

Metro
2024-25 Public Hearing
Minutes
600 NE Grand Avenue
Portland Oregon
Thursday, May 30, 2024
10:30 am

Present:

TSCC:

Chair Harmony Quiroz, Vice-Chair Mark Wubbold, Commissioner Matt Donahue, Commissioner Tod Burton, Commissioner Allison Lugo Knapp, Executive Director Allegra Willhite, Budget Analyst Tunie Betschart, Research Intern Caitlin Dougherty

Absent: None

Metro Council:

Metro Council Members: Metro Deputy Council President Duncan Hwang, Councilor Juan Carlos Gonzalez, Councilor Christine Lewis, Councilor Mary Nolan, and Councilor Ashton Simpson were in attendance.

Metro Staff:

Attorney Carrie MacLaren, Chief Operating Officer Marissa Madrigal, Deputy Chief Operating Officer Andrew Scott, Chief Financial Officer Brian Kennedy, Regional Housing Director Patricia Rojas, Fiscal and Tax Policy Director Josh Harwood and Director of Convention Center Craig Stroud, Strategic Initiatives Manager Rosalynn Greene

Chair Harmony Quiroz opened the public hearing by welcoming everyone to the hearing and briefly describing the duties and responsibilities of the TSCC. She reviewed the hearing process and stated that the hearing was to engage the district leadership and provide an opportunity for the public to comment before Metro adopts its budget. She asked those present to introduce themselves and asked the TSCC Commissioners to state if they have business relationships with the district that could be perceived as a conflict of interest with Metro.

Metro Deputy Council President Duncan Hwang recognized Metro's financial team during introductions for their leadership during the budget process. He briefly recapped Metro's activities, saying the Fiscal year 2024-25 budget was developed to support three key strategic targets adopted by the Metro Council with input from subject matter experts and community members. The budget prioritizes housing for all, a restored economy, and meeting climate and resilience goals. Metro's commitment to and investment in racial equity underpins these strategic targets. The adopted strategic targets have helped staff develop a budget that meets Metro's vision for the future while supporting the critical services Metro provides to the greater Portland region. The council and the entire Metro staff are committed to delivering financial responsibility and transparency to the residents of the region, whether it is bringing people closer to nature, managing the garbage and recycling system, helping the region stay smart about urban growth, creating housing options for those facing homelessness, or providing venues for people that

have a celebrated culture, and importantly to watch polar bears play. He thanked TSCC for the opportunity to discuss the budget and said they look forward to the questions.

Following introductions and the brief overview, Chair Quiroz asked if anyone would like to give testimony, stating each would be limited to three minutes.

Chair Quiroz asked Executive Director Willhite if any written testimony had been received or if any other members of the public wished to testify. Ms. Willhite said no written testimony had been received, and no one had signed up to give testimony.

Chair Quiroz suggested moving to the TSCC questions.

TSCC Questions:

Commissioner Allison Lugo Knapp asked the following questions:

Metro is in the unique position of leading, coordinating, and aligning affordable housing development and homeless services for the region. What have been your biggest successes in this coordination work so far? What are the largest challenges you have encountered?

Councilor Duncan Hwang said homeless services systems and affordable housing development efforts had been bifurcated for decades. But thanks to voters across the region, Metro and the jurisdictional partners are now in the unique position of ushering in a new and coordinated system that can serve people experiencing homelessness with permanent housing.

One of the major successes is the integration of rental assistance and services funded by the 2020 Supportive Housing Services (SHS) fund within affordable housing developments funded by the 2018 Affordable Housing Bond. More than half of the 52 development projects funded by the bond include plans to integrate SHS-funded services.

This includes the Hattie Redmond project in North Portland, which provides 60 units of permanent supportive housing (PSH) designed for individuals and couples with disabilities who are exiting homelessness and request culturally specific services within the Black/African American community. This project was co-developed by Home Forward and the Urban League of Portland, with capital funding from the Affordable Housing Bond and long-term rental assistance and wraparound services funding from SHS. The Hattie Redmond is one of several PSH initiatives that have braided SHS and Affordable Housing Bond funding to deliver a holistic approach to advancing housing stability that integrates housing and services.

