

**MINUTES OF OCFEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
HELD DECEMBER 19, 2024**

The following Minutes are a summary of Board action and proceedings. For a full transcript please click on the link below or visit the ocfair.com website.

[https://s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/ocfair.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/22154022/24\\_12\\_December\\_Transcription.pdf](https://s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/ocfair.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/22154022/24_12_December_Transcription.pdf)

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Kovacevich, called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

**2. MISSION STATEMENT**

**3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by Vice Chair Barbara Bagneris. Roll call was taken by meeting secretary, Summer Angus.

**4. DIRECTORS PRESENT:**

Chair Kovacevich, Vice Chair Bagneris, Director Pham (via Zoom), Director La Belle, Director Rubalcava-Garcia (via Zoom), Director Ruiz, Director Bilezikjian and Director Jackson.

**DIRECTORS ABSENT/EXCUSED:** None.

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Michele Richards, OCFEC CEO; Ken Karns, OCFEC Chief Operating Officer; Melissa Au-Yeung, Chief Administrative Officer; Michele Capps, OCFEC Chief Business Development Officer; Jason Jacobsen, Director Planning & Production; Summer Angus, OCFEC Executive Assistant; Evelyn Nunez, OCFEC Communications Associate; OCFEC Ag programs staff; Josh Caplan, Office of the Attorney General; Reginald Joseph, transcriptionist; Gibran Stout; Reggie Mundekis; Carolyn Beaver; Macki Hamblin

**5. MINUTES:**

**A. Board meeting held November 21, 2024**

Action Item

**ACTION:** Director Ruiz motioned and Director Bilezikjian seconded to approve the Minutes from Board meeting held November 21, 2024. **MOTION CARRIED. AYES:** Chair Kovacevich, Vice Chair Bagneris, Director Pham, Director La Belle, Director Rubalcava-Garcia, Director Ruiz, Director Bilezikjian and Director Jackson. **NAYES:** None. **ABSTENTIONS:** None.

**6. MATTERS OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**7. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**A. Standard Agreements:** SA-009-25FT; SA-010-25SP; SA-011-25SP

**i. Standard Agreement Amendments:** SA-067-24SP (Amend. #1)

- ii. **Standard Agreement Amendments (Exercise Option):** SA-006-23YR (Amend. #2)

**B. Rental Agreements:** R-140-24; R-143-24; R-145-24; R-147-24; R-148-24; R-149-24; R-150-24; R-005-25; R-021-25; R-031-25; R-048-25; R-049-25; R-050-25

- i. **Rental Agreement Amendments:** R-140-24 (Amend. #1); R-149-24 (Amend. #1); R-042-25 (Amend. #1)

**C. Active Joint Powers Authority Agreements Amendments:** 032-23-089 (FCO 001)

**D. Correspondence:**

Communications to the Board from members of the public related to OCFEC business are identified below and included with the Board materials (available on the OCFEC website). Note that this agenda item includes only those communication(s) that were sent to the entire Board and CEO before the publication of this month's agenda. The deadline for correspondence to be included on the January 2025 agenda is January 17, 2025.

- i. None.

**E. CDFA Correspondence:**

Communications to the Board from the California Department of Food & Agriculture Division of Fairs & Expositions regarding relevant topics at Fairs and Expositions.

- i. None.

- End of Consent Calendar -

CEO Richards highlighted Standard Agreement Amendment SA-006-23YR (Lopez Works for the horse stall cleaning, feeding and arena maintenance) for extension due to bid award protest.

**ACTION:** Vice Chair Bagneris motioned and Director La Belle seconded to approve the consent calendar. **MOTION CARRIED. AYES: Chair Kovacevich, Vice Chair Bagneris, Director Pham, Director La Belle, Director Rubalcava-Garcia, Director Ruiz, Director Bilezikjian and Director Jackson. NAYES: None. ABSTENTIONS: None.**

**10. CLOSED SESSION** (Closed to the Public)

The Board adjourned to closed session at 9:37 a.m. and resume at 10:47 a.m.

