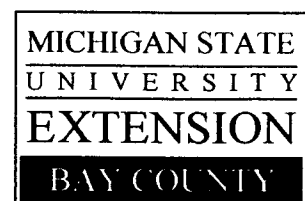




# **Bay County Fair Grounds**

## **Master Plan**

Revised Draft  
June 15, 2001



## I. OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS AND PROCESS

**Definition of Need** - Bay County made a commitment several years ago to invest approximately \$25,000 per year in capital improvements and building maintenance at the Bay County Fair Grounds. These investments have funded badly needed maintenance of existing Fair Grounds facilities including the livestock and horse barns, and grandstands.

The County must now contemplate what type of investments are warranted in new or additional facilities, and what is the best possible future use of the Fair Grounds. Repetitive suggestions for alternative uses for the site, coupled with the City of Bay City's designation of the site for housing in their recent master plan, heighten the need for the County to take a longer term view of the Fair Grounds, decide whether the site should continue in its present or similar use, or be converted or sold for some other public or private purpose. These determinations are necessary to allow the County to make rational decisions about the investment of additional County resources at the Fair Grounds.

**Source of Funding** - This study was requested by the Bay County Board of Commissioners and the Bay County Executive. It was funded through a grant from the East Central Region of the Michigan State University Extension Service.

**Public Comment** - Information used in writing this document was gathered through interviews with stakeholders and elected officials. Additional comment was sought through a public meeting held at the Bay County Fair Grounds on March 20, 2001. In addition, the plan was posted on Bay County's web site for public review with an automatic link to Bay County's e-mail system to facilitate additional public comment. . The draft document, "**Bay County Fair Grounds - Alternatives for Development of a Long Term Master Plan**", which was submitted to the Bay County Commission Planning Committee on March 12, 2001, has been modified here to reflect the input received from the general public regarding the plan and subsequent events..

While the initial draft document suggested several possible courses of action, this revision narrows those possibilities down to one suggested Master Plan for the Fair Grounds and suggests:

- General concepts that should guide future Far Grounds development.
- Future facility expansion on the site that meets those criteria.
- Steps which should be taken to determine which type facilities fit into the long term master plan for the Fair Grounds.
- Reviews new ideas suggested through public comment
- Explanation of why some ideas suggested through public input have not been included in this final master plan

**Study Overview and Content** - The draft's inclusion of several possible alternative uses for the Bay County Fair Grounds was based upon discussions, interviews, and surveys of local elected officials, 4-H Council members and the fair board executive committee. This process established that there was no current consensus about what the best use of this facility is, or should be in the

future. The presentation of several alternatives in the draft was designed to explore the viability of different suggested uses, and to stimulate discussion and debate about what future use best served the interests of the Bay County, neighboring residents, 4-H, the Bay County Fair, and area residents.

The draft plan suggested there were several key decisions which needed to be made by Bay County officials before a final master plan was developed for the Fair Grounds. During the process of collecting public input for this document, the majority of those discussions reached a conclusion and decisions on those issues were rendered. Those decisions were consistent with the suggested best scenario contained in the draft. That scenario envisioned the use of the grounds as a secondary building complex for the County and the use of the Fair Grounds as a multipurpose recreational facility and campground with priority given to the construction of new facilities which could be used for recreation and compliment the grounds use as a site for the Bay County Fair and other outdoor events.

## II. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

**Physical Description of Site** - The Bay County Fair Grounds was donated to the county as gift for a site for the Bay County Fair. The Bay County Fair has used the site since that time. In recent years, the County has used the site for other purposes which do not conflict with the Bay County Fair. Those uses include the County Animal Control Facility and Mosquito Control Facility, and storage for County owned equipment.

The site encompasses approximately forty acres. It is the largest undeveloped parcel of land within Bay City. The site lays adjacent to high value residential neighborhoods on the west, and an industrial site, Bay Cast Inc., to the east. There is an active rail line that runs along the east border of the property. An old rail line converted to a walking and biking trail skirts the west boundary of the property. The property is largely undeveloped with most of the structures clustered at the north and south ends of the parcel. The notable exceptions to this are the grand stands and bathrooms which are located near the center of the parcel and the new merchant building located west of the grand stands. The horse racing track occupies more than one third of the forty acre parcel and effectively limits the use of that area. There was a ball diamond located in the infield of the track. The new demolition derby track is also located there directly in front of the grand stand. The rest of the area within the track is left unused and vacant. The area has been used in the past as an outdoor ice skating rink in the winter.

Over time many different types of buildings were built on the site for the Fair and the events held in conjunction with that event. For purposes of clarity they are separated into two categories, those related to the fair and those unrelated to the fair.

### FAIR RELATED BUILDINGS

Building	Use	Current Status
Livestock Barn	Fair, 4-H Livestock Auction	Still used, re-roofed in 2000

<b>Building</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Current Status</b>
Horse Barn	Fair and private stall rental	Still used, re-built in 1998-99
Two Merchant Buildings	Fair exhibition, rental	Both torn down
4-H Canteen (old)	Fair, 4-H Activities	Torn down
Quonset Hut	Exhibition and storage	Still on site, now used only for storage
Grand stand	Fair and outdoor event rental	Still on site, various repairs and upgrades 1998-2000
Merchant Building (new)	Fair Exhibition, event rental and storage	Still on site
4-H Canteen (new)	Fair, 4-H events, event and party rental	Still on site
Horse Track	Fair	Still on site, needs repair, still used by horse barn renters
House	(old) Fair office and/or grounds keeper residence,	Still on site, now house rental unrelated to fair
Horse paddocks (3)	Fair, 4-H events, turn out for Horse Barn renters' horses	Still on Site
Emergency Services Garage	Storage	Still on site
Fair Office (new)	Fair Board offices & storage	Still on site
Demolition Derby Track	Built 1999, adjacent to Grand Stand, as fund raiser for fair board	Still on site
Covered Pavilion	Rental in conjunction with 4-H Canteen, Fair, other events	Completed in 2001
Bathrooms (2)	Fair and other events	In need of repair and or expansion, still on site
Small Livestock Building	4-H, Fair, storage	Still on site
Covered Pavilion (old)	Rental, Picnic events	Still on site
Fair Storage Building	Storage for Fair Board	Built by Fair Board 2001
Livestock Show Ring	Covered area for 4-H Livestock Auction	Built by 4-H 2001

