



A report from the Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee

October 2024

If you picnic at Blue Lake or take your kids to the Oregon Zoo, enjoy symphonies at the Schnitz or auto shows at the convention center, put out your trash or drive your car – we’ve already crossed paths.

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The 2019 parks and nature bond is a promise to build on the region’s legacy to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and provide opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home. In 2019, the voters of the region chose to invest \$475 million to continue to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities to connect with nature close to home across six program areas.



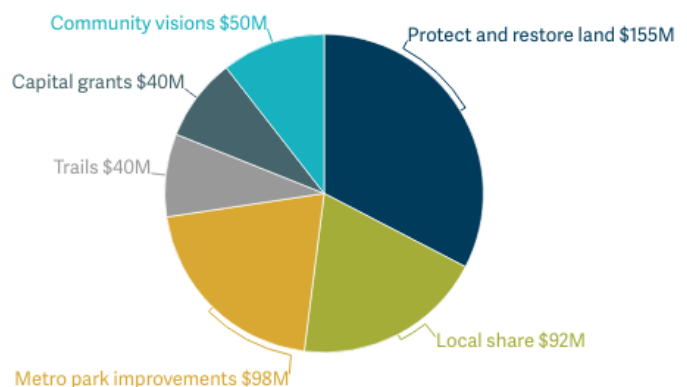
INTRODUCTION

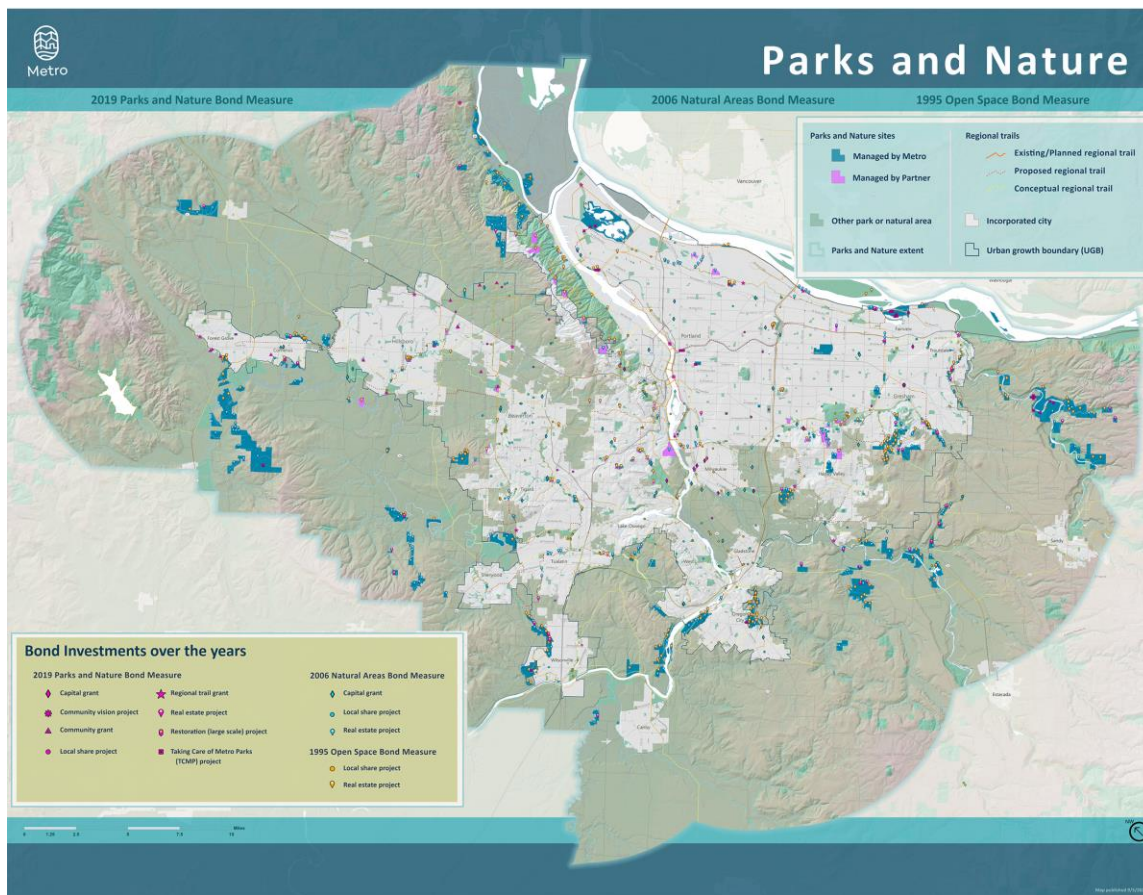
Committee purpose

Metro’s 2019 parks and nature bond measure calls for creation of an independent oversight committee to provide review to Metro Council and community members of the 2019 parks and nature bond and capital investments from Metro’s parks and nature five-year local option levy. The members of the Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee believe that natural areas are integral to the wellbeing of everyone in the region are focused on determining and sharing progress made on the parks and nature bond in terms of management, expenditures and addressing the three bond criteria of racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience.

Bond programs

The bond includes six programs. The funding levels were set by the legislation.





Map showing the Metro region and projects currently funded by the 2019 parks and nature bond. [Click to enlarge](#)

