



## **PHASED IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED FOR FAIRGROUNDS**

### **Background**

The Okaloosa County Fairgrounds, located behind the Courthouse on Lewis Turner Blvd., has always been owned and operated by the City of Fort Walton Beach. In 2022 this property was declared surplus by the Fort Walton Beach City Council. Realizing that the land could be sold for real estate development, the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners entered into negotiations to purchase what we believed was a valuable parcel of public land. The BCC realized that, in addition to annual events such as gun shows, the Okaloosa Fair, Antique shows and Fish Fries for All Sports, to name a few, the County will have a continuing need for a staging area when natural disasters, such as hurricanes, occur. This space would continue to be available to provide for power trucks and to house the National Guard. As a result of these discussions with the City of Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County agreed to purchase the Fairgrounds “as is” for \$4.1 million with the understanding that the County would have greater resources to update and modernize the facilities, especially with access to Tourist Development dollars which are available through the bed tax on short term rentals.

The idea is to keep as much green space as possible for such a need.

### **Improvements**

After the purchase of the property there seemed to be broad consensus by the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners that the existing dilapidated structures need to be improved. It was suggested that a citizen committee be appointed, with one appointment by each commissioner, with the goal of developing specific recommendations for improvements to the Fairgrounds. It is important to note here that all improvements will be paid for from Tourism Development Dollars. No money will be used from Ad Valorem tax dollars. *The Board of County Commissioners will have the final vote on any improvements.*

### **Committee Report**

The Citizen Committee began meeting in September 2023. A tour of the facilities was given and deficiencies noted. A history of the events was considered as well as what types of events might be possible in the future after completion of the much-needed improvements. I want to thank the

Citizens Committee, who served without compensation, for their many selfless hours of work on this project.

The suggested plan to improve the current site would be implemented in phases. Detailed below are the specific improvements suggested by the Citizen Committee. Although there is a general consensus as to the vast majority of the suggested improvements, I have outlined below in red several significant additions to the Fairgrounds for which I have received varying comments and feedback. Because this is such an important capital project for the County that would affect all residents, I need your input specifically as to the major additions outlined in red.

### **General Improvements suggested**

- Demolish the oldest and most dilapidated buildings;
- Remove trash and debris throughout the site and cleanup overgrown vegetation;
- Remove the storage of unused and unnecessary equipment from the site;
- Relocate remaining storage items to outer remote buildings;
- Develop sections of paved and grass parking over time; and
- Work to ensure electricity and storm water issues are up to date and working.

### **Existing Building Space**

- Ensure all roofs are weather tight with no leaks;
- Construct a new, attractive, uniform facade on outer existing buildings;
- Add new entrances at strategic points and demo existing entrances;
- Improve existing bathrooms;
- Add an 8 ft covered walkway along the front of the existing buildings;
- Address parking needs and improve landscaping;
- Redo the 60 ft area between Bldg. B and Bldg. C and the space between Bldg. D and Bldg. H by constructing a new addition that will include caterer's kitchen and bathroom that could serve both buildings;
- Explore improving the internal lighting, wall and floor finishing, painting and similar cosmetic improvements for each space;
- Redevelop the functional event spaces with HVAC, insulation, floors, lighting and wall finishes; and
- Allow for longer corridor space into a more finished homogenous space capable of being used as one space or divided for each of the Building B, C, D, and H.

### **Open Space Area Behind Buildings**

- Eliminate safety holes in the open space area and remove antiquated infrastructure;
- Relocate current RV spaces elsewhere on site, perhaps to the periphery, and build new side with correct infrastructure, adjusting any necessary Eglin agreements;
- Build oversized bathroom for the field/outside use events;

- Reconstruct the area with new underground infrastructure that can be utilized when needed and hidden when not needed; and
- Add landscaping and turf to improve the overall appearance.

### **New Large Multi-Purpose Building**

- Construct a new minimum 30,000 sq. ft. building on the east side of the existing building with approximately 10,000 sq. ft of additional support space, e.g. bathrooms, kitchen, storage, mechanical, etc.;
- Build other new or replacement sections and parking over time as demand is determined and funding permits, as shown in the conventional plan;
- Ensure the new building is modern and multi-purpose with technology, high ceilings, sprinklers, etc, with the ability to function alone or together with the other venue spaces as part of a bigger event;
- Build other wing in Phase V over time.
- **Estimates of cost for these improvements are north of \$10 Million dollars.**

### **Need for Feedback**

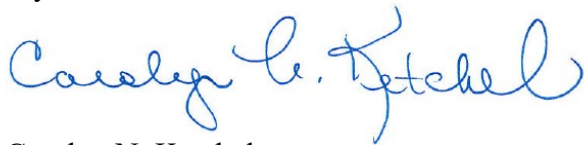
The Board of County Commissioners (BCC) will consider this plan and recommendations at the Tuesday, March 26th Board Meeting at 8:30 AM. There will be a time for public comments.

