

EXPO FUTURE PROJECT QUARTERLY UPDATE

Date: June 24, 2025

Department: COO/Council

Meeting Date: July 22, 2025

Length: Up to 20 minutes

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Presenters:

Craig Stroud, he/him, General Manager of Visitor Venues and project sponsor

ISSUE STATEMENT

On January 9, 2025, Council President Peterson requested a quarterly Expo Future project update to Metro Council. This is the second update, covering Q4 of fiscal year 2024-25.

ACTION REQUESTED

- Council's continued awareness of the Expo Future project and support during Phase 3 of the project
- Insight about other information or data Council would like to receive before the next quarterly update (September/October 2025)

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 early 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 any feedback or guidance for the project?
- Does Council have any information requests or data needs before the next quarterly project update, which will be presented in September/October 2025?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

Staff will provide a project update. 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 2 (and 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; and
- 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 structures and for reuse of the building's materials if reuse of the structure is deemed not to be feasible
- Installation of more landscaping and green, restored 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. Post-pandemic, Expo attendance has declined; in 2024, annual attendance was approximately 260,600 visitors at 91 events.

The site is the largest exhibition space in Oregon, with 333,000 square feet of existing building area and 2,500 parking spaces. Halls A, B, and C have been in operation for more than 100 years. Halls D and E were constructed in 2001 and 1997, 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 February 2023, after a multi-year community-involved assessment of opportunities to improve the long-term financial sustainability of the Portland Expo Center, Metro Council and MERC directed staff to focus on two overarching project objectives identified by Metro's Chief Operating Officer.

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.

The following table outlines the history and relevant actions of this project.

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| 2000 | Metro Council Resolution 00-3019 supports submission of a Conditional Use Master Plan to City of Portland. General components include site development plans, transportation and parking, mitigation of Expo development impacts, environmental compatibility, development review, neighborhood communication and coordination, project review procedures for future development, and public involvement. Major elements of the Master Plan include replacement and expansion of exhibit halls A, B and C to match the look of Hall E and Hall D (under construction at the time). CUMP is submitted and approved in 2001. |
| 2003 | MERC completes study “Expo: A Vision for the Future” with Yost, Grube Hall architects, to replace the outdated facilities of Halls A B C, and East and West Halls with 255,000 square feet of new facilities, including an exhibit hall, meeting rooms, support facilities, landscaping and related improvements to augment Halls D and E. |
| 2011 | MERC submitted Expo Center Conditional Use Master Plan, prepared by Shiels Oblatz Johnson, SERA and subcontractors to City of Portland for expansion and replacement of existing exhibition facilities –Halls A, B, and C—with a new exhibition hall similar to Hall D and E, as well as 11 other site developments. |
| 2014 | Metro commissioned Hunden Partners to provide an independent assessment of Expo governance and operations, a local competitive market analysis, and the possible impact of a new local headquarters hotel. The scope of work also included an analysis of the existing physical conditions. |
| 2016 - 2019 | From 2016 to 2019, a range of options to increase and diversify revenue streams was studied, including long-term tenancies and flexible outdoor space. |
| Fall 2019 | At the direction of Metro Council, the Portland Expo Center Development Opportunity Study (DOS) was launched. The study’s purpose was to identify development options that could complement, support, or replace the current operations at Expo and assess its current value. |
| 2020-2021 | Metro engages with the communities and stakeholders most impacted by the site through meetings and listening sessions, and a draft set of community-driven Guiding Principles is formed. |
| Spring 2021 | The DOS report is published, outlining nine scenarios (from logistics to film studios) the site could accommodate. MERC and Metro Council deprioritize the “sell option” and direct staff to create a solicitation process to seek creative ideas and public/private development partners for the site. |
| Spring 2022 | MERC and Metro Council adopt the community-driven Guiding Principles developed during the DOS by resolution as part of their framework for decision-making. |
| Summer, fall 2022 | The Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) is launched. Metro receives eight submittals in response to the RFEI process. |
| Winter 2023 | Metro engages community members, Tribal and other government partners, and staff in the evaluation of RFEI submissions, culminating in the “Phase one: RFEI Findings and recommendations” report. |

