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For instance, FIFA is yet to roll out its licensing guidelines for the official host city watch parties. Once those guidelines are released, SeattleFWC26 can instruct the contractors to execute on the event plans.

FIFA’s contract with Seattle, viewed by the Business Journal, stipulates the host city will bear all expenses in “connection with the hosting and staging the competition also in the host city.”

A separate contract between the city and the local organizing committee, signed in August 2023, outlined SeattleFWC26 responsibilities for all the operations related to hosting the event, including securing the necessary funding, hiring personnel and marketing the event.

With the event more than a year away, neither the city nor the organizing committee has an estimate of the financial cost or a budget set aside for hosting it.

Until the funding side of the equation clears up, the organizers might hedge on decisions that include big-ticket items.

“A lot of the things that are really going to make safety and the experience of the World Cup here stand out are going to depend on our ability to raise funds privately here in Seattle,” Flor says. “A big part of that is going to be possible because of the generosity of local corporations and donors.”

A first-of-its-kind FIFA Host City Supporter program allows the organizing committee to sell up to 10 brand sponsorship packages. The only committed sponsor so far is the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, which officially announced the partnership in June 2023.

The nonprofit SeattleFWC26 raised \$5.14 million in total contributions and grants in fiscal year 2023, according to tax records it filed with the IRS.

Flor recognizes the “immense amount of responsibility and stress that comes from taking this on the way we’re taking it on” as the kickoff to the World Cup draws closer.

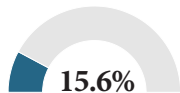
SeattleFWC26, in the mean-

**BY THE NUMBERS**

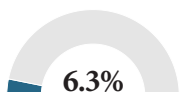
Opportunities for businesses to set up shop close to the action at Lumen Field during the 2026 World Cup.

● Retail vacancy rates as of March 2025

**Seattle downtown**



**Queen Anne, Magnolia**



**Belltown, Denny Regrade**



**Overall Seattle MSA**



**South Seattle Sodo and Chinatown**



**Pioneer Square, Waterfront**



SOURCE: COSTAR GROUP

time, is galvanizing local support to put the show on the road.

The committee said it is making gradual progress in landing other funding sources with negotiations and discussions ongoing. It recently launched a separate donor program that includes hospitality packages local organizations can purchase.

On April 3, the committee unveiled the official host city poster for the World Cup, meant to showcase the “lasting symbol of Seattle’s role” in hosting the tournament in the U.S.

**‘Economic vitality’**

While the World Cup is expected to attract billions of viewers worldwide, lot of unknowns still obscure the planning needs locally. Despite the opacity, the local business community has been buzzing with the world of possibilities the sporting event could bring.

“Hundreds of thousands of visitors will spend their money at hotels, at restaurants, at bars, on merchandise, in museums,” Flor says. “Some of that certainly will happen in the stadium and at Seattle Center. But most of it is going to happen out in the community.”

According to figures provided to the Seattle City Council, almost 70% of the visitors next summer will be international travelers who are arriving in Seattle for the first time. Hotels in most of the region, from Portland to Bellingham, are expected to be fully booked.

The origin countries of those visitors are still unknown, though. FIFA is expected to release the fixture and schedule of teams that will play in Seattle in December.

Still, wherever they come from, Seattle businesses are ready to welcome them. The ones closest to the action anticipate reaping the most benefit.

At Pioneer Square, where SeattleFWC26 set up its headquarters, a steady stream of new business interest has been flowing in.

Pioneer Square has been hit hard by a wave of retail and office



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Leo Flor, chief legacy officer at SeattleFWC26

closures since the pandemic. The office vacancy rate in the neighborhood sits at 29%. Retail vacancies hover around 9%, according to the Alliance for Pioneer Square.

Lisa Howard, executive director for the alliance, predicts a recovery on the horizon. She attributes some of the resurging demand to the World Cup effect.

“The World Cup is going to have a huge role in the economic vitality of the neighborhood,” Howard says.

About 20 new businesses set up shop in the neighborhood last year. They have been joined by 14 other new establishments so far this year. Another 16 have signed leases to open by the end of this year, according to the Alliance for Pioneer Square.

“It’s a chance to welcome people from all over the world,” Howard says.

That goes beyond providing a venue for the matches.

“We’re not the stadium. This is not where the game’s going to be held,” she says. “They’re not coming to Pioneer Square to actually see the World Cup game.

“What they’re going to come here for is the Seattle experience, and we are looking to give them the best game-day experience

that we can.”

**‘It’s going to be gangbusters’**

While the main event will pull and drive economic activity in the Seattle area, plenty of opportunities also lie in the outer orbits of the tournament.

Outside of FIFA’s and the local organizing committee’s influence, some businesses have already set plans into motion to leverage the World Cup.

“I met with a brand (the other night) that is talking about just bringing their best clients in town for the World Cup,” says Brett Robertson, CEO of SHW, a Seattle-based destination management and events company. “So, they’ll bring 30 of their best clients for a week or four days into Seattle. They’ll go to a match, and then they want to do all the other stuff that goes with it.”

A private dinner event centered around the World Cup could cost clients about \$10,000. And for half a million dollars, SHW can help host a full-blown watch party at their home. Consumer brands are looking to spend about \$300,000 to post signage at some of these private and public gatherings, Robertson says.

Apart from taking up marketing and private event gigs, SHW is in talks with a couple of Washington cities to organize their own World Cup-related events. Nine cities across Washington are tasked with hosting their own version of fan zones.

SHW plans to hire translators and tour guides in anticipation of next year’s event. It will begin with Spanish and French languages at first and then ramp up its search next year when the teams are finalized. Formulating logistics for transporting and accommodating large groups is also underway.

Robertson says the company expects to see a “bump in business at the end of this year,” adding that next summer “it’s going to be gangbusters.”

“It’ll be busy, and there’ll be a lot going on,” he says. “A lot of it will be last minute. But I think it’s all going to be great.”