

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 25-01 FOR THE PURPOSE OF REPRESENTING AND MEMORIALIZING THE HISTORIES AND CULTURES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PORTLAND EXPO CENTER

Date: December 30, 2024
Department: Chief Operating Officer
Meeting Date: January 8, 2025

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Craig Stroud, he/him, General Manager, Visitor Venues
Length: 10 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

Metropolitan Exposition and Recreation Commission (MERC) Resolution 25-01 advances one of two key objectives of the Expo Future project:

Objective 1: Metro will recognize Expo Center’s Hall A as a site of national historical significance and meaningfully memorialize the site’s history of forced displacement during World War II and the Vanport Floods, as well as the site’s pre-colonial history and importance to Indigenous Peoples.

This resolution expresses MERC’s support for Metro Council’s direction to staff to begin to take action on the recommendations identified in the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report*, which was presented to MERC and the Council on December 10, 2024. The report was informed by representatives of the urban Indigenous, Japanese American, and Vanport communities most connected to and impacted by the site.

ACTION REQUESTED

Adoption of Resolution 25-01, which

1. Recognizes the Portland Assembly Center as a site of national historic significance;
2. Accepts the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* presented on December 10, 2024; and
3. Expresses MERC’s support of Metro Council’s direction to staff to pursue to implement the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* through the following actions:
 - a. Work with Impacted Communities to assess the feasibility of the HSMC’s recommendations and develop an implementation strategy for recommendations deemed be feasible;
 - b. Commence a cultural resources assessment of the Expo property;
 - c. Request funding in Metro’s FY25-26 budget for an engineering study of Hall A’s structural integrity, capacity to stand independently, and feasibility of serving uses other than as an exhibit hall;

- d. Commence community conversations for the purpose of developing recommendations for potential use(s) of Hall A or portions thereof;
- e. Request funding in Metro’s FY25-26 budget for the development of an interpretive plan for representation and memorialization of histories and cultures connected to the Expo site; and
- f. Present a proposed governance structure for the development of the interpretive plan.

The actions directed in Resolution 25-01 comprise the foundation of a nine- to 12- month workplan for staff to advance recommended representation and memorialization activities in Phase 3 of the Expo Future project. Assuming adoption of this resolution by MERC on January 8, 2025 and by the Metro Council on January 9, 2025, the timeline for implementation of the actions directed in this resolution is as follows.

Est. Timeline	Expected Actions
January 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolution adopted • Staff prepare budget estimates and requests for an engineering study of Expo Hall A and an interpretive plan for the site
By March 31, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff commence with a cultural resources assessment of the Expo Center site • Staff provide a project update to Council and MERC
Late June/ early July 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff present a proposed governance structure and community engagement process for oversight and development of the Expo Center interpretive plan, inviting members of the urban Indigenous, Japanese American, and Vanport Communities and Tribes to participate. • Staff provide a project update to Council and MERC
August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff commence an engineering study of Hall A • Staff begin to work with members of Impacted Communities to assess the feasibility of HSMC representation and memorialization recommendations and to develop a strategy for implementation of recommendations determined to be feasible
Sept. 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff provide a project update to Council and MERC
October 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of the engineering study and a project update are presented to Council and MERC
Nov. 2025	Within 90 days after receipt of engineering study, staff begin community conversations to develop recommendations about potential uses of Hall A or portions thereof.
Dec. 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First draft of implementation of feasible representation and memorialization recommendations completed • Staff provide a project update to Council and MERC

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

The resolution directs staff to take action in support of representing and memorializing the historical significance of the Expo Center site. These actions support **MERC and Council's fall 2019 direction to find the highest and best public use and long-term financial sustainability of Expo** and the Chief Operating Officers' six objectives for Phase 2 of the Expo Future project, endorsed by Council and MERC in February 2023. In particular, the actions supported in Resolution 25-01 begin the process of additional evaluation and planning in support of implementing the Expo Future *Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* presented on December 10, 2024, to MERC and Metro Council.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

- 1) Does MERC accept the recommendations for representation and memorialization of the histories and cultures embedded in the Expo Center site as developed by the Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee?
- 2) Does MERC support Metro Council's direction to staff to pursue the resolution's actions (3.a to f., above) to begin to implement the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report*?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR MERC TO CONSIDER

- Whether to continue to pursue representation and memorialization of the histories and cultures embedded in the Expo Center site; and
- Next steps in the Expo Future process.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommend that MERC adopt Resolution 25-01.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING FOR DISCUSSION

There is no known opposition to this resolution. The actions that are directed by the resolution represent the collective input of 140 members of the urban Indigenous, Japanese American, and Vanport Communities who were engaged in a process to identify how Metro could appropriately represent and memorialize the histories and cultures associated with the 53-acre Expo Center site.

