



**IT'S NOT JUST A FAIR  
IT'S A COMMUNITY  
GATHERING PLACE  
& EMERGENCY CENTER  
MAY 2022**



**IN 2019, APPROXIMATELY  
350,000 PEOPLE  
ATTENDED THE  
SONOMA-MARIN FAIR  
AND ALL THE EVENTS  
AND GATHERINGS HELD  
AT THE FAIRGROUNDS.**

The annual Sonoma-Marín Fair held in late June has been the biggest, continuous event staged in Petaluma for the last 100 years. It features livestock shows, art, crafts, headlining entertainment, a carnival, car show, a tasting area featuring Sonoma County wines, and, of course, the World's Ugliest Dog Contest. Most importantly, the annual Sonoma-Marín Fair is where memories are made, old friends meet for impromptu reunions and the community comes together to celebrate the talent and ingenuity of their neighbors.

On average, more than 65,000 people attend the Sonoma-Marín Fair each year. Four of the last five fairs have topped the charts for the most paid attendance, a testament to the popularity of this hometown fair. While other community events decline in attendance, our local fair is experiencing an uptick in its fair time crowds. And the fair's reach is global! For nearly 30 years, the Sonoma Marín Fair has featured the trademarked, World's Ugliest Dog Contest, putting Petaluma on the world stage for the contest's international news coverage.

## INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, the Sonoma-Marín Fair Board expresses its sincere appreciation to community members advising the City of Petaluma on this project. The fate of the Sonoma-Marín Fair and the future use of the historic property - the fair's home for more than a century - is a complex, emotional and contentious issue. The decisions made by the advisory panel will not only impact the landscape of downtown Petaluma but the city's identity and culture as well. The panel's recommendations will affect our youth, non-profit organizations, farm families, and city neighbors who consider the fair and fairgrounds part of Petaluma's way-of-life.

At first glance, the task for The Panel seems monumental but the decision should be obvious if the City of Petaluma answers one simple question. **Does the Petaluma City Council have the authority to change the use of the property, or do only the voters of Petaluma have the right to change the use of the fairgrounds?** Once you review the information in this brief, we believe you will conclude that only the voters of Petaluma can change the public use of this historic property by casting their ballot in a city election. We believe if Petaluma residents were to vote there would be overwhelming support for keeping the fairgrounds a public space for the annual fair, emergency centers during disasters, and for the many events and community gatherings that are part of the Petaluma tradition.

There has been rhetoric about the 4th District Agricultural Association (DAA), the organization that manages the facility and produces the annual fair, paying an annual rent of \$1. However, rarely do those critics acknowledge that all the improvements, the utility services, the exhibit halls, the grandstands, and the barns were built by the 4th DAA with state funding and monies earned. When the DAA took possession of the property in 1936, it was pastures, some small buildings, and a dirt track - in essence, it was undeveloped land. The property looked much different than it does today. In addition, the 4th DAA has covered decades of maintenance and improvement costs associated with the fairgrounds. For almost 90 years it has been the Fair Board's financial responsibility to enhance and maintain this event center that has provided memories, fundraising opportunities, disaster support, and educational experiences to the residents of Petaluma throughout the year.

The contributions by the 4th DAA toward capital improvements and major repairs to the facility have been significant. In the last 10 years, the fair has completed over \$430,000 of projects including roof replacements, upgrades to electrical services, replacement of the sewer pump and lift station, and the list goes on. The 4th DAA has paid its "rent" through facility upkeep, grounds management, and improvements.

**The Petaluma community will be best served if the Petaluma City Council executes a 100-year lease with the 4th DAA. By doing so, they would guarantee a community gathering place, the celebration of the City's farming heritage, and most importantly, a well-equipped facility available to be an emergency shelter. In addition, the heart of Petaluma will continue to have open space and an iconic landmark that celebrates the town's beauty and history.**

*From the City of Petaluma's website: A lasting legacy. Much of Petaluma's identity is tied to the poultry and dairy industries.*

## **THE SONOMA-MARIN FAIR, PETALUMA'S LEGACY**

In many ways the Sonoma Marin Fairgrounds serves as Petaluma's town square, a place where citizens have gathered for celebration and comfort in both good and troubling times for more than a century.