One of the significant challenges is that with the AH Bond being nearly fully committed, the pipeline of new affordable units will dry up. This puts the integrated system Metro is currently building at risk, which is why the agency has started discussing expanding the use of SHS funds to include affordable housing.

What processes, approaches, or techniques have been most effective in this work?

Metro's role in regional housing is relatively new; the Housing Department was created in fall 2022. The approach is to support partners' implementation and guide growth towards a truly regional program. The department now consists of 46 FTE, working on:

- Public/private partnership models
- Coordination and partnership between jurisdictions that work towards regional goals yet are responsive to local needs
- Oversight and monitoring of partners' work in both AHB and SHS
- Developing the region's capacity to provide housing services through training, job

- fairs, conferences, and technical assistance
- Supporting regional alignment in areas such as landlord recruitment, employee recruitment and retention, and healthcare system alignment, directed by the Tri-County Planning Body
- Policies to support integration of AHB and SHS and with broader Metro programs and policies, such as the development of a Regional Housing Strategy with Planning, Development, and Research

Chair Harmony Quiroz asked these follow-up questions:

The public is starting to see some change – is that perception of moving the needle on houseless population true? How far are we from the end goal?

Councilor Hwang answered that Metro has been seeing a lot of great press articles in recent months, with many jurisdictional partners taking the lead. In Clackamas County, houselessness has been down 65% since 2020, and Washington County eliminated all long-term encampments. So, progress is being made, and data supports that. The agency is invested in continuing that momentum and progress, ensuring that housing needs are addressed at all levels and that people are supported as they transition from homelessness into permanent housing.

Commissioner Mark Wubbold asked the following questions:

Affordable housing is a clear need in our community, and as we just discussed, Metro has a pivotal role in moving progress forward. The Housing Funding Stakeholder Advisory Table held its final meeting in May. Can you share any of the recommendations that came from that process? What are the next steps?

Councilor Juan Carlos Gonzalez said the Stakeholder Advisory Table's input is one of several channels that the COO will consider in developing a housing funding recommendation to the Metro Council along with community engagement, advice, and input from regional oversight committees; conversations with public partners and practitioners; and research into best practices, revenue forecasts, and public opinion.

Though there are areas of difference, the Stakeholder Advisory Table and these other input channels have had some areas of broad alignment. These include the following:

- Ensuring any housing investments focus on those with the greatest need – specifically those experiencing chronic homelessness or at greatest risk of it
- Extending long-term certainty for partners, providers, and community by expanding allowable uses for SHS dollars to include housing and either extending or eliminating the 2030 sunset
- Exploring tax relief options that keep the measure focused on higher-income households as incomes rise with inflation
- Improving oversight structures to be more transparent, accountable, and able to correct when necessary.

Over the next several weeks, Metro will be engaged in close discussions with public partners and other stakeholders to better understand how these areas of alignment can fit into an effective recommendation, which the COO could bring to Council in June.

So, you will bring this set of recommendations to the council when they are finalized?

Ms. Marissa Madrigal said, as Councilor Gonzalez noted, this is one of the many channels Metro has opened to seek information. The agency has been engaging with the community, conducting technical analyses on housing investments, and making financial forecasts. All

that will come together in a recommendation to answer the questions, "What is Metro's role in continuing to fund affordable housing? What is the best path forward to ensure that continues to happen?"

As the 2018 bond is fully committed, Metro mustn't have an interruption in funding because the pipeline is starting to fall apart. The infrastructure has been built to make sure that affordable housing projects can be built and people take other jobs. So, the stakes are high.

She said she is encouraged by the alignment they see, not just from stakeholders but in public opinion research that Metro has completed. She anticipates a robust recommendation to the council.