Racial Equity

Expo Future Phase 2 (and future Phase 3) activities advance the following goals of Metro's *Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*:

- A, convening and supporting regional partners to advance racial equity;
- B, meaningfully engaging communities of color; and
- D, creating safe and welcoming services, programs, and destinations.

If or as the project evolves to include construction, business development, and job creation, it also has the potential to meet Goals C and E of the plan:

- C, a racially diverse workforce, and
- E. resource allocation that advances racial equity.

Climate Action

Sustainability is one of the Guiding Principles of the Expo Future Project. The recommendations of the Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee support climate action goals through the following proposed activities:

- Analyzing Hall A to determine the potential for reuse/renovation of the structures and for reuse of the building's materials if reuse of the structure is deemed not to be feasible
- Installation of more landscaping and green, restored space at the site
- Following Metro's Sustainable Building Practices as the project moves forward

BACKGROUND

Metro owns the Portland Expo Center ("Expo") site, a well-positioned, 53-acre employment and exhibition site at the economic center of greater Portland. Under the current business model, the long-term prospects of Expo are challenging due to the large-scale capital needs of Halls A, B, and C and the ongoing routine maintenance of the newer buildings and campus infrastructure. Pre-pandemic, Expo generated approximately \$50M in annual economic impact through 100+ public trade shows and community events. Post-pandemic, Expo attendance has declined; in 2023, annual attendance was approximately 311,000 visitors at 56 events.

The site is the largest exhibition space in Oregon, with 333,000 square feet of existing building area and 2,500 parking spaces. Halls A, B, and C have been in operation for more than 100 years. Halls D and E are 23 and 27 years old, respectively. Expo is adjacent to other popular sports assets such as Portland International Raceway and Delta Park, a multi-field outdoor sports complex owned by the City of Portland that hosts various youth and adult sports tournaments throughout the year.

Metro recognizes the site's pre-colonial history and importance to Indigenous Peoples. The land upon which Expo sits was previously part of a dynamic and complex network of wetlands and river channels supporting Tribes and Indigenous Peoples and their ways of life since time immemorial. In addition, given Expo's hundred-year operational history, many communities and partners in the greater Portland region have developed unique and important historical and cultural ties to the venue and surrounding area.

Specifically, the nearby Vanport Flood and World War II incarceration at the Portland Assembly Center have had lasting impacts on Black, Indigenous and Japanese American communities. Metro recognizes the past events and injustices that took place on or near the Expo property. Expo staff works with Vanport Mosaic and the Japanese American Museum of Oregon to ensure these occurrences are never forgotten.

Since 2003, Metro has been working to determine the highest and best use of the Expo Center site and to develop a plan for its financial sustainability. From 2020 to present, Metro has engaged with communities with historic and cultural ties to the site (such as the Black, urban Indigenous, and Japanese American communities), Tribes, business stakeholders, and other key partners to identify vision for the site. One outcome of this stakeholder and partner engagement was the development of the project Guiding Principles, which MERC and Metro Council adopted by resolution in spring of 2022.

In February 2023, after a multi-year community-involved assessment of opportunities to improve the long-term financial sustainability of the Portland Expo Center, Metro Council and MERC directed staff to focus on two overarching project objectives identified by Metro’s Chief Operating Officer.

Objective 1: Metro will recognize Expo Center’s Hall A as a site of national historical significance and meaningfully memorialize the site’s history of forced displacement during World War II and the Vanport Floods, as well as the site’s pre-colonial history and importance to Indigenous Peoples.

Objective 2: Leveraging Oregon’s status as an international powerhouse in the sport and outdoor industry, Metro will pivot Expo’s future redevelopment as a community-centric destination venue that prioritizes amateur, professional, and recreational sports.

The following table outlines the history and relevant actions of this project.

