

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 26-5581, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY CHOICE GRANTS

Date: June 22, 2026

Presenters: Jon Blasher, Crista Gardner,
Gabrielle Brown

Department: Parks and Nature

Meeting: July 21, 2026

Prepared by: Crista Gardner, Gabrielle Brown

ISSUE STATEMENT

Since 1995, voters in greater Portland have passed three bond measures that protect the region's air and water, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and connect people with nature. In November 2019, voters in greater Portland overwhelmingly approved a \$475 million parks and nature bond which included three critical aspects to this work: racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience. All six programs in the bond are launched and making investments in parks, trails and natural areas across the region.

The Park and Nature bond's capital grants program includes the Community Choice Grants pilot which is designed to support community driven projects that protect and improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, support climate resiliency and/or increase people's experience of nature at the community scale and to fund community-led projects, with an emphasis on benefitting historically marginalized communities.

Staff are presenting for Council consideration and approval a slate of funding awards recommended by the grant review committee based on the Council policy articulated in the bond measure, a community vote, applications submitted, the stated grants criteria, geographic distribution, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment. Feedback and lessons learned from this pilot will help shape and adjust any potential future funding rounds.

ACTION REQUESTED

Council consideration and approval of Resolution No. 26-5581

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

By approving this second round of Community Choice Grants funding, Metro Council advances the intended purpose, principles and criteria of the 2019 PN Bond resolution. Nature in Neighborhoods provides grants to projects led by community organizations, park providers, local governments, and others.

Metro Council direction has shaped the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants program to help deliver investment to protect and improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, support climate resiliency and/or increase people's experience of nature at the community scale.

The recommended projects from the grant program must meet bond legal requirements to result in a publicly owned capital asset and address bond criteria and program goals as is stated in the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants Guidebook.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

Does Council support and approve the grant committee's recommendation for funding awards?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

Approval of Resolution No. 26-5581 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all 23 proposed projects through successful executed funding agreements. Council can accept the recommendations for funding; make alternate recommendations and funding decisions; or award no funding and direct staff to revise the process.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council consideration and approval of the second round of recommended slate of awards for the Community Choice Grants pilot marks the completion of a two-year community engagement and process with Clackamas County partners. Council consideration and feedback during the initial round from 2022 – 2024 helped staff to adjust and shape this round and future potential rounds.

Staff recommends that Metro Council accept the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants review committee recommendation to the Metro Council for the following 23 grant awards in Exhibit A.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

HOW IS THIS RELATED TO METRO'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK OR CORE MISSION?

Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants Program background

Since 2006, the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants has played an essential role in meeting the needs of the community and organizations connecting people to nature in the region, with a focus on serving underserved communities and helping to embody the agency's goals on racial equity. The program has been well-loved and supported by community members and local partners. Through successive grant cycles, the program has evolved and adapted to reflect Metro Council direction and meet the needs of the community and organizations. As a part of the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program, the Community Choice Grants continue this tradition while expanding collaborative partnerships and community engagement.

The roots of Metro's Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program can be found in the Regional Framework Plan which unites all of Metro's adopted land use planning policies and requirements including the 2040 Growth Concept and is designed to create sustainable and prosperous communities for present and future generations.

Metro Council adopted Ordinance 05-1077B (Nature in Neighborhoods) in September 2005 to establish standards for development in streamside and wetland areas to conserve and protect fish and wildlife habitat and included Title 13 of Metro's Urban Growth Management Functional Plan,

which implements Oregon Statewide Planning Goal 5 (natural resources, scenic and historic areas and open spaces) and Goal 6 (air, water and land resources quality).

In 2006, Metro Council approved and directed staff to develop the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program by submitting to voters the Bond of \$227.4M to fund natural area acquisition and water quality protection in Resolution No. 06-3672B.