Since the early 1900's the site has been a community gathering spot for fairs, picnics, baseball games and traveling shows. The property was owned by benefactor Harry Stover who opened his well-known horse breeding farm - with its gardens, grandstand and pavilion - to his fellow citizens for outings and recreation. Mr. Stover, fiercely proud of his prize-winning racehorse, Kenilworth, had dubbed his farm "Kenilworth Park."

The historic property, now home to the Sonoma-Marin Fair, not only celebrates the area's rich agricultural heritage during the annual fair but has been quickly transformed into emergency centers during disasters like wildfires and earthquakes. The property's long and colorful history includes an important role during World War II when it was a staging area for military operations. The fairgrounds have hosted horse shows and car races, Fourth of July celebrations and community events sponsored by ethnic and fraternal organizations. It's where the world's ugliest dog is crowned and where families get their trees at Christmas.

The property remains a swath of scenic open space in a city proud of its legacy for butter and egg production. Indeed, during Petaluma's reign as "Egg Basket of the World" the fairgrounds hosted poultry shows that introduced innovations like the egg incubator to the area's mom-and-pop chicken farmers.

The threat of losing this valuable community asset is cause for concern during these unsettling times when history and local tradition are important touchstones for so many people in Petaluma and beyond. Efforts to preserve the property in its present form are gaining support from many citizens. They consider the fair part of the town's identity, culture and history while appreciating the benefits and flexibility of the fairground's property for emergency centers in times of need. Most municipalities, fortunate enough to have a state-sanctioned fair within its boundaries, value the role of the fair and fairgrounds in their community's quality of life. Petaluma leaders should too.

**THE SONOMA-MARIN FAIR ACTUALLY TRACES ITS BEGINNING TO THE 1850S WHEN THE FIRST FAIR EVER HELD IN PETALUMA WAS STAGED IN A COW PASTURE AT THE INTERSECTION OF MIDDLE TWO ROCK ROAD AND BODEGA AVENUE.**

The evolution of Kenilworth Park, now the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds, is one of on-going challenges and triumphs. But it's also one of perseverance by the citizens of Petaluma to push for a designated community space for events like fairs and horse racing. In 1910 Petaluma residents passed a \$20,000 park bond to buy the land that encompassed Kenilworth Park following the death of Mr. Stover.

Petaluma residents were willing to tax themselves to invest in a park and open space for the generations to follow. Once it was publicly owned, the land was deeded to the City of Petaluma, laying the ground for what would become the Sonoma-Marin Fair, one of California's premiere showcases for agricultural youth.

The Sonoma-Marin Fair actually traces its beginning to the 1850s when the first fair ever held in Petaluma was staged in a cow pasture at the intersection of Middle Two Rock Road and Bodega Avenue. By the end of the decade,

the fair was formally organized under an association called the San Pablo District Agricultural Society.

Throughout the Civil War years, the fair was held at different towns around Sonoma County, bringing pioneer settlers together to socialize while competing with their milk cows and apple pies. In 1867, the Society renamed itself the Sonoma and Marin District Agricultural Society and began acquiring the land that today is home to the Sonoma-Marin Fair. In early 1882, a racetrack, next to Kenilworth Park, was deeded to the Society by William Hill, a prominent Petaluma citizen and horse racing enthusiast.

By the 1930s, several Sonoma County communities were interested in establishing a permanent fair to showcase the county's agriculture that had grown to national prominence in areas such as dairy, poultry and fruit production. It was during this time that the Fourth District Agricultural Association was founded, encompassing both Sonoma and Marin Counties for a district fair under the auspices of the State of California. The association's first decision was to select Petaluma's Kenilworth Park as the site for a permanent annual fair that would be part of the state's network of fairs funded partially through a tax on pari-mutuel wagering on horse racing.

In 1936 the City of Petaluma leased Kenilworth Park to the Fourth District Agricultural Association for a \$1.00 per year for a period of ten years and gave them "absolute control" over the use of the property. This lease was renewed and amended under the same general terms in 1947 and again in 1972 and 1998.

During WWII, no fairs were held because the fairgrounds was leased to the War Department for military purposes. Following the war in 1945, there was a serious discussion by the Fourth District Agricultural Association and the State of California to possibly transfer the fairgrounds property from the City of Petaluma to the State of California and its Fourth District Agricultural Association. The transfer did not happen, however, because legal experts determined it would require a vote of city residents to transfer title of the property to the State of California.

