

## STAFF REPORT

### IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 23-5342, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING INITIAL ROUND FUNDING FOR NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS CAPITAL GRANTS

Date: June 12, 2023

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## 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 Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program 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 have completed the solicitation and review for an initial round of awards up to \$2.7 million.

Metro received many strong proposals for this initial round and is presenting for Council consideration and approval a slate of funding awards recommended by the grant review committee based on the information submitted, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment. Staff ensured that the review adhered to Council policy and were prepared to elevate any potential deviations to senior leadership and Council if needed. Feedback and lessons learned from this initial round will help shape and adjust future funding rounds.

## ACTION REQUESTED

Council consideration and approval of Resolution No. 23-5342

## IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

By approving this initial round of capital 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 capital 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 Capital Grants Handbook.

### **POLICY QUESTION(S)**

These grant awards implement the Metro Council direction for the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program.

### **POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER**

Approval of Resolution No. 23-5342 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all seven proposed projects through successful executed funding agreements.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff recommends that Metro Council accept the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants review committee recommendation to the Metro Council for the following seven 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*

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 (a.k.a. Nature in Neighborhoods) in September 2005. The ordinance established 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 and directed staff to refine the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program by submitting to voters the Parks and Nature Bond of \$475M to fund nature area and water quality protection and connect people to nature close to home in Resolution No. 19-4988. Metro Council approved new criteria in the PN Bond: racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience.

#### **HOW DOES THIS ADVANCE METRO'S RACIAL EQUITY GOALS?**

The Nature in Neighborhoods capital 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.

During solicitation for this initial round, parks and nature staff intentionally broadened outreach about this opportunity through social media, online, email listservs, parks director meetings, and non-profit events. Outreach was conducted with the help of local parks providers, grant makers,

and other Metro teams, such as the Metro transit-oriented development team outreach to affordable housing providers.

The resulting portfolio of projects reflect that outreach. Projects span the three-county area within Metro's jurisdictional boundary. The primary applicants cross many sectors, including affordable housing providers, community organizations, non-profit park operators, park providers, a library and transit agency. Partners demonstrate a wide breadth and diversity of community-based organizations and public agencies. Projects range from outdoor classrooms to large scale restoration projects to public plazas to nature play. Projects include a variety of community engagement, strong and established partnerships, and high level of involvement with BIPOC and marginalized communities.

Furthermore, the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants Review Committee and the capital grants pilot (now called community choice grants) Program Design and Review Committee members were selected through an open recruitment process. The committees' composition and focus reflect the agency's focus on advancing racial equity. Grant applicants were eligible to serve on the review committee and stipends of \$250 were available for review 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.

In addition, the bond also included a Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants pilot (now called community choice grants) that will be designed by community members and award grants through a participatory process in 2023 in Metro Council District 4 (Washington County).

#### **HOW DOES THIS ADVANCE METRO'S CLIMATE ACTION GOALS?**

The Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program advances Metro's climate action goals through implementation of the 2019 PN Bond and program criteria around climate resilience. The resulting project applications 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.

#### **KNOWN OPPOSITION/SUPPORT/COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

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.

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

The Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program and initial solicitation round has been shaped at each step by community members and partner 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 solicitation handbook, review committee composition and focus for this initial round.

In Spring 2022, Metro staff worked with the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants pilot (now called 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 and in winter 2023, Metro staff finalized the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grant handbook that identified the desired outcomes for investments and eligibility requirements for the initial cycle of Program funding.

The 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 unable to serve: Anthony Bradley (Play Grow Learn).

As outlined in the parks and nature bond measure, with support from Metro staff, 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.

In Spring 2023, the Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants Review Committee, staffed by Metro, was established to review all projects and make funding recommendations to the Metro Council. The application process has two stages: a pre-application phase and a full application phase. The Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants review committee met twice in spring 2023 to review 16 pre applications totaling \$6.08M in funding requests and 8 full applications totaling \$4.17M respectively.

The Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants review committee was selected through an open recruitment process and included Chips Janger (Urban Green, Park Ave Station Grant Recipient, Former Review Committee member), Colleen Mitchell (BES, Grants Administrator), Vio Rubiani (Seeding Justice), S.K. Amaro (BES), and Max Zapf Geller (PSU). Due to scheduling conflicts, two additional community committee members were invited but unable to serve during this grant cycle: Katya Reyna (Depave), Som Sobedi (Regional Arts Council and Bhutanese Community in America).

In addition to Metro's grants program manager, the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants review was aided by Metro staff in areas of land acquisition, landscape architecture, planning and development, science and natural areas management. 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.

## **ANTICIPATED EFFECTS**

Approval of Resolution No. 23-5342 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all seven 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, with an emphasis on benefitting historically marginalized communities over the next ten years.

## **BACKGROUND**

In summary, by soliciting this initial round of grants, the Nature in Neighborhoods grants program implements Council policy direction and builds on years of grant solicitation and management expertise. The grant solicitation, which was built on a guidebook developed with a community committee for the capital grants pilot, now called the community choice grants, launched in January 2023 and resulted in 16 letters of support submitted for over \$6 million in requests. Ten of those projects were invited to submit a full application and in early May, eight projects submitted an application then reviewed by the grant review committee.

The Metro Council has received updates on this program and progress to date in the initial round of solicitation through email updates and briefings as needed. Council consideration and feedback during this initial round will help staff adjust and shape future solicitation rounds.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Exhibit A: Recommended Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grant awards to the recipients and projects, and for the funding amounts