

STAFF REPORT

CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 26-5561, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING THE WILLAMETTE COVE NATURE PARK MASTER PLAN

Date: February 16, 2026
Department: COO/Parks and Nature
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Presenters: Jennifer D'Avanzo, she/her,
PN Senior Planner
Jon Blasher, he/him, PN Director
Andrew Scott, he/him, DCOO

Prepared by:
Jennifer D'Avanzo,
jennifer.davanzo@oregonmetro.gov

Length: 60 min

ISSUE STATEMENT

Staff presents the final master plan for the Willamette Cove Nature Park for Metro Council's consideration and approval.

The plan establishes a long-term framework for restoring, stewarding, and opening a public nature park at a historically industrial riverfront site along the Lower Willamette River. Located within the Portland Harbor Superfund area, Willamette Cove has been shaped by Indigenous stewardship, industrial use, environmental contamination, and ongoing remediation. This plan responds to the complex context by prioritizing ecological restoration alongside access to nature opportunities, while recognizing that restoration and use must proceed within the constraints of cleanup efforts.

The plan emphasizes the relationship between habitat and human use by designing habitat areas to maximize ecological value. The plan recognizes the importance of connecting people to a landscape and to the Willamette River. The plan establishes a framework shaped by input from Tribes, community, Metro Parks and Nature (PN) staff, and Council. It includes accessible trails, viewpoints, and gathering areas that are carefully located and scaled to protect sensitive habitats, respect remediation constraints, and align with long-term operations and maintenance capacity.

The plan was supported by a phased, iterative engagement process that included government-to-government coordination with Tribal governments, interviews, surveys, workshops, and accessibility-focused discussions. Internal coordination with Metro's science team, operations and maintenance staff, and planning staff ensured the plan is grounded in technical feasibility and stewardship capacity, with Metro Council engagement at key milestones.

A defining feature of the plan is its close coordination with ongoing remediation. The plan remains responsive to remediation sequencing and regulatory requirements and identifies

next steps for implementation, permitting coordination, and partnerships to advance the site toward a restored, publicly accessible nature park.

ACTION REQUESTED

Metro Council is asked to adopt Resolution no. 26-5661 and approve the Willamette Cove Nature Park Master Plan.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Through Resolution no. 20-5149, Metro Council instructed staff to develop a plan for meaningful public engagement regarding future passive recreation opportunities and trail development at Willamette Cove. Staff have been actively collaborating with Tribes and the community to shape the vision for the nature park at Willamette Cove while coordinating with in-water and upland cleanup groups and Metro’s Parks and Nature departments.

Following adoption of the Willamette Cove Nature Park Master Plan, Metro will continue to coordinate with Metro Parks and Nature staff and in-water and upland remedial design teams to design and construct park improvements and plan for long term operations and management responsibilities.

Plan approval would further the Parks and Nature System Plan and mission by planning future connections and access to nature close to home.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

Is the Willamette Cove Nature Park Master Plan reflective of Tribal, community, and advocacy group involvement, and consistent with prior Council Resolutions and directives to support natural resource restoration and passive recreation at the site?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

There are three options for Council to consider: adopt the plan as presented, reject the plan, or direct staff to evaluate additional considerations.

If Council approves the resolution and adopts the master plan, Metro will continue to coordinate with Metro PN staff and in-water and upland remedial design teams to identify long term operations and management responsibilities for the future nature park.

If Council directs staff to evaluate additional alternatives, staff would undergo that effort and bring back an amended master plan for future Council consideration.

If Council rejected the master plan, staff would take no additional actions to further develop this project.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that Metro Council adopt Resolution No. 26-5661 and the Willamette Cove Nature Park Master Plan.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

This resolution reflects staff efforts to address the direction from Council and the input and feedback from Tribes and community.

- How is this related to Metro's Core Mission?
 - Upon completion of the cleanup, the Willamette Cove nature park will create an opportunity to enjoy nature close to home through a regional trail and protected natural area. This regionally important park supports our agency-wide mission to plan for the region's future and ensure that this region remains a great place to live.

- How does this advance Metro's racial equity goals?
 - Staff has collaborated with many partners and communities including: the Indigenous community, Black community, people of color, youth, people with disabilities and the houseless community, in addition to conservation advocacy groups. Advancement of Metro's racial and community equity goals includes hearing from all concerned and affected communities during the planning process and future design and permitting.
 - Willamette Cove master plan development is the first comprehensive project where Metro established a clear plan for Tribal informal consultation from the outset, building on lessons learned from earlier efforts. It is also the first project where Tribes collaborated directly with Metro on the site conservation plan for the site, helping set a precedent for future site conservation plans.

- How does this advance Metro's climate action goals?
 - Environmental cleanup of Willamette Cove will result in substantial disturbance, including removing of most vegetation. Following cleanup mitigation measures, nature park development will further restore trees and vegetation, eventually creating canopy, shade, and habitat, and minimizing erosion.
 - The project will include removing invasives and supporting riparian and shallow water habitat restoration.