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| Spring, summer 2023 | Metro Council and MERC unanimously support the COO's recommendations for the future of Expo and Phase 2 of the Expo Future project began. In summer 2023, Metro Council and MERC endorse the proposed project governance structure and COO's recommended next steps for the project. |
| Sept. 2023 | Expo Future Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee, Expo Future Sport & Facility Committee, and Executive Advisory Committee begin working to fulfill their missions. |
| Dec. 2023 to June 2024 | Hunden Partners begins to study determine the feasibility of shifting Expo Center to sports-oriented uses. The firm conducts a comprehensive market analysis and interviews dozens of local representatives of sports teams, leagues, and facilities; committee members; and partner government, economic development, and tourism/hospitality organizations. |
| March 2024 | Metro Council and MERC receive a six-month Expo Future progress report from the cochairs of the Sport & Facility and Historical Significance & Memorialization Committees and staff. |
| June 25, 2024 | Results of the Expo Future sports feasibility study are presented to Metro Council and MERC by consultant Hunden Partners. |
| July to Sept. 2024 | Metro engages with key communities to identify ways to honor and recognize their histories and cultures at Expo Center. Interviews, virtual discussions, in-person workshops and online input are held to gather input from urban Indigenous, Japanese American, and Vanport communities. Expo clients provide project input during a virtual discussion on August 15, 2024. |
| August to Nov. 2024 | The Scenario Refinement Subcommittee of the Expo Future Sports & Facilities Committee analyzes all four recommended sports redevelopment scenarios identified in the sports feasibility study. Weighing multiple factors and with additional data analysis by Hunden Partners, the Subcommittee identifies a final recommended scenario, which is adopted by the Sports & Facilities Committee |
| March to Nov. 2024 | The Expo Future Funding & Financing Task Force reviews Hunden Partners' funding models for sports redevelopment, including public private partnerships, public financing tools, and federal and philanthropic resources. |
| Sept. to Nov. 2024 | The Historical Significance & Memorialization Committee, supported by consultants and staff, analyzes the community input and shapes its recommendations based on community input. |
| Nov. to Dec. 2024 | Expo Center clients are invited to provide online input about the project. North Portland residents are invited to provide online input about the Expo Future project. |
| Dec. 10, 2024 | Metro Council and MERC receive the Expo Future vision, including representation and memorialization of the histories and cultures tied to the Expo Center site, final recommended sports redevelopment scenario, and funding and financing strategies. Resolutions in support of representation and memorialization and sports are also presented for consideration. |
| Jan. 8, 2025 | MERC unanimously adopts Resolution 25-01: For the Purpose of Representing and Memorializing the Histories and cultures Associated with the Portland Expo Center and Resolution 25-02: For the Purpose of Redeveloping the Portland Expo Center as A Sports-Oriented Destination Venue. |

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| Jan. 9, 2025 | Metro Council unanimously adopts Resolution 25-5450: For the Purpose of Representing and Memorializing the Histories and cultures Associated with the Portland Expo Center and Resolution 25-5451: For the Purpose of Redeveloping the Portland Expo Center as a Sports-Oriented Destination Venue. |
| Jan. to March 2025 | Project staff begin work to develop FY25-26 budget requests, establish a timeline for project activities, research public private partnership best practices, develop the scope of work for Expo cultural resources assessment, plan for website content updates, and complete Phase 2 close-out activities. |
| April to June 2025 | Willamette Cultural Resources Associates, Ltd completed a cultural resources assessment of the campus to inform possible future development impacts. Staff prepared an initial draft scope of work for a phased approach to assess Hall A's structural integrity and its capacity to stand independently if separated from Halls B and C. Expo Future website now includes a tab highlighting the site development opportunity, and other website content revisions are underway. Metro Council approved a \$2 million initial interim investment in infrastructure and sports equipment for Halls D and E in the fiscal year 2025-26 budget. Staff drafted suggested criteria for solicitation of a public-private partnership for Expo Future redevelopment. Continued sales efforts and outcomes to bring youth, amateur and professional sporting events to the Portland Expo Center in the coming years. |

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution 25-5450: For the Purpose of Representing and Memorializing the Histories and cultures Associated with the Portland Expo Center (adopted Jan. 9, 2025)
2. Resolution 25-5451: For the Purpose of Redeveloping the Portland Expo Center as a Sports-Oriented Destination Venue (adopted Jan. 9, 2025)