

KENTUCKY STATE FAIR BOARD

The September Kentucky State Fair Board meeting began at 10:00 A.M. EDT, Thursday, September 24, 2026. Vice-Chairman Greg Pope presided over the meeting at the Kentucky International Convention Center.

Members present: Mr. Cleo Battle, Mr. John Cox, Mr. Jimmy England; Secretary Holly Johnson, Mr. Jeremiah Jury, Mr. Joe O'Brien, Mr. Greg Pope, Ms. Sadiqa Reynolds, Mr. Dorsey Ridley, Mr. Lee Robey, Commissioner Jonathan Shell, Dr. Laura Stephenson, Mr. Jay Brent Tolle

Absent: Mr. Ray Perry, Mr. Rocky Adkins, Mr. Hans Poppe, Mr. Garrett Zimmerman

Also present: Mr. Mike Berry, Kentucky Venues; Ms. Ellen Benzing, Kentucky Venues; Mr. Nick Carter, UK College of Ag; Ms. Faith Cummings, Kentucky Venues; Ms. Jessica Dunkelberger, Kentucky Venues; Ms. Corinne Fetter, Kentucky Venues; Mr. Thomas Gibbons, Kentucky Kingdom; Ms. Althea Jackson, Mayor's Office; Mr. Matthew Johnson, Kentucky Venues; Mr. Brad Kempf, Kentucky Venues; Mr. Travis Mayo, Office of the Governor; Mr. Kevin McCoy, Kentucky Venues; Mr. Tim Postlethwait, Kentucky Venues; Mr. Brandon Reed, KDA; Ms. Sierra Rojas, Kentucky Venues; Ms. Donna Schneider, TAH Cabinet; Ms. Laura Whitehead, Kentucky Venues

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 A.M. on September 24, 2026, by Vice-Chairman Greg Pope.

WELCOME

Vice-Chairman Pope welcomed everyone and expressed his appreciation to the board members for attending at the Kentucky International Convention Center.

ROLL CALL

Vice-Chairman Pope called on Ms. Jessica Dunkelberger to call roll. A quorum was present.

CONSIDERATION OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

Vice-Chairman Pope called for consideration of the minutes from the August 19, 2026, KSFB meeting.

Mr. John Cox moved, and Mr. Brent Tolle seconded to:
"Approve the minutes as presented." The motion carried.

PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT, Mr. Mike Berry, Interim President & CEO, Kentucky Venues

Mr. Mike Berry welcomed members and thanked them for their involvement during the Kentucky State Fair (KSF). He added that the 122nd KSF was highly successful, both in attendance and programming. Mr. Berry noted that the fair presented some operational challenges, including some unexpected issues related to power outside of our control and weather-related concerns, but he praised the staff, volunteers, and board members for their response. Mr. Berry emphasized that the organization handled

these challenges smoothly and credited the team for maintaining operations. He also viewed the public's continued attendance as evidence of the fair's importance to the community.

The organization had moved directly from the State Fair into a busy festival schedule with Louder Than Life and Bourbon & Beyond. Louder Than Life was extremely hot, while conditions for Bourbon & Beyond are considerably cooler. Mr. Berry expressed enthusiasm for the festival programming and referenced the well-documented partnership with DWP, the festival promoter. He acknowledged that large events inevitably involve challenges and occasional accidents but stressed the value of Kentucky Venues' facilities and available space. The organization can accommodate a wide range of activities, transitioning from trade shows to agricultural and equine exhibitions and then to major concerts drawing tens of thousands of people. He thanked and congratulated everyone involved in delivering these events.

He commented that management reports would be slightly shorter today due to staff needing to be at the festivals, but all reports are in the board members packets. He thanked Mr. Matt Johnson and Mr. Ian Cox for their work organizing the data from executive directors.