In 2019, Metro Council approved new criteria in the Parks and Nature Bond: racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience. Metro Council directed staff in the legislation to pilot a new “Participatory Grantmaking” approach within the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program area, referred to as the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants. The Community Choice Grants build on Parks and Nature’s experience soliciting and awarding capital and community grants, support matchmaking between park providers and community organizations and supporting external grant review committees, and increase the community led aspect of all of these elements.

HOW DOES THIS ADVANCE METRO’S RACIAL EQUITY GOALS?

The Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants program advances Metro’s racial equity goals set by 2019 PN Bond criteria around meaningful community engagement and racial equity and program specific criteria at every step of the process from the formation of the program design and review committee to the ways projects were designed and prioritized

The Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants program and projects were designed by community members in 2022. The Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants Program Design and Review Committee members were selected through an open recruitment process. The committee’s composition and focus reflect the agency’s focus on advancing racial equity. Grant applicants were eligible to serve on the committee and stipends of \$200 per meeting were available for committee members upon request. Metro recruited for people with backgrounds in water quality and habitat restoration, landscape architecture, real estate, community development, workforce development, job training and apprenticeship programs, climate adaptation and resilience policies and practices, sustainable development techniques.

Community Engagement and Vote Process

Outreach for this grant opportunity was conducted through social media and online venues, direct mailings, email listservs, parks director meetings, local advisory board meetings, and a series of open public events and tabling opportunities at community venues. Outreach was conducted with the help of local parks providers, watershed and conservation organizations, local special districts, grant makers, and other Metro teams. The resulting portfolio of projects reflects that outreach. Applying lessons learned through the first round of Community Choice Grants in Washington County to the second round in Clackamas County increased engagement dramatically while reducing costs by leveraging existing community spaces and focusing on the most effective engagement methods.

In Spring 2025, Metro and its partners conducted extensive outreach via three community workshops, one accessibility workshop, various community events, social media, direct mailers, newsletters, and emails. By July 1, 2025, community submitted 172 project ideas for Community Choice Grants.

After vetting and feasibility analysis by Metro and partner staff, 82 project ideas moved forward for further project development. In addition, several land acquisition ideas moved forward for further potential real estate negotiation under the program area Protect and Restore.

Through three mini-community design workshops at events, partner jurisdiction staff, community members, and the design consultant refined project ideas into conceptual illustrations and narratives. The resulting 82 projects were then included in an online ballot in October 2025.

During October 7 – November 7, 2025, community members cast 1,476 complete individual votes using ranked choice voting to select 50 projects to move on to additional development.

After further vetting and consultation with local park providers and partner organizations, 37 projects were developed by community members, partner and design consultants through individual design meetings and at four community design workshops in February 2026.

The Final Vote from April 20 – June 15, 2026, allowed community from the entire Metro region to recommend which of the final 32 projects to put before Metro Council. This process received 3,164 individual, verified votes over the course of voting on a bilingual ranked-choice ballot of the 32 projects. A review committee of local subject-area experts provided oversight of the results of the community vote and formally recommend 23 projects to Metro Council for community choice grant awards on July 21, 2026.

HOW DOES THIS ADVANCE METRO'S CLIMATE ACTION GOALS?

The Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants program advances Metro's climate action goals through implementation of the 2019 PN Bond and program criteria around climate resilience. The resulting projects and recommended funding awards demonstrated a focus on watershed health, restoration of natural areas, and connecting people to parks and nature fulfills climate resiliency in a broad way. In addition, many of these projects are located in communities designated by Metro as equity focal areas.

KNOWN OPPOSITION/SUPPORT/COMMUNITY FEEDBACK /NO KNOWN OPPOSITION.

See above description of community engagement. No known opposition.

EXPLICIT LIST OF STAKEHOLDER GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT.

The Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants program has been shaped at each step by community members, park providers, and community organizations. The program focus and description in the 2019 parks and nature bond measure explicitly reflects the feedback received during the bond development process in 2018 and 2019 through focused stakeholder discussions

and community forums. In addition, feedback collected during the refinement of other bond programs in 2021 and 2022 have also helped shape the grants guidebook, review committee composition and focus for this pilot.