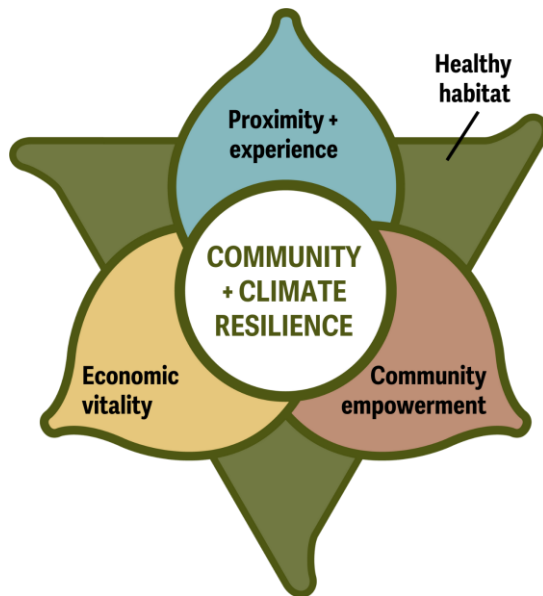
What we found

This report covers the committee's work through the June 2024 which involves reviewing bond programs and meeting regularly in working groups on land acquisition, community engagement and bond finance, which has helped organized the major themes in this report back. The committee has identified the following takeaways and recommendations related to overall bond progress. More specific information about each of the six program areas can be found in the program snapshots: ([protect and restore land](#), [local share](#), [capital grants](#), [trails](#), [large scale community visions](#), and [take care of Metro parks](#)) and quarterly updates on bond progress can be found on this online [dashboard](#).

- All six bond programs are making meaningful investments across the region. The level of bond spending and award is at the pace needed to achieve the majority of spend down by 2031.
 - **Bond investments are protecting and restoring priority habitat and future green space across the region.** The [protect and restore land program](#) has completed 22 land acquisitions for 824 acres, is supporting work needed to

return land to stable conditions and is funding significant capital restoration projects. All of these activities are conducted in alignment with the bond criteria and reflect feedback from community on priorities for land acquisition and restoration. In addition, the bond's [local share](#) program has awarded a total of \$5 million to date to park providers to complete three priority land acquisitions and the bond's [capital grant program](#) invested over \$1 million to fund three different capital restoration projects.