How does the need vary across the three counties? What trends do you see for each county going forward?

Councilor Gonzalez said they will be conversing with the region's leaders to decide what is next. The region has experienced this extraordinary moment of abundant resources to inject public dollars into:

- 1) subsidizing affordable units
- 2) building this wraparound service
- 3) helping support people who are exiting chronic homelessness.

Each county experiences homelessness differently. The agency continues to find ways to respect those differences while also building a strong regional system with regional priorities, regional data, regional programs, regional workforce, and investments, all of which have come up through the current oversight and planning committees. With local implementation plans that have been in place, those are things that the agency knows they want to continue.

The Stakeholder Advisory Table is a broader conversation that is not about disrupting and interrupting the excellent work that is happening. It's also about recognizing that the agency is collecting more resources than we anticipated, as we foresee the growth of the need for housing production and the horizon for homeless services in the future, as well as what areas for programs and change are available. That's the process that Metro has tried to engage in, to work with each county partner on that.

Chair Quiroz asked these follow-up questions:

One of the significant conversations last year was about the ability to spend the supportive housing dollars, the effectiveness and efficiency of getting the money out the door to partners, and making that happen. We see fantastic progress on the affordable housing side of things, building more units than anticipated. Is the drive that started last year to get the money out the door efficiently continuing? And not only to get the money out the door but to meet specific needs. Are we doing it in practical ways, targeted to outcomes and things like that?

Councilor Gonzalez said the agency has built a huge program from the ground up. These things take a long time to ramp up. That's something the council wrestles with. They want to communicate those success stories in a way that's authentic to each county and each of the districts. That's the real challenge and the actual area of the work.

Ms. Madrigal said Metro does have evidence that county spending is accelerating. There will not continue to be a large amount of money left on the table. What is still being analyzed is the effectiveness of that spending. So, is the agency employing the right strategies for the right acuity level? What is their success rate with the different programs the counties have implemented? These are still unanswered questions.

One thing that has come up at the stakeholder table and other tables is the accountability and transparency piece. The system was built to get the funds out the door. It's an emergency. It's urgent. Get it out the door. The analysis is all looking backward. There's interest in looking at governance as being transparent about the plan and the outcomes and strategies used upfront so that everyone follows the process instead of saying all this money was spent. What happened? Regardless of what happens, whether there's a referral to the ballot or not, there has to be a conversation about transparency and accountability.

Commissioner Matt Donahue asked the following questions:

It appears Metro's bond strategy is to maintain a steady tax rate for taxpayers, resulting in a type of "revolving bond" program where you return to voters again and again to fund significant scale capital across the Metro region. While we appreciate the work to keep taxes from rising even higher, the rate is only one factor, and Metro is borrowing large amounts of money for parks, the zoo, and affordable housing. How do you prioritize among these asks for the voters? At what point do you start to consider offering tax relief by NOT borrowing additional dollars? How do you ensure you are being transparent with taxpayers about your bond strategies?

Councilor Mary Nolan said that Metro starts by delivering services and facilities the region needs and desires. Then figure out how to pay for them. They don't say, "Oh, well, we've got this capacity out here, so how do we fill that bucket?" There will probably not be a moment when Metro has checked every box as being done because public activities and public services are an ongoing requirement. The facilities wear out, become inadequate, and become unsafe over 50 years. The comment was made that Metro should consider reducing or providing tax relief. Certainly, the agency ensures adequate, measurable, objective targets and results to deliver services.

But tax relief in and of itself isn't the goal. Having a tax system, including levies, tax bases, and bond measures that are adequate to the needs and desires of the region, progressive to the extent that Metro can make it stable. Those are the things Metro is looking for.

So, to specifically look at your question, Metro prioritizes predictability in predicting debt service. Still, the strategy is best described as being responsive to the voters and investing in public services and facilities - bonds only in facilities that matter to them. Every decision this council makes to refer something to the ballot results from a prioritization exercise conducted with partners, the general public, community-led organizations, groups representing taxpayers, and groups representing employers. Public involvement is robust here at Metro, and that's an important point to make on the record.

