

Meeting Minutes

Meeting details:

Meeting: Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission Meeting
Date: June 4, 2025
Time: 12:30pm - 2:30 pm
Place: Zoom

Commissioners present:

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

Commissioners excused:

Dañel Malán-González

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Stoudamire-Phillips called the meeting to order at 12:32pm

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

- Councilor Rosenthal reported on the ongoing budget process, which is set for approval this week with few changes. There are some reductions in Parks and Nature. The zoo rehabilitation process is underway, including contractor selection. Supportive Housing Services are still under agreement, with the President's Council reconvening to discuss future plans. Council is awaiting legislative impacts on housing and other areas.

General Manager Communications

Craig Stroud provided the following updates:

- An additional update from Travel Portland is scheduled for this meeting due to prior scheduling conflicts.
- A written report for Expo Future is expected next week, with a presentation in July focusing on the overall vision, project updates, and a deep dive into sports marketing efforts.
- A meeting was held on May 19th with Metro COO Madrigal and Expo Future Historical Significance and Memorialization Committee co-chairs, Lynn Fuchigami Parks and Ed Washington. The discussion addressed concerns from committee members regarding staffing changes for the Expo Center in the FY26 budget and how this impacts the Expo Future project's vision and commitments made in January. Metro reaffirmed its commitment to a modern Expo Center that reflects its history, acknowledged contributions of prior staff (Matthew Rotchford, Stephanie Redman), and provided an explanation of Metro's financial challenges, including significant layoffs and \$2.5 million investments in Expo Future. The meeting was characterized as positive, with co-chairs expecting the project to continue forward and commitments to be fulfilled.

- Metro Labor Relations successfully extended the ILWU and IATSE B20 collective bargaining agreements for one year based on prior feedback. ILWU will receive a 2.67% cost of living adjustment, consistent with other union agreements, and IATSE B20 will receive a single dollar increase to all classification wage scales. Both agreements are now set to expire on June 30, 2026.
- Monica Pea, Director of Sales for OCC/Expo, and Craig Stroud attended the final event of this year's Vanport Mosaic Festival, "We Are Still Here," which culminated the 10th Vanport Mosaic Festival and Renaissance Ensembles 2025 season. The program featured the Portland Assembly Center project, a reader's theater piece about the Expo site's future development. The performance included the world premiere of Kenji Bunch's setting of Chisao Hata's poem "On This Land". The performance, held in what is now Expo Hall A, was described as powerful and well-performed, connecting past, present, and imagined futures.
 - Chair Stoudamire-Phillips expressed thanks for the meeting with Co-Chairs Fuchigami Parks and Washington.

Financial Update

Ashley Sloan, MERC Finance Manager presented the financial report for July through April of the FY25 budget year, with two months remaining before FY26.

- The general forecast for all MERC venues has not changed significantly and is trending at or behind budget.
- Transient lodging tax is trending 3% less than the prior year, equating to approximately \$750,000 less for OCC and \$100,000 less for P5. Four payments are remaining, with August typically being a strong collection month.
- All venues remain on budget for materials and expenses. Cost savings are primarily seen in personnel due to hiring delays and attrition, totaling about \$2 million across all MERC venues.
- Revenue varied by venue. OCC had a busy April with event revenue over \$4.5 million, the highest-grossing event being the Hematology Oncology Pharmacy Association Annual Conference. Year-to-date revenue for OCC is lagging budget by 8%, or about \$3.9 million, primarily due to a decrease of 13 national convention events compared to the prior year.
- P5 had a strong April with events like "Life of Pi" and "Sailor Moon" driving revenue to \$2.2 million and is forecasting to meet budget by 2%.
- Expo also had a strong April, beating last year's April by 17% with auto-swap meet and CEVA generating the most revenue. While the financial report might show them beating budget, they are actually about 3% (\$200,000) behind budget, with internal transfers making up the gap.
 - Commissioner Krys-Rusoff expressed concern about the weakness in the third quarter and questioned whether it signifies a trend requiring a mid-year budget review. Cindy Wallace stated that they do not want this to be a trend, noting that convention cancellations years in advance are uncommon, citing a specific cancellation from the National Business Aviation Association for 2025 due to Portland not being the right destination for a particular group, despite a positive 2024 experience. It was noted that this could become a trend if negative national media attention affects future bookings. The budget for FY26 has been set conservatively, accounting for government changes, funding impacts on events, and the current pipeline. For FY25, despite no official budget

amendment, the team re-forecasted revenues and expenses, identified areas for cuts in materials and services, and explored new revenue streams like parking.