**I am asking for your comments. Please let me know if you want this kind of growth at the Okaloosa County Fairgrounds or what part of the renovation you particularly want. Your opinion is of great importance to me as your commissioner. Attached is a proposed drawing of the plan submitted for consideration to the BCC.**

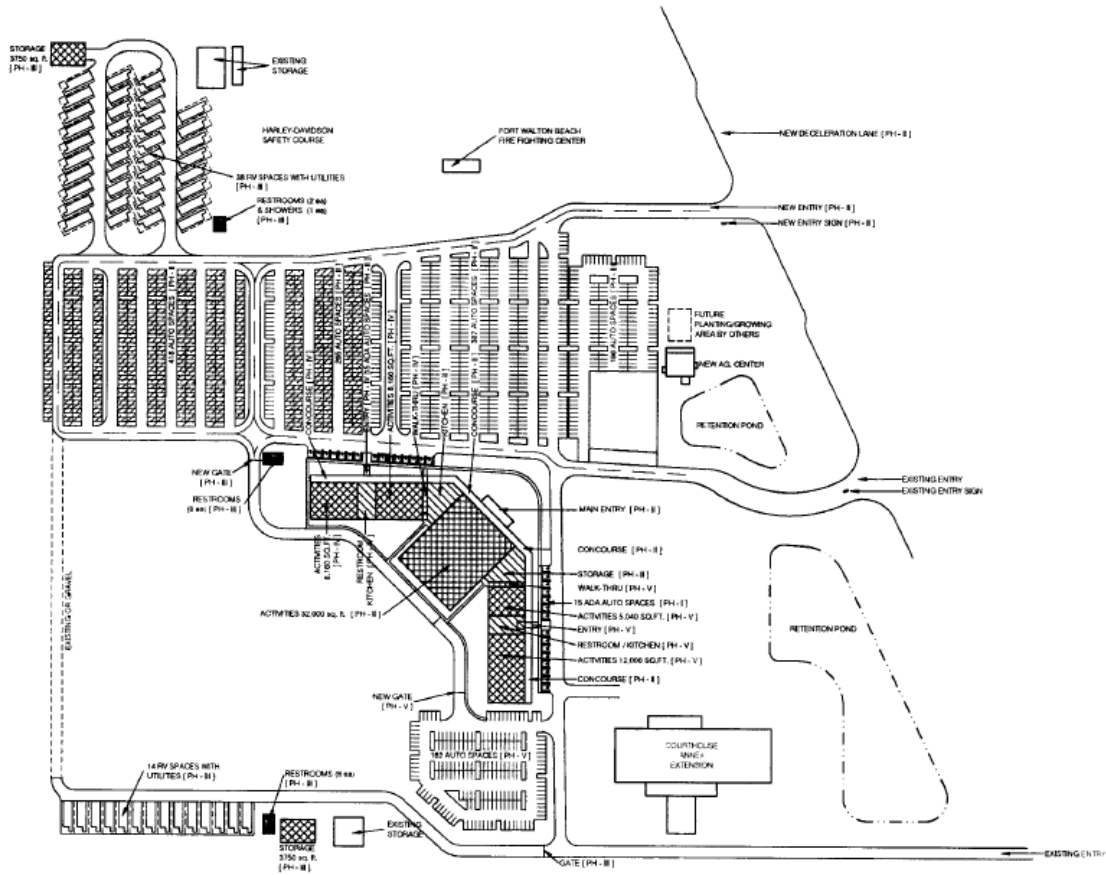
Please send your comments to [cketchel@myokaloosa.com](mailto:cketchel@myokaloosa.com), and plan to attend the BCC Meeting in Shalimar Tuesday, March 26<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 am when this project will be considered.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



Carolyn N. Ketchel  
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Okaloosa County, Board of County Commissioners  
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**PARKING**

PHASE I	15 ADA AUTO SPACES
PHASE II	15 ADA AUTO SPACES
PHASE III	20 ADA AUTO SPACES
PHASE IV	30 RV SPACES WITH UTILITIES
PHASE V	42 AUTO SPACES
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>30 ADA AUTO SPACES</b>
	<b>148 AUTO SPACES</b>

**LEGEND**

EXISTING BUILDING	12,860 sq. ft.
A1 - EXHIBIT AREA	12,000 sq. ft.
B - EXHIBIT AREA	8,000 sq. ft.
C - MUSEUM	5,000 sq. ft.
D - EXHIBIT AREA	1,000 sq. ft.

**PHASING V**

- \* DEWELPMENT EXISTING BLDG. A1, A2, A3, B, C, D AND H.
- \* ADD EXHIBIT BLDG. A1 WEST OF PHASE I CONSTRUCTION.
- \* ADD PARKING AREA TO WEST OF NEW CONSTRUCTION.

1 OVERALL SITE PLAN: OPTION B - Phase V

SCALE: 1" = 100'

