

## Why were MetraPark grandstands and Ag stall barns torn down?

The former MetraPark Marketing Director [commented on the GRANDSTANDS in 2020](#), “The building is not safe for mass public use.”

[February 25, 2020](#): “Commissioner Ostlund made a MOTION to pursue the demo of the grandstands and allow for asbestos abatement and engage CTA to do an RFP for the demo project, Commissioner Jones seconded...Passed Unanimous.”

The STALL BARNS were also in a state of unsafe disrepair, and after testing found asbestos and lead based paints, the decision was made by commissioners to have the barns removed. Votes to abate asbestos and remove 10 of the barns are below. On both occasions Commissioner Ostlund made the initial MOTION.

[December 29, 2020](#): Commissioner Ostlund made a MOTION to approve the Consent Agenda, which included item 2.A.: “MetraPark Contract with Safetech, Inc. for Barn #9 & Barn #11 Abatement Services.” Commissioner Jones seconded and the vote was unanimous.

[March 16, 2021](#): Commissioner Ostlund made a MOTION to approve the Consent Agenda, which included item 4.E.: “MetraPark Contract with Safetech, Inc. for Abatement of 8 Barns.” Commissioner Pitman seconded and the vote was unanimous.

### Professional analyses by Venue Solutions Group

Better seen at this [LINK Q&A links here](#)

### MetraPark Resource Library

This resource library was developed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce to provide accurate and important information so residents may arrive at a position on professional venue management of MetraPark based on fact. It includes the Billings Chamber’s official position along with professional analyses and public feedback indicating deep rooted long standing operational issues which can be resolved by hiring a professional venue management company. We have included the last seven years of MetraPark finances indicating massive taxpayer subsidies that have been steadily increasing. Additionally, a case study of a venue similar to MetraPark is featured to communicate what is possible. It is intended to be updated with additional information when available.

Below you will find:

- Our Statement
- Professional analyses by Venue Solutions Group, identifying numerous organizational issues.
- Public feedback indicates operational challenges, lack of customer service, and culture of ‘No.’
- Massive taxpayer subsidies that continually increase to cover operating losses.
- Ford Idaho Center Complex – an example facility successfully utilizing a professional management structure.
- FAQs

## **Our Statement**

The Billings Chamber of Commerce believes that MetraPark is an important public asset for Billings and Yellowstone County. MetraPark is a catalyst for visitation to our community and generates a significant amount of non-resident dollars to regional businesses. The Chamber supports efficient and effective operations of MetraPark as well as improvements to its facilities to help maximize its full potential.

The findings of a recent operations audit on MetraPark highlight several areas of concern; including, a lack of industry standard practices, absence of performance reviews, and no documented processes for performing work orders and preventive maintenance. These hinder the ability for MetraPark to meet the rising needs of events in our community and grow our visitor economy. **We believe MetraPark will be managed most effectively by a professional venue management company, with arms-length oversight by the County Commissioners, and ownership remaining with the public.** This is a proven national model for success that will ensure the facility provides an exceptional quality of place, increases non-resident spending and uses taxpayer dollars wisely.

We believe this is a necessary first step before County Commissioners consider asking voters to support a multi-million-dollar capital investment with the Vision 2025 Plan. The Billings Chamber of Commerce supports

County Commissioners taking the steps necessary to contract with a professional venue management company for MetraPark management.

## **MetraPark Operations Audit Report**

The report was completed in 2022 and authored by [Venue Solutions Group](#), experts in, “venue services, including operations, engineering, security, guest services, sustainability, and administration.” Their portfolio of work includes facilities like the brand new [SoFi Stadium](#), the [Chase Center](#), [Tennessee Performing Arts Center](#), and the [Town of Cary, NC](#), to name a few.



