

Chairman Terry Wanzek and members of the Senate Appropriations-
Government Operations Division Committee

House Bill HB 1591

Monday, March 24, 2025

8:30 am Red River Room, North Dakota State Capital Building

IN SUPPORT OF BILL

Chairman Wanzek and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill HB 1591, the County Fair Resiliency Grant bill. I strongly support the appropriation of these funds to help county fairs across the State of North Dakota maintain and upgrade facilities, and improve important community assets.

My name is Mark Landa. I serve on the board of directors for the Greater Grand Forks Fair in Grand Forks, ND. I have served as Secretary of the Fair board for 20 years. Prior to my election to the board I was a volunteer with the 4-H program working at the Fair for 11 years. So I have been involved with the Fair and the fair industry for more than 30 years.

Fairgrounds all across North Dakota are gathering places for their communities. There are more than 30 fairgrounds in the state. Each has unique facilities and capabilities. Some are seasonal such as our facilities. Some have buildings that can be used all year round. But each one brings people to their communities for events. That means that they bring dollars to the communities, and sales tax dollars to the state. Improving the facilities should help these fairgrounds attract more people to their events, which should bring even more dollars to our communities and more tax dollars. Therefore, I believe that the economic impact of these facilities is an important reason to support HB 1591.

We don't have good numbers to represent all of the fairgrounds. However, I can share some numbers from our facility. The Grand Forks Fairgrounds has been the fairgrounds for Grand Forks County for more than 120 years. During that time it has hosted a wide range of events including the North Dakota State Fair on many occasions through the 1950s, Grand Forks County Fairs, a wide range of race events, concerts, livestock events, etc. Our racetrack is very popular and is considered one of the top dirt tracks in the country by the World of Outlaws racing circuit. We also have a popular go-kart track and a good horse arena. The community has used the buildings on the grounds for meetings, class reunions, employee appreciation events, entertainment, auction sales, theater productions, etc. The 4-H program uses the facilities for several different purposes in the summer. We have several structures that were built by the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression, dedicated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and are listed on the National Historic Register. We also have some other buildings that are 25 to 50 years old that are used on a regular basis. All are in need of some level of repair in spite of our efforts to maintain them.

As you know, Grand Forks has several different facilities that support and host events in the community. Events that may be hosted at the Fairgrounds in many communities are hosted at the

Alerus Center, Ralph Engelstad Arena or other facilities in Grand Forks. But most people don't realize that the Fairgrounds is also an important facility from an economic aspect. The Alerus Center reported approximately 279,000 attendees in 2024. This number was up from closer to 200,000 in 2022 and 2023. Ralph Engelstad Arena set a record for attendance in 2024, also attracting approximately 280,000. Both are very significant numbers. The Grand Forks Fairgrounds attracts between 80-100,000 people every year operating for approximately 4 months in the summer. The first event is usually held some time in May depending on the weather and the last in the middle of September. The Fairgrounds is the 3rd most utilized event facility in Grand Forks and is only open for a portion of the year.

I have attached 2 forms to this testimony, both provided by Julie Rygg, Executive Director of Visit Greater Grand Forks. The first is a letter that Ms. Rygg provided when we applied for a Destination Development Grant in 2023. It highlights the economic impact of several events held at the Fairgrounds in 2022. Most are race events held at River Cities Speedway. It lists an average impact of more than \$243,000 for a regular Friday night race weekend. They normally race every Friday from some time in May through the middle of September plus a few special events on other nights. It also shows impacts of \$650-700,000 for every special event weekend at the track. It is missing a 2nd World of Outlaws Sprint Cars race normally held in August, which was rained out in 2022. If that was added to the list of events in the letter you would see an economic impact in the Grand Forks community of more than \$6,000,000. That does not include many of the smaller events held every summer such as go-kart races held every Wednesday evening all summer that attract 3-500 people every week, or multiple horse show and barrel races held in the horse arena all summer.

The second page is an Event Impact Summary of the Greater Grand Forks Fair in 2024. It shows a direct impact of \$466,166 in sales through the Fair, and a total of \$716,172 in sales for the community. The weather cooperated with us for the most part in 2024, so it was a good year. Those numbers should continue to grow as we make improvements in facilities at the Fairgrounds.

HB 1591 will help provide funding that we can use to make repairs and improvements to our facilities. We currently have a list of well over \$1,000,000 worth of repairs and improvements we need to make, and several million dollars more in projects that we will either need to make or would like to make in the future. These repairs and improvements will help us keep the facilities safe and make them both more comfortable and more appealing for our guests. They will also allow us to do more things on the grounds that can attract more people. So this investment by the state would benefit the Grand Forks area as well as the state of North Dakota.

I ask that you vote for a Do Pass Recommendation on HB 1591.



