

Multnomah County Historical Organization Levy Oversight Committee
Minutes of meeting on December 3, 2025
Oregon Historical Society

Co-Chairs Diane McKeel and Janice Dilg called the meeting to order at 3:30pm.

Attendance: Diane McKeel, Janice Dilg, Jennifer Burns, Silvie Andrews, Chris Garza, Peggy Olin, Libby Pruden, Elka Grishman, Sandy Cartisser, Bill Bennetts, An Bui, Debbie Menashe

OHS Staff: Kerry Tymchuk, Tara Cole, Glynis Jones

Reports from Historical Organizations:

Co Chair McKeel asked the five history organizations supported by Levy funding to provide a recap of 2025 and their plans for 2026.

Gresham Historical Society: Silvie Andrews, Museum Director, reported year-to-date attendance of approximately 5,000 visitors, which exceeds 2024 attendance. Levy funding primarily supports her position, and she oversees a team of roughly 50 volunteers.

Their largest fundraiser, Christmas at the Museum, runs for four weeks through December 20 and features family-friendly programming. The annual membership meeting and year-end celebration will be held on December 28.

The Indigenous Arts Festival in early October drew an estimated 3,000 attendees and was supported through partnerships with local organizations and restaurants. Plans are underway to expand the event in 2026. Recent and current exhibitions include *Putting Gresham on the Map*, which featured maps from the collection, and *Where Have All the Berry Fields Gone*, which focused on Gresham in the 1960s and 1970s. Planned 2026 exhibitions include *History and Memory*, commemorating the organization's 50-year anniversary, and *Building Gresham*, a photographic essay on local architecture.

Facilities updates included securing over \$400,000 in grant funding for roof replacement, masonry work, and carpet replacement at the Zion Church, a 1931 Gothic Revival building. Additional grant-supported projects including electrical updates and pest control for the museum building.

Other grant-supported projects include improving exterior signage, upgraded exhibition cases, and development of a historic guidebook for Gresham. Andrews is also pursuing grants to support the podcast and oral history program which is currently on hold.

Collection work continues through a monthly committee that reviews donation offers, with volunteers processing and digitizing materials that are then shared with the State Library of Oregon to be added to the Northwest Digital Heritage website and the Digital Public Library of America.

Looking ahead to 2026, the organization is planning programming for both the America 250 commemoration and the Gresham Historical Society's 50th anniversary.

Troutdale Historical Society: Chris Garza, Executive Director of the Troutdale Historical Society, reported that 2025 was very busy year. Visitation is expected to reach over 5,000 visitors by year end, well above the historical average of 1,100 annually. The strongest growth came from Multnomah County residents. Membership has also grown with 90 new members added this year. Local businesses have also become sponsors which strengthens community support.

The final history pub of 2025 featured a presentation by Chris Garza on the organization's 58-year history and sold out beyond capacity.

Looking ahead to 2026, the museum will present an America 250 exhibition highlighting local charitable, patriotic and military organizations. They will also host a yearlong exhibition on the Japanese American experience in Troutdale. A sister museum partnership in Japan has been established to enable shared exhibitions and live cultural workshops.

Levy funding in 2026 will support a significant portion of general operating expenses and allow continued free programming, partnerships with community spaces, and expanded outreach.

A facilities plan includes exploring opening the barn's second floor for exhibition space and relocating items currently stored there. Plans are in place to bring more collection items onto public display.

East County Historical Organization (ECHO): Peggy Olin, president of ECHO, shared recent programming highlights at the Heslin House and Zimmerman House. Events in Fairview included a community celebration featuring the first Fairview police car, children's activities, and photo opportunities inside the historic jail. In August, the Zimmerman House hosted a successful tea and quilts fundraising event.

Current exhibitions include a focus on a local teacher, with visitors occasionally sharing personal notes. Exhibitions at the Zimmerman House are drawn entirely from family-owned, original furnishings and objects.

Seasonal programming remains strong, with a *Nightmare Before Christmas* event at the Heslin House and upcoming Christmas activities at the Zimmerman House.

Facilities updates included full replacement of the furnace at the Zimmerman House, installation of new heating units in each room, and repairs to phone and alarm systems.

Looking ahead to 2026, priorities include replacing the Zimmerman House roof, recruiting additional volunteers, rotating exhibitions, and expanding programming such as a summer garden tea, an Easter egg event, and sales of engraved bricks for the garden path.

Crown Point County Historical Society (CPCHS): Sandy Cartisser, Treasurer of CPCHS, provided an update on their organization and new building. An open house and auction were held on August 23, followed by the launch of “sneak peek” openings on the first Sunday of each month through February, ahead of a full Spring opening. The sneak peeks are intended as a soft launch while new exhibitions continue to be installed. Attendance at these preview openings has been steady. Current exhibitions explore themes on logging, farming, pioneer history, and an East County champion cowgirl.

Upcoming programming includes a member-curated Santa Claus display and a Pearl Harbor remembrance honoring veterans. Research is underway into a recently identified Japanese school in Crown Point.

A planning meeting is scheduled to discuss future exhibitions and 2026 programming. Fundraising efforts will also begin to support garden improvements and outdoor exhibitions.

Oregon Historical Society: Kerry Tymchuk, Executive Director of OHS, reported a busy year with strong engagement across exhibitions and programs. He highlighted *The Yasui Family: An American Story* exhibition on view through September 2026, noting its relevance to the America 250 commemoration and its focus on democracy and citizenship. The museum team worked closely with the Yasui family who donated a significant collection to OHS.

Other exhibitions on display include *She Files with Her Own Wings*, on early aviation history in Oregon, and *Santaland*, on view through December 31, featuring a selection of materials from the historic Meier & Frank department store that are displayed annually.

Exhibitions in 2026 include two shows focused on Highway 101, one offering a contemporary photographic perspective, and the other exploring the highway’s historical development. Additional upcoming exhibitions include *Artists and the Origins of Crater*

Lake National Park, and an exhibition celebrating the University of Oregon's 150th anniversary.

School tours have been exceptionally strong this year and are nearly fully booked through 2026, with most visitors coming from Multnomah County.

Levy Renewal Discussion: An Bui reported that Multnomah County Attorney, CFO, and OHS CFO Glynis Jones have been working collaboratively on two documents for County approval: the Levy renewal language and the ballot form. Drafts were completed last week and shared with this committee for review. The committee was asked to review the materials in advance of the board vote on January 15.

The committee suggested strengthening the explanatory language that demonstrates program effectiveness. Additional discussion followed around the possibility of increasing levy allocations to East County Museums, which would be reflected in the explanatory section, including language that allows for annual increases to prevent funding from remaining flat over time.

Chair McKeel proposed that the explanatory section of the 2026 levy renewal include language stating that each of the four east county organizations should receive no less than \$70,000 annually from levy proceeds. There were not objections to this proposal from LOC members.

Adjournment:

Without further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:31.