

Meeting Minutes

Meeting details:

Meeting: Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission Meeting
Date: May 7, 2025
Time: 12:30pm - 2:30 pm
Place: Oregon Convention, Room F150 | Zoom

Commissioners present:

Chair Karis Stoudamire-Phillips, Deidra-Krys-Rusoff, Chris Oxley, Dañel Malán-González, Deanna Palm and David Penilton

Commissioners excused:

Damien Hall

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Stoudamire-Phillips called the meeting to order at 12:35pm

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 shared Metro supports the mayor's initiative to increase access to shelter for our houseless population. A commission was recently convened to work on the future vision for the region which will potentially impact developments like our performance venues, the Montgomery Place project, and Diamond project, among others.

General Manager Communications

Craig Stroud thanked Metro Attorney Carrie MacLaren for joining us today. Matthew Rotchford's last day as Expo's Executive Director on May 2nd was acknowledged. His years of service with Metro and the Expo Center were highlighted and he was thanked and will be missed.

Venue collaboration efforts continue, and OCC and the Expo Center have now combined management teams to operate the two venues. Cindy Wallace is interim Executive Director for both venues and oversees a single organization structure. We are maintaining separate budget and accounting funds for the remainder of this fiscal year and next for financial tracking and reporting purposes. Both venues will have regular leadership and management presence to support staff, contract partners, clients, and events. Responsibility and accountability are now within a single structure.

Additional staffing changes within the Metro FY26 proposed budget include the elimination of the Expo Future project manager position with the intention of consolidating project management within the COO office under a new Project Management Office. Stephanie Redman was acknowledged and thanked for her important contributions to the Expo Future Project.

Ashley Sloan, Rachel Lembo, Cindy Wallace, and I presented the venue budgets to Metro Council in late April. The budget process continues through May. Metro Council is scheduled to vote on a resolution to adopt the FY26 budget on June 12th.

- Commissioner Palm shared she would have liked to have received an individual update on leadership transitions prior to implementation.
- Chair Stoudamire-Phillips asked who the onsite leadership representatives at Expo will be. Wallace responded there will be a “director on duty” rotating schedule ensuring there will be a daily leadership presence.
- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff asked if there will be permanent leadership offices located at Expo. Wallace responded there is currently no adequate workspace for additional staff. It was highlighted that we are now a team of 105 combined and we’ll need to take the time in July/August to reorganize offices and add flex space modeled after the OCC and Metro.
- Chair Stoudamire-Phillips requested to attend the Expo in-person all staff meeting tomorrow at 9am and highlighted liaison roles for additional support during this time of transition.
- Commissioner Palm asked for more information regarding vendor communications around transitions. Stroud responded Rotchford communicated with vendors, clients, and key stakeholders directly in mid-April, Stroud followed up after that, and then Wallace reached out for introductions and to share contact info.
- Commissioner Malán-González asked why MERC wasn’t more involved in the decision-making process. Stroud highlighted the known challenges facing the venues and under Metro COO authority, difficult staffing decisions were made. Stroud acknowledged and apologized that this was not communicated more directly with Commissioners prior to implementation.
- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff highlighted the 33 layoffs within MERC and asked how many positions were affected at Metro. Stroud believes the number was 69 for Metro and 35 for the venues. For context, not all departments in Metro saw a decrease in staffing depending on individual revenue streams.
- Commissioner Palm acknowledged receipt of the letter sent from the Expo Future Historical Significance and Memorialization Committee Co-Chairs and requested to reaffirm Metro’s commitment to moving forward and ensuring their voices are heard. Stroud agreed and confirmed that he along with COO Madrigal and Chair Stoudamire-Phillips will be meeting with the HSMC Co-Chairs to discuss further.