August 30, 2023

Holly R. Miller
ND Department of Commerce
Tourism Division
1600 East Century Ave, Suite 6
Bismarck, ND 58503

Dear Holly:

On behalf of Visit Greater Grand Forks, I would like to offer support for the Greater Grand Forks Fair Board and the efforts to secure a Destination Development Grant. The improvements planned will have a significant impact on the facilities and the events which draw tens of thousands of visitors to our community each year. These changes will also provide the opportunity to expand current offerings, which will attract even more attendees from within and outside North Dakota.

The fairgrounds host events regularly that provide substantial economic impact for our city, county and state. For your reference here are just a few:

- Premier Racing // Fridays May through September - \$243,712 per week
- World of Outlaws Sprint Cars // June 2022 - \$662,167
- Greater Grand Forks County Fair // June 2022 - \$409,419
- World of Outlaws Late Models & IRA vs NOSA King of Wings // July 2022 - \$656,088
- John Seitz Memorial // September 2022 - \$705,032

Visit Greater Grand Forks subscribes to the Destinations International Economic Impact Calculator to generate the figures above.

As a destination marketing organization, we strive to not only entice visitors to Greater Grand Forks, but also ensure their enjoyment while they are here, and modernized facilities are crucial to achieving those goals. It is also important to note a visitor, whether in town for leisure, tournament, convention or business, has the potential to become a future resident.

Thank you so much for your consideration and this wonderful opportunity for our community! Please contact me with any questions you may have by phone (800.866.4566) or e-mail (julie@visitgrandforks.com).

Sincerely,

Julie Rygg
Executive Director

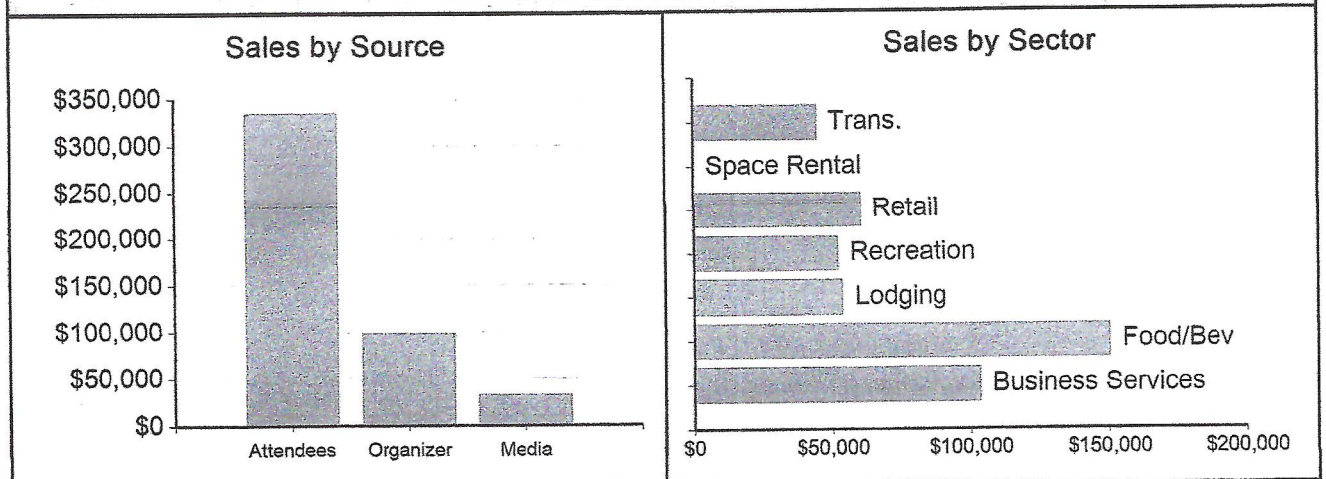
4251 Gateway Drive, Grand Forks, ND 58203
701.746.0444 | 800.866.4566
VisitGrandForks.com

Event Impact Summary

Destination: Greater Grand Forks Convention & Visitors Bureau

Event Parameters		Key Results	
Event Name:	2024 Greater Grand Forks Fair	Business Sales (Direct):	\$466,166
Organization:	Greater Grand Forks Fair	Business Sales (Total):	\$716,172
Event Type:	Other cultural (commemorations, religious, heritage, special interests, parades)	Jobs Supported (Direct):	156
Start Date:	6/19/2024	Jobs Supported (Total):	175
End Date:	6/23/2024	Local Taxes (Total):	\$12,007
Overnight Attendees:	156	Net Direct Tax ROI:	\$9,938
Day Attendees:	7666	Estimated Room Demand:	241

Direct Business Sales



Industry	Attendees	Organizer	Media/Sponsors	Total
Lodging	\$28,359	\$25,594	\$0	\$53,953
Transportation	\$44,140	\$522	\$143	\$44,805
Food & Beverage	\$149,476	\$500	\$402	\$150,378
Retail	\$60,745	\$0	\$0	\$60,745
Recreation	\$52,404	\$0	\$0	\$52,404
Space Rental	\$0	\$0	\$161	\$161
Business Services	\$0	\$72,023	\$31,697	\$103,720
TOTAL	\$335,124	\$98,639	\$32,403	\$466,166