Expositions – Ms. Corinne Fetter

- Kentucky State Fair and World's Championship Horse Show
 - Ms. Fetter described the events as phenomenal with attendance reaching 642,240, a result that exceeded attendance for the previous ten years. She recognized the efforts of the staff, and everyone involved.
 - The World's Championship Horse Show recorded a new high in participation for Saddlebred Horses, Roadsters, and Hackneys, with 1,866 horses reported.
 - The Championship Drive was another major highlight:
 - A total of \$198,500 was awarded.
 - More than 273 participants were showcased during the second and third days of the fair in Broadbent Arena.
 - The program depends on support from sponsors, The KY Expo Foundation, and individuals who helped raise the necessary funds.
 - State Fair sponsorship revenue reached an all-time high of \$1.2 M. She noted that this was the strongest sponsorship performance during her 20 years as director of Expositions.
 - When sponsorships for the World's Championship Horse Show were included, the combined total was close to \$1.7 M.
 - The Sunshine Classes were also highlighted as an important initiative shared by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and the Kentucky State Fair with a record of 120 participants
- North American International Livestock Exposition
 - The Expositions team works continuously on upcoming events, with the next major event being the North American International Livestock Exposition, scheduled for November 5–19.
 - She highlighted the organization's efforts to reduce its reliance on general fund support for the event by generating additional revenue through an online sale of the K-Lot. Several years earlier, the NAILE Executive Committee and Advisory Committee had recommended establishing the online sale as a way to help support the event financially.
 - The K-Lot online sale generated \$354,401 in 2026, a substantial increase over 2025 which was approximately \$274,000 and in 2024 approximately \$99,000.

She explained that exhibitors are not required to participate in the online sale and can choose other available tie-out areas that do not incur a fee. However, the K-Lot is a preferred area, and the online sale provides a way to generate additional revenue while helping offset the cost of operating the exposition.

Finance – Mr. Brad Kempf

- June Monthly Financial Statement
 - June total revenue was just over \$2.6M, which was \$0.3M below prior year and \$0.5M below budget.
 - Direct Event Revenue is \$2.1M for the month, down \$0.3M compared to prior year and budget.
 - KEC event revenue was \$0.8M, hosting 11 events for the month, led by The Players Championship with \$0.3M and LFA 235 with \$0.1M. Event revenue was down approximately \$0.2M, primarily because the facility hosted fewer events than in the prior-year period.
 - KICC event revenue was \$1.3M, hosting 3 events, with the AP Reading Louisville 2026 generating \$1.0M and the PCA General Assembly 2026 generating \$0.3M. Event revenue was down approximately \$0.1M with the facility hosting 7 fewer events this year.
 - Other Operating Income is up \$30k compared to prior year.
 - Direct expenses totaled \$0.8M, in line with prior year and below budget.
 - Indirect expenses totaled \$3.9M, \$1.2M below prior year and \$3.1M below budget.
 - Mr. Kempf explained that the favorable indirect expense variances resulted from a yearlong review of expenditures. Certain costs had been moved into a capital maintenance pool, affecting how the expense appeared in the operating results.
 - Overall net operating loss for June was \$2.1M, including \$1.6M in depreciation, \$0.7M better than prior year and \$2.9M better than budget.
- Year To Date
 - Total revenue \$72.4M, \$8.1M higher than the prior year and \$3.2M above budget.
 - Event revenue totaled \$59.3M, \$7.2M above the prior year and \$3.5M above budget.
 - Direct event expenses totaled \$26.9M, up \$3.7 M compared with the prior year and \$2.1M above budget.
 - Indirect expenses totaled \$62.6M, an increase of \$2.3M over the prior year and approximately in line with budget.
 - Net operating loss for the fiscal year was \$17.1M, including \$18.8M in depreciation expenses. The net loss was \$2.2M, better than the prior year and \$1.6M better than budget.

Human Resources – Ms. Sierra Rojas

- Ms. Rojas commented that the departments immediate priority was preparing for mandatory open enrollment for all full-time employees.
- The team is also working on developing new staff training materials. They are working toward completing the training and ensuring employees participate.
- The teams is also developing an Employee Advisory Committee.