In Spring 2022, Metro staff worked with the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants Program Design and Review Committee, to refine and build the framework of the Program based on the direction of the 2019 PN Bond to create the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants Guidebook that identified the desired outcomes for investments and eligibility requirements for the initial cycle of Program funding.

The 2022 Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants pilot (now called Community Choice Grants) Program Design and Review Committee was selected through an open recruitment process and included Blanca Gaytan Farfan (East Portland Rising Community Projects), Theresa Huang (Urban Greenspaces Institute), Jeffrey Lee (Portland Bureau of Environmental Services), Jairaj Singh (Unite Oregon), Alisa Chen (Grow Portland), and Kevin Hughes (Hillsboro Parks and Recreation). One committee member was invited but was unable to serve: Anthony Bradley (Play Grow Learn).

As outlined in the parks and nature bond measure, the review committee comes from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience on best practices related to racial equity, community engagement, and climate resilience and water quality, habitat restoration and traditional ecological knowledge to create the greatest benefits for people, plants, and wildlife. Committee members are committed to Metro's parks and nature mission and to supporting opportunities for communities of color and other historically marginalized groups to design and build access to nature for their communities.

Throughout this second round of Community Choice Grants, a coalition of local partners provided constant support and collaboration for program decisions, process refinement, outreach opportunities, and project development guidance. This partner coordination team included local Clackamas County partners from the City of Milwaukie, the City of Gladstone, the City of Oregon City, North Clackamas Parks & Recreation District, Clackamas County Water Environmental Services, Clackamas River Water and Clackamas River Water Providers, Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District, Johnson Creek Watershed Council, Greater Oregon City Watershed Council, and North Clackamas Watershed Council.

Non-profit members and one special district member of the continuous Clackamas County Partners Coordination team served as the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants review committee. These individuals were sought for their technical expertise and backgrounds listed above, knowledge of the Clackamas County nature and community, and their knowledge of the Community Choice Grants process, program and policies. Since Community Choice Grants result in projects on public land, the non-profit members and one special district member listed have limited or no conflicts of interest in the final 32 projects.

Members included: Amy Barton, Clackamas River Basin Watershed Council; Heather Neilsen, Clackamas Soil and Water Conversation District; Tom Gaskill, Greater Oregon City Watershed Council; Jennifer Hamilton, Johnson Creek Watershed Council; Noah Jenkins, Johnson Creek

Watershed Council; Amy van Riessen, North Clackamas Watershed Council; Neil Schulman, North Clackamas Watershed Council; and Kira Smith, North Clackamas Watershed Council and Greater Oregon City Watershed.

Committee members declared any direct conflict of interest in the proposals and did not score or participate directly in the discussion or ranking of an application where they had a conflict.

LEGAL ANTECEDENTS

Resolution No. 19-4988, “For the Purpose of Submitting to the Voters of the Metro Area General Obligation Bonds in the amount of \$475 million to Fund Nature Area and Water Quality Protection and to Connect People to Nature Close to Home; and Setting Forth the Official Intent of the Metro Council to Reimburse Certain Expenditures Out of the Proceeds of Said Bonds upon Issuance” was adopted on June 6, 2019.

Resolution No. 06-3672B, “For the Purpose of Submitting to the Voters of the Metro Area A General Obligation Bond Indebtedness in the Amount of \$227.4 Million to Fund Natural Area Acquisition and Water Quality Protection” was adopted March 9, 2006.

Resolution No. 05-3574A, “Establishing a Regional Habitat Protection, Restoration and Greenspaces Initiative called Nature in Neighborhoods” was adopted in 2005.

ANTICIPATED EFFECTS

Approval of Resolution No. 26-5581 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all 23 proposed projects through successful executed funding agreements. Metro will enter into Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) with governmental agencies and grant agreements with non-governmental agencies.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (CURRENT YEAR AND ONGOING)

No new financial implications result from this resolution. Metro Council approved funding in the 2019 PN Bond for the Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants program for grants funding community-led projects.