

LONE FIR MEMORIAL DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Date: May 9, 2024
Department: Parks and Nature
Meeting Date: May 28, 2024

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Presenters, Karen Vitkay, she|her, Senior
Regional Planner; Helen Ying, she|her,
Lone Fir Cemetery Foundation president

and Chinese American Citizens Alliance
National Vice President; Neil Lee, he|him,
President Oregon Chinese Consolidated
Benevolent Association; Marcus Lee,
he|him, Lone Fir Cemetery Foundation
and Oregon Chinese Benevolent
Association Board Member
Length: 40 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

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. In alignment with Council direction and priorities, Parks and Nature staff are working with community members to invest bond funds in a memorial to honor untold stories at the historic Lone Fir Cemetery in Southeast Portland, anticipated to be open to the public by end of 2026.

Over the last few years, staff have been partnering with the Chinese American community to develop a design that reflects community priorities and honors the site's history. Along the way, staff have provided regular updates on project progress to the Metro Council.

At the May 28 work session, the team is planning to provide a more detailed update on the work underway, community input sought and received, and anticipated milestones over the next eighteen months to ensure the Metro Council has an opportunity to understand the significance and the complexities of the project. In addition, the May 28 work session provides an opportunity for Council to hear directly from community leaders shaping the project.

ACTION REQUESTED

Receive an update on progress toward creating a memorial to honor untold stories at the historic Lone Fir Cemetery happening as a result of the 2019 Parks and Nature bond and ask questions or for more information as needed.

Flag any additional considerations or issues relevant for project next steps including community engagement, design engineering and approval processing through the City of Portland.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

The investment in the Lone Fir Memorial Project is aligned with Council direction as expressed in the 2019 Parks and Nature bond and the program guidelines for the Take Care of Metro Parks program area, which requires all funded projects to meet one or more of the following program criteria:

- Maintain critical infrastructure and improve visitor experience to ensure that parks are safe and welcoming, particularly those with high visitation and use by communities of color, or places/project identified by communities of color,
- Improve visitor experience through investing in new or existing park amenities,
- Provide opportunities for culturally responsive public improvements identified by communities of color and/or greater Portland's Indigenous community,
- Provide natural history and site interpretation including compelling and accurate representations of historical individual's communities and populations.

Council direction since the passage of the Parks and Nature bond has emphasized the importance of this project to the region and has directed staff to prioritize investing bond funds in advancing the vision.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

\$4 million has been allocated from the bond's Take Care of Metro Parks program area to design and construct a memorial at the Chinese section of Lone Fir Cemetery. Strong support from Chinese American community members and the general public has been instrumental in reinitiating the project and moving it forward.

The design development process prioritizes input from marginalized communities, and Chinese American people specifically. The project team has consulted Chinese American partners on how their community is engaged. We've heard about the importance of authentically telling the history, of recognizing ancestors once buried at the site, and honoring ancestors with traditional practices. Support services have been made available to community members as they process responses to learning about the site history. A therapeutic design approach is being incorporated into the memorial design so that a space is created which is welcoming, educational, reflective, and healing for all.

Please note, not all of the below items will be applicable to the proposed legislation, project or issue. Include as appropriate:

- How does this advance Metro's racial equity goals?
 - The memorial project will highlight an important part of the history of Lone Fir Cemetery, including the experience of Chinese people and other marginalized groups. It will also provide a space to reflect on that history and begin a process of healing. In line with engagement and equity criteria of the bond, engagement efforts are prioritizing marginalized groups, including Chinese American people.
- How does this advance Metro's climate action goals?

- The corner acre of Lone Fir Cemetery has remained a barren gravel lot since the county building was torn down in 2005. Low-impact development practices are being incorporated into the memorial design. A significant portion of the site will be planted and thus will contribute to the green space of the city's second-largest arboretum.
- Known Opposition/Support/Community Feedback
 - Community members are in favor of recognizing and honoring marginalized people buried at Lone Fir Cemetery. Chinese American community members are largely in support of the design and have explicitly stated they felt heard with the latest updated version of the design.
- Explicit list of stakeholder groups and individuals who have been involved in policy development.
 - Lone Fir Cemetery Foundation
 - Oregon Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association
 - Chinese Americans' Citizens Alliance
 - Mental Health Association of Portland
- Financial Implications (current year and ongoing)

\$4 million of the 2019 parks bond is allocated to support the memorial design and construction. Resources required to support operations and maintenance of the memorial will need to be absorbed within the existing parks operating budget. Levy funds may also be utilized for future maintenance needs.

BACKGROUND

Block 14 of Lone Fir Cemetery has a long and complex history. During the 19th and early 20th century, it served as the Chinese section of the cemetery. At least 2,892 Chinese people were buried at Lone Fir, most in Block 14. Remains were often disinterred and returned to China in keeping with cultural practice. In the 1950s, the Chinese section was paved over to build an office space for Multnomah County, which was torn down in 2005 and considered for development. Through continued community advocacy, the site's history was acknowledged and it was rejoined with Lone Fir Cemetery under Metro ownership in 2007.

Read more about the project and its history at oregonmetro.gov/lonefirgarden.

In alignment with Council's prioritization of funds from the 2019 Parks and Nature bond for this memorial, work kicked off in 2022 to connect with community around two design options. This spring, a preferred alternative design that incorporates community input has been shared.

ATTACHMENTS

Presentation slides attached.

- Is legislation required for Council action? Yes No
- If yes, is draft legislation attached? Yes No
- What other materials are you presenting today?

- Three community members will join and share their perspectives on the importance of the project: Helen Ying, she|her, Lone Fir Cemetery Foundation president and Chinese American Citizens Alliance National Vice President; Neil Lee, he|him, President Oregon Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association; Marcus Lee, he|him, Lone Fir Cemetery Foundation and Oregon Chinese Benevolent Association Board Member