## BUILDINGS UNRELATED TO FAIR ACTIVITIES

Building	Use	Current Status
Animal Control	Housing disposal of stray animals	Old facility needs to be expanded or upgraded
Mosquito Control Office	Offices for Mosquito Control	Old facility needs to be upgraded or expanded.
Chemical Storage	For Mosquito Control	Minimally meets environmental regulations, needs to be upgraded or replaced
Vehicle Garage	Storage for Mosquito and Animal Control vehicles and other county owned equipment	Fully utilized, expansion needed to meet current need, loss of jail garage requires additional space for grounds and maintenance equipment
RV Dump Station	Camper septic waste disposal	Still on site, in need of repair or replacement

**Site Operation and Maintenance** - The Fair Grounds and facilities are currently operated and maintained by the Bay County Building and Grounds Department. The Bay County Fair Board and 4-H Council also work on projects to maintain and upgrade facilities on the site. Rental fees from the 4-H Canteen, horse barn and other facilities, are deposited into the general fund of Bay County. The Fair Board and 4-H Council are able to schedule events on site free of charge. With the exception of the August Fair and several other events, the Fair Grounds is largely unused and vacant for most of the year. The majority of the 56 horse barn stalls are vacant despite very low rental fees. In FY 1999 total rental fees from all sources totaled \$25,638. This amount is somewhat below the cost of maintaining the fair grounds and other on site facilities which cost the County \$34,268, an additional \$30,701 was spent on capital outlay.

**Brief History of the Bay County Fair** - For most of its history the Fair has operated independently of the County. Several fair associations and boards have existed throughout the years. Prior to the county taking over the facility, the fair board was responsible for the Fair related facilities and the day to day operation of the Fair Grounds, scheduling events, and receiving rental fees. Former fair boards were more actively involved in maintaining the fair facilities. The new merchant building was built by a previous fair board, on site roads were blacktopped, and other on site facilities were built and/or upgraded by these entities.

The impetus for the County taking over the operation of the Fair Grounds was the financial insolvency of the previous fair board. Revenues from the fair and on site rentals did not cover

the costs of maintaining the on site facilities which largely fell into disrepair. The two old merchant buildings and 4-H Canteen were torn down because it became impractical to repair or upgrade the facilities.

The 4-H Canteen was replaced by the current facility at the south end of the Fair Grounds. The condition of the grand stands, horse and livestock barns, and horse paddocks generally deteriorated until the County became actively involved in repairing and upgrading the facilities. Since 1997 the County has committed approximately \$25,000 per year to building repairs and maintenance. The grand stands have been repaired, the horse and livestock barns have been structurally repaired and re-roofed. These investments from the County general fund have reversed the decline of these facilities and allowed the Fair to continue to operate.

The previous board's financial difficulties left this board without resources or capital reserves. As a result, 4-H became the focal point of Bay County Fair and Youth Exhibition. Members of the 4-H Council became more actively involved in the Fair Board. Open classes of competition largely disappeared from the Fair as did the midway and carnival rides. Fair attendance, which had already declined through previous years, continued to decline without these attractions.

**Current Status of Bay County Fair** - The current Fair Board has made considerable progress in the last several years. While the Fair is still a 4-H centered event, the board has made steady financial progress. A recent report showed a fund balance in excess of \$40,000. The board has pursued several fund raising and cost cutting strategies. They include sharing the cost of the carnival and midway with a local UAW summer picnic and sponsoring demolition derbies and figure 8 races. The Fair Board's ability to foster and sustain collaborative relationships with other community agencies and businesses is key to the future viability of the Bay County Fair. This hard work has resulted in the accumulation of financial resources which allow the fair board to consider new options to expand or improve the existing Fair.

These accomplishments must be tempered by several harsh realities. In general, attendance at county agricultural fairs is dropping. While there are several excellent examples of fairs which are successfully fighting this trend, there is more competition from other events, and other recreational opportunities.

The Saginaw County Fair and several other old, well established fairs are experiencing difficult times. The Saginaw County Fair recently chose to sell a portion of the existing Saginaw Fair Grounds and move the Fair to Chesaning in the hope that this will promote a revival in interest. The Saginaw Fair's ability to do this is supported by their ability to sell the existing Saginaw Fair Grounds which they own. The Bay County Fair has no similar source of capital assets which could be converted to fund a similar relocation.

Given the history of the Bay County Fair prior to the current board's involvement, the general trend in fair attendance, and the limited financial resources available, there is little margin for error. The next few years will be critical in determining if the Bay County Fair will continue to grow and evolve into an effective competitor for people's attention and recreational dollars.

### III. UNRESOLVED ISSUES RAISED IN DRAFT MASTER PLAN RELATED TO THE BAY COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS

There were several issues raised in the draft master plan which impact any future use of this site. They were raised by one or more parties during the information gathering process. Their resolution or progress toward resolution was important to moving forward on the development of this Master Plan. Each issue raised in the draft document is included below with a report on its current status and whether the action taken was consistent with the best recommended course of action suggested in the draft submitted to the Commission for review and comment. The issues include:

- **Does the County intend to replace the existing Animal Control and Mosquito Control facilities at the Fair Grounds?**

✓ **Resolved by Board Action.** The Bay County Board of Commissioners has moved to construct both animal control and mosquito control facilities at the Fair Grounds. This action included permission to begin design and cost estimates for these two facilities on this site. One reason cited for the decision was the savings the County realized by not having to purchase additional land and the ability to move forward quickly to build on the site. Both reasons were cited in the draft plan as positive reasons for citing the facilities at the Fair Grounds.

*“The decision to rebuild on the Fair Grounds does not severely limit other potential uses for the site if the replacement buildings remain clustered in the general area they now occupy at the south end of the property. These facilities and other needed County facilities could be clustered in a compound at the southern end of the property and separated from the rest of the Fair Grounds by vegetative barriers and an earthen berm. Since the County already owns the Fair Grounds, replacement on the site would not require additional property acquisition which may lower the total cost of replacing and/or expanding these facilities.”* Taken from the draft report submitted the Bay County Board of Commissioners Planning Committee.

- **Does the County want to create a County secondary complex and designate the Fair Grounds as a site for future expansion and or replacement of County facilities?**

✓ **Resolved by Board action.** The area of construction for the Animal and Mosquito Control facilities also includes area for the construction of additional County facilities. Preliminary site plans also include sites for additional building and grounds storage facilities and record storage for the County.

- **What facility will replace the old County Jail?**

✓ **Action taken consistent with draft master plan, decision delayed until later date.** While this specific issue has not been resolved, the site plans for the Fair Grounds submitted with this revised plan include planned sites for replacement facilities for both records storage and building and grounds maintenance on the Fair Grounds. The actual placement of these facilities will be decided when the old

County Jail is no longer available and must be replaced. The inclusion of these facilities in the master site plan is consistent with the recommendations of the Master Plan draft document.

