



Seattle Center Advisory Commission Meeting

May 7, 2026 | 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.

Armory Loft 3 / WebEx

Adopted

ATTENDEES

Commissioners: Michael George, John Olensky, Sally Bagshaw, Adriane Musuneggi, Mark Dederer, Lara Mae Chollette, Lauren Campbell, Will Ludlam, Gloria Connors, Eric Berlinberg, Eric Pettigrew, Sarah Rich, Holly Golden

Absent Commissioners: Stacey Hutchison, Matt Roewe, Matthew Mead

Seattle Center Staff: Randy Engstrom, Diamatris Winston, Rose Ann Lopez, Chelsea Riddick-Most, Kaori "Kiyo" Kiyono, Karin Butler, Vi Nguyen, Ariana Grlj, Gretchen Lenihan, David Kunselman, Marc Jones

Guests: Pinky Estell, Rob Johnson, Sarah Marino

Welcome/Review & Approve April Minutes – Mark Dederer, *Chair*

- Vote to approve April meeting minutes: approved

Public Comment – Mark Dederer, *Chair*

No public comment

Director's Report – Randy Engstrom, *Acting Director*

- Introduction of new staff:
 - Vi Nguyen joined Seattle Center as Chief of Staff today. This new position is the re-imagining of the role Angie Bronson held as Senior Executive Assistant previously. Her support and thought partnership will extend beyond Director Engstrom to the wider Executive team, and she will serve as a force multiplier for Director's time and the Office's capacity.
 - Sarah Marino joined Seattle Center Foundation as their new Advancement Director last month. In her role, Sarah will be helping Seattle Center secure funding and cultivate the strong donor base needed to help support the goals of the Strategic Vision and 10-Year Action Plan.
- Director Engstrom mentioned critical infrastructure points of failure and the impact of 15 years of budget cuts on staffing levels, including reductions in janitors from 20 to 8, guards from 8 to 4, and constables from 3 to 1.
- Despite these challenges, he praised the team for their incredible work, including their efforts related to the World Cup. The local organizing committee's decision to pull out of a fan festival resulted in a \$1 million budget impact. However, the Seattle Center team absorbed that impact and responded with grace and dignity.
- Commissioners are encouraged to bring their families and friends to World Soccer Fan Celebration events at Seattle Center.
- Director Engstrom also acknowledged the importance of the Seattle Center Advisory Commission and its volunteers, thanking them for their partnership and advocacy.

Let's Play SEA'26 - World Soccer Fan Celebration – Gretchen Lenihan, *Seattle Center Lead FWC2026 Seattle Fan Celebration*



- Seattle Center programming for SEA '26 includes watch parties, visual art installations, performing arts, a curated vendor program, workshops and activities, spectacles, and a global DJ program during the World Cup (June 11-July 19)
- Three main goals: 1). maintaining Seattle Center as a community gathering space, 2). serving as a landing pad for visitors without game tickets, and 3). clearly conveying Seattle Center's role in the community.
- From June 1 through July 19, Seattle Center will have 83 events, 41 of them are specific to Let's Play '26, with projected attendance over 225,000. We will have more events and attendance compared to the previous year.
- Armory is Seattle Center's everyday match viewing spot. Mural screen for Seattle match days (6 dates), June 25 (US match) and July 4.
- Collaboration with KEXP and Tom's Watch Bar for supplemental screenings.
- Diplomatic outreach and community engagement, including the Greater Seattle Korean Business Association's hip hop festival.
- Seattle Waterfront Park, including Pier 62, will serve as a major Sounders activation site and host World Cup-related fan experiences and match-viewing events. Pier 58 is planned to host Waterfront March to the Match activations.
- Seattle Center's sponsorship team continues to pitch potential sponsors, and the booking team is fielding mobile marketing inquiries.
- Seattle Center staff (both campus and waterfront) were provided a training during the April 15th All Staff meeting, based on information provided in Visit Seattle's Hospitality Playbook.
- Waterfront Park will be Sounder's activation site, and Pier 58 will host Pride Match event.