Then again in 1949 it was firmly established by Petaluma's City Attorney that a property transfer could be "done only by ballot" in a special election. This issue of possibly deeding all or part of the fairgrounds to the state resurfaced again in 1978 and 1990. In both instances Petaluma's City Attorney echoed the 1949 opinion that it would take a vote of Petaluma residents to transfer the property from the city to the state.

During the boom decades of the 1950s and 1960s, the Sonoma-Marin Fair grew in prominence and scope, making many improvements and additions to the property. By the 1970s, the fairgrounds had become a centerpiece of Petaluma life, holding one of the largest junior fairs in California while being the site for many community events, police and fire training sessions and other activities throughout the year.

The Petaluma fairgrounds became a disaster relief center following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and a safe refuge for people, pets and livestock during the wildfires that ravaged Sonoma County over the last five years. Many anxiously wonder where displaced people and animals would go during disasters if the fairgrounds ceased to exist.

Over the years, pieces of the original land purchased through the Park Bond were dedicated to other community uses besides the fair. Approximately 9 acres of Kenilworth Park were dedicated to the swim park and library.

There are many reasons to keep the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds as a showcase for agriculture, public gathering place and safe haven in times of disaster. It would be short-sighted not to preserve and protect this community treasure



# PARK BOND

## HOW WAS THE FAIRGROUNDS PROPERTY ACQUIRED BY THE CITY OF PETALUMA AND WHAT USE LIMITATIONS SURROUNDS LAND PURCHASED WITH A PARK BOND?

In 1910, after decades of using the current fairgrounds property for annual fairs, Fourth of July celebrations, community events, and horse racing, city leaders proposed that Petaluma's residents purchase the Stover horse farm to create a city park for their town.

By the early 1900s, this property, called Kenilworth Park, had become the community meeting spot with its gardens, grandstand, pavilion and shade trees. Mr. Stover had passed away, and the township wanted to preserve the property in its park-like state and limit any development of the property. To fund the purchase of the property, the City after a public vote on December 14, 1910, authorized the issuance of a \$20,000 bond to purchase the property to be used as a park. The proposition before the voters read: "...shall the City of Petaluma incur a bonding indebtedness of \$20,000 to pay the cost of acquiring certain lands for public purposes for a public park..."

In 1936 the process of the 4th District Agricultural Association leasing the property from the City of Petaluma began. By the 1970s, the sometimes-heated conversations around the bond indebtedness and the allowed uses of the property started. Three different city attorneys, several attorneys representing the DAA, and even current Councilmember Mike Healy have indicated that since the property was purchased through defined bond issuance, the City may only use the property consistent with the purpose of a public park. The California Supreme Court has broadly construed the meaning of "park purposes", but at the core, the standard to determine whether a use is consistent with park purposes is whether the use is designed for recreation, pleasure, and enjoyment of the community in general.

As mentioned, over the last 50 years attorneys have opined on various proposed uses of the property and how those uses may or may not be consistent with the intent of the park bond. Here are some snippets of letters or written comments made regarding the allowed use of the property:

### OCTOBER 30, 1945, KARL BROOKS, PETALUMA CITY ATTORNEY

*In a letter sent to Mr. A. E. Snider, Chief of the Division of Fairs and Expositions, Mr. Brooks asks for Mr. Snider's presence at a meeting to discuss "the possibility of the city transferring the property known as Kenilworth Park to the State of California." Mr. Brooks reminds Mr. Snider of the "circumstances under which the city acquired...the property", which included and may need to include a "ballot approved for the election".*

### MARCH 13, 1978, P. LAWRENCE KLOSE, PETALUMA CITY ATTORNEY

*In 1977, the 4th DAA fair board and manager were looking to lease a section of the front parking lot. The City Council was against this use, and the city attorney, Mr. Klose, opined that "The real property in question was acquired exclusively for park purposes under a bond issue approved by the voters of Petaluma on December 14, 1910. To allow commercial usage of the property, as proposed by the Association would violate Government Code Section 38450, requiring a vote of the people prior to abandonment for park purposes."*