*“The jail is currently used for records storage, furniture and equipment storage, as a garage for Building and Grounds vehicles, a mechanical shop. These facilities could be located at the Fair Grounds or at some other site purchased by the County. If the County decides to rebuild and expand the Animal and Mosquito Control facilities at the Fair Grounds, the addition of replacement facilities for those lost at the old County Jail could also be located at the Fair Grounds with minimal additional impact. The same cost savings may also apply to locating these facilities at the Fair Grounds.”*, Taken from the draft Master Plan submitted to the Bay County Board of Commissioners Planning Committee.

- **Does the County want the Fair Grounds to be financially self sustaining?**
- This issue has yet to be decided. The Fair Grounds will move toward financial self sufficiency if the suggested guidelines for development contained in this document are followed.***

*“The County Golf Course generates a profit which is in turn re-invested into course improvements and improvements to other county recreational facilities. The Civic Arena has been treated in a similar manner and the County Commission and County Executive have invested a great deal of time and energy into making it a financially self-sustaining entity. There was a clear indication from local elected officials that the Pinconning Park was expected to cover the costs of its operation. All of this suggests that local officials may want the Fair Grounds to also pay for its operational and maintenance costs. The suggested master plan moves the Fair Grounds in this direction by giving a preference to improvements that can generate additional revenue as well as improve the Fair. Taken from the draft Master Plan submitted to the Bay County Board of Commissioners Planning Committee*

- **Does the County have any interest in selling the Fair Grounds for private development or some other purpose?**
- ✓ ***This issue is largely resolved by previously cited Board actions which are consistent with the recommendations of the draft master plan document. This decision would be further strengthened by the adoption of a final Master Plan.***

*“A clear statement of intent and the adoption of a five or ten year plan for the Fair Grounds would help to end the speculation about how the site will be used in the future.”* Taken from the draft Master Plan submitted to the Bay County Board of Commissioners Planning Committee.



#### IV. FUTURE ALTERNATIVE USES FOR THE BAY COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS

There are many possible uses for the Fair Grounds. The County Corporate Counsel has researched the issue of limitations on use or conversion for other uses and determined that there are no deed restrictions which limit the use of the Fair Grounds or the sale of the property for other purposes.

Four alternative scenarios for future use were included in the draft submitted to the Bay County Commission Planning Committee. Each is identified and discussed in the following paragraphs.

- **Maintain the Status Quo** - This scenario envisions little change in the current operation of the Fair Grounds. It would continue to be largely underutilized and vacant for much of the year. This scenario minimizes future investment at the site, but it also ensures that the County will, for the foreseeable future, subsidize its operation. The construction of new or replacement County facilities on the site is consistent with this plan as long as the new construction remains concentrated at the south end of the site where existing County buildings are located. This allows the rest of the site to be preserved in its current state, for the Bay County Fair and other planned activities. It also postpones major decisions about future site use. The scenario invites continued speculation about how the site will be used. Given the recent decision by the City of Bay City to designate the site for future development, this scenario would invite the City to press the County to convert the site to some other use more consistent with the City's development plan.
- **Sell the Fair Grounds or Convert it to Another Use** - The City of Bay City has determined that this is the best use for the Fair Grounds. A conversion to upscale housing would increase tax revenues for the City and County. This use would be consistent with existing housing in the adjacent area and with the City's long term development plan.

One of the issues the City's new long term development plan focuses on is additional upscale housing within the City. There are few available parcels of land available to convert to this use. This is one of the reasons the long term development plan targets the Fair Grounds for conversion to housing. The plan also contemplates the conversion of open space in the south end of the City along with a good portion of the existing waterfront to housing. The City has already begun planning and development of a parcel it owns in the south end for additional housing and the recent controversy over the future use of the Fletcher Oil property clearly indicates the City is committed to the conversion of existing industrial and commercial property to residential use. The old Industrial Brown Hoist, Bay Aggregates, and City Power and light facility are slated for conversion to residential or residential/mixed commercial development.

The need for additional planned housing is called into question by the recently completed **Bay County Build Out Analysis** which projects flat population

growth and limited demand for additional new housing. The Build Out Analysis actually projects the population of Bay City will decline between 4.48% to 13.34% between 1990 and 2020. The newly gathered 2000 U.S. Census Data would seem to bear out that projection given that Bay County was one of the few counties in Michigan to lose population during that time period.

In all scenarios, housing unit capacity estimates far exceed the 2020 projected demand. The baseline county build-out capacity allows for approximately 162,086 dwelling units. This number, when compared to the most generous projected 2020 population, overestimates capacity by approximately 156,859 dwelling units. The lowest difference of 35,895 dwelling units, occurs when you exclude from development all parcels containing developed, tax exempt, wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas, and all prime farm land. While the capacity of the county as a whole exceeds projected need, some variation among townships and cities exists. All of the townships building capacity exceeds projected demands. Cities, being largely built out, are closer to meeting demands and, in some cases, fall short of housing demands. Unfortunately, the city's under capacities do not balance township excess capacities

Population projections for Bay County municipalities were obtained from four sources. Each source uses its own methodology, providing a range of estimates for comparison purposes. While Bay County's overall population is expected to decrease from its 1990 count, certain municipalities within the county can expect population increases. In general, townships, which contain approximately 60 percent of the county's population, are expected to have relatively minor population change from -1.14 % percent to +1.42 percent. This compares to the City's projected change of -11.16 percent to -3.69 percent, all of which indicate continued decline in population.<sup>1</sup>

The City levies 21.75 mills of property tax. This millage rate combined with more flexible zoning and planning ordinances, provides a huge financial incentive for developers to build new homes in nearby charter townships with water, sewer, police and fire protection services. This competitive advantage reduces the overall need for additional housing within the City limits.

The construction of thirty \$250,000 homes on the Fair Grounds site would generate an additional \$80,000 in revenue per year for Bay City and an additional \$21,000 per year for the County. While the City incurs little additional cost through a conversion to housing, the County would have to relocate the existing Animal Control, Mosquito Control, and Building and Grounds maintenance facilities to other sites. This would require the purchase of new land and/or buildings. There would be considerable pressure to identify an alternative site for the Bay County Fair and fund the transition costs for the Fair.

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<sup>1</sup> Bay County Build-Out Assessment, September 2000; Beckett and Raeder Inc.; pages 40-51.

The sale of the Fair Grounds would generate a significant amount of money which could be used to procure new sites for these facilities and the Fair. However, \$21,000 in additional revenues may or may not cover operational cost for replacement facilities, particularly if they are located at more than one site or located some distance from other County owned properties. The County may receive substantial financial benefits from designating the Fair Grounds as a County secondary complex and using the site as a location for multiple County facilities including currently needed facilities and future building needs such as a replacement facility for the old County Jail, or the existing Farmer's Market if that facility is ever converted to some other use.