Items to report out of closed session: None.

Directors Pham and Rubalcava-Garcia left the meeting after closed session.

**8. CEO'S OPERATIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES**

CEO Richards reported the following:

- Nick Berardino, former OCFEC Board member and Heroes Hall Veterans Foundation President, was inducted into the Orange County Hall of Fame
- She and COO Karns attended retirement party for Orange Coast College's Doug Bennet, highlighting his partnerships and contributions to OCFEC
- The City of Santa Ana dedicated a park in memory of former OCFEC Board member Gerardo Mouet; Director Ruiz, COO Karns and CBDO Capps were in attendance
- Updates on The Ranch include the first after-school class graduation, a new MOU with the North Orange County Veteran Center, the near completion of the entrance mural and inquiries from potential new boarders
- Staff attended IAFE convention in Phoenix, where COO Karns was announced as the incoming IAFE Board Chair for 2025
- She attended CDFA's Fair CEO Collaborative Meeting in Sacramento where they received updates from CDFA legal, CalHR, the California Office of Emergency Services and California Construction Authority
- The \$5 Taste of Fair food promotion during the 2024 OC Fair was very successful with 12% of patron participation
- OCFEC will once again partner with OCTA for the 2025 OC Fair

Ken Karns, OCFEC Chief Operating Officer, reported the following:

- Administration building construction tracking two weeks behind due to weather, but no major concerns
- David Grindle, the new IAFE CEO visited the OC Fair, expressing his admiration for the property
- In partnership with OVG, two more water carts will be constructed for the 2025 OC Fair - improvements to spout dispensing technology are planned
- The new multi-workplace Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) completed the final draft of the terms of reference
  - He explained the purpose, scope and responsibilities of the committee with representation from all work groups at OCFEC

Gibran Stout criticized there were only twelve kids that graduated from The Ranch after school program. She alleged the remaining three boarders at The Ranch do not have contracts. She asserted and alleged Walk Intuit is not certified for any equine therapy, and criticized their horses. She stated the annual operating budget for her OC Vaulting is \$50,000 and reached hundreds of thousands of kids. She alleged the eviction of all the trainers and criticized the classroom programming of The Ranch program.

## **9. GOVERNANCE PROCESS**

### **A. Presentation of 2025 Budget Submittal Letter**

Information Item

Melissa Au-Yeung, OCFEC Chief Administrative Officer presented the 2025 budget submittal letter.

### **B. Continuation of 5-Year Strategic Planning Workshop 2025-2029**

Action Item

Reggie Mundekis provided two suggestions for the strategic planning process: First by utilizing technology for parking and storage by building a high-tech, automated parking garage with integrated storage facilities, which would minimize labor costs and utilize space efficiently. She also suggested decorating the structure with LED screens for advertising or creating a visually distinct design (e.g., resembling a barn or orange crate) to enhance functionality and serve as a landmark. Secondly, she advised avoiding outsourcing property control and cautioned against leasing portions of the property for external operations, citing past challenges with external operators at the swap meet and equestrian center. She also warned of potential long-term lease issues. She emphasized careful planning to avoid repeating past mistakes and to maintain flexibility for future development.

Carolyn Beaver, former boarder for over 11 years, shared her insights and concerns about the facility related to the strategic planning discussion. She emphasized the role of trainers in attracting boarders, filling stalls, and improving safety for riders and horses. She asserted trainers provide essential horsemanship instruction, enhancing safety, proper handling of horses and positions around horses. Beaver asserted the need for trainers to provide public riding services, as the facility's insurance does not allow these services to be offered directly. She expressed disappointment that riding programs are no longer available. She urged the Board to focus on attracting and retaining knowledgeable trainers to restore and sustain public riding programs and ensure the safety and success of future equestrian activities.

