

Meeting Minutes

Meeting details:

Meeting: Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission Meeting
Date: July 2, 2025
Time: 12:30pm - 2:30 pm
Place: Zoom

Commissioners present:

Chair Karis Stoudamire-Phillips, Deidra-Krys-Rusoff, Damien Hall, Dañel Malán-González, Chris Oxley, Deanna Palm, and David Penilton

Commissioners excused:

none

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Stoudamire-Phillips called the meeting to order at 12:34pm

Public Communication

- Chair Stoudamire-Phillips opened the meeting to members of the public wanting to testify on agenda and non-agenda items

Commission / Council Liaison Communication

- Commissioner Krys-Rusoff expressed appreciation to Portland's staff for hosting a staff appreciation BBQ and highlighted the value of direct engagement with frontline workers
- Commissioner Penilton and Chair Stoudamire-Phillips echoed their appreciation for the event

General Manager Communications

Craig Stroud provided the following updates:

- Visitor Development Fund: The financial review team for the Visitor Development Fund met in mid-June to examine its financial stability and debt capacity over the next 20 years. No decisions were made. The next step is for elected officials from the city, county, and Metro to provide guidance to the board.
- FY2026 Budget: Craig thanked Rachel Lembo and Cindy Wallace for their leadership during the challenging budget process.
- Leadership Restructure: The Office of the Chief Operating Officer has undergone a restructuring. Craig's portfolio has expanded to include the Oregon Zoo, which aligns with historical General Manager responsibilities. This restructuring will also provide resources for the Expo Future project.

Financial Update

Ashley Sloan, MERC Finance Manager presented a report covering July through May of the FY2025 fiscal year.

- All venues are trending at or slightly below budgeted revenue and are spending 2-3% less than budgeted expenses.
- Personnel savings across all venues amount to approximately \$2 million, achieved through hiring delays and attrition.
- Oregon Convention Center (OCC): Had a good sales month for food and beverage in April and May, boosting net revenue by \$95,000 month-over-month. The OCC is forecasting 4% less revenue and 1% less in expenses than budgeted.
- Portland's Centers for the Arts (P5): Is beating its budget by 2%, expecting about \$530,000 more in revenue than budgeted. May's food and beverage and ticket services revenues have already exceeded their budgeted amounts. P5 had budgeted a \$1.7 million operating loss but is now forecasting a \$600,000 loss.
- Expo Center: Is forecasting 2% less than budgeted revenue and expenses. They budgeted a \$635,000 operating loss and are expecting a \$541,000 loss. A budget amendment transferred \$800,000 from the General Fund to help bolster the Expo's fund balance during the reorganization.
 - Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff raised concerns about transient lodging tax shortfalls, the need for conservative budgeting, and careful monitoring of Q1 FY26. Wallace responded that June will close strong, but acknowledged we will have a soft Q1.

Attachment: [Finance Report](#)

Venue Business Reports

Portland's Centers for the Arts

Rachael Lembo Executive Director, provided the following updates:

- **Staffing:** A new Director of Operations, Jeff Weinkauff, has been hired. The organizational structure is being changed to move the production team under operations and the setup/custodial team to the events department.
- **Programming:** P5 Presents had 18 performances in FY2025 with a fantastic house net of over \$450,000. Highlights included *Sailor Moon*, Hillary Clinton, and *Riverdance*.
- **Music on Main:** The summer Music on Main series lineup was announced, with performances by Band After Midnight, Conjunto Alegre, Grassroots Movement, and Jujuba.
- **Operations:** The Schnitz roof project is underway and is expected to be completed in early August. The box office is shortening its hours to Wednesday-Friday from noon to 5:00 PM.
 - Commissioner Penilton asked about operational efficiency and staffing levels moving into the fall season. Lembo responded that they are taking some time with the transitions and the restructure will help us become more efficient.

Oregon Convention Center and Portland Expo Center

Cindy Wallace Executive Director provided the following updates:

- **Staff Tour:** 33 staff members went on a bus tour to learn about Portland's history of housing discrimination, including stops at Vanport and the Expo Center.

- **Personnel:** Staff reductions have been made at both Expo and OCC. Julie Deweese, who was the second person ever hired at the OCC, retired after 38 years.
- **Travel Portland:** Travel Portland closed FY2025 with over 330,000 room nights, the highest production year ever.
- **National Education Association (NEA) Conference:** The OCC is currently hosting the NEA conference, the largest ever in Portland, which is expected to have an economic impact of \$18 million. The event has 7,000 delegates and 1,000 staff/contractors, utilizing 36,000 room nights at 42 hotels.
- **Orbit Marketplace:** The renovated Orbit Marketplace reopened today, featuring house-made pastries, snacks, new beverage options, and AI-powered self-checkout technology.
- **Venue Collaboration Project:** OCC management spent 224 hours on-site at Expo in June to support the transition. The project has identified 304 action items, with 82 completed so far. A joint all-staff meeting and BBQ is scheduled for August 5th.
 - Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff thanked Wallace for the hard work around transitioning to one team
 - Commissioner Penilton shared his excitement at hosting the NEA conference

Consent Agenda

- **Consideration of the June 4, 2025, MERC Meeting Minutes**
This item was approved.