The County should explore and compare the financial impacts on building and operating new replacement facilities at the Fair grounds and at other scattered sites prior to considering the sale of the Fair Grounds. The City should reexamine the need for additional planned housing in the light of the projections contained in the Build Out Analysis and consider changing its planned use from residential housing to mixed recreation.

- **Turn the Fair Grounds into a Multipurpose Recreational Facility** - The Fair Ground's location in the county's urban center offers a unique opportunity to create a multipurpose recreational facility at the site. Some of the existing structures are already rented out for private parties and events. The construction of an open pavilion near the existing 4-H Canteen compliments and expands this capacity. The size of the parcel allows for the placement of large recreational and sports complexes in the urban center where it is difficult to find large parcels of land. Soccer fields, tennis courts, and ball diamonds are a few examples of facilities that could be built on the site.

The existing horse barn creates the possibility of establishing an urban equestrian complex at the site which local schools and urban residents could use. This type of facility would necessitate the construction of an indoor or covered riding and exhibition facility and additional outdoor horse paddocks to promote additional horse stall rentals and year round use. The site is large enough to accommodate a horse riding trail on the site. These improvements offer a significant opportunity to increase rental revenues at the Fair Grounds which will bring it closer to financial self sufficiency, and provide additional facilities which compliment and allow for the expansion of the Fair, 4-H, and use for other events.

The County should undertake a study to evaluate the feasibility and financial implications of constructing new or expanding existing equine facilities at the Fair Grounds. The County should also review its recreational plan and assess community needs to determine what type of recreational facilities are needed and will be used by urban residents.

- **Use the Fair Grounds as an urban campground** - There are a number of summer weekend events in Bay City, River Roar, the Fireworks Festival, Pig Gig,

and the River of Time. Each of these weekend events offers an opportunity to utilize the Fair Grounds as a camping facility. The identification of Bay City as an antiquing destination offers another market for a urban campground. The Fair Grounds is directly adjacent to the rail trail network which provides easy access to the River Walk, the State Recreation Area and easy access for cyclists and hikers.

The Fair Grounds has existing facilities which compliment this use. An RV dumping station is already located at the site as are two sets of rest rooms. The blacktopped drives are already laid out to accommodate camp sites. The County would have to make investments to expand existing rest room facilities, add showers, install electrical hook ups at campsites and put gravel or mulched parking pads at some sites to accommodate RV's and camp trailers. This use also offers an excellent opportunity to increase annual operating revenue generated by the Fair Grounds. The use is compatible with the Fair and compliments the scheduling of other events at the site.

## V. MASTER PLAN FOR THE BAY COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS

There are many possible uses for the Fair Grounds. It's location in an urban center makes it an attractive parcel for many types of development. The City of Bay City's decision to designate the parcel for future development without consultation with the County about its intentions for future use provides impetus for the County to outline a long term plan which clearly states intentions for the parcel's future use. This will diminish the ongoing speculation about how the land can be used and allow the County to seek grants and other community resources to finance the improvements proposed in the long term plan.

There are many competing political and economic interests which impact the Fair Grounds. However, there is a natural synergy to many of the potential uses of the Fair Grounds and a clear opportunity to create a win-win situation which serves the financial interests of Bay County, increases recreational opportunities for citizens, Preserve the Fair Grounds for the fair and 4-H events, and enhances tourism and economic development.

***The County should reject the opportunity to sell or develop the Fair Grounds and use the southern end of the site to locate Mosquito and Animal Control facilities and as a site for other current and future construction needs.*** The site provides a low cost option for the expansion and/or replacement of existing county facilities at a location near the County administrative offices and the County's urban center. The County should restrict the building of County governmental facilities to the southern end of the parcel where they are currently located. This part of the parcel is adjacent to other industrial and commercial parcels. Building on the southern end of the parcel also minimizes impacts on nearby residential neighborhoods. The County should assess what facilities it needs to replace in the next ten years which could be located on the Fair Grounds and develop a site plan to accommodate current and future needs. This area should be segregated from the rest of the Fair Grounds by an earthen berm or vegetative barrier along the northern perimeter of the area to screen the buildings from the rest of the Fair Grounds. The inclusion of a fence in the barrier design would increase security and help prevent vandalism. The County should also explore the establishment of a separate entrance off

Livingston Street for this secondary complex. This use is consistent with other suggested uses of the site contained in the master plan.

***The County should develop the Fair Grounds as a Multipurpose Recreational Facility and Urban Camp Ground and continue to use the site for the annual Bay County Fair .*** Future expansion of facilities at the Fair Grounds should be designed to foster multiple goals, promote multiple uses, and enhance and or expand the use of the site as a multipurpose recreational facility, urban campground, and as a site for the Bay County Fair and other special events activities. The County should adopt guidelines for future facility development and criteria by which it can measure the relative merits of creating new or expanding existing facilities. Suggested guidelines to govern future facility expansion include:

- Facilities with multiple uses should be a priority
- Multiple use facilities that also enhance or expand the Fair should be a priority
- New facilities should be self financing with a prospect that County dollars spent on construction will eventually be repaid with revenues from those facilities
- New recreational facilities should serve the needs of citizens and be consistent with needs established in the County's Recreational plan.
- Additional revenues generated from new facilities should, after they are paid for, be kept in a separate account to be used to finance future expansion and defray maintenance costs.

***The County should build recreational facilities that are identified as existing needs in its recreation plan and survey city residents to identify additional facilities they would be most likely to use.*** The County should review its recreational plan to include the Bay County Fair Grounds as site for expanding recreational facilities. Priorities should be given to new recreational facilities that can be utilized for multiple purposes. Open space in the existing exhibition area should be preserved for the Fair and rental for other large outdoor events. The County should work with the City of Bay City to identify recreational needs and coordinate efforts to fill those needs. A survey of city residents should be conducted to identify what facilities they would use.

***The County should begin the phased development of modern campsites at the Fair Grounds and expand the number of sites as demand increases.*** One of the best opportunities to enhance both revenues and usage of the Fair Grounds lies in the creation of an urban campground on the site. Much of the infrastructure to support this is already in place. This existing infrastructure would have to be modernized and upgraded to accommodate a fully operational campground. The site is currently available for this type of use. However, there are limited temporary electrical hookups for individual campsites. There are no individual site water hookups, and individual campsites are not identified or designated. Modernization would require the expansion and modernization of existing bathroom facilities and the addition of on site showers for campers. Campers are familiar with designated sites with trailer parking pads, power hook ups, showers and camp fire pits as regular amenities. A successful campground would need these amenities to meet camper's expectation's. The costs associated with upgrading and adding these amenities at the Fair Grounds should be done in phases to minimize the out of pocket costs incurred by the County. Marketing this type of facility should at first focus on the special

weekend events held throughout the summer on the waterfront.

