and similar events in the State of Nebraska. He said the facility would be good for the children, the county, state and city.

Andrew Ferguson, 423 Oregon Trail, appeared in favor of the facility and urged the County Board to approve the funds.

Jeff Smalley, Co-President of the Havelock Business Association, appeared on behalf of the association to support the Event Center.

Sharon Klein, Southwest 112<sup>th</sup> Street, appeared in opposition. She stated she is concerned that Phase I has not yet been completed and that she is also concerned about the amount of money which has been expended to date.

Harry Muhlbach, 14605 North 56<sup>th</sup> Street, appeared and stated he felt the Ag Society is trying to establish the identity of Lancaster County separate from the State Fair.

Rod Hollman, Martell, Nebraska, appeared to support the facility. He stated safety is a concern for him and feels that the design of the project will eliminate many of those concerns.

He also said that many individuals have approached him regarding the project and that he has not received any negative comments.

In response to a question asked by Workman, Dave Kroeker, Budget and Fiscal Officer, stated taxpayers would pay \$5.68 per \$100,000 of value for a ten year period.

Kroeker also noted the following:

- The operating budget for the Ag Society is \$1.30 per \$100,000 of value
- \$270 per \$100,000 of value goes to the County budget (including the Ag Society)
- \$1,300 per \$100,000 of value goes to the public school system

No one else appeared to testify.

Campbell announced they would take final action on the budget on Tuesday, August 29, 2000 at 1:30 p.m.

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Bruce Medcalf  
County Clerk