

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
ALPENA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
Special Full Board Meeting Minutes  
Friday, April 17, 2026 – 1:00 p.m.  
Howard Male Conference Room/Zoom Room**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Alpena County Board of Commissioners met, and the special meeting was called to order by Chairman John Kozlowski in the County Annex Building, Howard Male Conference Room, Alpena, Michigan and via Zoom on Friday, April 17, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Roll was called with the following Commissioners present: Bill LaHaie, District #1; Dan Ludlow, District #2; Lucille Bray, District #3; Bill Peterson, District #4; Brenda Fournier, District #5; Todd Britton, District #6; Travis Konarzewski, District #7; John Kozlowski, District #8.

**AGENDA**

Moved by Commissioner Fournier and supported by Commissioner LaHaie to adopt the agenda with removal of the closed session and adding the County Administrator to speak before the board takes in for consideration the items being presented today. Motion carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Fair Board President Courtney Tauriainen introduced herself and spoke on behalf of the Alpena County Fair Board. She thanked everyone involved and stated they appreciate the respect the board has for them and what they do. This is a unique opportunity to make the fair bigger and help to grow the fairgrounds. Courtney stated the Fair Board has not received an updated version of their agreement to review and approve today and presented a list of things they still needed to work through.

Rachar Ruczynski agrees this is an amazing opportunity and wants to make sure that the fair and the kids with the 4-H program are kept at the forefront of everyone's thoughts.

Fair Board Vice President Corey Standen believes this is a good opportunity for the community but wants to protect the interest of the Fair Board, community, fair, and 4-H. To move forward Blackwater needs to prove themselves and gain trust.

4-H Program Coordinator Michelle Eagling spoke about the program and embraced the opportunity for change but wanted to remind the board of the significance of the fairgrounds and the continued opportunity for growth with the community and kids.

**FAIRBOARDS PROPOSAL PRESENTATION**

Jason Atwell with Blackwater presented a slideshow and reported that Blackwater's mission and vision is to bring the fairgrounds up to a place that is an experiential attraction and enhance the community. One thing the area lacks is entertainment. Some potential events include concerts, sporting events, music festivals, rodeos, holiday events, boat shows, and much more to offer the community a wide variety of opportunities as well as bringing tourism and money into the community. Blackwater will honor and continue honoring the current setup and take down days the fair has for fair week.

Mike Romanowski with Blackwater stated he grew up here locally, and their hearts are with the kids, 4-H, and the community. This opportunity will help everyone all the way around and the kids with getting more out of the local community and farming.

Chair Kozlowski opened the meeting up for questions and discussion by the board.

County Administrator Jesse Osmer provided background on the result of today's meeting. He met with Mr. Atwell and Mr. Romanowski on March 23<sup>rd</sup> and began working with attorneys to create a contract for consideration by the board. There are two agreements to be made by Blackwater. One is with the county, and the other is with the Alpena County Fair Society. Administrator Osmer has met with the Fair Board and MSU Extension over the last few weeks and both seemed to have positive feedback. Today's consideration is on the contract between Blackwater and the county only, but an agreement with the Fair Board must be met in order for the county's agreement to be validated and those negotiations are ongoing. Administrator Osmer thanked all parties for their communication, input and work over the last few weeks.

Discussion was made by the board.

Moved by Commissioner Peterson and supported by Commissioner Fournier to approve the contract with Blackwater as presented.

Commissioner Konarzewski offered to sit down with Blackwater, two members from 4H, and two members from the Fair Board to prepare a document to give to the attorneys that all have agreed on and not spend any more money wastefully going back and forth. A meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup> at 12:00 p.m. at the fairgrounds.

Roll call vote was taken: AYES Commissioners LaHaie, Ludlow, Bray, Peterson, Fournier, Britton, Konarzewski, and Kozlowski. NAYS: None. Motion carried.

**ACTION ITEM #1: Recommendation to approve and sign the Alpena County Fairgrounds Lease, Development, and Operations Agreement between Alpena County and Blackwaters NE LLC as presented.**

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Amy Matuzak of Herron asked that there be consideration with letting them continue to schedule the horse clinic twice a month in the arena at no charge and shared her concerns with the campsites and allotted time for the fair.

Stephanie LaCross expressed her concerns about 4H and commended the Fair Board on the amazing job they have done. She does not want to see this hurt the program or the kids and shared her concerns about camping, parking, loitering, garbage and the strain this will have on our police departments.

Carolyn Dubie is a council member for 4-H and is concerned about how this relates to 4-H and how this affects the fair. The barns are lacking, and the kids are part of the process of improving those barns. She questions about making all these improvements and where 4-H comes into that and their needs. She also shared concerns about how this will affect local businesses and parking.

Karmen Powell of Alpena shared concerns about parking areas and the rise in crime.

Ben Young is a downtown business owner and believes this is a huge opportunity and will bring a lot of business to Alpena and we can't afford to pass up this opportunity.

Corey Standen feels the Fair Board was put into a bad situation and the county should have stood beside them and waited to approve this along with them.

Susan Bowen of Alpena has been involved with 4-H as a member, parent, and leader. She believes we are going to lose out by changing the use of the fairgrounds. She does not want to see the agricultural aspect of the fairgrounds and the community fair be compromised for money.

Haley Powell of Alpena has been in 4-H her whole life and asked the board to think about the long run and how this will affect small businesses and local people starting new businesses if they get pushed out. She asked that 4-H doesn't get taken away from the kids because it is a great program.

Jason Attwell with Blackwater addressed some of the concerns and misinformation. They are not bringing in massive infrastructure that's just a dollar machine. They are developing a complex that will accommodate 4-H, the fair, rodeos and will accommodate other things that are revenue generators like concerts. They are looking to do events that raise money and create money so that it can be put back in the community.

Rachar Ruczynski believes Blackwater will have an interest in keeping 4-H and the Fair Board at the forefront and is an amazing opportunity for everyone to have partnership in.

Dalton Kenney, owner and operator of Family Fun Time Amusements, is the company that provides the rides, food, and games for the Alpena County Fair. He is concerned with this sidelining and taking away from the fair. It was not a good show of faith for the county to vote without the Fair Board agreeing.

Comments were made from the board and County Administrator.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Commissioner Bray and supported by Commissioner Fournier to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 2:48 p.m.

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John Kozlowski, Chairman of the Board

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Keri Bertrand, County Clerk

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