- **Bond investments are supporting local priorities across the region.** To date, the bond's [local share](#), [capital grants](#), [trail grants](#) and [large scale community visions](#) programs have awarded \$67 million to over 55 priority parks, trails and natural area projects across the region. These programs, which can only fund eligible projects that meet the bond requirements—advance racial equity, strengthen the region's climate resilience and reflect feedback from meaningful community engagement—have awarded funds to a range of project types across the region ranging from nature play areas to new culturally specific amenities to investments in the regional trail system to investments that update or improve the accessibility of existing parks, trails and natural areas in communities across the region.
- **Bond investments are making Metro developed parks across the region more safe, welcoming and inclusive.** The bond's [take care of Metro parks program](#), has invested over \$34 million to complete projects that advance capital improvements at Blue Lake, Oxbow and Lone Fir, helped to complete Newell Creek Canyon and Chehalem Ridge nature parks, and continue to advance some of Metro's most recent policy commitments around accessibility, sustainability and workforce equity.
- Reporting on bond investments, awards and activities highlights progress on advancing the three bond criteria of racial equity, climate resilience and community engagement across all six bond program areas.
- The committee has reviewed the work underway to respond to the [Metro Auditor's audit of the parks and nature bond](#) focused on whether Metro was prepared to increase access to nature as envisioned in the bond commitments. In particular, the committee supports staff's work to develop a multi-dimensional approach to access and an evaluation framework to understand progress on elements of access like proximity and experience, community empowerment and economic vitality as shown in the trillium image below.



The committee emphasizes and recommends the following items this year and beyond:

- The committee believes strongly that conservation of fish and wildlife habitat is a generational opportunity, both now and in the future and should not be shortchanged. In acknowledgement that the 2019 bond measures includes a relatively smaller amount of funding for land acquisition than previous natural area bond measures, the committee encourages Metro Council and staff to preserve and maximize the amount of funds available for bond funded land acquisition in alignment with regional priorities.
- Work with staff to understand the portfolio of land acquisitions to date for impact and balance now that there is a significant portfolio of land acquisitions completed and focus on understanding opportunities for acquisition in the urban target area.
- Encourage staff to increase the pace and opportunities for acquisition of trail gaps to strengthen the regional trail system where possible.
- Encourage Metro to explore strategies, tools and software that would allow for a deeper analysis of COBID participation for contractors and sub-contractors on bond funded projects, especially as we anticipate more bond funds to be spent on larger construction projects with multiple contractors.
- Further review of the framework to evaluate bond investments for their impact on the region and ability to make progress on bond criteria and the set of tools built to report on and share progress publicly. In addition, review how staff evaluates local share project submittals and what reporting is being asked of park providers to demonstrate alignment with bond criteria and expectations.

- Continue to explore ways to clarify and simplify the complex information about the bond measure and progress of programs within.
- Explore opportunities to use mapping to display more information about each property in the mapping format within feasibility.

Process

This report covers the committee's work through the June 2024 which involved meeting regularly in working groups on land acquisition, community engagement and bond finance:

- Update on the bond's local share program from park providers implementing the program
- The audit of the parks and nature bond and staff's work to respond to the recommendations in the audit
- Update from Parks and Nature's ADA Construction Program Manager on the approach to prioritizing bond investments that increase accessibility and address ADA barriers across Metro's developed parks
- Update on the bond's large scale community visions program
- Update on the bond's community choice grants pilot and strategies to incorporate meaningful engagement into this participatory grantmaking process
- Update on the agency's bond spend and award targets
- Memo to Council and the committee articulating how individual land acquisitions meet bond and program criteria
- Mapping of bond investments to visualize breadth and depth
- [The staff report on bond investments and activities completed through June 2024](#)



LAND ACQUISITION

The oversight committee has three working groups that meet quarterly—land acquisition, community engagement and finance. This section summarizes milestones and takeaways for bond funded land acquisition activities, reflecting the work of the committee’s land acquisition working group. See more detail about the protect and restore land program in [the protect and restore land program snapshot](#).