### AUGUST 15, 1990, RICHARD R. RUDNANSKY, PETALUMA CITY ATTORNEY

*In the late 1980s, the 4th DAA was leasing a parking lot space to a flower shop and Mr. Rudnansky, on behalf of the city, determined that this use was inconsistent with the allowed uses of the property, and restated Mr. Klose's opinion related to the use limitations that governed the property as it relates to the issuance of the park bond.*

### APRIL 2022, MIKE HEALY, CITY COUNCILPERSON

*In a letter to the editor, longtime city councilperson and attorney, Mike Healy recognizes the December 1910 vote taken by the Petaluma voters to preserve the then 65.74 acres of land, known as Kenilworth Park, to be used as a public park. In his letter, he suggests some additional uses for the property and suggests that his proposed hybrid governance model "would keep the promise made 112 years ago to use the property as a public park" while allowing the Fair to continue.*

## SONOMA-MARIN FAIRGROUNDS AS AN EMERGENCY EVACUATION CENTER

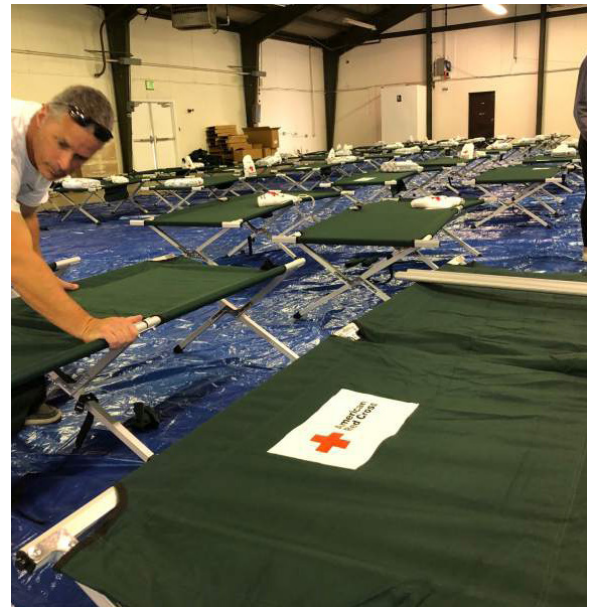
As important as the fairgrounds is as for community events, the availability of the Sonoma-Marín Fairgrounds to be transformed almost instantly into emergency centers during disasters is extremely important for residents of the North Bay. Built to accommodate thousands of people at one time, the fairgrounds property has kitchens, large buildings, restrooms, animal holding facilities, and massive flat outdoor space to provide comfort to misplaced disaster survivors and the emergency personnel dispatched to help them.

**IN AN OCTOBER 1, 2021 ARTICLE IN THE ARGUS-COURIER, REPORTER KATHRYN PALMER WRITES “AT THE FAIRGROUNDS, SEVERAL EVACUEES COUNTED SUNDAY NIGHT AS THEIR SECOND, THIRD, OR EVEN FOURTH TIME THEY’VE SOUGHT REFUGE AT THE CENTRAL PETALUMA PROPERTY, WHICH HAS BECOME ONE OF THE CITY’S MOST IMPORTANT SHELTER LOCATIONS.”**

Last year, when other City-owned shelter facilities were shut down due to the Pandemic and unavailable for sheltering during the fires, the Petaluma Fairgrounds welcomed people, pets, and livestock who had nowhere else to go.

The number of people provided refuge and assistance at the fairgrounds is staggering. During one of the wildfire disasters, fair records show 315 people were sheltered, 355 animals secured and more than 2,000 meals served. In the 2019 wildfire, the Sonoma-Marín fairgrounds stayed open to provide emergency services when other North Bay fair facilities were evacuated and no longer available for disaster relief.

Simulation models show that a significant earthquake (but of smaller magnitude than the 1906 shaker) will likely cause many Sonoma County highway overpasses to collapse, making it nearly impossible to get from the west side of Petaluma to the hospital and other services on the east side. **If the property is developed and no longer a fairgrounds where will westside Petaluma residents be sheltered, fed, and medically treated in a disastrous earthquake?**



## PETALUMA SPEEDWAY

The Petaluma Speedway is another of the many attractions at the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds, bringing car race fans from throughout the San Francisco Bay to Petaluma for more than 60 years. Saturday night races at the Petaluma Speedway have been a tradition for generations of racing enthusiasts drawn to Petaluma by the track's 3/8th mile configuration, built in the 1960s by promoter Johnny Soares. The first recorded automobile race at the site was in 1936 when local racing legend Ed Normi won the 30-lap race held at Kenilworth Park's one-mile horse racing track



## EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The Live Oak Charter School and Happy Hearts Pre-School have been located at the fairgrounds for many years. Combined, there are 500 students attending school daily at the facility.