You talked in the previous question about housing, the stakeholder advisory group. Metro has a culture of engagement from an early age. The agency works hard at asking in advance what's needed and how to do it, how to structure it, and how to sequence it, instead of at the end, especially with the time-limited bond measure, saying, "Well, we spent the money. Did we get what the voters wanted out of it?" This combination of capital and services is a perfect example of the current stakeholders' roundtable on housing.

The zoo bond resulted from an intentional investment in parts of the zoo that were not covered by the updates funded by the 2008 zoo bond measure. The zoo is the most popular ticketed venue in the state of Oregon. It is a pivotal point for the tourism economy. It is also an opportunity to lead the stewardship of the region, the climate, and the animals with which the area shares this space. Research there supports protecting engaged species and reviving species on the brink of extinction. A lot of what the agency is anticipating providing

through this bond measure has to do with access to the zoo for people with a variety of abilities and disabilities, reaching out to the entire regional school groups, making sure as the agency balances all of that, it welcomes people of all income brackets to the zoo, all cultures, make sure that it's not just responsive to them but something that resonates for them.

She closed by saying those who have been doing this for eight years have watched Metro's bucket of responsibilities explode in those eight years. Councilors and staff are doing their best to balance all the interests because all those additional responsibilities the voters have asked the agency to undertake did not come with funding until voters approved the affordable housing bond measure. Metro is delivering results while the agency is figuring out how to balance priorities among disparate responsibilities.

Chair Quiroz offered the following explanation:

I want to provide additional context to the reason for the question. We see a trend among districts with rolling bonds. It is not that there isn't a need. We talk about the need with folks as well. We also hear from our neighbors in conversation, such as what's next, where's the end, and what it looks like. Then there are conversations statewide around tax relief livability, where taxes fall. That's an important context to provide. There's a recognition of the need. We want to ensure that we're conversing about how those priorities are set, and decisions are made in the greater context of our current trends.

Commissioner Wubbold added:

It is also in the name of the organization we serve, the Tax Supervising and Conservation Commission. We take the request for and use of taxes very seriously.

Chair Quiroz asked the following questions:

Four years since the pandemic started, our region has changed substantially. What trends have you seen with Metro Parks and Nature Area usage? How have community needs changed? And how do you plan to change or adjust services to serve community needs?

Councilor Ashton Simpson said the pandemic brought into sharp focus many inequities experienced in the region and a deep desire to protect and connect with nature, parks, and green spaces. Based on car counts after the 2020/2021 initial dips in visitation, Metro has seen numbers return to pre-pandemic levels and steady visitation at the two new nature parks opened in 2022.

As part of the outreach and engagement for the 2019 Parks and Nature bond and 2022 Operating Levy, the agency is aware of a growing request for access to nature in several areas. That shows up as requests for access to decisions that shape new parks or natural spaces, access to programming that meets the culturally specific needs of communities, and access to the more significant benefits that natural spaces provide. Metro has and will continue to incorporate feedback and ongoing listening to communities. This will help ensure this process of responsive community engagement transitions toward full collaboration and co-creation of outcomes.

Parks has worked to encourage underserved groups to engage with park services. Are you seeing success? How have park visitor demographics shifted (or not) in recent years?

Councilor Simpson said Parks and Nature continues to make progress in several efforts to build community resilience and access to programming and natural space. The department facilitates several programs to empower community organizations and non-profits through subsidized or special access to programs or spaces to maintain and build connections to

the natural spaces they steward. While these efforts do not easily translate into car count data, Parks and Nature are exploring ways to collect demographic data for park use unobtrusively, as well as participation programs or community engagement efforts.

He gave a personal experience, saying he was the executive director at Oregon Walks. They were starting a walking program here to get Black folks active. It was based on several reports, Walking While Black. Access to nature was a significant component of that report that came out. They took that data and said, "How do we give folks access to nature?"