Gibran Stout agreed that storage is an issue for the property and suggested a purge of unneeded items. She also suggested looking for and purchasing empty office space offsite.

CEO Richards continued the strategic planning workshop, items discussed:

- Where the Board left off after the last workshop:
  - The Board suggested a slight change to the mission statement by changing creating to enhancing
  - Strategic Pillars of the organization – Innovation, Stewardships, Operational Excellence and Guest Experience
  - SWOT analysis

CEO Richards guided the Board through a time capsule exercise and a GAP analysis exercise, creating strategic direction statements in regards to the four strategic pillars.

CEO Richards stated the next steps in the strategic planning process:

- Staff will formalize the Boards planning work from today
- Board will review the draft strategic plan at the January meeting
- Staff will distribute the draft plan to various stakeholder groups for feedback
- Stakeholder recommendations will be incorporated into the plan
- Staff will develop formal SMART goals to achieve Board's strategic direction and incorporate into the plan

- The final plan will be brought back in January or February for review and approval

Director La Belle discussed Master Site Plan (MSP) funding and the need to explore public, private partnership that could bring enhanced revenues and resources to the OCFEC to finish the MSP.

Vice Chair Bagneris suggested a MSP mid-point check-in with regard to the stewardship pillar.

Director Bilezikjian discussed funding and possible priority changes relative to the MSP.

NO Action taken.

### **C. Committee / Ad Hoc Committee / Liaison Report**

Information Item

To assure compliance with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, Committee reports are only for the purpose of the Committee chair, Ad Hoc Committee members or Liaison to provide a verbal update. Should the Board want to discuss any Committee work item not already on the agenda; those would need to be agendaized for a future Board meeting.

- i. **Leadership Committee** (Chair Kovacevich, Committee Chair; Vice Chair Bagneris)
- ii. **Financial Monitoring and Audit Committee** (Director Pham, Committee Chair; Director Bilezikjian)
- iii. **Facilities Committee** (Director Ruiz, Committee Chair; Director Bilezikjian)
- iv. **Governance Committee** (Director La Belle, Committee Chair; Chair Kovacevich)
- v. **Community Affairs Committee** (Director Rubalcava-Garcia, Committee Chair; Director Jackson)

Chair Kovacevich on behalf of the Leadership Committee, reported:

- Committee met on December 5 to plan the December agenda
- Next meeting is scheduled for 1/8/2025

Director Bilezikjian, on behalf of the Financial Monitoring and Audit Committee, reported the committee coordinated via email and she presented the November financial reports.

Macki Hamblin, trainer, alleged she was illegally moved from the property. She discussed and encouraged the Board to read an op-ed article from the Voice of OC alleging OCFEC wasted funds through overpayments, unnecessary expenses and paying for work not done. She criticized that individuals provided letters of recommendation for LWI that participated in the review process of the RFP.

## **11. UPCOMING EVENTS PREVIEW**

Michele Capps, OC FEC Chief Business Development Officer, gave an update on upcoming events at OC FEC.

## **12. BOARD OF DIRECTORS MATTERS OF INFORMATION**

Board members made concluding comments:

- Happy holiday wishes to everyone
- Happy birthday wishes to Chair Kovacevich
- Thanked staff for continued high level of support to the Board
- Thrilled to be part of the Board and organization
- Staff runs a tight ship and does good work
- Appreciation for the leadership of this fair
- Thanked CEO Richards for another great year
- Feelings of honor to be on the Board
- Congratulation to COO Karns and his chair appointment to the IAFE board and representing the industry
- Appreciation of directors' knowledge and the leadership of senior staff
- Looking forward to 2025
- Looking forward to the WFA convention
- Recognition and thanks to Deputy Attorney General Caplan and RJ the transcriptionist
- Reflection on all the Board accomplished over the past year

## **13. NEXT BOARD MEETING: JANUARY 30, 2025**

## **14. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 12:17 p.m.

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Nick Kovacevich, Chair

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Michele Richards, Chief Executive Officer