2000	Metro Council Resolution 00-3019 supports submission of a Conditional Use Master Plan to City of Portland. General components include site development plans, transportation and parking, mitigation of Expo development impacts, environmental compatibility, development review, neighborhood communication and coordination, project review procedures for future development, and public involvement. Major elements of the Master Plan include replacement and expansion of exhibit halls A, B and C to match the look of Hall E and Hall D (under construction at the time). CUMP is submitted and approved in 2001.
2003	MERC completes study “Expo: A Vision for the Future” with Yost, Grube Hall architects, to replace the outdated facilities of Halls A B C, and East and West Halls with 255,000 square feet of new facilities, including an exhibit hall, meeting rooms, support facilities, landscaping and related improvements to augment Halls D and E.
2011	MERC submitted Expo Center Conditional Use Master Plan, prepared by Shiels Oblatz Johnson, SERA and subcontractors to City of Portland for expansion and replacement of existing exhibition facilities –Halls A, B, and C—with a new exhibition hall similar to Hall D and E, as well as 11 other site developments.
2014	Metro commissioned Hunden Partners to provide an independent assessment of Expo governance and operations, a local competitive market analysis, and the possible impact of a new local headquarters hotel. The scope of work also included an analysis of the existing physical conditions.
2016 - 2019	From 2016 to 2019, a range of options to increase and diversify revenue streams was studied, including long-term tenancies and flexible outdoor space.
Fall 2019	At the direction of Metro Council, the Portland Expo Center Development Opportunity Study (DOS) was launched. The study’s purpose was to identify development options that could complement, support, or replace the current operations at Expo and assess its current value.
2020-2021	Metro engages with the communities and stakeholders most impacted by the site through meetings and listening sessions, and a draft set of community-driven Guiding Principles is formed.

Spring 2021	The DOS report is published, outlining nine scenarios (from logistics to film studios) the site could accommodate. MERC and Metro Council deprioritize the “sell option” and direct staff to create a solicitation process to seek creative ideas and public/private development partners for the site.
Spring 2022	MERC and Metro Council adopt the community-driven Guiding Principles developed during the DOS by resolution as part of their framework for decision-making.
Summer, fall 2022	The Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) is launched. Metro receives eight submittals in response to the RFEI process.
Winter 2023	Metro engages community members, Tribal and other government partners, and staff in the evaluation of RFEI submissions, culminating in the “Phase one: RFEI Findings and recommendations” report.
Spring, summer 2023	Metro Council and MERC unanimously support the COO’s recommendations for the future of Expo and Phase 2 of the Expo Future project began. In summer 2023, Metro Council and MERC endorse the proposed project governance structure and COO’s recommended next steps for the project.
Sept. 2023	Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee, Expo Future Sport & Facility Committee, and Executive Advisory Committee begin working to fulfill their missions.
Dec. 2023 to June 2024	Hunden Partners begins to study determine the feasibility of shifting Expo Center to sports-oriented uses. The firm conducts a comprehensive market analysis and interviews dozens of local representatives of sports teams, leagues and facilities; committee members; and partner government, economic development, and tourism/hospitality organizations.
March 2024	Metro Council and MERC receive a six-month Expo Future progress report from the cochairs of the Sport & Facility and Historical Significance & Memorialization Committees and staff.
June 25, 2024	Results of the Expo Future sports feasibility study are presented to Metro Council and MERC by consultant Hunden Partners.
July to Sept. 2024	Metro engages with key communities to identify ways to honor and recognize their histories and cultures at Expo Center. Interviews, virtual discussions, in-person workshops and online input are held to gather input from urban Indigenous, Japanese American, and Vanport communities. Expo clients provide project input during a virtual discussion on August 15, 2024.
August to Nov. 2024	The Scenario Refinement Subcommittee of the Expo Future Sports & Facilities Committee analyzes all four recommended sports redevelopment scenarios identified in the sports feasibility study. Weighing multiple factors and with additional data analysis by Hunden Partners, the Subcommittee identifies a final recommended scenario, which is adopted by the Sports & Facilities Committee
March to Nov. 2024	The Expo Future Funding & Financing Task Force reviews Hunden Partners’ funding models for sports redevelopment, including public private partnerships, public financing tools, and federal and philanthropic resources.
Sept. to Nov. 2024	The Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee, supported by consultants and staff, analyzes the community input and shapes its recommendations based on community input.

Nov. to Dec. 2024	Expo Center clients are invited to provide online input about the project. North Portland residents are invited to provide online input about the Expo Future project.
Dec. 10, 2024	Metro Council and MERC receive the Expo Future vision, including representation and memorialization of the histories and cultures tied to the Expo Center site, final recommended sports redevelopment scenario, and funding and financing strategies. Resolutions in support of representation and memorialization and sports are also presented for consideration.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Resolution 25-01 for the purpose of representing and memorializing the histories and cultures associated with the Portland Expo Center
- B. *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report*