

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 26-5580, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING 2025-26 NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP AND RESTORATION COMMUNITY GRANTS

Date: June 21, 2026
Department: Parks and Nature
Meeting: July 21, 2026

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ISSUE STATEMENT

Community stewardship and restoration grants support and create partnerships in local communities that improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature.

The program has three goals: Improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat; Community partnerships, collaboration and accountability; and Economic and environmental equity. Fulfillment of these goals are the primary evaluation criteria for the proposals submitted to the Nature in Neighborhoods community stewardship and restoration grants program.

Requests for this year's funding opportunity were evaluated by a volunteer review committee. The review committee evaluated pre-applications and full applications based on the information submitted by applicants, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment.

ACTION REQUESTED

The Metro Council is requested to vote to approve the award of the 2025-26 Nature in Neighborhoods community stewardship and restoration community grants to those recipients listed in Exhibit A and for the amounts listed for each individual award.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Metro Nature in Neighborhoods community grants implement the Metro Council policy direction outlined in the 2005 Title 13, 2013 Parks and Nature (PN) Levy, 2018 PN Levy and 2022 PN Levy as well as the 2016 Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Plan and 2025 PN REDI Action Plan, including the Racial Equity Framework. Furthermore, the community grants improve administrative processes based on lessons learned and feedback from previous grant cycles, other grantmakers, community and community research, such as Metro's 2017 report on Resident Needs and Behaviors in Portland Parks and Natural Areas and the Coalition of Communities of Color's 2011 report Philanthropy and Communities of Color in Oregon. By doing so, the community grants have evolved in step with Metro Council direction over the past 19 years to better

meet the needs of the community and organizations connecting people to nature in our region.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

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

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

The Metro Council has the option of approving or declining the attached funding recommendations.

Approving the funding recommendations would allow the projects to begin and would obligate the full \$750,000 available to this program in this year's budget. The projects recommended for funding help people of many local communities connect with nature and with one another in the region's parks and natural areas. These projects ensure that historically marginalized communities in greater Portland enjoy the benefits of conserving land, air and water, and equitable access to safe and welcoming parks, trails and natural areas; communities enjoy learning about, helping restore, experiencing and connecting with nature and the region's natural areas. The projects recommended for funding support efforts to ensure that historically marginalized communities will prosper economically from the business of Parks and Nature in greater Portland.

Declining the funding recommendations would leave this year's \$750,000 unobligated and the recommended projects would not receive funding. This would delay distribution of this year's funds and would require program staff to redo the funding opportunity and organizations to reapply for funding.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that Metro Council accept the Nature in Neighborhoods community grants review committee recommendation to the Metro Council for the following ten (10) grant awards in Exhibit A.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

How is this related to Metro's Strategic Framework or Core Mission?

Metro's Nature in Neighborhoods community stewardship and restoration program is grounded in the Regional Framework Plan, especially Chapter 3 which explicates how Metro policy supports the participation of citizens in environmental education, planning, stewardship activities, and recreational services in alignment with the Metro Citizenship Involvement Principles.

As noted in Chapter 3 of Metro's Regional Framework Plan:

"The importance of the region's natural landscape and its recreation facilities cannot be understated. They support the air we breathe, the water we drink and define the look and feel of our communities. They ensure that natural resources and habitats are protected and that citizens have recreational opportunities close to where they work and live.

Citizens throughout the region have demonstrated the importance of parks, natural areas, trails and recreation services through their support of funding measures, participation in recreational activities and volunteer community service and from what they have said in public opinion surveys. Metro recognizes the desire of citizens to have high-quality natural areas, trails and parks close to home. Metro is working with federal, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations and citizens to address and meet the park and recreation needs of the Portland metropolitan area."

The Nature in Neighborhoods community grants program community stewardship and restoration funding opportunity is responsive to Metro area residents' desire to have easy and equitable access to nature and to have opportunities to connect with nature in ways that are resonant with their personal and community priorities.

How does this advance Metro's racial equity goals?

