

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 23-5322, FOR THE PURPOSE OF SELECTING THREE PARKS AND NATURE BOND LARGE SCALE COMMUNITY VISIONS PROJECTS AND AWARDING FUNDING FOR THE INITIAL PROGRAM CYCLE

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Department: Parks and Nature

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ISSUE STATEMENT

In November 2019, voters in greater Portland overwhelmingly approved a \$475 million parks and nature bond. All six programs in the bond are launched and making investments in parks, trails and natural areas across the region.

The Metro Council created the bond's large scale community visions program to support projects that uplift communities by leveraging nature to achieve benefits such as job opportunities, affordable housing, and safe reliable transportation. In 2022, the Metro Council approved a pilot program handbook to govern an initial solicitation of up to \$10 million for projects that meet the bond and program criteria and goals. Staff have compiled information and evaluation from the following three applications submitted for Council consideration and review.

- Trust for Public Land and Oregon State University for acquisition of private timber site in the Tualatin Mountains
- Waterfront Education Park Development by Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission and Prosper Portland
- Albina Vision Trust for site acquisition adjacent to the Willamette River

Approval of Resolution No. 23-5322 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all three proposed projects through successful executed funding agreements.

ACTION REQUESTED

Council consideration and approval of Resolution No. 23-5322.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Metro Council direction has and will continue to shape the large scale community visions (LSCV) program to help deliver investment in habitat preservation, restoration, and access to nature.

Eligibility with bond legal requirements, bond criteria and program goals

After hearing staff present on each of the three applications, the Metro Council has signaled that each proposed project has the potential to fully address the bond measure and program requirements as listed below. As a group, the three proposed projects offer significant investment in nature uplift and land protection and help catalyze and knit together advances in regional priority outcomes of housing, transportation, climate resilience and workforce. The three proposed

projects each require actions to meet bond legal requirements for a capitalizable asset that is publicly owned.

<i>Requirement/criteria</i>	<i>Description</i>
Bond legal requirements	Project results in a capital asset that is publicly owned
Program criteria from the bond measure	<p>Improve access to nature for people</p> <p>Protect and reclaim rivers, increase tree canopy and/or restore or improve other important natural features in urban areas for the benefit of people and wildlife</p> <p>Create access to nature in a regional or town center, employment area or other areas identified as a priority for investment in Metro’s 2040 Growth Concept</p> <p>Foster partnerships between public agencies and between the public and private sectors and/or catalyze private investment by focusing public investments and efforts on specific priority projects</p> <p>Meet a need identified by communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with low incomes and other historically marginalized communities</p> <p>Complement investments in affordable housing and transit or active transportation projects</p>

Eligibility and alignment with pilot handbook

The Council-approved large scale community visions program pilot handbook builds on Council’s direction in the bond measure by defining eligible projects for the pilot round and anticipating some, but not all of the potential complexities that accompany large projects of regional significance with both public and private interests and equities.

<i>Requirement/criteria</i>	<i>Description</i>
Defines eligible projects	<p>Restoration projects: Create or renovate an asset to enhance fish habitat and/or wildlife connectivity by enhancing stream complexity with large woody debris, removing or replacing culverts to enhance fish passage and habitat, providing viewing platforms to reduce human impact on sensitive habitat, expanding tree canopy and the like.</p> <p>Urban transformation projects: Seek to shift the balance of marginal urban land use toward natural environment in the region’s most urban settings by deindustrializing underutilized sites, removing environmental contamination or hazards to create or improve habitat, expanding tree canopy, and/or by doing ecological restoration that shifts</p>

	<p>marginal urban nature toward sustainable natural area nodes.</p> <p>Neighborhood livability projects: Seek to connect people to existing natural areas in ways that minimize negative impacts on natural habitats and their functionality, including but not limited to expanding the tree canopy.</p>
Fits within parameters of pilot round	<p>Up to \$10 million in funding awards; projects must have \$2 million in nature uplift with a \$6 million project cost</p> <p>The minimum grant amount is \$1,000,000. The total project requires match of \$5 for every \$1 of Metro funding.</p>

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Metro Council approve Resolution No. 23-5322 to select three large scale community visions projects to receive funding. However, given that this program is new to Metro, the Metro Chief Operating Officer (COO) also recommends the following supportive activities to ensure that staff can carry out Council’s policy objectives, support a successful pilot round, right-size Metro’s role in project development and match appropriate resources to project needs.