## CULTURAL EVENTS

The Sonoma-Marin fairgrounds is the center for many ethnic and cultural celebrations. These include: Ligue Henry IV Picnic, the Cinco de Mayo Festival, the Basque Picnic, the Northern California Guatemalan Festival, the Dia de Los Muertos Celebration, Quinceañeras, Church Concerts, Jewish Day Camp, and Jaripo Baile (Mexican Rodeo).



## COMMUNITY & PRIVATE EVENTS AT THE FAIRGROUNDS:

- The 4th of July celebration
- Wedding Receptions
- Kiwanis' beer booth at the annual fair
- School Fundraisers
- Sonoma Sriracha event to benefit The Redwood Empire Food Bank
- Youth Ag Days
- Nonprofit Fundraisers (nearly \$250,000 raised annually)
- Lagunitas Beer Circus
- RIP City Riders
- Petaluma Music Festival
- Car Shows
- Cinnabar Theater Chili Cookoff
- The Wiseman-Cooke Aeronautic STEM Challenge
- Cooling Center
- PG&E Public Safety Power Outage
- Circus
- Winter Carnival
- Celebration of Life
- Luma Con
- Neighborhood Night Out
- Livestock Education Training
- Farmers Market

### Community Support during Pandemic

- Ag Education Drive Thru Ag Education Event
- Blood Drive
- COVID Testing Site
- HallowLuma Drive-Thru Trick or Treating
- Drive-In Movies
- Drive-In Concert
- Hybrid Fair
- Livestream Rodeo

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE SONOMA-MARIN FAIRGROUNDS & EVENT CENTER

*From a report done by the California Department of Food & Agriculture that was based in 2015*

- In 2015, the fairgrounds generated approximately \$9,945,000 in spending activities alone, benefiting the local economy and creating a ripple effect of economic benefits for California. When calculated for 2019, the economic impact increases to almost \$12,400,000.
- The Sonoma-Marín Fairgrounds & Event Center created the equivalent of 146 jobs because of the spending by the 12th DAA, its support businesses, and its attendees.
- The annual labor income generated annually by these additional jobs was approximately \$3,302,000
- The Sonoma-Marín Fairgrounds & Event Center also generates business tax revenue through the collection of state and local sales taxes, transient occupancy taxes, possessory interest taxes, and other taxes and fees. These revenues stimulate further economic activity by providing for programs that benefit the local community





## WHY A STATE AGENCY?

### WHY IS IT IN THE BEST INTEREST OF PETALUMANS FOR THE FAIRGROUNDS PROPERTY TO CONTINUE BEING MANAGED BY THE 4TH DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATION (DAA), A STATE AGENCY?

There are 482 cities in California but only a handful of them enjoy the benefits of having a fair organization within their boundaries. In the 1930s our state leaders formed the network of District Agricultural Association fairs to solidify the future of fairs. These leaders recognized fairs as the avenue to educate urban residents about the importance of farming and the source of their food. This need is even more prevalent today because so few California residents are directly involved in agriculture. 21st-century fairs continue the tradition of promoting agriculture, but they also have evolved into a community meeting place showcasing the talents and celebrating the diversity of its residents.

Management of the fairgrounds property by the 4th DAA provides these benefits:

#### A NETWORK OF POLITICAL RESOURCES

Over the past 90 years, the family of California fairs has grown into one of the most valuable and iconic industries in the state. By being a DAA, the Sonoma-Marin Fair is part of a much larger industry that shares knowledge, resources, and statewide political power, features that are difficult, if not impossible, for the City of Petaluma, or any small to medium-size city, to achieve.

There is no question that the City of Petaluma has a legal responsibility to uphold the requirements of the Park Bond passed by voters in 1910. Under terms of the bond, the fairgrounds property must continue to provide recreation and open space to residents of Petaluma. Who better to manage a space steeped in the tradition of staging an annual fair and other community events than an organization with long-reaching communication lines with similar facilities?