Nature in Neighborhoods community grants advance Metro's racial equity goals by prioritizing proposals that support historically underserved communities' access to nature and which center the voices and perspectives of historically and marginalized communities.

How does this advance Metro's climate action goals?

This work supports Metro's climate change goals supporting community stewardship and restoration projects at the neighborhood level and focuses on helping individual Metro area residents build their relationship with nature, become environmental advocates, and build the skills and knowledge necessary to actively participate in restoration projects in their own homes, in their neighborhoods, and even at the regional level.

Known Opposition/Support/Community Feedback

There is no known opposition. The Nature in Neighborhood community grants program has been supported by the community. Staff continuously seek opportunities to evolve and improve the program in response to community feedback.

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

Metro has collaborated with a broad array of local stakeholders to develop this policy and program staff continue to consult with local environmental organizations and other stakeholders to refine and improve the funding opportunity.

Beyond direct feedback from the community members and community led organizations served by this program, the need for such a funding focus has been established via many sources. Work done by Metro that illuminates this need includes:

- Metro Parks and Nature Systems Plan
- 2022 Levy Renewal Framework
- Metro Parks and Nature Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion Plan
- Resident Needs and Behaviors in Portland Parks and Natural Areas – Needham and Rushing
- Connect With Nature: Planning Parks and Nature with Communities of Color

External research also highlights the importance of directing resources to historically and systemically underserved groups as an important part of efforts to address existing inequities, and offers guidance on how to more effectively implement equity-centered grantmaking:

- Philanthropy and Communities of Color in Oregon: from strategic investments to assessable impacts amidst growing racial and ethnic diversity (2011), by the Coalition of Communities of Color
- Analysis of Policies, Practices, and Programs for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (2013), by the D5 Coalition
- Incorporating Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion In Your Grant-Making Process: A Checklist Of Potential Actions (2016), by Arabella Advisors
- Oregon by the Numbers (2018), by The Ford Family Foundation
- 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report (2021), by the Outdoor Foundation

Parks and Nature Director Jonathan Blasher approved this year's review committee who were recruited from a diverse pool of applicants. Participation on the grant review committee is by application, which is open to all and broadly advertised. The review committee included local experts in habitat restoration, natural area land management, conservation planning, mentorship and job skill development, diversity, equity and inclusion, community partnership development, philanthropy, and grant management.

The members of the 2025-26 Nature in Neighborhoods Community Stewardship and Restoration Grants review committee are:

- Angie Morrill, *University of Oregon, Grow Your Own Program for Sapsik'wala Mentor/Elder*
- Cristy Morales Munoz, *Inti Collective LLC, West Coast manager and co-owner*
- Diego Gioseffi, *Oregon Metro, Community education and stewardship program manager*
- Gabriela Gonzalez, *Wapato Table Farm culinary herbalist and holistic nutritionist*
- Holly Beer, *PSU grad student, Leadership for Sustainable Education M.S. program*
- Jasmine Samples, *former Oregon Metro hourly employee, former nonprofit professional, current community organizer*
- Jasper Lieber, *Community volunteer and retired software engineer*

- Maya Hurst-Mayr, *Columbia Slough Watershed Council, Development manager*
- Stone Hudson, *Meyer Memorial Trust program officer*
- Winn Holly, *Legacy Emmanuel, RN Lactation Consultant*

Committee members declared any direct conflict of interest with the proposals and did not score or participate directly in the discussion or ranking of an application where they had a conflict. Perceived conflicts were also noted and recorded in meeting minutes.

Legal Antecedents:

Resolution No. 24-5417, For the Purpose of Approving 2023 Nature in Neighborhoods Community Stewardship and Restoration Community Grants

Resolution No. 22-5279, For the Purpose of Referring to the Voters of the Metro Area Renewal of the Metro's Local Option Levy for Protecting Water Quality, Restoring Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Connecting People to Nature.