- Known Opposition/Support/Community Feedback.
 - The plan before Council is the direct result of Tribal consultation, community engagement, partner, and staff feedback. They are supportive of the plan.
 - While there is no known opposition to the project, some community members have requested additional hydraulic studies in the cove to support efforts to evaluate harmful algal blooms in the Lower Willamette River. Metro, DEQ, and the City of Portland are coordinating with the community to determine how existing cleanup-related studies can inform these efforts.
 - Community feedback from the October 26, 2025 open house was overwhelmingly positive, emphasizing excitement about river access,

environmental restoration, accessibility, and the respectful, balanced approach. A few concerns were raised about the project timelines and the potential overuse of asphalt and concrete, with requests to avoid overdevelopment.

- Explicit list of stakeholder groups and individuals who have been involved in policy development.
 - Coordinated public engagement for master planning efforts has involved a broad range of stakeholders, including Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Yakama Nation, Nez Perce Tribe, Portland Harbor Community Advisory Group, Portland Harbor Community Coalition, Oregon Health Authority, Environmental Protection Agency, Port of Portland, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, npGreenway, Cathedral Park Neighborhood Association, St. Johns Neighborhood Association, City of Portland Parks and Recreation, Department of State Lands, Blueprint Foundation, Experience Life Science Outdoors (ELSO), Verde, Groundscore, Bird Alliance of Oregon, Human Access Project, Aim 4 Access, People of Color Outdoors, Loco Por la Aventura, Adventure Without Limits, Growing Gardens, and Disabled Hikers.

- Legal Antecedents.
Resolution 20-5149 Willamette Cove as amended
Councilor Stacy’s Budget Note from 2021, that funded \$1.1 for the nature park master plan
- Anticipated Effects.
If the resolution is approved, staff will proceed with park design, engineering, permitting, and construction, along with continued engagement with Tribes, advocacy groups, and community.

- Financial Implications (current year and ongoing).
Is this item in the current budget?
 - The nature park project is funded:
 - Master planning has been funded by the Parks and Nature Bond.
 - Design, engineering, and permitting will be funded through the Parks and Nature Bond and included in the FY27 budget
 - Construction costs for the nature park are currently estimated at \$15.5 million. Funding will come from bond proceeds, Taking Care of Metro Parks, Protect and Restore Lands, Trails, and grant opportunities.
 - Development of a nature park will also include clarifying long-term operations and maintenance (O&M). Current revenues do not cover O&M

costs across the entire parks system, so additional O&M will strain the system.

BACKGROUND

Metro purchased the 27-acre Willamette Cove property in 1996 pursuant to the Open Spaces, Parks, and Streams Bond Measure 26-26 and has held the property for purposes of creating a green space and extending the multi-use North Portland Greenway trail. Habitat restoration plans support aquatic, riparian, bird and native vegetation species. The North Portland Greenway trail is shown on the City of Portland's comprehensive plan and is part of the regional trail plan.

In November 2000, Metro and the Port of Portland entered into a Voluntary Agreement with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to perform a remedial investigation/feasibility study (RI/FS) and implement any needed source control measure to prevent releases to Portland Harbor. In December 2000, the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) identified the Portland Harbor area of the lower Willamette River as a Superfund Site and placed it on the National Priorities List, primarily due to concerns of contamination in the Willamette River sediments and the potential risks to human health and the environment from consuming fish. Metro's agreement with the Port of Portland and DEQ has supported a significant investment in environmental studies and testing to ensure the site is eventually cleaned up to support our region's desires for healthy, sustainable natural areas.

In March 2021, DEQ issued its Record of Decision following six months of public input. In 2022, additional soil sampling supported development of the upland cleanup strategy, with the basis of design report completed in fall 2025. The upland cleanup is now at 30% remedial design, proceeding alongside the in-water cleanup, which is at 60% remedial design.

For decades, neighbors and nature advocates have seen Willamette Cove's potential as a rare natural refuge along the river in North Portland. This plan outlines a vision and recommendations for developing public access to the site, restoring wildlife habitat, and highlights connection to Willamette River. The plan includes recommendations for a new parking lot, trailhead and entry area with restroom and shelter. The park will have a regional trail, as well as additional nature trails and water access points. Other planned amenities include overlooks and viewing for wildlife, gathering spaces, and art and education opportunities.

The Willamette Cove Nature Park Master Plan represents a long-term investment in people, plants, and wildlife, opening access for communities who have had limited connection to this stretch of the Willamette River for many years.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution 20-5149 Willamette Cove as amended
2. Councilor Stacey Budget Note

3. Willamette Cove Nature Park Master Plan and appendix

[For work session:]

- Is legislation required for Council action? Yes
- If yes, is draft legislation attached? Yes
- What other materials are you presenting today? Slide Presentation