Legal Counsel – Ms. Ellen Benzing

- Ms. Benzing presented a brief tutorial on premises liability and negligence, explaining that the subject was particularly relevant given the large number of visitors attending Kentucky Venues events.
- She referenced the State Fair and the ongoing festival activities, noting that Kentucky Venues had approximately 1.9 M visitors in 2025. Despite the volume of visitors, she indicated that the organization had maintained a strong track record concerning liability claims. She explained the legal framework for negligence claims involving the Commonwealth of Kentucky noting that the Commonwealth generally benefits from sovereign immunity against negligence claims. An administrative process allows certain claims involving injury or property damage allegedly caused by the Commonwealth to proceed through the Kentucky Board of Claims. Ms. Benzing handles routine premises-related incidents, including slip-and-fall cases, such as situations where a spill was not cleaned up in time.
 - Since the beginning of 2026, the organization has experienced seven routine slip-and-fall claims. All have been resolved, none remain pending, and their combined cost was less than \$5,000.
- She also described a more complicated trend involving attorneys filing lawsuits in Jefferson Circuit Court despite the availability of the Board of Claims process noting that some attorneys have begun naming individual employees as defendants. These claims may allege that employees performed ministerial duties rather than discretionary acts, making dismissal more difficult. The organization has five pending cases of this type, with a brief description of each included in her written report.

Sales/Food & Beverage – Ms. Laura Whitehead

- Ms. Whitehead reported that the sales teams secured 12 new definite bookings in August:
 - 6 at KEC
 - 6 at KICC
 - The bookings represent approximately \$0.8M in revenue, a 5% increase over the same period in the prior year.
 - She highlighted the Presbyterian Youth Triennium, a youth conference expected to bring approximately 3,000 attendees. The group had previously held its event with Kentucky Venues in 2025 and had chosen to return in 2028.
- Recent Events include concerts at KEC and the Sam's Club holiday show at KICC. The Sam's Club event was considered a significant achievement for the sales team. Kentucky Venues had worked for years to attract a convention associated with Sam's Club and Walmart, with the effort involving collaboration with Louisville Tourism. The event was successful, and the client praised both Louisville and KICC.
- Upcoming events:
 - KIPP Expo at KEC
 - The American Professional Pickleball Association event at KICC
 - The Humana Open, a related festival-style event planned for the streets surrounding the KICC building, with Humana serving as a sponsor.
- Food & Beverage
 - OVG, KEC's F&B provider, recently went through a change in management. Mr. Chase Shopshire is the new General Manager
 - The State Fair was a major test of the in-house concessions operations. She complimented the team on overseeing liquor sales for vendors and ensuring that vendors had the appropriate licenses and met health-related approval requirements.

Operations – Mr. Kevin McCoy

- Mr. McCoy introduced Mr. Trevor Carter, a long-time employee of Kentucky Venues who is retiring. Mr. Carter took on responsibilities for maintaining and repairing elevators and escalators in 2011, when Kentucky Venues began handling this work in-house rather than relying entirely on outside contractors. Mr. Carter has held the necessary license since 2011 and was recognized for his extensive technical knowledge, reliability and responsiveness to after-hours calls. Mr. McCoy estimated that the financial impact of not having Mr. Carter and relying on an outside contractor, just for our in-house shows, would cost approximately \$1M.
- Mr. McCoy thanked Mr. Carter for more than 26 years of service and assured him that he would always be welcome at Kentucky Venues.
- The Board and Mr. Berry thanked Mr. Carter for his service and wished him well in retirement. Mr. Berry gave an example of Mr. Carter's responsiveness during the Fair that reinforced his value to the organization.

Mr. Berry encouraged the Board to read the Communications report particularly because it included comments from the public regarding the KSF. He also had several personal experiences receiving positive feedback on the Fair and commented that it was gratifying and reflected positively on the work performed by the staff. He also noted that all 120 counties were present at the KSF, a goal of the team to achieve each year.

Mr. Berry expressed appreciation for Ms. Faith Cummings and Ms. Jessica Dunkelberger for their dedicated work and service to himself and the Board. He noted that Ms. Dunkelberger had been coordinating credentials for the DWP Concerts and asked if she had any updates. Ms. Dunkelberger commented that all Board members who had requested wristbands, parking access, and related credentials should have what they need but if any additional assistance was required they could reach out to her.