Working with the staff here at Metro, they gave the group access to nature and safety equipment PPE to be along the river and took them to Oxbow Park. They gave them free parking passes. They had a park ranger on staff in case anything happened or anyone needed assistance. That level of care from Metro staff showed him that the region is moving in the right direction and trying to ensure everybody has access to those natural spaces. This agency has done right and continues to do right by communities of color.

What progress have you made in identifying sustainable funding for parks operations? Are there specific permanent funding sources you are pursuing?

Councilor Simpson said the overall answer is they don't. But Metro will continue to talk to folks and get a re-up on measures and levies. Staff are having conversations internally and externally about how the agency is doing this, and hopefully, when you come next year, the council will have a better answer.

Commissioner Tod Burton asked the following questions:

Your budget describes continued challenges faced by visitor venues and notes that staff are working with partners to "improve perceptions of safety and bring more travel back to Portland." What does this entail? How will you convince people to select Portland as a destination of choice?

Councilor Christine Lewis said Portland's national reputation for safety and livability conditions continues to suppress future business. To overcome this challenge, OCC, with Travel Portland and the broader Portland hotel community, have put in place the following strategies and actions:

- 1) Increased Sales and Outreach - OCC and Travel Portland's sales teams continue robust tradeshow and sales mission travel and outreach to potential clients to highlight all Portland has to offer and directly address client or decision-maker concerns about livability issues.
- 2) Aggressive Promotions - Increased hotel room rebates, complimentary services, and rental discounts are offered to convention clients who book by established dates for defined future periods.
- 3) General and Targeted Marketing and Public Relations – Travel Portland is leading strategies to deliver marketing materials to general convention delegates and materials targeted to professional convention planners and convention site selection decision-makers who are typically association board members or C-suite executives. These strategies will increase awareness of key Portland attributes, attractions, and information to address livability and safety issues.
- 4) Convention District Safe Connect Program – Anticipated to start July 1, Downtown Clean and Safe will field public safety coordinators in the areas immediately surrounding OCC and on the routes to the Lloyd hotels hosting convention delegates. This program will provide a public coordinator presence seven days a week for the next year, augmented by an event-specific increase to create a safer environment for visitors and reduce the likelihood of negative experiences. Similar programs were launched in

the past year for the downtown hotel district, the neighborhood immediately south of OCC, the Central Eastside, and by TriMet through their Reimagining Public Safety & Security on Transit program.

How is it going with the new convention center and the new hotel? Is the Enhanced Presence Program in place now, or is something going forward?

Councilor Lewis said the Enhanced Presence Program starts July 1. It is modeled off enhanced presence programs in at least three other parts of town that have been rolled out this past year.

Given the challenges, notably the pandemic, do you have any comments on how the convention center and the new hotel have done? Anything you can add to that?

Councilor Lewis said the hotel faced some challenges. Metro celebrated its opening three months before people quit getting on airplanes. However, they had completed thorough modeling with the worst-case scenario, an earthquake and recession happening simultaneously. That's remarkably similar to a pandemic. Bond repayment has gone okay. The hotel owners are hoping more people will come, but from the public finance side, it's solid.

Chair Quiroz asked these follow-up questions:

Are you saying we're still three to four years from a return to pre-pandemic levels or to the predicted rate of what we expected? What was that expectation?

Councilor Lewis said that's the timeline Metro is looking at. Mr. Craig Stroud noted that it was specific to the Convention Center and that they had a couple of relatively robust years. That's because of the work that was done pre-pandemic. With the hotel coming online, clients were actively booking. The center was booked so far out in the future that it is now just getting through the tail end of that business pipeline.

However, during the pandemic, Portland was not as effective as other cities at booking this year, next year, 2026, and 2027. So there has been a bit of diligent work to try to find clients booking on a short-term basis, which is abnormal but happening a little more regularly, to bridge this dip.