# MetraPark Organizational Review

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VENUE SOLUTIONS GROUP • 2022

“ Private management companies are merely an agent of the owner; however, they may be better equipped to balance the community’s needs with improved bottom-line financial results. ”

## KEY INSIGHTS

“Throughout the interview process, a recurring theme was there are few, if any written policies and procedures, including checklists, for MetraPark operations. It was described to us during the interviews that information was ‘between the ears.’” (p. 6)

“Currently there is no documented process for performing work orders and preventive maintenance at MetraPark.” (p. 8)

“Several individuals lamented that they did not receive event information in a timely manner or were directed to check the MetraPark website for upcoming events. That is not a reasonable course of action...” (p. 10)

“We recognize the relationship between MetraPark staff, and the Commissioners could be improved, and absent the implementation of private management, we recommend leadership and conflict resolution training to improve the rapport.” (p. 10)

“Annual performance reviews have not been performed for full-time MetraPark employees which is not consistent with industry ‘best practices.’ Throughout our interviews, a recurring theme was a lack of overall organizational goal setting and setting of employee expectations.” (p. 20)

“Whether ownership is public or private, privately managed assembly facilities tend to be organized along the lines of dynamic entrepreneurial operations and are less subject to traditionally restrictive government guidelines. Regardless of ownership, privately managed public assembly facilities tend to encounter less resistance to the implementation of competitive business concepts than their publicly managed counterparts. Private management companies tend to be more bottom-line focused, which is often why they are engaged by the facility’s ownership or governing body. Private management companies are merely an agent of the owner; however, they may be better equipped to balance the community’s needs with improved bottom-line financial results. Finally, private management brings with it a body of intellectual property and combined industry resources that can provide advantages over individually operated facilities.” (p. 26, quoted from book, *Public Assembly Venue Management*)

## **Vision 2025 Public Outreach and Engagement Findings**

As part of the MetraPark Vision 2025 Master Plan, the public was asked to offer feedback on MetraPark's strengths, potential for improvement, and new ideas about the future of MetraPark. The report is largely focused on the physical components of MetraPark, but also notes the public's concern about management.

# MetraPark: Vision 2025 – 50 More Years

## *Public Outreach and Engagement Findings*

July 2021



Report prepared by:

**KINETIC**  
MARKETING & CREATIVE

### **METRAPARK STAFF AND MANAGEMENT**

“We received repeated feedback from stakeholders related to perceptions of operational challenges at MetraPark. Participants in the process have

raised concerns about insufficient staffing (both in overall numbers and specific skill sets) to fully support facilities in place now; a perception that MetraPark staff doesn't have a customer service and/or problem-solving culture; and noted challenges in collaborating and communicating with staff for a successful event.

“We also heard that there seems to be a culture of ‘No’ at MetraPark and that the staff doesn’t often seem willing to try and fix issues for people renting the spaces. There is also a pervasive perception that there is not enough professionalism and little responsiveness to the needs of event sponsors. There is frustration that MetraPark is overly risk-averse. People are disappointed when they hear about some of the events that Metra passes on.” (pg. 7)

## Finances

Contrary to recent headlines, MetraPark does not operate at a profit. The facility’s operational deficit requires a hefty multi-million-dollar subsidy of taxpayer dollars.