Vice-Chairman Pope thanked the executive director for their reports.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Vice-Chairman Pope called for any unfinished business to bring before the board. Mr. Berry commented that committee assignments had been announced at the August KSFB meeting and added that they now need to begin meeting. Certain bylaws or committee charters require the committees to elect their own chairperson. As a result, there was not yet an established chairperson for each committee who could convene the groups. To address this, Mr. Berry has asked designated board members to take the lead in organizing their respective committees and arranging initial meetings.

Mr. Berry asked Vice-Chairman Pope to convene the Executive Committee. The members of that committee are Ray Perry, Greg Pope, Rocky Adkins, Cleo Battle, Hans Poppe, Dorsey Ridley and Commissioner Johnathan Shell.

Mr. Berry asked Mr. John Cox to convene the Finance and Budget Committee. The members of that committee are John Cox, Secretary Holly Johnson, Sadiqa Reynolds, Lee Robey and one vacant position corresponding to the vacancy on the board.

Mr. Berry asked Mr. Brent Tolle to convene the NAILE Executive and Events Committee. The members of that committee are Jimmy England, Jeremiah Jury (representing 4-H), Joe O'Brien, Dean Laura Stephenson, Brent Tolle and Garrett Zimmerman (representing FFA).

Vice-Chairman Pope asked how frequently the committees should meet. Mr. Berry explained that the appropriate frequency would depend on each committee's responsibilities and workload. Mr. Berry also noted that auditors were on-site and that the Finance and Budget Committee would need to meet to review the audit and related matters. He encouraged committee members to coordinate closely with the relevant staff member in their area to determine an appropriate meeting schedule and identify logistical needs.

NEW BUSINESS

Vice-Chairman Pope introduced Mr. Thomas Gibbons, President of Region Three for Herschend, the parent company that operates Kentucky Kingdom. Mr. Gibbons gave a presentation to review the park's development over the last several years as well as outline future plans. He added that Herschend plans to announce its 2027 project publicly within approximately six weeks, but the board was being given an advance look at the company's plans. Below is a summary of his presentation:

- Herschend operates 40 locations nationwide, including Newport Aquarium and a partnership with Dollywood. Mr. Gibbons personally oversees 10 locations.
- The company establishes a guiding theme for each property to direct investments and guest experiences.
- Kentucky Kingdom's theme is "Thoroughly Kentucky," emphasizing attractions and themed areas that celebrate the state's unique identity.
- Herschend is developing four themed areas as part of its ongoing investment strategy.
- Recent improvements and seasonal events:
 - Discovery Meadow opened in 2025 with an approximately \$11M investment.
 - Flying Fox, a suspended coaster, represents an approximately \$14M investment.
 - The Pumpkin Festival began in 2022, followed by a Christmas festival in 2024.
 - The Jack O'Lantern Spectacular was scheduled to open at Kentucky Kingdom the following Wednesday.
- Planned developments:
 - Happy Valley Farms: A redesigned, farm-themed family area near the park entrance, with an estimated \$4M investment.
 - Bluegrass Mounds: A new themed area featuring an indoor coaster, with approximately \$3M allocated to the area and \$ M for the coaster.
 - Lake Life: Planned for 2029, following a pause in the development sequence during 2028.
- The Christmas development involved approximately \$8M for the event and an additional \$3M in related property investment.
- Mr. Gibbons emphasized Herschend's substantial financial commitment to improving attractions and the overall guest experience.
- The Gravity Group is developing the indoor coaster, with construction beginning the previous week. The building previously housed a coaster many years ago. Following Bourbon & Beyond, the park plans to use the event's laydown area to stage and deliver large construction

components. Detailed designs and blueprints are available at the park's offices; the presentation provided the board with an overview of the park's development direction.

- Kentucky Kingdom is prioritizing families with children. A chaperone policy introduced during Herschend's first year helped address concerns about large groups of teenagers and support the park's family-oriented focus.
- The park coordinates with Kentucky Venues to encourage families attending events at KEC and KICC to visit Kentucky Kingdom, although event attendees can be difficult to attract away from their primary activities.
- Mr. Gibbons confirmed that all current attractions were operational and that no unused roller coasters were being held in reserve.
- Additional details about the planned 2027 project were expected in approximately six weeks, with a public announcement anticipated in November.

