



**HB 2291-2, MARCH 31, 2025**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND TRADE**

**TESTIMONY OF ANDREW HOAN, PRESIDENT & CEO, PORTLAND METRO CHAMBER**

The Portland Metro Chamber is an affiliate of the Portland Business Alliance that also includes Downtown Portland Clean & Safe, and the Charitable Institute.

The Chamber strongly supports the passage of HB 2291 with -2 amendments forthcoming.

The State of Oregon has benefited from Portland's city-wide, cultural and community gatherings that have drawn millions to our state, and untold millions more watching in broadcasts around the world. The positive economic activity benefits Oregon in both direct spending and the good media attention that our large-scale and legacy festivals garner for the state.

Our festivals and events are the gateway to Oregon. They are cultural assets that reflect our values, they give people the opportunity to connect with one another, and bridge divides. And, perhaps most critically these days, festivals provide opportunities that invite those who may have chosen to stay away from Portland to come back and see for themselves the progress that has been made.

It is no secret that the pandemic placed the economic model that festivals and cultural gatherings are based on in shaky conditions. What might not be better known is the lens by which festivals and events were often treated prior to the pandemic. They were considered "nice-to-haves", a financial resource for the public sector, and in some cases, they were treated as a nuisance to be managed, rather than an asset to be cherished and cultivated. This perfect storm of headwinds caused the degradation of these amazing community partners that bring joy to so many and, in some cases, brought them to the brink.

I am here to testify that much has changed.

And more is needed.

Coming out of the pandemic with new leadership and a new form of government, the city pivoted to being supportive. The creation of the event office at Prosper Portland provided critical resources to event and festival operators. The private sector and hospitality sectors have also stepped up and stepped in by bringing more events and activities to our beloved city. Led by Councilor and then-Parks Commissioner Dan Ryan, and now co-chair of our council's Parks Committee, innovative partnerships were formed at Directors Park and the soon-to-be-opened Darcelle XV Plaza that are pioneering models for new public-private partnerships in open spaces that are proving highly successful.

Most critically – the city is here with the private sector, academia, hospitality industry, operators and more – to share in the acknowledgement that our state's most visibly important, visited and centrally located open space, Tom McCall Waterfront Park – needs a dramatic change predicated in large part on the innovative partnerships at Director Park and Darcelle XV Plaza. This is not a change in a superficial sense, but in the underlying operations of the park itself.

Not all parks serve the same purpose; think Millennium Park in Chicago, the Henry Meier Festival Grounds in Milwaukee, the Seattle waterfront, or, my personal favorites, Brooklyn Bridge Park, the

Coney Island Boardwalk, and The High Line. Cities around the world embrace their waterfronts, and design new operating systems that run away from the status quo and towards sustainable models in partnership with the private sector to facilitate open spaces as economic drivers where appropriate.

Our community, city, and state have failed to keep pace with the rest of the planet when it comes to our waterfront and management of our open spaces. But things are different now, and our city, with newly invigorated leadership under Mayor Keith Wilson, is rolling up its sleeves and coming to the table to participate and lead the change.

The bill before you is an opportunity to invest in festivals, not as a handout, but as a hand up – coupled with a platform to re-engineer a failed operating system in Waterfront Park, among other things. The plan for the park to be redeveloped will remove barriers, establishing peer city-informed best practices that should be replicable across all communities in Oregon. It charges that the festivals update their operating paradigm as well to include new, diverse vendors so that we can create new businesses that grow into large ones.

We hope this form of partnership will be a model for communities across the state. We believe that with these changes, our most storied Waterfront Park will be filled every single day of the year with opportunities to gather, celebrate, and our city, region, and state can reap the economic benefits of this vibrancy.

The city, private sector, and academia are all doing their part in partnership. We need the state to join us. We urge the passage of this bill.