Attachment: [Finance Report](#)

Venue Business Reports

Oregon Convention Center and Portland Expo Center

Cindy Wallace Executive Director, provided the following updates:

- Expo recently concluded its longest consecutive volleyball run to date, with five straight weeks of tournament activity, receiving positive feedback from clients.
- June will have a few events at Expo, and the Flex Workspace project is progressing to support a more agile and collaborative environment.
- Q1 of FY26 for Expo is expected to be light in events, allowing for cross-training, new technology implementation, and a continued pivot towards sports-focused programming.
- Travel Portland, in partnership with MERC, OCC, and our hotel partners, completed a successful Washington D.C. Sales mission from May 12-15. The mission, themed "Portland Uncorked," hosted five events and six client appointments, engaging with approximately 100 clients, reinforcing Portland's appeal as a premier meeting destination.
- Public Safety has moved to its new front-of-house location at OCC, enhancing safety and visibility. The third and final phase of renovation will convert the vacated back-of-house space for the parking and dock department, with full project completion anticipated by August.
- Representatives from Levy, United Kingdom, and Excel London (UK's first carbon-neutral venue) visited OCC to discuss innovation and sustainability in the events industry, highlighting shared values and opportunities for collaboration.
- The venue collaboration project is progressing with staff onboarding at both OCC and Expo, and the Flex Workspace Initiative officially launched at Expo. Sales and event staff will now work remotely with flexibility to operate from either venue. In May, OCC management contributed 168 hours on-site at Expo to support the transition. Cindy Wallace will meet with Expo clients to build confidence in the new structure. Summer focus includes cross-training, streamlining processes, and implementing technology solutions.
 - Commissioner Palm asked if their needs to be a mindset shift around shorter booking window trends. Wallace agreed and expressed that this is being considered when forecasting.
 - Chair Stoudamire-Phillips expressed thanks for Wallace taking time to start making connections with Expo vendors and long-time clients.
 - Commissioner Penilton asked if our pricing structure is driving the recent short-term bookings. Wallace shared they are aggressively pricing and have the availability.

Portland's 5 Centers for the Arts

Rachael Lembo Executive Director, provided the following updates:

- Metro Council will be considering a budget amendment to extend the Youth Arts and Culture manager position for 1 year through June 2026. The amendment reflects the P5 Foundation's decision to fund the position to allow fulfillment of the last year of the 3-year commitment to the Youth Arts Council.

- The Schnitzer roof project will start again at the end of the month and is expected to be finished by the first week of August.
- Staff will focus on preventative maintenance and repairs over the summer during the slow season.
- We continue to work on transition planning which has been difficult and emotional work for staff.
- We will hold out summer staff BBQ next Wednesday on Main St.
 - Commissioner Krys-Rusoff shared excitement for the upcoming budget amendment and appreciation for the P5 Foundation.
 - Commissioner Penilton asked about the cost of the roof project. Lembo shared the total project cost is 7 million, but we do expect we may come in under but don't want to make any adjustments yet as there is still work to be done.

Consent Agenda

- **Consideration of the May 7, 2025, MERC Meeting Minutes**
This item was approved.

Attachment: [MERC Meeting Minutes](#)

Action Agenda

- **Resolution 25-05:** For the Purpose of Electing Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission Officers for Fiscal Year 2025-26.

Attachment: [Resolution 25-05](#)

Chair Stoudamire-Phillips called for a vote on Resolution No. 25-05.