Resolution No. 21-5213, For the Purpose of Approving 2021 Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Community Stewardship Community Grants

Resolution No. 19-4985, For the Purpose of Approving 2019 Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Community Stewardship Community Grants

Resolution No. 16-4690, For the Purpose of Referring to the Voters of the Metro Area Renewal of the Metro's Local Option Levy for Protecting Water Quality, Restoring Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Connecting People to Nature.

Resolution 16-4708, For the Purpose of Approving the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

Resolution 16-4725, For the Purpose of Approving the 2016 Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Community Stewardship Community Grants.

Resolution No. 15-4644, For the Purpose of Approving 2015 Nature in Neighborhood Restoration and Community Stewardship Grants.

Resolution No. 14-4554, For the Purpose of Approving 2014 Nature in Neighborhood Restoration and Community Stewardship Grants.

Resolution No. 12-4398, For the Purpose of Referring to the Voters of the Metro Area a Local Option Levy for the Purpose of Preserving Water Quality, Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Maintaining Metro's Parks and Natural Areas for the Public.

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

Resolution 05-3580A, Transferring \$1,250,000 from the Balance of the FY 2004-05 Recovery Rate Stabilization Reserve to a General Fund Reserve for Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration Projects.

Ordinance No. 07-1160B, Transferring \$250,000 from the Recovery Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund for Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration Projects.

Ordinance No. 09-1215B, Approving \$92,500 in the FY 2009-10 Budget and Appropriation Schedule for an additional round of Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Enhancement Grants.

Ordinance No. 10-1235B, Approving \$150,000 in the FY 2010-11 Budget and Appropriation Schedule for an additional round of Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Enhancement Grants.

Ordinance No. 12-1274A, Approving \$200,000 in the FY 2012-13 Budget and Appropriation Schedule for an additional round of Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Enhancement Grants.

Anticipated Effects

This Resolution approves the award of 2025-26 Nature in Neighborhood community stewardship and restoration community grants and begins the individual contract award process for the selected grant applicants with an anticipated project start date on or after July 21, 2026. Projects may be up to three years in length.

Financial Implications (current year and ongoing)

This Resolution authorizes award of contracts in an amount previously identified by the Metro Council in the budget for this purpose. The adopted FY 2025-26 budget includes the necessary appropriation authority for reimbursement of these grants.

BACKGROUND

For nearly two decades, the Metro Council has provided funding for grants to community groups, non-profits, and other organizations, designed to support and create partnerships in local communities that improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature.

In May 2013, voters approved Measure 26-152, providing new funding for Metro's parks and natural areas and providing increased funding for Nature in Neighborhoods community grants, which was referred to the voters by Metro Council (Resolution 12-4398). The Metro Council awarded Nature in Neighborhoods restoration and community stewardship grants in 2014 (Resolution 14-4554), in 2015 (Resolution 15-4644), in 2016 (Resolution 16-4725), in 2019 (Resolution 19-4985), in 2021 (Resolution 21-5213), and in 2024 (Resolution 24-5417). This year's funding opportunity is the seventh round of awards for Nature in Neighborhood community stewardship and restoration grants (Resolution 26-5580).

In November 2016, voters renewed the Metro parks and natural areas levy with the approval of Measure 26-178, referred to the voters by Metro Council (Resolution 16-4690), which continued funding for Nature in Neighborhoods community grants. Furthermore, in June 2016, the Metro Council adopted the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Resolution 16-4708), which directs the agency to incorporate racial equity into all aspects of its work.

In May 2023, voters renewed the Metro parks and natural areas levy with the approval of Measure 22-5279, which continued funding for Nature in Neighborhoods community grants. The Metro

Council awarded Nature in Neighborhoods restoration and community stewardship grants in 2023 (Resolution 24-5417).

Grant program staff used the framework provided by Metro Council in Resolutions No. 12-4398, No. 16-4690, No. 16-4708, and No. 22-5279 to develop an outreach plan, application materials, review committee and evaluation criteria for these community grants, referred to as Nature in Neighborhoods community stewardship and restoration grants. Staff also aligned Metro's grant criteria with state, regional and local conservation plans and community initiatives in order to achieve multiple benefits.