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY, MONTANA							
COMBINING STATEMENT OF REVENUES, EXPENSES, AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS							
METRA FUND							
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30							
	6/30/21	6/30/20	6/30/19	6/30/18	6/30/17	6/30/16	6/30/15
<b>OPERATING REVENUES:</b>							
Charge for services and use of facilities	\$ 1,867,836	\$ 4,343,019	\$ 5,159,345	\$ 4,190,090	\$ 5,206,800	\$ 4,789,590	\$ 4,443,201
<b>Total operating revenues</b>	<b>1,867,836</b>	<b>4,343,019</b>	<b>5,159,345</b>	<b>4,190,090</b>	<b>5,206,800</b>	<b>4,789,590</b>	<b>4,443,201</b>
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES:</b>							
Salaries and benefits	2,837,787	3,277,635	3,297,810	3,213,685	3,372,601	3,080,367	2,829,818
Supplies	285,124	382,854	468,337	422,551	491,494	472,956	455,964
Contracted services	1,496,905	2,740,821	3,057,679	2,596,263	2,682,804	2,531,667	2,282,424
Stop-loss insurance and administration	-	3,335	56,475	59,586	70,133	81,244	49,701
Awards	42,417	115,958	114,346	114,964	107,702	114,436	114,441
Special Assessed Taxes	-	5,030	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total operating expenses</b>	<b>4,662,233</b>	<b>6,525,633</b>	<b>6,994,647</b>	<b>6,407,049</b>	<b>6,724,734</b>	<b>6,280,670</b>	<b>5,732,348</b>
<b>Operating income (loss)</b>	<b>(2,794,397)</b>	<b>(2,182,614)</b>	<b>(1,835,302)</b>	<b>(2,216,959)</b>	<b>(1,517,934)</b>	<b>(1,491,080)</b>	<b>(1,289,147)</b>
<b>NONOPERATING REVENUES (EXPENSES):</b>							
Taxes	2,023,819	1,969,587	1,945,528	1,787,383	1,756,513	1,675,608	1,607,634
Intergovernmental revenue	60,976	58,972	56,836	55,685	55,277	52,913	50,647
Other revenue	7,220	105,162	25,322	73,278	21,549	21,289	20,487
<b>Total nonoperating revenues (expenses)</b>	<b>2,092,015</b>	<b>2,133,721</b>	<b>2,027,686</b>	<b>1,916,346</b>	<b>1,833,339</b>	<b>1,749,810</b>	<b>1,678,768</b>
<b>Income (loss) before transfers and extraordinary gain</b>	<b>(702,382)</b>	<b>(48,893)</b>	<b>192,384</b>	<b>(300,613)</b>	<b>315,405</b>	<b>258,730</b>	<b>389,621</b>
Transfer in from other funds	750,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transfer out to other funds	-	(250,000)	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Change in net assets</b>	<b>47,618</b>	<b>(298,893)</b>	<b>192,384</b>	<b>(300,613)</b>	<b>315,405</b>	<b>258,730</b>	<b>389,621</b>
<b>Net position July 1</b>	<b>2,225,316</b>	<b>2,524,209</b>	<b>2,331,825</b>	<b>2,632,438</b>	<b>2,317,033</b>	<b>2,058,303</b>	<b>1,668,682</b>
<b>Net position June 30</b>	<b>\$ 2,272,934</b>	<b>\$ 2,225,316</b>	<b>\$ 2,524,209</b>	<b>\$ 2,331,825</b>	<b>\$ 2,632,438</b>	<b>\$ 2,317,033</b>	<b>\$ 2,058,303</b>