A motion was made by Commissioner Palm, seconded by Commissioner Penilton, that Resolution 25-05 be adopted. The motion passed by the following vote:

Aye: 5 Stoudamire-Phillips, Hall, Krys-Rusoff, Palm, and Penilton

Performing Arts Venue Workgroup Update

Chris Oxley, MERC Commissioner and Rachel Lembo, Executive Director, Portland's Centers for the Arts provided an update on the Performing Arts Venue Work Group:

Background: An August 2022 Metro Internal Auditor's Office report highlighted challenges with the management IGA between the City of Portland and Metro, noting complex governance, unclear direction for financial and reputational risks, and a lack of reliable information on P5 building deficiencies.

P5 Financial Challenges: P5's event numbers and audiences grew post-pandemic but did not fully recover to pre-pandemic levels. This, combined with rising costs (inflation, wage pressure, maintenance), led to an unbalanced and unsustainable budget, projecting an operating deficit of approximately \$0.5 million for this fiscal year. Rate increases were considered unmanageable for local arts groups. The budget for the next fiscal year was balanced only by eliminating 12 positions, representing 17% of full-time staff.

Workgroup Formation: In October 2024, Metro Council and Portland City Council directed the formation of a performing arts venue workgroup. Its mandate was to evaluate P5 operations, maintenance, and long-term planning, focusing on aligning management with regional economic and cultural goals, and exploring alternative operating models. The 19 workgroup members were selected for their diverse experience in arts, venue management, business, finance, labor, development, and government, representing various organizational sizes and perspectives.

Workgroup Process: The group met 10 times starting in January 2025. Initial meetings focused on understanding stakeholders and perspectives, generating ideas, and delving into current financial and operational details. Subsequent discussions involved an expert on national trends in performing arts funding and operating models.

Recommendations: While no consensus was reached on a specific operating model, clear throughlines emerged. The final recommendation report is expected later this month. Key recommendations include:

- Improvements within the existing model: increased bookings, more transparent booking policies, enhanced food and beverage options, and improved relations with local arts organizations.
 - Immediate capital planning: identifying needed capital projects through facility condition assessments and securing funding that does not rely on positive net operations.
 - Future Operating Model Analysis: The workgroup determined that more analysis is needed to determine the best operating model. They recommended that one entity should lead this analysis, with the City of Portland (as the building owner) being the expected entity. The complexities of the current two-government model (City owning, Metro managing) were acknowledged.
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- o Commissioner Penilton asked about further direction on identifying additional funding mechanisms. Lembo responded the workgroups scope did not include funding source exploration. It was highlighted that a national performing arts center expert stated to the group that performing arts centers do not fund capital through operations.
 - o Councilor Rosenthal asked if the city continues with further analysis, has a specific department been identified to do the work? Lembo responded the workgroup did not get to that level of detail.
 - o Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff acknowledged the recommendation that the City manages the work moving forward, and does that mean we transition out of the process? Lembo clarified the workgroup is recommending the city be the accountable entity for continuing this work but is not recommending that the city become the operator.

- Chair Stoudamire-Phillips thanked Commissioner Oxley and Lembo and added this conversation was overdue and is pleased that we are moving forward with this work.

Travel Portland 3rd Quarter Report

James Jessie, Chief Sales Officer provided an update focusing on international inbound travel and a direct-to-consumer strategy. Angela Nelson, Vice President of Equity and Partnerships provided an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion update focusing on Education and Training Foundation grants, Black Travel Alliance update and EDI training.

- Commissioner Krys-Rusoff requested the next report include 2019 numbers for comparison
- Commissioner Penilton praised the EDI report, and asked how previously canceled events can be pulled back into the pipeline. Jessie responded a few groups that refused to rebook in 2023-24 are now coming back to book in future years.
- Councilor Rosenthal would like to see future influencer trips that focus on Beaverton and Hillsboro in addition to Portland. He also asked if the new Portland Airport updates have had positive impact on travelers' impression of the city. Jessie responded yes, especially during the arrival experience.
- Commissioner Hall appreciated the innovative approach to highlight positive social media content

Attachments: [Travel Portland 3rd Quarter Report](#)

Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Stoudamire Phillips adjourned the meeting at 2:11 p.m.

- *Minutes submitted by Amy Nelson*