When you look at the three to five-year window, Metro believes the center will reach 2019 levels and 2019 dollars in the next year or two. The challenge is the expenses are not in 2019 dollars. It will be three to four years until the region will probably hit that hospitality level.

The Convention Center hotel performs arguably better than other hotels because it gets so much of Metro's business, in addition to the Moda Center business, and it's a brand-new hotel in that mid-luxury scale. It is performing well. The bonding is being repaid through site-specific transit lodging taxes. However, the district continues to press forward and create a better future for hospitality in Portland.

Chair Quiroz asked the following questions:

First, congratulations to the voters on passing the new zoo bond! As part of the bond, we understand funds are planned to improve facilities and enhance educational opportunities at the zoo. Pre-pandemic, the zoo had many educational opportunities and programs, and we sense that these may not have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Is this accurate? Are there fewer educational programs than before? Now that the bond has passed, what does the future of education look like at the zoo?

Councilor Lewis explained that the Oregon Zoo is the most significant environmental education facility in Oregon, serving 1.3 million visitors annually. The Oregon Zoo has a long history of curating the entire zoo experience as educational, whether you read the thoughtful exhibit interpretive signage, join a keeper chat, or have a meaningful interaction with the trained volunteers or paid Zoo Naturalists on zoo grounds. These in-person experiences are designed with the guests learning something new and having a positive experiential learning experience.

It is accurate there are fewer staff and fewer programs than in 2019 in the education division. The agency took this post-pandemic time to focus on rebuilding educational programs and reducing the volume of programs and participants based on six months of needs assessment with community involvement and understanding of zoo resources and capacity. New education programming is focused on deeper learning with underserved communities and measuring educational outcomes.

The bond will allow the Oregon Zoo to take interpretive signage and messages to the next level using best practices data, formative assessments, and front-end evaluation to determine how to become more effective at communicating the conservation and animal well-being messages to the guests.

If you're on the web page looking for camp, you'll probably never find it again. She said to go over to OMSI to sign up through Zoo Camp. Metro decided they could do the same or more by doing this. So, they are no longer replicating the infrastructure of camp signup, and camp management is still getting kids on-site in the summer.

Besides signage and communication pieces, are there other capital expenditures related to education we should expect to see from the bond?

Councilor Lewis said the 2008 bond built the new education center. Metro is not going to replicate that work. There's not going to be a new building for education.

Commissioner Burton asked the following questions:

Solid waste fee increases have been relatively steady in recent years, in line with a model prioritizing predictability. We understand a Waste Fee Policy Taskforce was convened to consider the switch from the prior model to a total cost recovery model. We have a few questions on this topic. First, can you please explain what full cost recovery means? How do you determine appropriate service levels when some functions are discretionary?

Councilor Nolan said that to understand the fees for solid waste and recycling, waste prevention, and environmental services. The department manages this for Metro in two buckets. One of the improvements staff implemented a year ago at the beginning of this fiscal year is to separate the reserves and ending fund balance from those two functions. They are the operation of the transfer stations and regional services designed to help the region reduce its waste to landfill.

In the context of the transfer stations, Metro operates two major transfer stations in the region. There are privately owned transfer stations that serve the same function within the area, and Metro regulates them. They do not operate them. The cost of service applies specifically to the operations of those transfer stations.

There had been some concern, probably some reality, that there had been a little bit of sloppy handling between the operations funds and the regional system funds in years past. Staff led the way to make sure that doesn't happen anymore. Metro looks at efficiencies in transfer station operations. The leadership team there is good at ensuring that the agency

is using equipment as efficiently as possible, using personnel as efficiently as possible, and meeting all of the obligations to the regulators, which is DEQ, plus employee safety and other factors.

On the regional system fee side, those funds are collected for every ton of wet and landfill waste, delivered either to the transfer stations or to any privately owned transfer stations the agency regulates. They are used for recycling programs like Rid Patrol, which cleans up rights-of-way. All services are part of the long-term vision of reducing the tonnage of garbage that goes to landfills. Metro is focusing on reducing, reusing, and recycling. Those funds allow them to run those programs.