The installation of electrical power will enhance the rental of the site for other out door events and also benefit the Fair. Campsites should be developed so they did not interfere with the Fair. Likely locations include the area along the site's western boundary and areas where the existing track is located. The operation of a campground should be contracted out to an outside vendor who will handle reservations and the collection of camping fees. As the facility grows in popularity, the County may want to combine campground management with the rental of the onsite house formally used as a fair office. State Forest Campgrounds have successfully attracted hosts who stay at the campgrounds and receive modest remuneration for watching over the site and facilities. These hosts also collect money from campers and help enforce park rules and regulations.

***The County should consider constructing an indoor riding and exhibition facility to compliment the existing horse barn.*** This type of facility enhances the Fair, provides a covered facility for 4-H and other non-fair events, and creates additional revenue from rentals for horse and livestock shows and other exhibitions. The construction of such a facility would provide the County with additional rental income through horse stall rentals and rental of the facility for lessons and riding. Other enhancements that compliment this expansion include an on site riding trail and additional horse paddocks. The County should undertake a study to evaluate the feasibility and financial implications of constructing new or expanding existing equine facilities at the Fair Grounds. The study should survey usage rates and fee schedules for similar facilities that already exist in Midland and other counties. The survey should also measure the likelihood that additional stall rental fees will be realized.

***The County should remove the existing horse track and replace it with other more diverse recreational facilities.*** The track effectively isolates over a third of the parcel making it unuseable for other purposes. This area provides the most likely site for additional recreational and/or camping facilities. Electrical power and water are already available in the area The removal of the track would present an opportunity to combine the building of new facilities with the track removal.

***Master Plan overview and goals*** -There are natural synergies to the improvements suggested in this master plan. The separate strategies incorporated into this document support and complement each other. The strategies are designed to save the County money and minimize the costs of future development. The improvements can be done in phases to minimize costs and measure the need for continued expansion. The suggested master plan and strategies are designed to accomplish the multiple goals of:

- Increasing non-fair exhibition rentals
- Generating additional revenues to support the construction of new facilities
- Enhance urban recreational opportunities
- Expand tourism and support local economic development
- Allow the Fair to continue at the site
- Expand the use of the Fair Grounds as a special event facility

All these goals are designed to enhance the use and value of the site, move the Fair Ground toward a financially self sustaining entity, and preserve the County's future options.

## V. PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

After the County Board of Commissioners received the draft master plan, public comment on the plan was solicited through a public meeting at the Fair Grounds and through the County's web site where the draft master plan was posted for comment. This section of the plan will attempt to:

- Summarize those public comments
- List concerns about the plan raised during public comment
- List new ideas brought forth through public comment
- Examine those ideas based upon the criteria listed above
- Suggest additions to the plan

Over 60 people attended the March 20, 2001 public meeting held at the Bay County Fair Grounds to present the draft master plan for public comment. The meeting was announced in a large front page (Section B) article in the Bay City Times. In addition, flyers were placed in businesses in the general vicinity of the Fair Grounds. Individuals who had called and expressed interest in the Fair Grounds received a personally addressed notification of the meeting. The meeting included a presentation which summarized the draft proposal. Mock ups of possible site changes were also presented. The presentations were followed by a public session where comment and additional ideas were solicited.

General reaction to the proposal to make the Fair Grounds into a multipurpose recreational facility and campground were generally well received. The sentiment at the meeting was opposed to the sale of the Fair Grounds for private development. There was good discussion in support and against Mosquito Control remaining at the site and general support for using the site for other County owned facilities as long as they did not compromise the use of the site for recreation, the Fair, and as open space. Citizens also suggested several additional recreational facilities which they wanted the County to explore which were not included in the draft document. These included a Play Scape similar to those in Veterans Memorial Park, a golf course, the Farmers Market, and a Water Park. There was little support for building tennis courts on the site which had been included as a possible recreational facility. Comments are summarized below.

- Opposition to the sale of the Fair Grounds for private development
- Support for the concept of a multipurpose recreational facility
- Support for urban campground
- Support for the construction of Bay County governmental facilities
- Mixed reaction to locating Mosquito Control on site (less opposition if facility was located at the rear of the property)
- Support for the continued use of the site for the Bay County Fair
- Support for projects being financially self sustaining
- Concern about traffic and other impacts if the site is too aggressively developed
- Concern about the number of motorized events at the Fair Grounds - this was not expressed as opposition to the events now held there but concern if the events became more frequent and regularly scheduled

- Support for moving the Farmers Market to the Fair Grounds

Three new ideas for recreational facilities at the Fair Grounds were suggested by the public. In addition the group was asked to react to the proposal to move the Farmers Market to the site. Each is briefly described below and measured against the guidelines contained in this document for the construction of new recreational facilities at the Fair Grounds

- **Play Scope** - This type of children's recreational facility already exists in Veteran's Park and at the State Recreation Area. There is currently no similar facility on the eastern side of Bay City to serve children on the east side of Bay City and in Essexville. This type of facility can usually be constructed with a large portion of the materials and labor donated by local communities which can significantly lower the costs associated with construction. This type of facility would compliment other proposed site uses including the Fair, campground, outdoor event facility, local recreation needs. The Play Scope does not itself generate revenue. However, if the cost of construction could be decreased through the donation of materials and labor, the facility would add significantly to the attractiveness of the Fair Grounds as general use recreation site. This type of facility is not currently contemplated in the County's general recreation plan. The need for this and other facilities should be explored and evaluated the next time the Recreational Plan is reviewed and amended.
- **Water Park** - This type of facility would significantly expand the Fair Grounds into a major recreational destination. At least two similar facilities already exist in Saginaw and Au Gres. The Building and Grounds department did a preliminary investigation of costs associated with the construction and operation of this type of facility and found that the Saginaw facility cost \$3.1 million to construct and has operated at deficit since it opened. The facility employs as many as 90 people on a full or part time basis with the majority of those being part time summer help. The other facility located in Au Gres is privately owned. The owner was understandingly reluctant to share private financial information. However a recent article in the Bay City Times indicated that the owner was seeking to sell the facility because foreclosure was imminent. The costs of construction and operation of this type of facility would make it a unlikely candidate for construction at the Fair Grounds. It is not financially self sustaining. While it would itself be a recreational destination, it has little synergy with the other planned uses at the site. An additional concern would be the added traffic it would bring to the area, something local residents already have concerns about. The facility would also occupy a significant portion of the site which would be completely unavailable for other use.
- **Golf Course** - This type of facility is inconsistent with the other planned uses of the site. It would make the site a single use recreational facility and require the sale of the property into private hands.