Financial Update

Ashley Sloan, MERC Finance Manager

- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff highlighted the zero-fund balance – do we have an emergency plan in place for an unexpected failure? Stroud responded that Expo falls within the larger MERC fund and can be managed from there. Additionally, we are transferring \$400,000 in FY26 to seed a fund balance and the operations collaboration changes result in \$700,000 of net operating positive revenue next year to continue to seed a fund balance. If we were to have a critical failure, we would have a conversation with Metro on a plan to resolve.
- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff requested a meeting to look at future budgets post-merger. Stroud responded we are not merging budgets at this time until we can study data and make informed decisions around possible future changes.

Attachments: [MERC Finance Report](#)

Venue Business Reports

Oregon Convention Center and Portland Expo Center

Cindy Wallace Executive Director, shared event updates, Expo and OCC venue manager recommendation work for merging teams, series of Expo Staff Town Hall events, Venue Collaboration project plan update, recent Travel Portland sales mission event held in Chicago, and DC sales mission will be held next week.

- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff cited a recent article highlighting that California is expected to see a 9% decrease in international visitors and asked for more information around international conference attendance in Oregon. Wallace responded that we haven't seen any cancellations due to low attendance but do anticipate impacts from lower attended conferences. Overall, it will depend on the association. We will have more data around this topic as we enter FY26.

Portland's 5 Centers for the Arts

Rachael Lembo Executive Director, shared booking and programming updates, Culture and Community Department Art Show showing now, volunteer celebration event, Director of Operations final interviews have been completed, and closed with a Performing Arts Venue Workgroup update.

- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff praised Lembo on her work with the P5 Advisory Committee

Consent Agenda

- **Consideration of the March 5, 2025, MERC Meeting Minutes**
This item was approved.

Attachment: [MERC Meeting Minutes](#)

First Opportunity Target Area (FOTA) Audit

Metro Auditor Brian Evans, Angela Owens

- Stroud provided a response noting management agrees with the recommendations. The 6 recommendations that focus on stabilizing the program include clarifying roles and responsibilities, updating program income eligibility, improve data collection and reporting, and deepening relationships with community-based organizations relied on for program outcomes. Our timeline for stakeholder engagement is proposed to begin after a stabilization period of 2 years.

Attachments: [FOTA Audit](#)

Travel Portland 2nd Quarter Report

Megan Conway, President & CEO; James Jessie, Chief Sales Officer; Jackie Hagan, Director of Communications & Public Relations; Desiree Everett, VP of Convention Sales & Services

- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff requested the 2025 *Portland, City on the Rise* messaging playbook
- Councilor Rosenthal asked about recent tourism impacts around Portland's status as a sanctuary city. Megan Conway responded that she hasn't received any questions or comments on the topic from clients or partners around the country, but they are monitoring. Desiree Everett added one group did reach out and shared their relief around our status due to their attendees being Indigenous.

- Commissioner Penilton cited the 10% international business piece and asked what that translates to in dollars. Conway responded she need to get back with the international spend breakdown.
- Commissioner Penilton asked if we have seen any Covid-era cancellations rebooking their events. Jessie responded we are starting to see some rebooking now but did highlight the National Conference on Race and Equity had planned on hosting in Portland every 4-5 years were forced to cancel everything and close due to recent federal government actions.
- Commissioner Oxley asked Travel Portland to identify a consistent consumer sentiment around Portland that continues to be an issue. Conway shared that the Quarterly Consumer Seniment Report shows that general negative media and continued perception issues continue to linger.
- Councilor Rosenthal asked if there are issues around public transportation that need to be addressed. Conway shared they are tracking and understand TriMet is struggling with ridership and safety perceptions. We do give convention attendees transit passes to move around the city.

Attachments: [Travel Portland 2nd Quarter Report](#)

Expo Future Project Update

Craig Stroud, General Manager, Visitor Venues

- Commissioner Kryz-Rusoff highlighted the uncertainty around project and budget planning with unknowns around tariffs and other federal actions.

Attachments: [Expo Future Update](#)

Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Stoudamire Phillips adjourned the meeting at 2:25 p.m.

- *Minutes submitted by Amy Nelson*