The protect and restore land program builds on the successes of Metro’s 1995 and 2006 natural areas bond measures in protecting greater Portland’s special places, by purchasing land from willing sellers and restoring it to help preserve regional watersheds, protect some of the region’s rarest habitats, protect culturally important plants and provide opportunities to create potential future access to nature.

With funding from the 1995 and 2006 natural areas bond measures, Metro has completed over 500 individual transactions resulting in over 15,000 acres of protected habitat funded. Since 2020, Metro has invested \$32 million of the 2019 parks and nature bond in 25 transactions to add over 800 acres to the portfolio of protected habitat, support returning acquired land to more stable conditions and complete significant capital restoration projects. Bond funded land acquisition priorities have been shaped [by engagement](#) with communities across the region including the urban Indigenous community, BIPOC¹ individuals, the region’s conservation and community organizations.

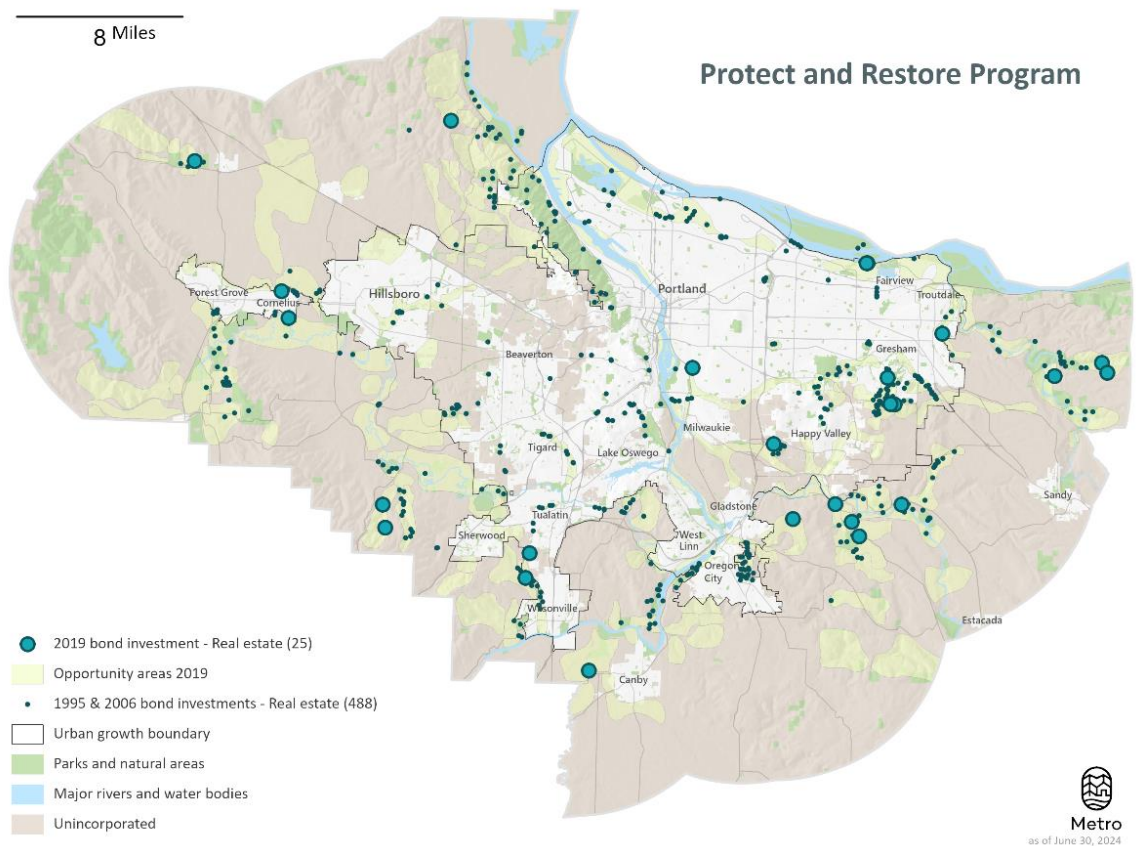
Parks and Nature’s real estate team is also managing the investment of up to \$10 million from the create trails for walking and biking program to buy rights for park providers to one day build regional trail connections. Finally, bond funded pass through and competitive grant programs to the region’s park providers, community and conservation organizations continue to fund local priorities for land acquisition and major restoration projects.

