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Gun shows at Ventura County Fairgrounds to continue into 2019, board decides

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(Photo: JUAN CARLO/THE STAR)

The Ventura County Fairgrounds board of directors voted 5-2 on Tuesday to allow two gun shows in 2019. Meanwhile, work on a policy that governs gun shows or, less likely, bans them altogether, will continue well into next year.

Ventura County Fairgrounds board discusses gun shows

Board members Dan Long and M. Cecilia Cuevas voted "in favor of continuing to show contracts until the fairgrounds had adopted a policy. Director Bonnie Atmore was absent and Armando Lopez recently resigned, leaving a vacancy on the nine-member board.

The board's action followed comments made by dozens of speakers on the issue of whether the shows should continue at the state-owned fairgrounds. The board has been mulling the issue since early this year, following the shooting deaths of 17 students and staff members in Parkland, Florida.

In October, the board directed the ad hoc committee of board Chair Leslie Cornejo and Vice Chair Leah Lacayo to begin looking at the legal implications of banning or regulating the gun shows and the financial implications of getting rid of them and various other related issues.

More: [Ventura County Sheriff's officials provides new details in Thousand Oaks shooting.](https://www.vcstar.com/story/news/2018/11/27/borderline-shooting-update-thousand-oaks-shooting-officials-live/2113802002/) (story/news/2018/11/27/borderline-shooting-update-thousand-oaks-shooting-officials-live/2113802002/)

Board member Michael Bradbury asked how long that might take.

"It might take as long as a year. We just don't know," Lacayo said.

"It could go on longer than that," Cornejo added, because the committee will study every issue raised by public speakers.

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Sheri Cecil holds a sign during a discussion about gun shows at the Ventura County Fairgrounds. The board that oversees the fairgrounds met Tuesday to consider whether to allow gun shows to be held there. The meeting in Ventura drew both opponents and supporters of the shows. (Photo: JUAN CARLO/THE STAR)

Long favored not allowing gun shows "until we have a policy and standards in place." Things were changing, he said, and the board had the opportunity to be "leaders in the community" when it came to the issue.

Cuevas noted the board wasn't obligated to allow gun shows into next year.

Board member Jim Salzer said that was just creating barriers and objections.

"We've talked about how important it is to defend our decision," he said.

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People wait to speak during a Ventura County Fairgrounds board meeting in Ventura. The board discussed whether to implement new rules for gun shows at the fairgrounds or whether to continue to allow them. (Photo: JUAN CARLO/THE STAR)

Any decision the board makes must be legally defensible, Cornejo said. She pointed out how other lawsuits have been filed or threatened when it comes to gun shows and related issues.

The Del Mar Fairgrounds board opted in September to suspend gun shows (<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/communities/north-county/sd-no-gunshow-suspended-20180911-story.html>) until it adopted a policy. It is looking at staging education-only shows.

Crossroads of the West has held gun shows in Ventura and other fairgrounds throughout the state for decades. It had asked the board for six shows next year.

Tiffany Chevront, the attorney representing Crossroads, said the decision wasn't the best solution but it would let the board develop a plan and allow the company to hold its February and April shows.

Chevront said the board wanted gun shows to be done in accordance with state laws, but Crossroads was already in compliance with them. She said last week was the first time the board reached out to them for information and state and federal gun laws.

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Alfred Monroy, an Army veteran, speaks in favor of keeping gun shows at the Ventura County Fairgrounds. The fair board met Tuesday to discuss whether to implement new rules for gun shows or even to allow them. (Photo: JUAN CARLO/THE STAR)

Banning the gun shows would be a constitutional violation unless the board could show there was some kind of safety issues or local concerns directly related to violence from the shows, Chevront said.

Crossroads hasn't had an incident in Ventura, she said.

"This is not about safety. This is about political pressure and people who just want to get rid of gun shows and firearms sales," Chevront said.

Once the ad hoc committee's work is done, the report will be included in the board's meeting packet and becomes a public document and possibly available online, said Christine Vana, staff counsel for the California Department of Food and Agriculture. The fairgrounds fall under the purview of the department.

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Trudy Arriaga speaks against gun shows at the Ventura County Fairgrounds during a meeting of the fair board Tuesday in Ventura. (Photo: JUAN CARLO/THE STAR)

The fairgrounds makes \$92,000 to \$100,000 per year on the shows, Chief Executive Officer Barbara Quaid said.

Supporters of the gun shows said the weapons weren't the problem but the people doing bad things with them. They said it wasn't the job of the board to make a decision based on moral directives and if that was the case, it would need to look at alcohol sales, livestock treatment, gambling and any other issue people may raise or feel is questionable.

Those who favored getting rid of the shows said the biggest thing that sets the United States apart with its many mass shootings was how readily available firearms were. The board could send a message by doing its part to reduce how many of the weapons are available, several said.

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A banner advertisement for DonorsChoose.org. The text reads "Every California student deserves a great education" in white font on a dark background. To the right, there is a small image of a smiling young girl in a library setting. In the top right corner, the DonorsChoose.org logo is visible. A green button with the text "Learn more" is located in the bottom right corner of the banner.