Attachment: [Meeting Minutes](#)

Expo Future Project and Sports Marketing Update

Craig Stroud, GM of Visitor Venues, Cindy Wallace, Executive Director, OCC + Expo provided an update:

- **Expo Future Project:** The final cultural resources background review of the campus has been received and will be shared with relevant parties. Metro has engaged with the Interstate Bridge Replacement project team to draft a memorandum of understanding to address project impacts, such as the loss of parking and changes to Marine Drive, Expo Road, and the TriMet Max platform.
- Staff are developing a three-phase approach to assess the feasibility of decoupling Expo Hall A from Halls B&C. A memo outlining public-private partnership models for the project will be distributed to Metro Council and MERC in the coming weeks.
- **Sports Marketing:** In accordance with Council and MERC resolutions, the Expo Center is pursuing the sports and event market.
- In FY2025, there was a 36% increase in total sports event bookings compared to FY2024.
- Revenue from sports bookings grew by 30%, totaling over \$950,000 from rent, parking, and food/beverage sales.
- The team is actively bidding on future events, including the USA Judo Junior Olympics and Hoop Source basketball.

- Commissioner Krys-Rusoff noted the exciting list and asked about how conversations with existing clients are going. Wallace responded that they are going well; everyone is concerned with their bottom lines and the clients understand our commitment to Expo and share our desire to see the venue thrive.
- Commissioner Penilton asked if there is concern about losing any of our contracts as we work through transitions. Wallace responded no, they are committed to serving Expo's existing clients while adding additional sporting events.
- Chair Stoudamire-Phillips cited funding set aside for sporting equipment and asked about a potential carve out for historical memorialization work. Stroud responded that the resolutions were specific to sports equipment investment to support an interim pivot, however there is an intent to explore opportunities to advance historical memorialization components of the project.
- Commissioner Malán-González referenced the marketing materials and asked if we will continue to market towards non-sport related events as well. Wallace clarified that the marketing piece shared was specific to the sports market, however the sales team has collaborated to market both Expo and OCC for all types of uses.
- Commissioner Malán-González asked about the Interstate Bridge project impacts to the Expo parking lot. Stroud responded that as their project unfolds, we will accommodate potential changes to the Northeast corner of the campus and incorporate them into our designs as we further Expo development.
- Commissioner Malán-González asked if there be an RFP for historical memorialization project work to engage with a broader group of communities. Stroud cited the resolution language specific to the interim investment for sports equipment and infrastructure. We are still early in the process of development.

Attachments: [Expo Future Update](#)

Performing Arts Venue Workgroup Recommendations

Rachael Lembo, Executive Director, Portland's presented the recommendations from the performing arts venues work group. The report was published last week and shared with the Commission.

- The work group recommends that the City of Portland become the single entity responsible for continuing this work. The current two-government model is not preferred, and they may recommend that the city and Metro prepare a plan for the dissolution of the Intergovernmental Agreement.
- A key recommendation is to address the backlog of deferred maintenance and building modernization upgrades. The work group recommends that capital planning begin immediately.
- The group also made recommendations for immediate improvements, such as increased revenues through expanded bookings, enhanced food/beverage, and updated booking policies.

- The next steps include a work session with Metro Council on July 15th for direction on how to proceed.
 - Commissioner Palm asked about the timeline for transition. Lembo clarified that if we are directed to work on a transition plan the transfer will not happen quickly, as the work group recommends a smooth, thoughtful process. The IGA provides specific timelines for an un-agreed-upon transition, which would be 6 months if initiated by the city and 18 months if initiated by Metro.
 - Commissioner Krys-Rusoff highlighted the need for thoughtful communication with staff and clients around yet another possible transition. Lembo acknowledged the uncertainty this brings to staff and emphasized the importance of communication. She held a listening session with staff to hear their questions and provide updates, reassuring them that nothing is changing immediately and that they are all invested in the work of the buildings.
 - Commissioner Malán-González highlighted recent conversations from the Office of Arts and Culture around upcoming reductions in general operating support. How will this affect planning around the workgroup's recommendations? Lembo acknowledged the broader perspective of the arts ecosystem and noted the workgroup did not delve into that space as the City Administrator would likely make those decisions.
 - Commissioner Oxley added that the workgroup's scope specifically did not include financing or funding but directly focused on venue operations and long-term structural changes for increased venue sustainability.
 - Commissioner Hall commented that the main benefit of the workgroup was developing a shared knowledge base of operation requirements from which to collectively start problem solving.

Attachments: [Performing Arts Venues Workgroup Recommendations](#)

Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Stoudamire Phillips adjourned the meeting at 1:58 p.m.

- *Minutes submitted by Amy Nelson*