

Commissioners Nix Orange County Fair Plan

By Elizabeth Friend

Posted January 24, 2014 at 1:46 am

HILLSBOROUGH- Local food, crafts, music, an agricultural expo and a midway- these were some of the plans laid out by a work group that spent the last six months exploring the idea of hosting an Orange County Fair.

But commissioners voted 4-3 on Thursday to put those plans on ice, citing concerns about cost.

“Sure it would be fun, it’s a great idea. But it costs too much right now,” said Commissioner Alice Gordon. “That’s why I’m having a problem with it.”

Gordon, along with Bernadette Pelissier, Penny Rich, and Earl McKee argued the potential \$189,000 price tag to plan the event was too high, despite assurances from the workgroup that the fair would likely break even.

The work group proposed a two-day event in the spring of 2015 at the Blackwood Farm between Chapel Hill and Hillsborough. The group estimated funding would come from event partners, corporate sponsors, local governments and donations, but Commissioner Pelissier questioned if the committee’s budget was realistic.

Commissioner McKee said the county can’t afford to take on new projects at a time when schools are relying on more local dollars to compensate for state funding cuts.

“Part of our responsibilities is to make hard decisions. Every good idea does not have to be moved forward,” said McKee. “I’m not saying this is a bad idea, it probably is a good idea, if there were not other considerations for me that were not overriding considerations and education overrides everything.”

Commissioners Mark Dorosin, Barry Jacobs and Renee Price supported the fair concept, saying it would build community throughout the county. Dorosin says he’s been hearing from people interested in the fair idea since he first suggested in during his 2012 campaign.

“Why I believe this is important is that there is not something that is for the entire county, and that is what this would be,” said Dorosin. “Everything about this is to focus on the local, to celebrate it, to highlight it, and also to show it off beyond the county.”

Former Carrboro Mayor Mark Chilton and current Board candidate Mark Marcoplos also spoke in favor of the plan. Marcoplos urged commissioners not to get hung up on the logistics early in the process.

“I’m definitely pro-fair, I think it’s a great idea,” said Marcoplos. “It would be a great celebration of the county’s business, its agriculture, its history, its culture, its dance and music. It would be plain fun, and I think that’s a hard thing to measure.”

Nonetheless, the board voted not to continue planning efforts or hire a consultant to vet the workgroup’s plans. While the current plan was scuttled on Thursday, the board could revisit the topic of future funding for a county fair during the budget planning process later this spring.