

EXPO FUTURE PROJECT – HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND MEMORIALIZATION UPDATE

Date: January 22, 2026
Department: Chief Operating Officer
Meeting Date: February 10, 2026
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Presenters: Craig Stroud, he/him,
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Length: 15 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

Metro Council Resolution 25-5450 and Metropolitan Exposition and Recreation Commission (MERC) Resolution 25-01 both adopted in January 2025 advanced one of two primary 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.

The Resolutions outlined the next phase of work through the following statements:

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 directs staff to work with members of Impacted Communities to assess the feasibility of those recommendations and to develop a strategy to pursue implementation of the recommendations deemed feasible, and to report progress regularly to Metro Council.
3. Directs staff to commence a cultural resources assessment of the Expo property within 90 days of adoption of this resolution for the purpose of identifying existing and potential historic, cultural, archaeological, and architectural resources at the site.
4. Directs staff to develop cost estimates and to request funding in Metro's proposed FY25-26 budget for additional study and analysis of the Portland Assembly Center Hall A as described in the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* presented on December 10, 2024. The engineering study would assess Hall A's structural integrity, its capacity to stand independently, and the feasibility of serving uses other than as an exhibit hall and, where feasible, provide cost estimates for potential renovation or deconstruction. Within 180 days of availability of funding for the study, staff will commence the study and, once complete, present the study's findings.
5. Directs staff to commence community conversations within 90 days of completion of the engineering study of Hall A for the purpose of developing recommendations about potential use(s) of Hall A, or portions thereof, including use as a multi-use community/interpretive center as recommended by the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* presented on December 10, 2024.
6. Directs staff to develop cost estimates and request funding in Metro's proposed FY25-26 budget for development of the interpretive plan for representation and memorialization

of histories and cultures connected to the Expo site as identified in *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* presented on December 10, 2024.

7. Directs staff to present a proposed governance structure and approach to community engagement for the development of the Expo Center interpretive plan, described in Action 6 above, within 180 days of adoption of this resolution. The approach must, at minimum, invite representatives of the urban Indigenous, Japanese American, and Vanport communities and Tribes to participate in the plan's development.

ACTION REQUESTED

- Council and MERC's continued awareness of the project and support during Phase 3.
- Insight about other information Council or MERC would like to receive before the next project update in early summer 2026.

STATUS UPDATE

1. Metro Council recognizes Portland Assembly Center as a site of national historic significance – completed with Metro Council Resolution 25-5450.
2. Assess the feasibility of the recommendations in the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* - Four Metro staff with expertise in enterprise operations; non-profit partnership; diversity, equity, and inclusion; legal; and other areas have been identified to complete an initial feasibility assessment of the recommendations. Once this initial assessment is completed, impacted communities will be engaged through the governance structure that is under development, see update 7 below.
3. Conduct a cultural resources assessment – completed: Willamette Cultural Resources Associates, Ltd completed a research-only assessment to identify known and potential archaeological and historic resources. The assessment has been shared with appropriate parties.
4. Conduct an engineering study of Hall A's integrity, reuse capacity - Akana engineering has completed its geotechnical assessment of the foundation and underlying soil conditions of Hall A. The study indicates that the existing foundations are located within the near surface dredge fill and are not adequate to withstand a seismic event. The engineers report stated that a deep foundation system will be required to either retrofit the existing or a replacement structure. We are continuing with the engineering assessment of the hall's structural foundations, framing, and exterior envelope. This information will be valuable as the project moves into future planning and impacted community discussions.
5. Engage community in conversations about Hall A's engineering study – to be started once Hall A's engineering study is completed.
6. Interpretive plan development – this action is dependent upon the feasibility of recommendations in the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report*, which is underway. In addition, the engineering study for Hall A and its potential use as a multi-use community/interpretive center will inform development of the interpretive plan. Work on this plan will commence after those efforts are completed.
7. Develop governance and engagement for development of interpretive plan - Metro contracted with Kearns & West, a collaboration and strategic communications firm, to

support Metro in developing a governance structure to guide the creation of an interpretive plan for historical representation and memorialization. This includes ensuring community involvement is meaningful and appropriately scaled to technical, cultural, and financial considerations. The intent is for Kearns & West to continue developing an overall engagement plan and communications approach while the governance structure is finalized. Relatedly, the Expo Future project team has met several times with Metro's Government Affairs and Policy Development (GAPD) team in the past six months to structure an approach to Tribal consultation for the project. A newly hired employee in GAPD is expected to support those actions with the timing of this effort to be determined.

In addition to the progress noted above, Metro successfully negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program, Washington Department of Transportation, and Oregon Department of Transportation for the potential siting of a Light Rail Transit Overnight Facility at Expo. The MOU identifies Expo Future project future conditions as well as overnight facility potential developments and defines how the parties will coordinate to support positive outcomes for both efforts. The possible location is south of the main Expo campus in an existing overflow gravel parking and storage lot. Impacts to the Expo Future vision are minor and manageable.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Metro Council directed staff to find the highest and best public use of the Portland Expo Center and to ensure its long-term financial sustainability. In February 2023, Council and the Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission (MERC) unanimously approved six objectives for the Expo Future project. Phase 2 of the project focused on two key objectives: meaningful memorialization of the site's history and culture, and pivoting Expo to a sports-centric venue. Community-developed visions for both objectives were presented to a joint meeting of MERC and Council on December 10, 2024. In January 2025, MERC and Council both adopted resolutions to accept the vision and to direct staff to continue working to achieve these objectives in Phase 3 of the project.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

- Does Council or MERC have feedback or guidance for the project?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR TO CONSIDER

Policy options are not being proposed with the update. As always, Council and MERC input on the project is warmly welcomed.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

N/A.

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

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 structure and for reuse of the building's materials if reuse of the structure is deemed infeasible
- Installation of more landscaping and restored green 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 that attracted. Post-pandemic, Expo attendance has declined; in 2024, annual attendance figures are approximately 260,000 visitors to over 90 public trade shows and community events.

The site is the largest exhibition space in Oregon, boasting 333,000 square feet of existing building area and over a million square feet of paved parking. 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 January 2025, after a multi-year, community-involved assessment of opportunities to improve the long-term financial sustainability of the Portland Expo Center, the Metro Council and the MERC directed staff to focus on two overarching project objectives:

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.

ATTACHMENTS

None