So, one of the task force recommendations was affordability. So, could you comment on how affordability affects your thinking about establishing these fees?

Councilor Nolan said there are other priorities the task force recommended. They include

- equity
- accessible systems
- healthy environment
- fair affordability

The way Metro considers affordability is staff taking those four directives -- affordability being one of them -- and tries to balance them, has conversations before developing a specific proposal with the council and, gets some input, then brings the council a recommendation based on those priorities. The council almost always makes a tweak or two to it before approving it.

Another part of the task force work is for Metro to increase its outreach about how these fees are established and educate the public about what they cover. It sounds like the task force was talking about what does that do. What services and benefits are you providing?

Councilor Nolan explained that to get to the vision of reducing waste and providing affordable services, Metro is on a mission to help people understand that the services, their local garbage collector, garbage and recycling collector, is to reduce the wet waste and move to thinking about affordability or thinking about what they pay for those services as they're paying for the results. It will, at least initially, increase costs paid for reuse, for example, or recycling materials because, over the last ten years, the worldwide market for recyclable materials has just fallen apart. Metro wants people to be thinking, "I'm paying for responsible, environmentally appropriate removal of things I am no longer using in my house or my business." I am not thinking, "I am paying for a 90-gallon can," but rather, "I am paying to have things removed and taken care of responsibly." That's going to require quite a shift.

The district adds educational material directly on Metro's website and through the local jurisdiction partners. Metro sets tipping fees for 24 cities, three counties, and private and non-profit participants.

Commissioner Lugo Knapp asked this follow-up question?

With the added services and the introduction of Ridwell, are you seeing any change in the amount of waste? Have you seen a shift in anything that is going to landfills?

Ms. Rosalynn Greene said they have a new study from DEQ called Our Waste Composition Study. This study will show trends. There is a vast, monumental legislation called the Recycling Modernization Act, which expands services for everyone throughout the region, both at the curb and recycling depots, which Metro has been discussing in the system facilities plan.

Changes are coming. Metro regularly works with DEQ to assess the waste stream and is excited that those results will come out soon.

Commissioner Burton asked this follow-up question?

Can you talk a little bit about EPR?

Ms. Rosalynn Greene said that the EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility Law) or the Recycling Modernization Act is a producer responsibility law. Oregonians are fortunate to have many of those laws in this state.

Paint care is one, and Oregon e-cycle is another, just updated. There is a new mattress EPR law. Essentially, these provide regulations for holding companies accountable for the end of life of their products. The Recycling Modernizing Act focuses explicitly on packaging and plastic packaging that has huge negative impacts worldwide.

The focal point of that legislation is responsible for certified end markets so that the public can be sure that when material goes into Metro's recycling bin, it doesn't negatively impact other countries. This is a groundbreaking new law. Oregon is the third state in the country to have it. All eyes are on Oregon and what agencies do with that law because a significant overhaul of the recycling system is needed. It's been outdated for a while. Metro is excited about that new law.

Matt Donahue asked the following questions:

Last year, you shared that the Urban Growth Boundary review (UGB) will have a steering committee as part of the process, a new approach to improve transparency. What is the status of this steering committee? Where are you in this process? Has this approach been successful so far?

Councilor Gonzalez said Metro made that commitment and is following through on that. The primary goal of these committees, which is the Urban Growth Roundtable (UGR) and a Youth Advisory Table, has been around the demystification of the urban growth process at Metro, which includes modeling, a lot of data, a lot of laws, and precedents and committed staff that want to have a transparent process.

The UGR has met nine times. They have two remaining meetings. The UGR has formed a lot of different perspectives on urban growth issues. It has been very fruitful discussions in conversations, really poking around assumptions and ways that the region can continue to make improvements.

