




STATE OF WISCONSIN | Legislative Audit Bureau

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Joe Chrisman
State Auditor

DATE: March 27, 2017

TO: Senator Robert Cowles and
Representative Samantha Kerkman, Co-chairpersons
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

FROM: Joe Chrisman
State Auditor 

SUBJECT: Proposed Audit of Wisconsin State Fair Park—Background Information

At your request, we have gathered some background information the Joint Legislative Audit Committee may find useful in considering an audit of Wisconsin State Fair Park. State Fair Park, the State's 190-acre fairgrounds located in the cities of West Allis and Milwaukee, has been home to the Wisconsin State Fair since 1892 and has operated as a separate state agency—the State Fair Park Board—since 1990. Other agricultural, industrial, educational, and recreational fairs, exhibits, and promotional events are also held at the fairgrounds each year.

State Fair Park operates as a single business entity that provides event services through its various facilities, such as the Wisconsin Exposition Center and the Milwaukee Mile racetrack. Attendance fees and other revenue from the annual Wisconsin State Fair are State Fair Park's primary source of funding, but operation of the Wisconsin Exposition Center and the Milwaukee Mile racetrack affect State Fair Park's operations and financial condition. State Fair Park was appropriated approximately \$24 million in fiscal year (FY) 2016-17, including approximately \$21 million in program revenue and \$3 million in general purpose revenue.

Although the 13-member State Fair Park Board is attached to the Department of Tourism for administrative purposes, State Fair Park's Chief Executive Officer is responsible for daily operations. State Fair Park's authorized staffing level is 48 full-time equivalent (FTE) permanent positions in FY 2016-17.

The Legislative Audit Bureau's most recent financial audit of State Fair Park was published as report 13-8 and included information on its financial condition as of FY 2011-12 and on the 2012 Wisconsin State Fair.

To provide an update on the management of State Fair Park operations in recent years, an audit of State Fair Park could:

- analyze trends in revenues and expenditures;
- examine trends in event offerings and reported attendance, including at the Wisconsin State Fair, the Wisconsin Exposition Center, and the Milwaukee Mile racetrack;
- assess management of State Fair Park operations;
- evaluate State Fair Park's contractual relationships with vendors, including those that provide food, beverages, rides, and amusements; and
- compare State Fair Park operations with other states in order to identify best practices and opportunities for improvements.

I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any additional questions regarding this proposed audit, please contact me.

JC/bm

cc: Senator Chris Kapenga
Senator Alberta Darling
Senator Kathleen Vinehout
Senator Mark Miller

Representative John Macco
Representative John Nygren
Representative Melissa Sargent
Representative Terese Berceau

Kathleen O'Leary, Chief Executive Officer
Wisconsin State Fair Park