Land acquisition, stabilization and restoration milestones completed from 2023 through June 2024

Category	Completed in fiscal year 2023-2024 (July 2023-June 2024)
Number of land acquisitions	8 acquisitions
Dollars spent on land only	\$8.46 million
Number of trail gap acquisitions completed	1

¹ Abbreviation for Black, Indigenous, and people of color

Category	Completed in fiscal year 2023-2024 (July 2023-June 2024)
Capital restoration projects prioritized for Protect and restore land funds	5 projects
Metro real estate team capacity	Hired third team member to create a complete team of three real estate negotiators and a program manager
Outreach to landowners	Outreach to 77 landowners, 42 new
Conversations with the region's park providers about potential acquisitions	45
New reporting tools developed to measure progress	Finalized measures of success for land acquisitions, especially related to the bond measure's climate resilience criteria summarizing how individual property purchases meet bond goals and criteria



From the committee:

We've reviewed how staff evaluates properties for acquisition, pursues land acquisition opportunities and reports on alignment with bond and program criteria. We find that the properties acquired as of June 2024 meet the bond goals and criteria, reflect community feedback and demonstrate alignment with key pillars of climate resilience including connectivity, anchor habitat and water quality and quantity. In addition, the team anticipates continued progress on the bond funded priority capital restoration projects. The protect and restore land team continues to see the fruits of its work to reach out to landowners across the region to create a pipeline of opportunities for acquisition in alignment with the targets and goals approved by the Metro Council. With the team at full capacity, the pace of acquisition is expected to maintain or increase in this current fiscal year (July 2024 through June 2025), anticipating the completion of up to 10 acquisitions for at least \$7 million in purchase prices. The team is anticipating a similar pace of land acquisition investments in future fiscal years through 2031.

Nevertheless, we're at a pivotal point in the land acquisition trajectory for this bond and look forward to working with staff this upcoming year to evaluate the portfolio of land acquisitions completed to understand how acquisitions to date are balanced across target areas.

We understand that this acquisition work will continue against the backdrop of a real estate market that continues to be dynamic and challenging. The largest challenges the team faces in the cultivation of willing sellers are still related to seller expectations of value, and real estate staff are also seeing the impacts of low inventory and high interest rates. We appreciate staff reporting on fair market value for the portfolio of acquisitions and emphasize that Metro values land acquisition far beyond just the price of the acquisition, taking into account the bigger value to the public for future habitat, water quality and other values. Finally, we encourage staff to continue working with the committee to explore opportunities to include more specific (and qualitative) information about each property in the mapping format.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The oversight committee has three working groups that meet quarterly—land acquisition, community engagement and finance. This section summarizes milestones and takeaways for bond funded community engagement across multiple bond programs, reflecting the work of the committee’s community engagement working group. See more detail about community engagement activities through June 2024 [here](#).

When voters approved the 2019 parks and nature bond, they called on Metro to meaningfully engage communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with low income and other historically marginalized groups, and prioritize the projects and needs they identify. In pursuing bond related engagement activities, Parks and Nature continues to employ a community engagement approach that builds on feedback received to date, incorporates lessons learned from previous engagement activities and creates focused opportunities for BIPOC communities to increase participation and shape bond funded projects and programs.

