

EXPO FUTURE PROJECT: PRESENTATION OF INTERIM SPORTS INVESTMENTS

Date: June 24, 2026
Department: Chief Operating Officer
Meeting Date: July 1, 2026

Presenters:
Cindy Wallace, she/her, Executive Director,
OCC+Expo
Layan Ammouri, she/her
Expo Future Project Manager

ISSUE STATEMENT

Metro Council Resolution 25-5451 and Metropolitan Exposition and Recreation Commission (MERC) Resolution 25-02 both adopted in January 2025, advanced one of two key objectives of the Expo Future project:

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.

Among other directives, the resolutions included the following action:

Directs staff to propose a package of short-term, interim investments and funding sources in Metro's FY25-26 budget within 90 days of adoption of this resolution for the purpose of better preparing Expo Center to attract and to host more sporting events and tournaments, preferably regional or larger, and to generate resources that allow Expo to meet needs for public use.

ACTION REQUESTED

Staff will present MERC with responses to questions posed by Metro Councilors and MERC Commissioners at the February 10, 2026, joint work session, as well as staff recommendations for interim sport investments and improvements to Halls D & E, the two modern halls at Expo. The questions posed focused primarily on the viability of transitioning one or both halls to year-round sports usage, as well as impacts to trade and consumer shows and how those impacts may be mitigated. The presentation will include market and financial forecasts to inform decision-making.

Staff is seeking MERC direction to the following:

- Direction on which of the investment options presented better equip Expo to attract and host sporting events in Halls D & E, as well as best balance annual repeat consumer and trade show use, regular community use, and sports tourism.
- Insight about other information MERC would like to receive to support direction on interim investments.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

The goal for Expo's future redevelopment is to be a community-centric destination venue that prioritizes amateur, professional, and recreational sports. Expo Future Phase 2 reviewed four sports scenarios that resulted from a market study. The preferred scenario identified basketball and volleyball based on their forecast event counts and attendance. The flat floors needed for basketball and volleyball provide flexibility for other sports uses, such as pickleball, wrestling, and

cheer/dance. Within the Sports & Facilities Committee's Public Use Statement, an emphasis is placed on the importance of striking a balance in creating a regionally significant sports competition and tournament venue and ensuring local community members have reliable venue access.

There are several important considerations to weigh as part of the equipment selection for this project, including:

- Annual Repeat Clients - Do the sport equipment and infrastructure investments accommodate or preclude the future use of Halls D & E for Expo's traditional tradeshow and consumer event activities.
- Community Benefit – Staff will recommend equipment and sports improvements that support community benefit. In some cases, the investment that best supports community use is more expensive than mobile solutions. For example, permanently installed basketball hoops to the hall roof structures has the significant advantage of reduced time and labor to turn the halls from basketball to other uses. This higher initial investment is valuable to support community use and reduce on-going operational costs.
- Tournaments/Economic Impact – It is expected that the court spaces will be available for weekend tournaments. This use provides the greatest economic impact to Expo's operations and the region through the attraction of out-of-town families and athletes who generate impact through local hotel stays, restaurant visits, and other spending. Facility scheduling and use will follow the *Portland Expo Center Booking and Scheduling Policies and Procedures*, which also provides direction on scheduling annual repeat clients.

Most of the equipment and sports improvements needed to make Halls D & E sport ready for basketball and volleyball have permanent or temporary solutions. For example, there are "rubberized" court floor options with a 10+ year expected use life that are permanently installed and that can accommodate the impacts associated with most of Expo's annual repeat client activities. Hardwood court flooring is much less flexible and would require either removal or protective coverings to support annual repeat client activities. Other variables include cleaning and maintenance requirements, warranty, the time required to set and strike equipment, repairability, storage needs, and client/user preferences. The team also reviewed existing facility conditions to identify other maintenance or infrastructure renewal, and replacement needs to ready the halls for sports. The project team assessed these options with the intent to provide recommendations that balance the considerations.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

N/A

POLICY OPTIONS FOR TO CONSIDER

N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff will present MERC with responses to questions posed by Metro Councilors and MERC Commissioners at the February 10, 2026, joint work session, as well as staff recommendations for interim sport investments and improvements to Halls D & E, the two modern halls at Expo. The presentation will include market and financial forecasts to inform decision-making. Staff considered future business development, annual repeat client use, community benefit, and tournament use (economic impact) when determining recommendations.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

In January 2025, Council and MERC directed staff to proceed with activities that support meaningful representation and memorialization of the histories and cultures associated with the Expo site and to pivot Expo to a sports-centric venue. These activities will support Metro's goal of ensuring long-term financial sustainability of the Portland Expo Center.

Racial Equity

Expo 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
- D, creating safe and welcoming services, programs, and destinations

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
- E, resource allocation that advances racial equity

Climate Action

Sustainability is one of the Guiding Principles of the Expo Future Project. Phase 3 project recommendations of the Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization and Sports & Facilities committees support climate action goals through the following proposed activities:

- Analyzing Halls A, B, and C to determine the potential for reuse/renovation of the structures and for reuse of the buildings' materials if reuse of the structure is deemed not to be feasible
- Designing the proposed new court sports facility to secondarily accommodate large-scale exhibitions, thereby extending its functional capacity
- Installation of more landscaping and green restored space at the site
- Following Metro's Sustainable Building Practices if or as the project moves to design and construction

BACKGROUND

The Metro FY2025-26 adopted budget included \$2 million from the Metro General Fund to prepare Expo Center to attract and host more sporting events and tournaments, including improvements such as sports flooring, basketball hoops, volleyball nets, court net curtain dividers, and other related sports improvements. This \$2 million was not expected to fully cover the improvements and equipment needed for the complete interim sports pivot. Rather, the investment provided funding to contract with the necessary experts to inform options and decision-making for an interim sports investment.

To advance this work, Metro established a project team consisting of OCC + Expo sales, facilities, and events staff plus representatives from Sport Oregon, Travel Portland, Columbia Empire Volleyball Association (CEVA), and Hoop Source. These experts were engaged to provide strategic input on improvement options, venue operations, and to share their deep experience hosting volleyball and basketball tournaments and the requisite investments to make Expo sport ready for future tournaments.

Metro contracted with Scott Edwards Architecture (SEA), an architecture firm to support programming and design options for a full investment of equipment and improvements for Expo Halls D & E. At the February 10, 2026, joint Metro Council and MERC meeting, staff were directed to pursue the full build-out options for Halls D & E with project costs estimated between \$14-16 million. In addition, Metro engaged Hunden Partners to support market and financial analyses associated with the options. Hunden Partners was a primary consultant for Expo Future Phase 2 deliverables. Representatives from Expo, Sport Oregon, Travel Portland, CEVA, and Hoop Source all provided financial, event count, event attendance, and hotel night data to inform forecasts for growth potential.

The FY2025-26 adopted budget provided \$2 million for this project. That amount was not expected to cover a full improvement solution needed for the complete interim sports pivot. To accommodate annual repeat client use, community benefit, tournaments and future business development while keeping operational and labor expenses down, staff recommended Council affirm the full turn-key solution that incorporates permanent sport flooring, installed basketball hoops, mobile volleyball nets, enhanced lighting and mobile scoreboards with an estimated project cost of \$14-16 million. The Metro Chief Financial Officer recommends Metro obtain a loan to fund these improvements. The FY26-27 COO Recommended Budget, which Council will likely adopt in June 2026, includes general fund appropriations to pay debt service on such a loan.