Considerations for maximizing funding allocation

In order to be responsive to Council direction to maximize the impact of the pilot and future rounds, the COO recommends not exceeding the \$10 million threshold of the pilot round by exploring relevant funding opportunities across the entire parks and nature bond that may be better matched to these projects, including, but not limited to, the protect and restore land program as well as other grant programs within Metro.

Right-sizing Metro’s role and support of each proposed project

In order to be responsive to Council’s direction to work with each of the applicants to become ready to receive the funding awards, the COO will direct Metro staff invest needed time, technical support and collaboration with the goal of realizing the potential of each of these proposed projects on bond criteria and program goals and executing a funding agreement that specifies an award amount.

However, the COO recommends that the Metro Council should carefully consider the risks, liabilities and tradeoffs with Metro serving as a site owner for any of these proposals. As needed, staff and Council would further examine the dynamics of Metro as a site owner related to liability, resources for site stewardship and maintenance, and precedent setting for future rounds of LSCV and other Metro grant programs.

Adjustments to current handbook and future rounds

The LSCV program is new to the parks and nature bond measure and Metro. The COO recommends that Metro Council and staff process the lessons learned from the pilot round to update the current program handbook and future rounds to better meet project opportunities, community needs and Council goals for the program based on:

- Feedback from letter of intent submitters and applicants

- Feedback from park providers and community partners who heard about the program and considered applying and those who haven't yet heard about or considered the program
- Feedback from Metro staff

Planned touchpoints with Council in the next 6-12 months

With the Metro Council's understanding that each of the projects will be ready to receive funding on a different timeline, the COO will provide an update to Council on progress towards readiness to execute initial funding agreements within three to six months of Council approval of Resolution No. 23-5322. In addition, the Metro COO will come back to Council if any of the dynamics of the three projects change from assumptions and expectations established in spring 2023. Finally, the COO plans to return to the Metro Council when each project is ready to finalize a funding agreement.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/INPUT

During the solicitation for letters of intent, Parks and Nature staff reached out to the region's park providers, jurisdictions and community-based organizations to understand project opportunities that may be eligible for the pilot round. Staff shared this opportunity through Metro's website, with hundreds of former and current Parks and Nature grant recipients and with housing and community development focused organizations through collaboration with the Planning, Development and Research Center team.

Staff met with over 10 different entities with potential project ideas to talk through eligibility for this pilot round. Several potential applicants signaled interest in the program but did not feel ready to apply in this project round. Before beginning the next funding cycle, staff will plan a robust outreach to strategy to ensure follow up with those entities as well as partners who are identified as a potential good fit for LSCV funding through other Parks and Nature and Metro grant programs and other partners across the region.

BACKGROUND

The large scale community visions program is intended to provide \$30 million in bond funds to help deliver significant investment in habitat preservation, restoration, and access to nature in coordinated and visionary capital projects. Council direction has further defined a large scale community vision project as a capital investment that uplifts community by returning natural environment to a central role in projects that seek to address job opportunities, affordable housing and safe, reliable transportation. These projects are transformative projects of regional significance that increase access to nature for people in urban areas and/or improve the resilience of urban natural areas. By leveraging other public and private investments, these capital projects will also support improvements in affordable housing and safe, reliable transportation, and job creation.

In Spring 2022, Metro Council approved a handbook for a pilot project solicitation of up to \$10 million, which received four letters of interest and three full applications. In April 2023, the Metro Council reviewed the staff evaluation of the different applications and directed staff to return with a COO recommendation for advancing all three projects for eventual funding awards.