Metro led community engagement activities underway provide examples of how Metro is continuing to utilize and improve meaningful engagement strategies and tactics that center BIPOC communities in program and project decision-making. The engagement activities completed from 2023 June 2024, for the [community choice grants pilot round](#), [the Lone Fir Memorial](#), the [Blue Lake Park renovation project](#) and the [Willamette Cove Master plan project](#) engaged over 5,000 people using multiple methods including online surveys, in person events, site visits and focused workshops and design charettes. Of this total, approximately 700 people were engaged as part of an in person or virtual engagement activity. Finally, more individuals and communities were engaged by the region’s park providers around priorities for the bond’s local share funds.



From the committee:

We believe that the type of meaningful community engagement defined by the parks and nature bond measure goes beyond counting who has been engaged to understanding who has been able to participate in engagement activities, what their feedback has helped shape and the experience community members had in sharing their feedback to shape bond programs.

Overall, Metro-led bond investments and activities are meeting expectations for meaningful community engagement. Metro Parks and Nature works to ensure community feedback is guiding bond programs and projects and to use engagement activities to build and strengthen relationships with community members over time. In the last year, we have seen Metro staff's ability to be thoughtful about incorporating best practices and lessons learned and being innovative in conducting engagement. We also appreciate learning about initial work underway to engage community members around accessibility improvements being piloted and planned at Metro sites, and in the coming year we would like to better understand how staff is prioritizing accessibility investments. Finally, we value the opportunity to also learn about the successes and challenges local share partners are having with community engagement while using bond funding and hope to continue to learn about this going forward.

We encourage Metro to continue and build on this approach to engagement moving forward. Practically, this means that as Metro implements bond funded programs and projects, it remains critical to intentionally engage BIPOC and other marginalized communities who have historically not been included well in outreach. In instances where bond meaningful engagement activities are completed, such as the work to engage community members on land acquisition priorities, we encourage staff to continue to utilize the feedback received from community on an ongoing basis. This means continuing to reflect on engagement activities completed to identify lessons learned, areas for improvement and using post-engagement evaluation surveys to understand trends in the experience of community members participating in engagement. In this vein, we value staff's inclusion of reflections on engagement and identifying what strategies are working well, exemplified by staff's reporting back and evaluation of [Willamette Cove engagement activities on Metro's website](#).

Beyond evaluating the impact of each engagement activity, we look forward to hearing more about how Metro is evaluating the impact of the entire portfolio of bond investments and activities and measure progress on bond investments including multiple dimensions of access.

FINANCE

The oversight committee has three working groups that meet quarterly—land acquisition, community engagement and finance. This section summarizes milestones and takeaways for bond finance, reflecting the work of the committee’s finance working group. See more detail about bond financial reporting [here](#).

As of end of June 2024, Metro has spent \$80 million of bond proceeds available², representing a significant increase in the pace of spending since the committee’s previous report. Metro has awarded \$67 million through the local share program, competitive grant awards for trail planning and construction, the large scale community visions program and the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program and community choice grants program. Metro tracks financial data in alignment with its fiscal year, which runs from July 1 to June 30 each year.

Indirect expenditures or administrative expenditures, expenditures that directly benefit the bond projects but aren’t tracked by specific project, currently represent 17 percent of total expenditures. We will refer to this number as the bond’s administrative rate. Some of these services include, but are not limited to, legal costs, financial support, technical support, and human resource support that do not correspond directly to a single project but are essential to delivering on the bond’s objectives and outcomes.

Now that all the bond programs are up and running, the administrative expenditures as a percentage of total spending has decreased since 2020 and we anticipate this trend to continue as direct project spending increases. Generally, administrative expenditures as a percent of total spend are high at the beginning and end of a bond spend down.



² Metro issued the first round of the \$475 million bond in April 2020 for the start of a 12-year program. At the time of the bond sale, Metro was able to take advantage of historically low interest rates and earn a return while preparing to spend in the form of a bond premium.