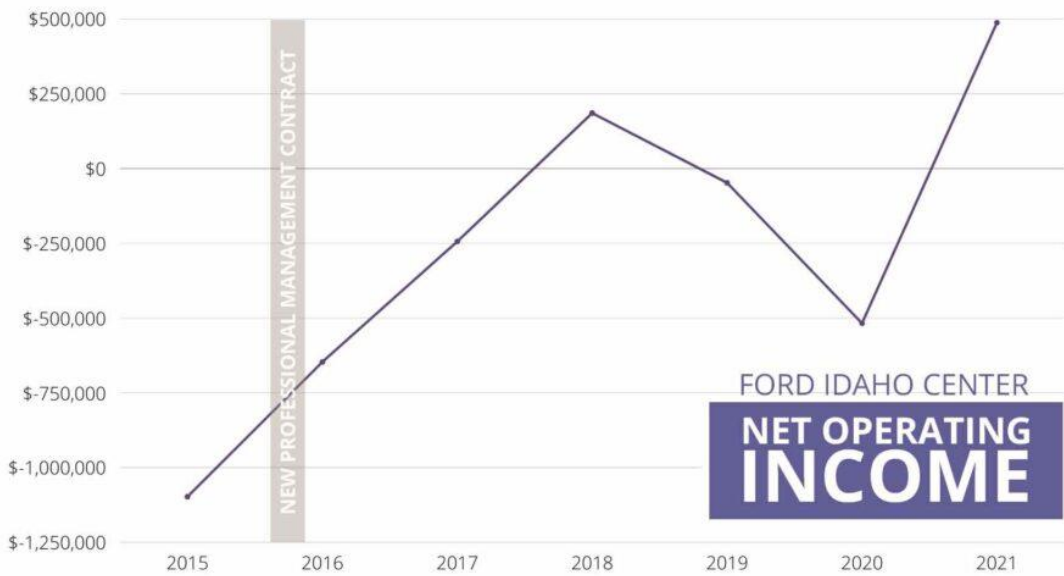




# Ford Idaho Center Complex

(professional venue management example)

The [Ford Idaho Center Complex](#) is located in Nampa, ID, a city of approximately 100,000. The complex consists of an Arena, a Horse Park, and an Amphitheater as the primary venues. In 2015, after a decade of over \$1 million operating losses, the City of Nampa contracted with Spectra, now Oak View Group, to manage the facility. In the following years, the professional venue management company reversed the trend of significant public subsidies, while continuing to host legacy events.



[2016](#), [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#) Statements

## LEGACY EVENTS CONTINUED AFTER NEW PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT CONTRACT

One of the objections voiced about professional management is the concern about discontinuing legacy events. Contrary to that concern, the Ford Idaho Center’s Horse Park continues to host almost every event/organization it hosted in 2015, along with adding new events. In addition the Horse Park hosts three different riding groups on a weekly basis, has funding to build new stall barns, and has almost doubled the number of confirmed event days since 2015.

Looking at the events calendars from [2015](#) and [2022](#), you can see the vast majority of events continued after a new contract with professional management in 2015, and they added many new events.

<u>2015 events continuing through 2021/2022</u>	<u>Events added after 2015</u>	<u>2015 events not scheduled in 2022</u>
Idaho Cutting Horse Association Idaho State Horse Show Idaho Horse Expo Best Little Derby in the West Boise Saddle & Jump Club Idaho Reined Cow Horse Association Region 4 Arabian Championship Horse Show Snake River Reining Alliance Idaho Paint Horse Show NW Affiliate Finals Low Roller Reining Classic Des Arab Arabian Horse Show (2021) Idaho Dressage Festival (2021)	Gun Show Idaho Catholic Youth Barrel Futurity Gem State Stock Horse Association McDowell Training Mustang Mania Zone One Paint Horse Show Western States Stock Horse Equus and Overture Festival of Trees	Jesus SD (concert) MacDon Academy Training Driving Festival Extreme Mustang Makeover