The youth cohort is a new and diverse group from across the region. They've had six meetings. They will have a tour around the urban growth boundary this July. Not just learning about urban growth management but also seeing its implications and benefits and the work Metro has done to oversee the urban growth boundary. Metro Council feels that these two advisory committees have tremendously succeeded in demystifying and improving the process. They have to engage new audiences, bring forth new ideas, make people feel included in the process, and define the shared future as a region for urban growth. They're approaching their end fairly soon as Metro approaches a potential decision. Metro Council feels they have been successful.

Can you tell us about some of the current pressures on the UGB? What challenges are you facing?

Councilor Gonzalez said the tensions are about land for housing and jobs. It is also about conservation and protecting forests, farmlands, and green spaces. Metro takes an earnest, data-driven approach to understanding how to bring the most of the land inside the

boundary. Metro's decision is guided by a firm commitment to making the most of that land. When a decision is made to expand the boundary, the council will ensure that there are clear regional goals around that benefit the local community and support regional goals.

Metro's focus is on continuing to have as transparent a process as possible, making sure people feel decisions are right for the region's future, using the feedback received from community, practitioners, and industry experts, and trying to weigh those trade-offs.

Commissioner Wubbold asked these follow-up questions:

I've always thought Metro was a brilliant solution to regional problems; urban growth boundaries are one example. Other areas don't have Urban Growth Boundaries, robust recycling programs, and the many different services we have because of the existence of Metro. Are other states, countries, and places coming to you and saying, "How do we get a regional government? How do we get our own Metro?"

Ms. Madrigal said Metro is the only regional government with an elected body. Others are attempting to solve problems at this scale, but this region is unique in that the people of this region have elected representatives here.

Do you think having an elected body is a deterrent to making this a more common model?

Councilor Gonzalez said there is a spirit of innovation in Oregon. The people of this state try different things. It sets Oregonians apart. There are various best practice trips where leaders from Portland will go to other places to learn from cities such as Nashville, Houston, and other cities and learn about what others are doing. The same happens when other cities, business leaders, and government leaders come to Portland. He has heard that the concept of Metro Regional coordination is something people value across the country. When he went to Washington, D.C., and lobbied for the transportation agencies to come together and advocate for a shared list of priorities, he noticed that it helps to have this regional approach.

Councilor Lewis added that she feels their work, telling their story, ebbs, and flows, as they are telling their story either to prove value locally or if they are doing it more on the national and international stage. This council is focused on telling the story and solidifying the role here and now. Previous council presidents have spent much more time speaking on panels nationally and internationally than most council members. She has done national networking, local conferences, and many one-on-one conversations.

But governance questions are tough. It takes more than a study or a good idea, mainly adding a level of government. You look to folks who come from the national area and are incredibly proud of telling the story of their city and county blending. That's an innovation. So, blending two into one is kind of the opposite answer of giving a regional government, where you're still allowing individual cities to have that level of control and not forcing Fairview to look like Forest Grove.

She said she is happy to go to those national conferences and plant the seed, but right now, this area is going through some significant challenges at home.

Chair Quiroz said this is the end of the formal questions by the commissioners. She thanked Metro's Councilors and staff for their attendance and contributions to the hearing. She closed the public hearing and opened a Tax Supervising and Conservation Commission meeting. She asked if commissioners had any comments on the budget. There were none. Chair Quiroz asked Executive Director Allegra Willhite to give staff recommendations for the certification letter.

Ms. Willhite said Metro did a great job with the budget document. It is well organized, informative,

and gives a comprehensive budget analysis. She thanked Metro staff for their quick responses to questions about the budget and throughout the year. She said staff found the budget estimates reasonable for the purposes stated and the budget to comply with Local Budget Law. TSCC staff have no recommendations or objections to the fiscal year 2024-25 Approved Budget.

Chair Quiroz called for a motion.

Commissioner Wubbold moved to certify Metro's 2024-25 Approved Budget with no recommendations or objections as recommended by staff. Commissioner Burton seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous vote of the commissioners.

There being no other business, Chair Quiroz closed the meeting.