

EXPO FUTURE PROJECT: SPORTS MARKETING UPDATE

Date: May 28, 2026
Department: Chief Operating Officer
Meeting Date: June 18, 2026
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Presenters: Cindy Wallace, she/her, Executive Director, Oregon Convention Center + Portland Expo Center
Length: 10 minutes

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.

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

1. Accepting the Expo Sports & Facilities Committee's preferred sports development scenario presented on December 10, 2024; and
2. Directing staff to pursue key actions in support of implementing the preferred sports redevelopment scenario:
 - a. continue to analyze and refine the scenario and provide regular project updates to MERC and Metro Council;
 - b. propose a package of short-term investments in Halls D & E in Metro's FY2025-26 budget to better equip Expo to attract and host sporting events;
 - c. develop criteria for solicitation of a public-private partnership for full build-out of the preferred Expo Center sports redevelopment scenario, including representation and memorialization recommendations and other required site features, with the intent of selecting a development partner by December 2025; and
 - d. continue to make every effort to pursue the sports event market per the Portland Expo Center Booking and Scheduling Policies and Procedures.
3. Expresses the Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission's (MERC) support of Metro Council's intent and direction to staff to ensure that actions in pursuit of the preferred sports scenario at Expo are compatible with the *Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee Recommendations Report* and do not commodify or cause harm to involved partners and communities.

ACTION REQUESTED

- Council's continued awareness of the actions taken to advance the sports pivot of the Expo Center through sales and marketing efforts. These efforts align and support interim sports equipment and infrastructure investments that staff will present at the June 18, 2026, Metro Council meeting.

- Insight about other information Council would like to receive before the next project update in winter 2026.

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 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 have feedback or guidance for the sales and marketing efforts supporting Expo Center’s pivot to a sports-centric venue?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

Policy options are not being proposed with the update. As always, Council 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
- 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 infeasible
- Designing the proposed new court sports facility to secondarily accommodate large-scale exhibitions, thereby extending the center's functional capacity
- Installation of more landscaping and restored green space at the site
- Following Metro's Sustainable Building Practices as the project moves to design and construction

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 \$50 million 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 annually.

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 Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission (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