#### STATE AGENCY TO STATE AGENCY FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND INFORMATION SHARING

As a state agency, the 4th DAA board and staff are governed by the Division of Fairs and Expositions, a section of the California Department of Food & Agriculture. Karen Ross, the Secretary of Agriculture for our state works directly with all the other state departments. As part of the Governor's cabinet, she is one of the first to know of funding opportunities available to state districts and agencies. The State of California is nimbler and more capable of doing business with the State of California.

For the last 30 years, the Sonoma-Marin fairgrounds have been overlooked for capital improvement monies and unable to compete for any long-term grants or funding sources to improve the facilities because of the tug-of-war over control of the property between the fair board and the city. If the City were to grant the property to the DAA or agree to a 100-year lease, the improvement opportunities could be significant.

#### GUARANTEED ANNUAL FUNDING INTO PERPETUITY

In July of 2018, the state legislators showed their support for the network of California fairs by approving AB1499. This bill provides  $\frac{3}{4}$  of 1% of all sales tax earned annually at California's fair facilities to be shared between the state's fairs. If the property continues to be the location of the Sonoma-Marin Fair under the management of the 4th DAA Board of Directors, there is escalating funding in perpetuity available for the facility.

#### EMERGENCY SUPPORT FACILITY:

No community knows better than Sonoma County how valuable it is to have fairgrounds facilities available during wildfires and other disasters. Fair facilities across the country offer large buildings, vast sections of flat ground, and seasoned staff who know how to manage large groups of people. The fairs also have a strong base of volunteers familiar with the facilities and immediately available to serve. Just as important, no one fair facility stands alone in

its effort to be the primary location for emergency services. The 4th DAA staff and board, when confronted with a natural disaster, work closely with the State Office of Emergency Services and the California network of fairs to share equipment, and provide support for one another.

## OPEN SPACE IN THE CENTER OF TOWN

The 4th DAAs mission is to produce an annual fair, to provide a community gathering place, and as demonstrated recently, to make the facility available to people and animals in need during a natural disaster. To accomplish their mission, the 4th DAA leaders need a facility that offers open, outdoor space. Unlike a municipality, they will never look to develop the property into housing, big box stores, or uses beyond what is allowed under the Park Bond.

## LOCAL CONTROL

The volunteer board members of the 4th DAA are appointed by the Governor of California and must reside in Marin or Sonoma counties. This leadership model offers local control with direct ties to state leaders and funding opportunities.

## 2021 FAIRGROUNDS USE & OPINION SURVEY

The survey was distributed electronically through the City of Petaluma's newsletter and the Fair's social media platforms. Approximately 29,000 surveys were distributed.

### RESPONSES:

- 1,540 responses were received - only 8% of the respondents identified as a Fair volunteer
- Over 54% of the respondents were between the ages of 25-54

### WHAT INFORMATION WAS GLEANED FROM THE SURVEY?

- Half of the respondents visited the fairgrounds 3 to 10 times per year and almost 90% of the respondents attended the annual fair.
- 57% of the respondents visit the fairgrounds regularly to attend non-fair events such as concerts and festivals.
- Over 50% of respondents attend private events and gatherings, and 35% of the respondents visit the site to participate in non-profit fundraisers.
- As the primary site for emergency services in southern Sonoma County, 22% of the responders have been at the fairgrounds either as a recipient of emergency response services or as a volunteer.
- 82% of the respondents indicated they do not want to see the use of the fairgrounds property change. For those respondents that did want to see

a change of use, 56% of the participants explained that they wanted the general use to stay intact, but events and activities should be expanded, and the activities should evolve.

### What were their responses when survey participants asked what they thought was the most critical use of the fairgrounds besides the annual fair (respondents could choose more than one)?

- 45% valued event and performance space availability for public and private events.
- 33% expressed that having the facility available for emergency services was the most important.
- 29% of responders indicated the Petaluma Speedway was their choice.
- 26% of the participants recognized educational activities as the essential purpose of the fairgrounds property. These educational services included ag education and onsite schools.

### What activities did respondents want to see expanded or added to fairgrounds uses (highlights from the responses)?

- |                         |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| • Concerts & Festivals  | 51%          |
| • Ag Educational Events | 18%          |
| • Community Gatherings  | 12%          |
| • Housing               | 2%           |
| • City Hall             | Less than 1% |