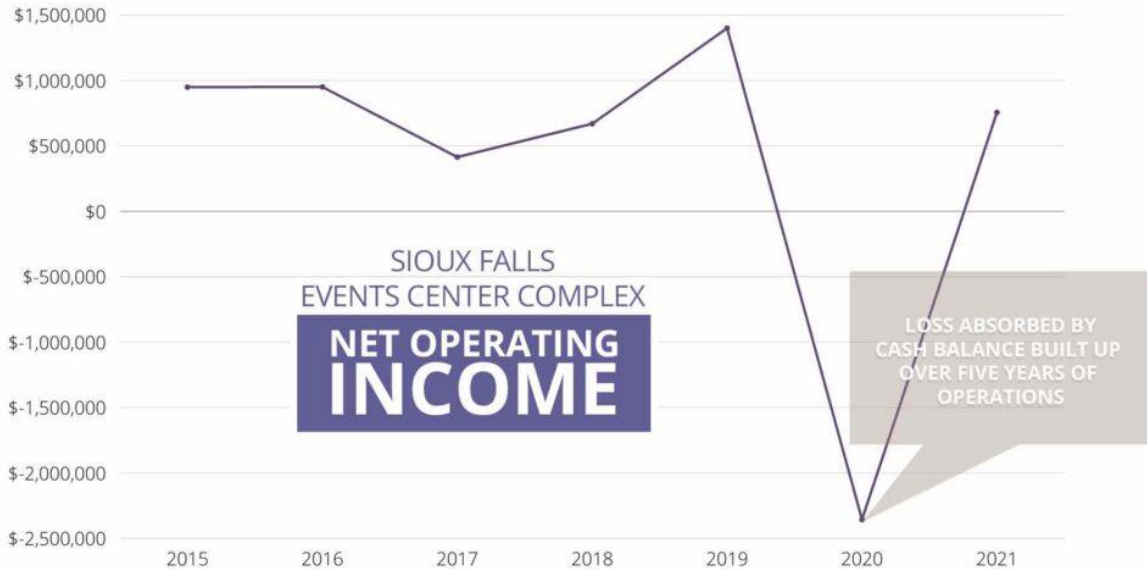
## Sioux Falls Events Center Complex

Over the last seven years of operations at the [Sioux Falls Events Center Complex](#), professional management has provided an operating profit every year except for 2020 due to Covid impacts. Fortunately, the years of surplus allowed management to cover the loss with a cash balance that was built up.

These figures show the summarized operating position for facilities in Sioux Falls under the same private management contract and include the events center, arena, convention center, ballpark (added to management in 2018), and Orpheum Theater (transferred to a local non-profit in 2019). The city has not needed to subsidize operations of the Events Complex and they've been profitable across the various managed buildings, self-funding all operations. The only year they took a global loss was 2020, which they could absorb with \$5M in cash balance built up over the first five years of operations. No tax dollars support operations while their [capital expenditures/improvements and major maintenance](#) is funded by sales tax proceeds.

**Combined Total Facilities (actual)**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Revenue	\$11,956,165	\$13,002,640	\$13,214,210	\$13,551,183	\$14,300,001	\$5,070,781	\$10,700,303
Net Events Revenue	\$6,990,545	\$7,525,790	\$7,276,928	\$7,815,204	\$8,198,302	\$3,218,754	\$6,577,337
Operating Expenditures	\$6,040,881	\$6,574,270	\$6,861,727	\$7,145,380	\$6,797,854	\$5,573,288	\$5,820,856
<b>Net Operating Income (Loss)</b>	<b>\$949,664</b>	<b>\$951,520</b>	<b>\$415,201</b>	<b>\$669,824</b>	<b>\$1,400,448</b>	<b>(\$2,354,534)</b>	<b>\$756,481</b>
Other Revenue*	\$52,822	\$59,123	\$118,052	\$151,868	\$152,898	\$77,930	\$46,672
Other Expenses (released from restriction)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Income (Loss)	\$1,002,486	\$1,010,643	\$533,253	\$721,692	\$1,553,346	(\$2,276,604)	\$803,153



**FAQs On the LINK, these questions are answered in an interactive [LINK](#)**

**What are the advantages of a professional management company?**

**Who would own MetraPark if a professional management company is hired?**

**Who else uses professional management for public facilities?**

**Will a private corporation take all the profits while taxpayers remain on the hook?**

**Didn't the media say MetraPark is already profiting?**

**Will a professional management company replace all our local workers?**

**Will community groups continue to have access to MetraPark?**

**Will Ag events be minimized?**

**Why were MetraPark grandstands and Ag stall barns torn down?**

**Is privatization “irreversible”?**

**Hasn't the public already spoken on MetraPark because of the recent county commissioner election?**

**What HAS the public said about MetraPark?**

**Shouldn't our unified Republican County Commission be in favor of government efficiency and the most prudent use of tax dollars?**

**Isn't the \$2 million dollar subsidy worth the \$150 million in economic impact?**

**Why is the Chamber concerned about the management of MetraPark?**