- **Farmers Market** - The replacement of the existing Farmers Market on Columbus Avenue to allow the expansion of the YMCA has been discussed and is under consideration. This facility may or may not move from its current location. However, moving the facility to the Fair Grounds would provide an opportunity to construct an open air pavilion which could not only be used as a Farmers Market but also be incorporated into the Fair and provide covered facility for other outdoor events. Such a structure would make the site more attractive for outdoor events and expand the rental capacity by allowing more than one event to take place at a time. This would be consistent with the proposed master plan.

Based upon the analysis of the additional projects raised from public comment there are at least two additional projects that should be considered to be included in the master plan for the Fair Grounds. Those projects are the Play Scape and the Farmers Market, if the County seeks a new site for that facility. The Water Park is an attractive recreational resource. However, based upon the financial information obtained by the Building and Grounds Department, it would be a significant drain on County financial resources and would not enhance the other recreational opportunities at the site. The sale of the property for the construction of a golf course is also inconsistent with the objective out lined in the master plan.

## **VI. SUMMARY**

There is public support for the conversion of the Fair Grounds into a multipurpose recreational facility and campground. That support also envisions keeping the Fair Grounds largely open and available for use by the Bay County Fair and other outdoor events. The use of the Fair Grounds as a County secondary building complex is consistent with this vision and supported by the public, as long as the County buildings are located and clustered at the southern end of the existing site. The construction of new recreational facilities at the Fair Grounds should done with the following guidelines in mind:

- Facilities with multiple uses should be a priority
- Multiple use facilities that also enhance or expand the Fair should be a priority
- New facilities should be self financing with a prospect that County dollars spent on construction will eventually be repaid with revenues from those facilities
- New recreational facilities should serve the needs of citizens and be consistent with needs established in the County's Recreational plan.
- Additional revenues generated from new facilities should, after they are paid for, be kept in a separate account to be used to finance future expansion and defray maintenance costs.

In addition, the County should undertake studies of new facilities, prior to their construction, to gauge the likelihood they will be financially self sustaining and/or significantly add to the other multiple uses of the property.

## **Appendix: Bay County Fair Grounds Master Plan**

A: Bay City Times Article

B: Meeting announcement flyer

C: Summary of Public Comments from March 20, 2001 meeting

**A: Bay City Times Article**

# FAIR DEAL

## County officials propose plan for fairgrounds future

By Jeff Kart  
Times Staff Writer

The Bay County Fairgrounds is an attractive piece of real estate, county officials acknowledge.

In recent years, the 40-acre parcel in Bay City has been proposed as a site for new housing and a new school.

But county officials like Howard J. Wetters, Michigan State University Extension director, want to see the speculation end.

Wetters says in a new fairgrounds report that the Bay County Board of Commissioners should make a long-term commitment to keep the fairgrounds for recreational use, and make improvements to expand those uses in the future.

"This is the largest undeveloped parcel in the city," said Wetters, who drafted the report with information from research and interviews conducted by graduate students and staff from the MSU Travel, Tourism and Recreation Resource Center.

"Absent some long-term plan and commitment from the county, people are going to continue, on a regular basis, to say, 'I've got an idea for how we can use that.'"

Wetters said he doesn't think the Fair Board or the 4-H Council, which both run activities at the fairgrounds, are served by the continued turmoil and turmoil.

"We've got enough turmoil in our community without setting a pot on the back burner that's going to boil over every three years just because somebody's got a new idea," he said. "We should make a decision and we might as well move on with it and not make a decision."

The County Board asked the MSU researchers about a year ago to put together a master plan for the fairgrounds, Wetters said.

He came back last month with a report entitled "Alternatives for Development of a Long Term Master Plan," because he said there isn't a consensus in the community on the long-term use of the fairgrounds.

"I think it sort of provides direction for a master plan," he said.

A county Planning Committee received the report without comment at a meeting last month, to give time for commissioners to look it over and receive comments from the public.

The 10-page report recounts the fairgrounds' history, examines alternative uses and makes several conclusions:

- The county should reject the opportunity to sell or develop the fairgrounds.

- The county should restrict the building of departmental facilities to the southern end of the parcel, where the Animal Control and Mosquito Control buildings are located.

- The county should consider developing recreational facilities that complement the annual August fair, such as a riding and exhibition facility and urban campground.

Jay VanOchten, president of the Fair Board, and Walt Guthrie, president of the 4-H Council, say they think the report presents some good ideas.

Guthrie said it's important to keep the fair alive for future generations. Records show the fairgrounds property was deeded to the county for \$1 by the Bay County Agricultural Society in 1915.

"I'm a firm believer that when you have something, you shouldn't let it go," Guthrie said.

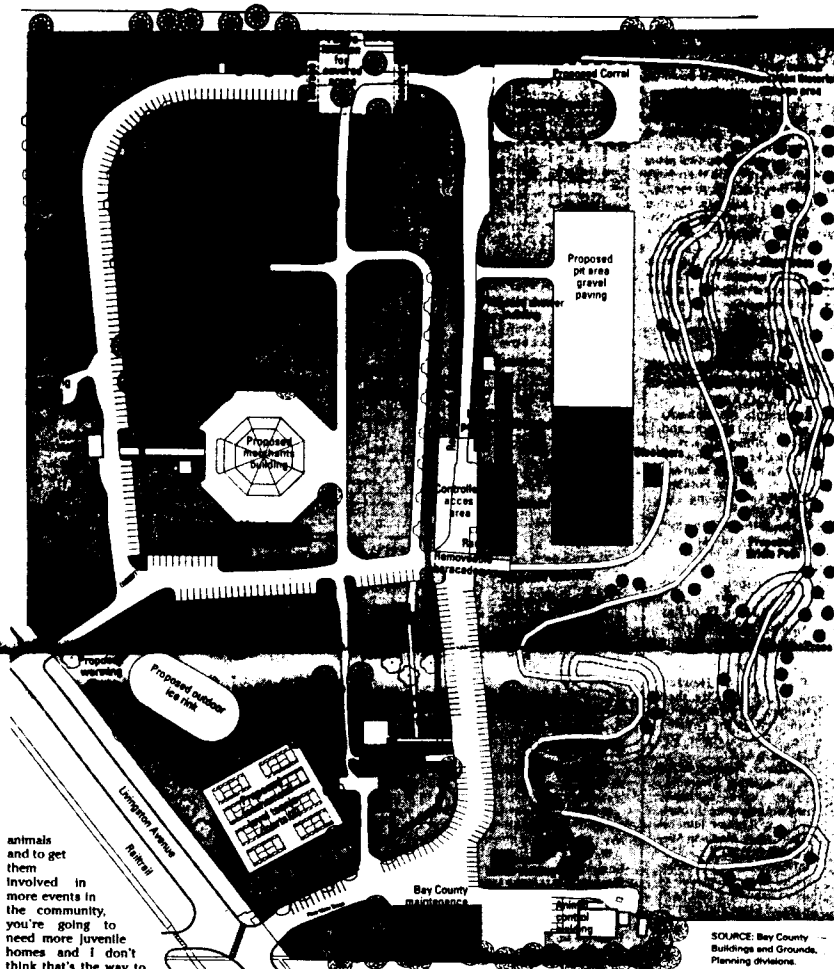
He said he's been involved for 42 years with 4-H, an agriculture-based, youth development and leadership program that uses the fairgrounds. About 375 kids participate each year in Bay County, Guthrie said.