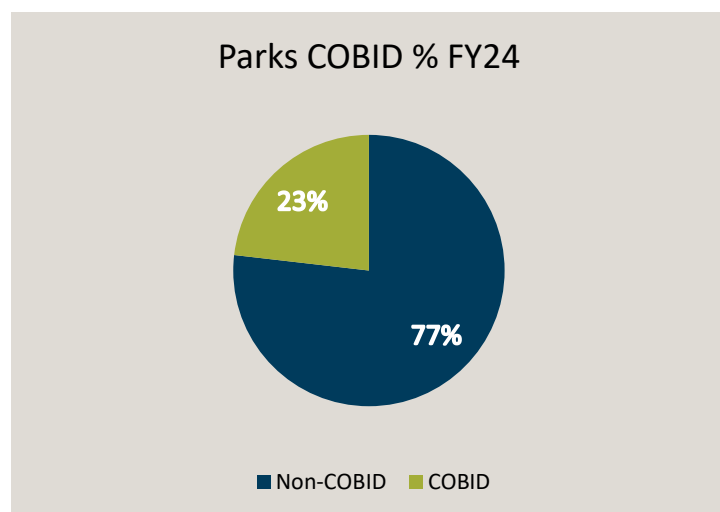
Contract equity

Beyond reporting on the pace of bond spending, Metro also sets and tracks progress towards targets for the contractors and workers who are participating in bond funded contracts. Specifically, Metro tracks the percentage of bond spending with minority owned, women owned and emerging small businesses that are certified with [Oregon's Certification Office for Business Inclusion and Diversity \(COBID\)](#) and in addition, with each type of COBID certification (minority owned, women owned and emerging small businesses, service-disabled veteran-owned).

Metro's participation reporting method removes work that cannot reasonably be performed by a COBID-certified firms from the participation rate calculation including:

- Services provided by another public agency that do not compete with the private sector
- Services for which there is a single or limited group of businesses, none of which are COBID-certified
- Services mandated by Oregon Law (Oregon Revised Statutes) to be provided by qualified rehabilitation facilities

The COBID participation rate to date for Metro's eligible bond funded projects is 23%, which exceeds the floor for COBID participation set for bond investments (20%) and is lower than the cumulative COBID rate included in the last annual report.

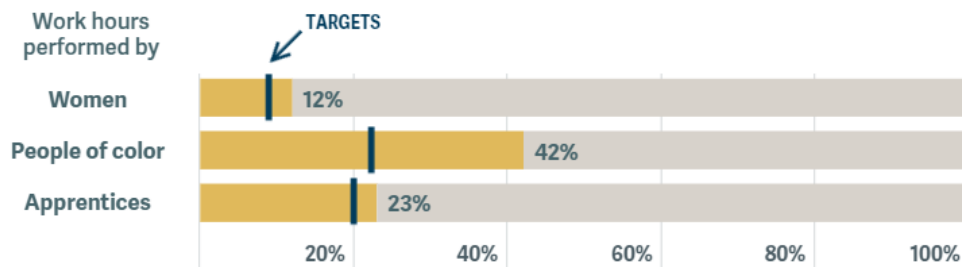


Workforce equity

Metro also tracks progress towards agency targets on workforce participation for people of color, women and apprentices on eligible construction projects. The guidelines for tracking and making progress to workforce equity goals as established in Metro's [Construction Careers Pathways Program](#) are dependent on the total project cost for any bond-funded capital construction projects.

Currently, a subset of bond-funded capital construction projects are tracking and making progress towards a more equitable workforce. This past year staff began to track progress toward goals for diverse workforce participation on bond funded construction projects like Blue Lake Park Curry Building that are part of the Regional Workforce Equity Agreement. The current targets are: 22% of work hours performed by people of color, 9% of work hours performed by women and 20% of work hours performed by apprentices.

Workforce demographics for the Blue Lake Park Curry Building project (as of June 2024)



As of June 2024, the workforce demographics for the Blue Lake Park Curry Building project are exceeding targets in every category.

