

Meeting Minutes

Meeting details:

Meeting: Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission Meeting
Date: September 3, 2025
Time: 12:30pm - 2:30 pm
Place: Oregon Convention Center, Room F150 and Zoom

Commissioners present:

Chair Karis Stoudamire-Phillips, Damien Hall, Dañel Malán-González, Chris Oxley, and David Penilton

Commissioners excused:

Deidra-Krys-Rusoff, Deanna Palm

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
- Bill Crane, Executive Director, Portland Piano International shared concerns about high rental fees, appearance, and signage at Portland's Centers for the Arts

Commission / Council Liaison Communication

- Commissioner Penilton congratulated Expo staff on the success of the recent FoodieLand event
- Council Rosenthal reported on the required Regional Housing Needs Analysis and transportation package

General Manager Communications

Craig Stroud provided the following updates:

- Reported on recent visits to Climate Pledge Arena, Epicenter Summit, Hillsboro Hops Stadium, Travel Portland Hotel Symposium
- Craig Stroud and Rachael Lembo are part of the delegation travelling to Minneapolis participating in the Best Practices trip in October
- The October MERC meeting will be canceled. We will provide written updates and an invitation for a capital project site tour at OCC on October 1st

Financial Update

Ashley Sloan, MERC Finance Manager, presented the FY25 Year-End Results

- TLT: OCC \$770K below budget, P5 \$108K below
- OCC: Revenue 3% below, expenses 3% above
- P5: Revenue 1% above, expenses 4% below
- Expo: Revenue and expenses 2% below

Attachment: [Finance Report](#)

Venue Business Reports

Portland's 5 Centers for the Arts

Rachael Lembo, Executive Director, provided the following updates:

- Completed \$6M roof project and power upgrades
- Cultural Arts Grant program has launched
- Ongoing transition planning with City of Portland
 - Commissioner Hall asked if Metro would have a role on the City's steering committee. Lembo responded that Metro will not be directly involved in this next phase of the Future of Large-Scale Performing Arts project
 - Chair Stoudamire-Phillips asked if anyone could apply to serve on the committee. Lembo responded yes, they are looking for expertise in urban planning, venue operations, real estate development, finance, and fundraising. Conflict of interest concerns were outlined.
 - Commissioner Malán-González asked if the committee would report out to MERC. Lembo responded that updates will be shared
 - Commissioner Hall stated there might be some benefit of an informal liaison role for MERC representation

Oregon Convention Center and Portland Expo Center

Cindy Wallace Executive Director provided the following updates:

- FoodieLand: 40K attendees, \$470K revenue
- Bee Project: 75 lbs. of honey harvested
- Sales team integration is complete
- Staff development and facility upgrades ongoing
 - Commissioner Penilton asked how the team is adjusting to changes around operational efficiency. Wallace responded that staff are adapting well, and management support has increased

Matt Uchtman, Senior Director of Facilities Operations shared an Expo Solar Project update:

- Benefits outlined: \$1.6M savings for low-income households, \$300K for Expo, 28% electricity offset
 - Commissioner Oxley asked about the lifespan of the roof system. Uchtman responded there is a 30-year warranty, and it was just inspected
 - Councilor Rosenthal asked about the completion timeline. Uchtman responded that planning is underway, and they are aiming for early 2026

Consent Agenda

- **Consideration of the July 2, 2025, MERC Meeting Minutes**
This item was approved.

Attachment: [Meeting Minutes](#)

Action Agenda

- **Resolution No. 25-06:** For the purpose of increasing income thresholds for Metro's First Opportunity Target Area hiring program
Craig Stroud, General Manager, Visitor Venues presented
- Recommends methodology to update annual income thresholds using CPI increased by an escalator for the years that the University of Washington, Oregon Self-Sufficiency Index is not published
- New thresholds: Households (1–2): \$81,660; Households (3+): \$104,660
 - Commissioner Malán-González was surprised that there wasn't already a fixed annual increase. Stroud responded that the CPI varies so using the base amount of CPI with a 60% inflator smooths adjustments

Chair Stoudamire-Phillips called for a vote on Resolution No. 25-06.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hall, seconded by Commissioner Malán-González, that Resolution 25-06 be adopted. The motion passed by the following vote:

Aye: 5 Stoudamire-Phillips, Hall, Malán-González, Oxley, and Penilton

Attachments: [Resolution No 25-06](#)
[Staff Report](#)
[Attachment A: FOTA Audit Report](#)

Levy Annual Update

Ed Strong, Vice President of Hospitality & Strategy at Levy Restaurants provided an update with the following highlights:

- Workforce partnerships with local schools
- Orbit Café remodeled; AI checkout added
- Sustainability: 48K containers reused
- FY26 Plans: Expand marketplace model, new concepts
 - Chair Stoudamire-Phillips thanked Levy for all they do in the venues and the community
 - Councilor Rosenthal asked if Portland is more open to innovative changes due to the strong food culture. Strong responded yes, they are committed to doing things differently and pushing change
 - Chair Stoudamire-Phillips asked if it is easier to do plated meals than short order. Strong responded that short order is more labor intensive
 - Stroud asked about convention client behavior changes. Strong shared that client budget cuts are shifting risks to venues

Travel Portland Quarterly Report

James Jessie, Chief Sales Officer, Jon Hixon, Senior Vice President of Business Strategy, and Desiree Everett, Vice President of Convention Sales and Services presented the report with the following highlights:

- FY25 Highlights: 332K room nights booked, strong ROI, high satisfaction scores
- Marketing: Positive media sentiment, influencer engagement
- Challenges: Perception, budget constraints, need for more citywide conventions
 - Commissioner Penilton asked what the top challenges are. Everett shared perception, budget uncertainty, and maintaining workforce
 - Commissioner Oxley highlighted ongoing challenges in North Portland affecting Expo, Delta Park, and PIR
 - Councilor Rosenthal asked if the discrepancy between a 3% drop in TLT with a 14% increase in rooms due to lowered room rates. Hixon responded that it is partially responsible but clarified that the number of booked rooms are spread out over several years
 - Commissioner Malán-González asked about impacts of the newly remodeled airport. Hixon shared that the design and amenities have been well received by the marketplace
 - Commissioner Penilton asked about Airbnb impacts. Everett shared we do have tax collection from Airbnb. Jessie added they are performing well and are comparable to airport hotels
 - Chair Stoudamire-Phillips asked if there is a Safe Connect program for the Expo and Delta Park area. Jessie responded not currently, but there are ongoing discussions with North Portland partners. Chair highlighted that Marriott owns 5 properties in the area so they may be a good potential partner for a safety program

Attachments: [Travel Portland 4th Quarter 2024-25 Report](#)

Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Stoudamire Phillips adjourned the meeting at 2:32 p.m.

- *Minutes submitted by Amy Nelson*