"I have never, in the years I've been attached to 4-H in Bay County, have known of a child that ever went wrong in 4-H," Guthrie said.

"We've never had one that's run stray, there's never been one that's had a run-in with the law or anything. What it's all about is the kids."

VanOchten agrees.

"If you don't have someone or these 4-H kids to show their



This is a conceptual drawing of what the Bay County Fairgrounds might look like in the future. Some proposed improvements include:

- Handicapped ramp to the grandstands
- Multipurpose walking path
- Bridle path with landscaping and trees
- Additional parking spaces
- Tennis courts
- Additional camping sites
- Octagon pavilion
- New merchant building
- New trees throughout the grounds
- Bath house
- Fair pavilion

animals and to get them involved in more events in the community, you're going to need more juvenile homes and I don't think that's the way to go," he said.

But VanOchten said he wonders where the money would come from for the improvements.

He said fair organizers just finished constructing a new storage barn and pavilion on the grounds three weeks ago. They were paid for with money from fund-raisers and other events, he said.

"I hope they come," Van Ochten said of the proposed improvements. "As far as when selling the fairgrounds, I don't have any worry about that at all."

He said that's because the county has been committing about \$25,000 a year for improvements at the fairgrounds since 1997. Major expenses in 2000 were for a new roof on a livestock barn, and the construction of a picnic pavilion, said County Buildings and Grounds Superintendent Richard C. Pabala.

The fairgrounds requires a small county subsidy to operate. It generates revenues from rents and leases of its canteen, horse barn and other facilities, said County Finance Officer Michael J. Regulski.

The rents and leases brought in \$25,600 last year, and the county spent \$64,400 on personnel, supplies, utility costs and building additions and improvements, Regulski said. Minus the building additions and improvements, which aren't part of normal operations and maintenance, the subsidy was about \$8,100.

Wetters said the Fair Board and 4-H Council deserves credit for resurrecting the fair in recent years.

He said a previous Fair Board ran into financial problems and allowed things to fall into disrepair. A new group of people came along in the mid-1990s and tried to

revive the fair. Because there wasn't a lot of money to bring in attractions, the animals raised by 4-H participants became the fair's focus.

"4-H became the horse it has ridden — pardon the pun — back into financial stability," Wetters said.

A recent report showed the Fair Board with more than \$40,000 in the bank. The board has now begun to expand the fair, with a midway and other attractions, which has increased attendance, he said.

County Executive Thomas L. Hickner said the county has the resources to increase its invest-

### SOUND OFF

A meeting is planned for March 20 to allow the public to comment on a report on the Bay County Fairgrounds. The meeting is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. at the canteen at the fairgrounds, 800 Livingston Ave. The report will be posted on the county's Website at <http://co.bay.mi.us> by Monday or can be obtained from MSU Extension, County Board or County Executive Office, all located in the County Building, 515 Center Ave. Comments can be e-mailed to [fairgroundspen@baycounty.net](mailto:fairgroundspen@baycounty.net).

ment in the fairgrounds. The \$25,000 the county has been putting towards annual upgrades could be used as matching funds for state grants, which could double the amount of money available for new construction, he said.

But Hickner said he thinks a market study needs to be done before the county spends money for improvements like those suggested in the report.

The fairgrounds is located in the county's 8th District, represented by Democratic Commissioner Michael F. Halstead, who supports the master plan suggestions.

"I think it's time we got off center on the issue of the fairgrounds," Halstead said.

"For too many years, it's just languished as a taxpayer-owned piece of property. It's set unused most of the days of the year. By improving it, we hope to increase its use and its value as a place to hold outdoor events."

With the exception of the fair and several other events, the fairgrounds is largely unused and vacant for most of the year, the report states.

The county considered selling the property for housing in 1996, according to Hickner, but Halstead said the idea was cost-prohibitive, because the site doesn't have utility lines and other infrastructure required for residential development.

Residents also came out against

the proposal. More than 100 people came to one County Board meeting to protest it, Hickner recalls.

The issue of whether to keep the Animal Control and Mosquito Control buildings at the fairgrounds was debated several times in County Board meetings last year. Officials say new, larger buildings are needed. Some commissioners want to keep the buildings at the fairgrounds, others want to build off-site.

Hickner said he's not sure whether the county agencies will stay, but either scenario would allow the county to pursue developments like those suggested in the report.

Guthrie said he doesn't think the Animal Control and Mosquito Control buildings need to move. "They don't seem to bother us a bit," he said.

VanOchten said he thinks a riding and exhibition facility and campground would help bring in extra money to maintain the fairgrounds.

"We need ideas to utilize it more

See **Fairgrounds**, 2E

### You Asked for It

The column You Asked for It is expected to return next week. Columnist Frank C. Lee has been ill.

## FAIRGROUNDS

From 1E

throughout the year," VanOchten said.

Wetters said the exhibition facility would be a covered, open-air structure that could host equestrian and other events and increase stall rentals in a horse barn on the fairgrounds.

VanOchten said there are about 50 campsites on the grounds now, with electrical hookups and access to a dumping station.

The sites are used mostly by people involved with the fair and other events during the year, like a pow wow, dog show and circus, he said. A couple of camping clubs also use the spaces each year, he said.

VanOchten said he thinks more campers would come if extra space was available.

Guthrie agrees.

"I think it should be used for more things than it is now," he said of the grounds. "I think it could be used as an aid to the riverfront."