From the committee:

The committee regularly reviews financial reporting for the 2019 parks and nature bond, and we are pleased to see a meaningful uptick in the pace of bond spend through June 2024 and a drop in the share of administrative expenditures as a percentage of overall bond spending. This is largely due to continued ramp up of land acquisition activities due to building pipeline through steady landowner outreach over the last few years and completion of several essential infrastructure projects at Blue Lake Park. We believe that the current pace of bond spending meets expectations.

We are also pleased to see how bond investments represent a meaningful boost to contractors and workers across the region through contract opportunities for a variety of services including planning, engagement, due diligence, construction, and restoration, to name a few. For that reason, in future years, we would like to better understand how Metro's overall policy requirements for construction projects are shaping guidelines for bond funded contracts at Metro's developed sites in terms of contract and workforce equity and overall project sustainability. In addition, we would like to see more information on how park providers are addressing workforce and contract equity for priority projects funded through the bond's local share program.

With the overall COBID participation rate dropping from the committee's last report to 23 percent, to continue to maximize the impact of bond investments on contractors and workers, we believe it's also important to gather as much information underlying the COBID participation rate as possible.

We encourage Metro to explore strategies, tools and software that would allow for a deeper analysis including opportunities to more reliably track the rate participation rate for sub-contractors and identifying priority categories for COBID such as racial and gender identify. Developing a better understanding of COBID participation for sub-contractors could be helpful as we anticipate more bond funds to be spent on larger and more complicated construction projects, often involving sub-contractors.



LOOKING TO THE YEAR AHEAD

With a recruitment for new members completed in spring 2024, the committee looks forward to continuing to deepen connections by participating in some site visits and in person activities to build stronger foundations for committee work.

We have identified additional topics to review in 2024 and beyond as a full committee or through working groups:

- How Metro is building and using an evaluation framework to measure progress on the impact of bond investments and to identify areas for improvement
- How Metro is asking agencies receiving bond funds through the local share and competitive grant programs to report regularly on overall progress and demonstrate follow through with bond criteria
- Build on initial mapping of parks, trails and natural areas to further analyze bond investments as connected systems
- Information on Metro's tribal government engagement related to the parks and nature bond
- Review evaluation outcomes framework and related reporting and storytelling tools
- Updates on progress at park improvements at Metro sites like Blue Lake, Oxbow and Lone Fir Cultural Heritage and Healing Garden
- More information about how staff are prioritizing projects to address ADA barriers and increase accessibility
- The comprehensive set of Metro's policy requirements that impact bond funded capital construction projects
- How Metro identifies capital expenditures that should be paid for by the local option levy



2024 OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Tana Atchley Culbertson	Indigenous Community Coordinator, City of Portland
Sachi Arakawa	Environmental Planning Consultant, Cascadia Partners and Adjunct Professor, Portland State University
Yume Delegato	Senior Communications Coordinator, Prosper Portland
Burt Edwards	Director of Programs, Re-Think Media
John Ferguson	Former Geotechnical Engineer
Ananda Gordon-Peabody	Environmental Planner, Maul Foster & Alongi
Sophie Kaady	Independent Strategy Consultant
Georgena Moran	Accessibility Specialist, ACCESS recreation
Martita Meier	Digital Strategist and Project manager
PK Melethil	Environmental Scientist, TCM physician
Jean Paul Mugisha	Product Development Engineer, Intel Corporation
Vivek Shandas	Professor, Portland State University
Shannon Shoul	Director, Procurement Sustainability, Nike
Jim Sjulín	Former Portland Parks & Recreation Program manager, 40- Mile Loop board member
Emma Stocker	Information Security Governance Manager, OnPoint Credit Union
Erin Upton(co-chair)	Environmental Social Scientist and Landscape Architect
Cary Watters (co-chair)	Contracts Supervisor, Portland Bureau of Transportation
Owen Wozniak	Land Transactions Program Manager, the Land Trust Alliance