



Tom McCall Waterfront Park Collaborative Project

Project Summary | Oregon Solutions & Institute for Metropolitan Studies, Portland State University | June 2026

Background

The Oregon State Legislature allocated \$3 million in the 2025 session (HB 5006) to address a variety of needs related to supporting waterfront park festivals, analyzing the economic opportunity of the Park, and studying potential operating and sustainable funding opportunities for a future Tom McCall Waterfront Park. As part of that, the City of Portland, the Portland Metro Chamber, and Portland State University asked the Institute for Metropolitan Studies (IMS) and Oregon Solutions (OS) to lead a collaborative assessment of the Park's future and conduct a study on some of its most pressing needs with an eye towards implementation actions.

This Report

This assessment is a stop along the way towards a new roadmap for Waterfront Park. Between February and May 2026, IMS and OS interviewed 64 stakeholders representing local government, tribal nations, businesses, nonprofits, community organizations, and individuals with deep ties to the Park, to understand where interests align and diverge.

During this assessment we found, in addition to a study, the need for a collaborative project to catalyze, connect, and fill in the gaps across all of the activity already happening in the park: aligning parallel efforts, surfacing shared interests, and creating the structured, accountable process needed to move from study to implementation.

These findings are meant to be shared so that interested parties can engage with the needs and concerns of the broader group. The goal is honest reflection on where consensus exists, where tensions lie, and what it will take to build a durable, broadly supported path forward for the Park.

Key Themes from Stakeholder Interviews

Good Bones

The Park's location on the Willamette, its trees, civic memorials, and role as the city's primary outdoor event space are a strong foundation. But aging infrastructure, safety concerns, and the absence of a shared vision hold it back. Stakeholders consistently called for strategic direction with clear goals and accountability.

Make This Asset Sweat

Interviewees want to think about the Park differently: not just as green space, but as a catalyst for downtown recovery. People want everyday activation: playgrounds, food and drink, connections to downtown, public art, wayfinding, and river access. Fixing persistent logistical problems — broken water hookups, insufficient electrical infrastructure, and difficult permit timing — is long overdue.

Greater Than the Sum of Its Parks

The City owns the Park, but the scale of investment needed is beyond what the City can provide alone. Multiple planning efforts are already underway, and every person interviewed said the same thing:

before any significant investment, those efforts must be aligned. Stakeholders want a collaborative process with accountability, sustainable funding beyond public dollars, and intentional inclusion of different users and organizations connected to the park.

No Time Like the Present

People are ready to act. There is wide consensus on near-term infrastructure wins (fix water hookups, add pavers, improve lighting and seating) and policy wins (address permit timing, clarify turf damage cost allocation). Most interviewees said they'd participate in a collaborative process if it had real teeth behind it.

Recommended Next Steps

- Establish the collaborative project's structure
- Clarify the City's role and commitment
- Map the existing work
- Organize for near-term action