

UPDATE ON PROXIMITY AND EXPERIENCE TO PARKS AND NATURE

Meeting date: July 2, 2026

Department: Parks and Nature

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ISSUE STATEMENT

Nature close to home is essential to quality of life in the Portland region. Helping the people of greater Portland connect with nature is one half of Metro Parks and Nature's mission, established in the Parks and Nature System plan, which Metro advances through its role as a land protector, park provider, convener and funder.

In 2024, the Metro Council affirmed Parks and Nature recommendation to utilize a multi-dimensional concept of access to articulate how bond investments in healthy habitat advance outcomes related to community empowerment, economic vitality and proximity and experience. At this work session, Parks and Nature will provide an update on baseline metrics and data for the proximity and experience impact area.

ACTION REQUESTED

Review more details on access related to proximity and experience and identify additional information needed from staff.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Metro Parks and Nature investments are guided by several policies and commitments listed below. All of the following help define and clarify Metro's mission to help the region connect with nature as a land protector, park provider and funder.

- The Parks and Nature System Plan last approved by Council in 2016;
- 2025-2032 racial equity, diversity and inclusion plan
- Frameworks adopted by the Metro Council when it referred the 2022 levy renewal measure and the 2019 parks and nature bond to voters
- ongoing commitments to operationalize agency values in program delivery, including deepening Tribal relationships and engagement, prioritizing improvements to address ADA barriers

POLICY QUESTION(S)

1. Does the multi-dimensional concept of access being utilized by Parks and Nature still align with Council expectations?
2. How does the information and mapping related to the proximity and experience impact area align with Council expectations?

3. Are there elements of access related to proximity and experience that Council would like to review in more detail?

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Metro helps people of greater Portland connect with nature through investments and activities in park provision, land protection education and grants that lead to increased distribution of safe and welcoming parks, trails and natural areas across the region our parks, education programming. Metro convenes the region around advancing a vision for an 800-mile network of regional trails linking parks and natural areas to communities and other destinations.

The Parks and Nature system plan classifies Metro portfolio of 34 developed sites and 150 natural areas into tiers based on the purpose of the site and the type of infrastructure that visitors can expect to find there. Of Metro's nearly 20,000 acres, all which are open to the public, about one third is made up of developed sites developed for human use and two thirds is made up of sites that are meant to protect nature for nature's sake. 98 percent of the region is currently within a 20-minute drive of one of Metro's developed nature parks and boat launches where Metro is continuing to invest projects that improve site experience through adding amenities, improving infrastructure to extend the useful life of the sites and addressing ADA barriers.

Finally, Metro's Parks and Nature work is designed to complement the priorities of local park providers, Tribal and state governments, nonprofit conservation partners and community organizations. Metro policy recognizes that local governments remain responsible for the planning and provision of community and neighborhood parks, local open spaces, sports fields and trails within their jurisdictions and since 1995, Metro Parks and Nature has invested over \$190 million in local nature projects.

Measuring impact

The bond evaluation outcomes framework helps underline how Metro's role as a land protector and steward, park provider and funder, with a unique regional scale and vision strengthens healthy habitat, while improving outcomes related to access in three primary areas:

- Proximity and experience
- Community empowerment
- Economic vitality

The vision statement for the proximity and experience impact area is that visitors of all backgrounds, ages and abilities have access to a variety of nature experiences to strengthen

their relationship to the natural world. The evaluation framework also articulates an established theory of change that links bond investments and activities to long-term outcomes in a way that allows for evaluation of progress on the path to meeting those long-term outcomes and continuation iteration on outcomes and metrics.

Explicit list of stakeholder groups and individuals who have been involved in policy development:

Parks and Nature uses community feedback to shape priority habitats and species for land acquisition, large scale restoration projects and investments in developed sites for sites like Chehalem Ridge and continuing with the engagement around the Willamette Cove master plan, Blue Lake Park renovation project and the Lone Fir Memorial project.

Two priorities from community that shape our work on land protection and park experiences include protect nature for nature's sake and take care of the sites you already have. We've heard this from community over and over again during bond development and implementation. This continues to be a core part of our mission that resonates with voters.

The Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee, which provides oversight to investments from the 2019 parks and nature bond, has been the primary group to work with Metro on tools that articulate the impact of bond investments.

BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2019, greater Portland voters overwhelmingly approved a \$475 million parks and nature bond measure to improve water quality, protect fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature close to home. The bond measure includes three criteria to guide all bond investments—racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience, along with guiding principle language about increasing access to parks and natural areas.

The 2023 audit of the Parks and Nature bond focused on whether and how Metro was prepared to increase access to nature as envisioned in the bond commitments and found a lack of clarity about specific outcomes the bond sought to accomplish and an underdeveloped performance measurement system relating to access. In 2024, Parks and Nature updated the Metro Council on the response to the recommendations in the audit and introduced the bond evaluation outcomes framework. Council affirmed the multi-dimensional approach in the framework and expressed an interest to review more details and data as the work to operationalize the evaluation framework continued.