

## EXPO FUTURE PROJECT – HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND MEMORIALIZATION UPDATE

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Department: Chief Operating Officer  
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### 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's continued awareness of the project and support during Phase 3.
- Insight about other information Council would like to receive before the next project update in winter 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*** - Staff continue work to better understand how the recommendations developed by the Historical Significance and Memorialization Committee could be carried forward at the Expo campus. This phase is focused on exploring implementation considerations and identifying opportunities and constraints, rather than reopening or revising the recommendations themselves. Staff completed an initial internal feasibility assessment to better understand the operational, legal, equity, and implementation considerations associated with advancing the recommendations under current conditions. The assessment is intended to clarify what would be required to move recommendations forward and identify considerations that may inform future decision-making. The next phase of work will focus on Tribal consultation and engagement with community partners to share and discuss the assessment findings and gather feedback. Staff are currently developing an approach and process for those conversations, which are anticipated in the coming months.
3. **Conduct a cultural resources assessment** - A desktop cultural resources research assessment was conducted by Willamette Resources Associates, Ltd in 2025. The contract was closed internally and later it was brought to the project's attention that further tribal consultation and review work is needed. Metro's Historic Preservation Officer is currently reviewing the desktop report to identify additional cultural resource investigations that may be needed to ensure compliance with laws and regulations related to the project, and to meet our commitments and responsibilities to our tribal partners with whom we consult.
4. **Conduct an engineering study of Hall A's integrity, reuse capacity** - Akana Engineering recently provided Metro with a draft report for Hall A. Metro engaged Akana to complete a phased assessment of Exhibit Hall A to evaluate its structural condition and the feasibility of separating it from Halls B and C for potential future redevelopment. The assessment included a structural facility evaluation, review of existing documentation, integration of geotechnical findings, a high-level review of architectural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, and a Tier 1 seismic evaluation. The study documents

existing conditions, identifies deficiencies, and outlines the extent of repairs or structural interventions that would be required should Hall A be retained as a standalone facility. Staff expect to finalize the report in the coming weeks.

5. **Engage community in conversations about Hall A's engineering study** – Staff will define a process for sharing the findings of the Hall A engineering assessment with community partners and stakeholders following completion of the final report. Those conversations will help inform future planning discussions regarding Hall A and its potential role within the Expo campus.
6. **Interpretive plan development** – Development of the interpretive plan remains dependent on several ongoing efforts, including the feasibility assessment of the Historical Significance and Memorialization Committee recommendations and the Hall A engineering study. Findings from these efforts will help inform opportunities for memorialization, historical representation, and potential future uses of Hall A, including consideration of its role as a community and interpretive space. Work on the interpretive plan will be guided by an interpretive framework, and planning for that effort is underway and will require support from an expert in that field. The process will include substantive community engagement and Tribal consultation.
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. Staff continue to advance work related to the development of a long-term governance structure for the Expo Future project. Given the scale and complexity of the redevelopment effort, governance discussions have focused on creating greater clarity around decision-making, roles, and processes. This includes ongoing work to map decision types, identify appropriate engagement and oversight structures, and clarify the respective roles of project staff, community stakeholders, and future development partners. Particular attention is being given to ensuring memorialization commitments related to Tribal, Vanport, Japanese American, and urban Indigenous histories have clear avenues for involvement in future interpretive planning. Staff are also exploring how the governance structure can remain flexible enough to evolve over time and support both interim activation efforts and long-term redevelopment implementation.

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 have feedback or guidance for the project?

**POLICY OPTIONS FOR 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, 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 significant capital improvement 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.

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