Action Items:

- Obtain final FIFA licensing approval for World Cup match-viewing events at Seattle Center, which will allow the use of the term "watch parties."
- Plan and execute cross-promotion of the other World Cup fan celebration sites (including the waterfront and other partner locations).
- Lock schedules and layouts
- Contract local artists and final event additions
- Finalize public safety plan and provide Seattle Center staff an operational orientation.

First Quarter Financial Report – *Diametris Winston, Deputy Director*

- Campus revenue trends show the historical pattern of operating in the red during Q1, with revenue expected to ramp up in Q2 and Q3.
- Parking revenue has declined, while monorail ridership has increased significantly. The current net loss is largely attributed to reduced parking revenue. FIFA-related summer activity is expected to help increase parking revenue.
- Ongoing efforts to enhance revenue include securing parking tax revenue. The team also noted the need to plan for potential budget impacts related to upcoming collective bargaining.
- A FIFA-related budget gap and anticipated loss of rental revenue are noted. Due to the transition to a distributed model, we may lose revenue during a time when we would typically generate rental income. While large free events may increase campus attendance, they are not direct revenue generators beyond parking and concessions. Increased visitor spending on campus will be important to help offset the anticipated shortfall.



- Background: The reason for moving to a decentralized model was that the LLC was ultimately unable to raise the funds needed for its original proposal. Initially, the LLC had discussed renting nearly the entire campus, which would have generated significant rental revenue. Because that full-campus rental model was no longer financially feasible, the plan shifted to a decentralized approach.
- MacCaw Hall has positive income in 2025 and the expected higher income this year despite \$771,000 deficit in Q1.
- Waterfront fund has a \$74,000 surplus, with predictable funds and expenditures.

Conversation with Pinky Estell, Director of Operations & Facilities, Cornish College of the Arts at Seattle University – Will Ludlam, Vice Chair

- Cornish College of the Arts at Seattle University is the new official name for Cornish after it became part of Seattle University in 2025. The transaction became official on June 2, 2025, and Cornish is now operating as an arts college within Seattle University.
- In 2013, Cornish College of the Arts took over management of the Playhouse and renamed it Cornish Playhouse at Seattle Center. The theater program moved into the Playhouse that year, and Cornish later signed a long-term lease with Seattle Center.
- Cornish typically presents four mainstage, larger-scale performances each year, along with approximately ten additional programs on a regular cadence throughout the year.
- The Playhouse is also used for public events, such as the City's free clinic, Northwest Folklife Festival, and women-led dance companies.
- Estell noted that the partnership with Seattle Center has been very positive, from the event team to the facility team, with strong communication across the board. Public safety teams from both organizations also work together.
- Regarding the recent merger with Seattle University, Estell shared that there have been many changes in procedures and policies. These changes are expected to filter through the organization and may bring both unintended impacts and positive outcomes.
- One early challenge was that Seattle University had less experience with the performing arts side of the organization and did not fully understand Cornish's staffing structure or programming support. As a result, the structure was dismantled for about six months, though it has since been restored.
- Because that support was not in place during that time, Cornish produced fewer events over the past six months. Estell noted that there have been some bumps that made the transition somewhat clunky, but both organizations are learning from each other.
- The Playhouse's next major needs are aesthetic and infrastructure upgrades, including replacing the worn seats and carpet from 1983, updating the outdated 1962 bathrooms with gender-neutral options, and improving the lobby and house areas.
- The next step is to understand the school's fundraising strategy and work with the grants department to support these projects.

Good of the Order – All

- Will Daugherty, President & CEO of Pacific Science Center, will step down at the end of June. Kevin Malgesini will begin as Pacific Science Center's new President & CEO on June 1, 2026. Becky Witmer is serving as Interim Managing Director at Seattle Children's Theatre.



- The Boeing IMAX Theater at Pacific Science Center will reopen under new ownership by Space Needle LLC as IMAX at the Center.

1:19 p.m. – Meeting adjourned