PARTNER REPORTS

Kentucky 4-H – Mr. Jeremiah Jury

- Mr. Jury the Fair went very well and thanked the Board for their support of Kentucky 4-H. 4-H recorded a record number of entries
- The Southern Regional Team Leadership Conference had recently concluded in Tennessee. The conference brought teens together from states spanning from Kentucky, Florida Texas and Virginia. Participants learned how to influence people in their communities and develop solutions to issues affecting their hometowns.
- 4-H is preparing for the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE), with numerous livestock participants already getting ready.
- Mr. Jury is traveling to a local event as part of "All In for Ag Week", a program focused on educating young people throughout Kentucky about agricultural production and farm safety.

Finance and Administration Cabinet – Secretary Holly Johnson

- Secretary Johnson reported that the cabinet continues work on high-group properties and several other projects. One highlighted project is the Bowling Green Veterans Center which will have its grand opening soon.
- Mr. Berry thanked the cabinet for repeatedly sending staff to support tours and answer questions about the Phase I and Phase II projects.

Levy Restaurants – Ms. Lori Kennedy

- Ms. Kennedy introduced three members of the team serving KICC.
 - Ms. Danna Robinson – Asst. General Manager
 - Has worked for Levy for more than 20 years, all within the Louisville market.
 - Previously served as general manager at the KEC when Levy operated there.
 - Has been working at KICC for approximately one year.
 - Ms. Stevie Stevenson – Director of Sales
 - Has been with Levy for eight years and at KICC for nearly five years.
 - Previously worked at the America Center in St. Louis, bringing convention-center experience to the role.
 - Mr. Mike Gervintoro – Executive Chef
 - A Marine veteran and has been with Levy for three years.
 - Previously worked at Topgolf and Omni Hotels in Louisville.

Department of Agriculture – Mr. Brandon Reed

- Mr. Reed reported that the Fair was a very successful event and thanked the board and staff for their partnership. KDA supplied more than 170 employee volunteers to work at the KSF and he emphasized that the Fair would not be possible without them.
- Commissioner Shell was highly visible during the Fair and enjoyed showing visitors what Kentucky has to offer.
- During ‘All In For Ag’ Week, Commissioner Shell has visited approximately 15-20 schools across the Commonwealth as a part of the fall Ag in the Classroom programming.
- KDA also held its fourth annual Farmer Appreciation Day with Raising Hope at the Rural Center in Somerset. The event recognized the late Dale Dobson, who created Raising Hope, described as an international model for farm safety. A separate evening event honoring Mr. Dobson was also held at the venue and went well. The event brought together FFA and 4-H partners, medical teams, and other participants. Attendance was estimated at 300–400 or more people, although final figures were not yet available.

Louisville Tourism – Mr. Cleo Battle

- Mr. Battle reported that their FY ended in June.
 - Definite group room nights increased 7% year over year. Group nights had exceeded the previous year’s results for four to five consecutive years. Mr. Battle credited the board and the broader work of KTHC for contributing to that sustained growth.
 - Attraction attendance rose 3%, including attendance at distilleries. Mr. Battle noted the connection between attracting meetings and groups to the area and increasing visitation to local attractions.
 - Despite recent negative news coverage, Louisville’s urban tourism experiences continued to perform well, with visitors still lining up for attractions.
 - Louisville Tourism’s offices helped host 630 meetings, conventions, and events during the fiscal year, making it a busy year for both the organization and the communities it serves.
 - For September, the region had 57 groups totaling 121,663 group room nights, with the DWP festivals among the major events taking place during the two-week period.
 - The following month was expected to bring 56 groups and approximately 75,000 group room nights. Mr. Battle identified the Equip Expo as a major contributor.

Mayor Greenberg’s Office – Ms. Althea Jackson

- Ms. Jackson expressed excitement about the DWP festivals and added that the office looks forward to seeing the attendance results and other outcomes.

Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet – Ms. Donna Schneiter

- The Governor announced that the administration secured more than \$10.4M in FEMA disaster funding to reimburse the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management, Kentucky State Parks, Fort Boonesboro, and Breathitt, Carroll, and Owsley Counties for expenses related to flooding in 2022 and 2025. Of that funding, \$232,900 would go to Kentucky State Parks and Fort Boonesboro for expenses resulting from flooding in April 2025.
- Ms. Schneiter highlighted upcoming centennial celebrations for two Kentucky landmarks: Natural Bridge State Resort Park and a second site identified in the transcript as “ALA1.”

- A Natural Bridge 100-Year Adventure Photo Challenge was being launched as part of the centennial celebration. Further information is available through the Kentucky State Parks website.

University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment – Dr. Laura Stephenson

- Dr. Stephenson commented that their partnership with the Kentucky State Fair supports the Fair through its research, teaching, and extension programs, including equine, animal science, and horticulture activities.
- The university tracked 10,415 entries across 4-H and the Junior Livestock Program. Dr. Stephenson thanked board members who attended competitions and presented ribbons to youth participants.
- 404 UK employees and 200 volunteers supported Fair activities and operations.
- The college invested approximately \$509,000 in connection with the two-week Fair.
- The College of Agriculture includes 14 departments and encompasses areas beyond traditional agriculture, including social sciences and Retail Tourism Management.
 - The university is developing a new 12-credit-hour undergraduate certificate in Event Innovation Management. The certificate would be open to undergraduates from any discipline and delivered in a hybrid format, combining online and in-person learning.
 - Dr. Stephenson encouraged the board and its partners to contribute expertise in the classroom and help provide students with experiential learning and internship opportunities.
- NAILE
 - She explained that the university and its partners coordinate seven national events in Kentucky. The events are managed by seven different groups across the state, requiring substantial coordination. She stressed that Kentucky benefits from hosting these events and that the work of the university, Kentucky Venues, and other partners helps keep them in the state.

That concluded partner reports.

Vice-Chairman Pope announced that one more topic, not on the agenda, had been brought to his attention. The board needed to enter into executive session to discuss.

Mr. Brent Tolle moved, seconded by Mr. Cleo Battle to:
 “Go into closed session.” The motion carried.

Mr. Jimmy England moved, seconded by Mr. John Cox, to:
 “Go back into open session.” The motion carried.

Vice-Chairman Greg Pope noted that there is one more item of business to discuss and that is the contract for the Interim CEO, Mr. Mike Berry.

Mr. Joe O’Brien moved, seconded by Ms. Sadiqa Reynolds to:
 “Extend Mr. Mike Berry’s contract for three months, which is written in his current contract that’s already been accepted and ratified.” Vice-Chairman Pope explained that this is an action that the board needs to take to formally activate the extension in his contract. Presuming that is something Mr. Berry would like to do. The motion carried.

Mr. Berry thanked the Board and commented that he serves at their pleasure, as well as the Governor and people of the Commonwealth.

Mr. O'Brien commented that the Board discussed the need to clarify the process for finding a permanent President & CEO. Vice-Chairman Pope added that the discussion emphasized the importance of beginning the permanent hiring process following the successful Kentucky State Fair and the DWP events. Mr. Berry's interim designation was noted as an important distinction while the permanent position was being pursued. Mr. Berry reported that he has a meeting scheduled for that afternoon to begin drafting a job description for the position. He was asked to contribute his perspective and has been seeking input from others before the description will be brought back to the board. Mr. O'Brien suggested a committee be established or designated group to participate in the search process and that the previous CEO job description be utilized. Mr. Berry confirmed that Chairman Perry is very engaged and there would likely be more information coming in the near future.

ADJOURN

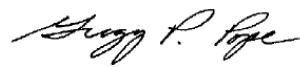
Vice-Chairman Pope called for any other business. There being none he called for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Cleo Battle moved, seconded by Mr. Joe O'Brien, to:
"Adjourn the meeting." The motion carried.

Dated: 10/20/26



Jessica Dunkelbeger, Secretary



Greg Pope, Chair