He said he thinks the sites would fill up during summer festivals, like the city's River Roar and Fourth of July events.

"It would make a beautiful place for them to come with their families when they can't afford motels," Guthrie said of tourists. "At that time of year, you can't get into the state park (in Bangor Township). It's plum full."

Hickner said he thinks the County Board will use the report as the basis for a master plan that will be adopted by May.

## **B: Meeting announcement flyer**



## PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING



### BAY COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS MASTER PLAN

- WHERE:** 4-H Canteen at the Bay County Fair Grounds
- WHEN:** March 20, 2001 at 7:30 P.M.
- WHAT:** Public Presentation on the Proposed Master Plan

You are invited to come and listen to a presentation about the future of the Bay County Fair Grounds, make comment on the proposal, and make suggestions or express concerns about the plan. Let us know what was missed or what changes you would like to see. See you there!

For more information call the MSU Extension Bay County Office at 895-4026. The Fair Grounds Plan is posted on the Bay County Web Site ([www.co.bay.mi.us](http://www.co.bay.mi.us)). Your comments may be e mailed to [fairgroundsplan@bayco.net](mailto:fairgroundsplan@bayco.net).

**C: Summary of Public Comments from March 20, 2001  
meeting at the Bay County Fair Grounds**



# FAIRGROUNDS PUBLIC MEETING

## MARCH 20, 2001

(Corrected 4-11-01)

### PUBLIC MEETING ON PROPOSED FAIRGROUNDS MASTER PLAN & RECREATION IMPROVEMENTS

#### HOW WILL IMPROVEMENTS BE FUNDED?

1. County
2. State
3. Partnership with Fairboard
4. Foundation sources
5. Private sector
6. Bond/installment investment

#### HOW DOES THE COUNTY PROPOSE TO MANAGE VARIOUS USES-CAMPGROUND, TENNIS COURT, MULTI USE TRAIL RENTAL / WILL COUNTY PROMOTE USE THRU HIRING A POSITION?

Use existing resources.

#### DOES FAIR BOARD HAVE A WEB SITE?

[Http://www.community.mlive.com/cc/BayCountyFair](http://www.community.mlive.com/cc/BayCountyFair)  
[www.co.bay.mi.us](http://www.co.bay.mi.us)

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- ◆ GOOD PLAN-NO NEED FOR TENNIS COURTS
- ◆ PAST CONSTRUCTIONAL ICE RINK-HIGH WATER BAD CONDITIONS.
- ◆ CAMPGROUND OK
- ◆ MULTIPLE USE IS GOOD THING.
- ◆ 4-H NEEDS TO REMAIN.
- ◆ HIGH SCHOOLS WANT TENNIS COURT-NEED NORTH/SOUTH ALIGNMENT.
- ◆ WATER SLIDE FULL- LOTS OF HANDS FOR WATER PARK-NO PLACE FOR SWIMMING.
- ◆ COVERED PAVILION MAY NOT BE BEST PLACE-DON'T CUT TREES
- ◆ SLOW DOWN, GET CAMPSITE PLAN FIRST BEFORE TREES.
- ◆ LOTS OF HANDS FOR CAMPING-MODERN CAMPSITES.
- ◆ IF YOU DEVELOP CAMPGROUND-NEED CARETAKER & COULD SERVE AS PROMOTER.
- ◆ MULTI USE PAVED SURFACE TRAIL WILL CONNECT EXISTING AND NEW FACILITIES AT FAIRGROUNDS, AS WELL AS THE RAIL TRAIL.
- ◆ TENNIS COURTS IFFY/COMPATIBLE WITH CAMPING.
- ◆ THREE-FOUR YEARS SCHOOLS WILL BUILD NEW SCHOOL & CAN BUILD TENNIS COURTS THEN.

- ◆ PLAY STATION FOR KIDS-AUBURN (where tennis courts are shown) DO NOT GENERATE INCOME.
- ◆ TENNIS COURTS AT VETS PARK NOT USED.
- ◆ HIGH MAINTENANCE COSTS FOR WATER PARK (costs associated with juvenile delinquents).
- ◆ HAVE RELOCATIONS TO MID-COUNTY BEEN CONSIDERED?
- ◆ NEIGHBORS HAVE NOISE, LITTER, PARKING PROBLEMS.
- ◆ OVERUSE CONCERNS.
- ◆ ATTRACTING LOCAL USERS & A PLACE FOR KIDS SHOULD BE FIRST PRIORITY BEFORE DEVELOPING FOR TOURISTS.
- ◆ MOSQUITO CONTROL WILL NEED FOR COST CONSIDERATION, IF RELOCATED/POSSIBLE LOOK FOR BROWNFIELD.
- ◆ ANIMAL CONTROL FACILITY NEEDS IMPROVEMENT, LOCATION OK.
- ◆ TEEN DANCING.
- ◆ MARKET TO MOVE TO FAIRGROUNDS? OK. LOTS OF HANDS. WOULD TIE IN WELL WITH 4-H.
- ◆ MOSQUITO CONTROL-CONCERNS ABOUT DOLLARS FOR PURCHASE OF LAND IF LOCATED ELSEWHERE.
- ◆ IF HAVING MOSQUITO CONTROL WILL HELP FAIRGROUNDS, THEN LETS KEEP.
- ◆ INCREASED USE HAS INCREASED IMPACTS TO NEIGHBORHOOD. DOESN'T SEEM TO BE LARGE ENOUGH TO HANDLE CROWDS.
- ◆ LATE NIGHT NOISE WITH DEMOLITION DERBY-COULD LATE NIGHTTIME NOISE BE ADDRESSED?
- ◆ NEED MORE DISCUSSION BETWEEN FAIRBOARD & NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS.
- ◆ DEMOLITION DERBY IS BIG SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR FAIRBOARD.
- ◆ NEED INPUT ON RESIDENTS/NEIGHBORS.
- ◆ TENNIS COURTS NEED SUPPORT FACILITY IN ADDITION TO COURT-LOCKERS, SHOWERS.



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FAX 517-895-4217  
E-mail bay@msue.msu.edu

## MEMO

**Date:** June 21, 2001

**To:** William Reder, Chair  
Planning Committee  
Bay County Board of Commissioners

**From:** Howard Wetters  
MSU Extension Director

**Re:** Agenda Item

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard Wetters". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the right of the "From:" field.

I am submitting the revised Master Plan for the Fairgrounds for the approval of the Board of Commissioners.

Please place this item on the agenda for next week's Planning Committee meeting.

Thank you.

HJW:bak

Attachment

**cc:** Mike Gray  
Tom Hickner  
Bob Redmond