

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 24-5389, FOR THE PURPOSE OF  
UPDATING THE NATURAL AREAS WORK PLAN TO FUND REAL PROPERTY  
PURCHASES BY A PUBLIC PARTNER THROUGH THE BOND ACQUISITION  
PROGRAMS OF THE 2019 PARKS AND NATURE BOND MEASURE

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Date: February 1, 2024  
Department: Parks and Nature  
Meeting Date: February 12, 2024

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Presenter(s): Jon Blasher (he/him),  
Director  
Shannon Leary (she/her), Real Estate  
Manager  
Length: 30 minutes

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### **ISSUE STATEMENT**

The Metro Council and voters in the region have strongly supported the 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure, which sets aside funds for acquisition of land and trail easements from willing sellers to protect fish and wildlife habitat and connect people to nature (the “Bond Acquisition Programs”). The Metro Council adopted Resolutions directing staff to acquire properties that meet certain goals and objectives in each target area (“Target Area Refinement Plans”) and set the process through which the Council delegates authority to the Chief Operating Officer (“COO”) to acquire properties (“Natural Areas Work Plan”). The Natural Areas Work Plan, last updated in 2014, contemplates Metro acquiring property by setting out the acquisition parameters under which the COO is authorized to negotiate and complete real property acquisitions without further Council review and approval. The 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure directs use of bond funds to acquire property, but it does not expressly require that Metro must own the property, nor does it prohibit Metro from contributing bond funds to public partners to acquire properties. Since the Natural Areas Work Plan only contemplates Metro acquiring property, this update aims to amend the Natural Areas Work Plan to authorize the COO to contribute bond funds to transactions that meet bond goals, objectives and criteria but are led and acquired by public partners.

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

Feedback from the Council regarding the proposed Natural Areas Work Plan update and agreement to adopt amended Natural Areas Work Plan authorizing the COO to contribute funds to property purchases led and acquired by public partners on March 7, 2024 via Resolution.

### **IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES**

Continue to implement the Bond Acquisition Programs of the 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure by leveraging Metro resources with other public partners to achieve the goals of the 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure and associated Target Area Refinement Plans.

## **POLICY QUESTION(S)**

Through this Natural Areas Work Plan update, staff request that the Metro Council adopt the amended Natural Areas Work Plan to authorize the COO to expend bond funds for acquisitions that meet the goals of the 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure and Target Area Refinement Plans, through partnership with other public park providing entities who will lead real estate negotiations and due diligence and own and manage the property.

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

1. Adopt the Natural Areas Work Plan update.
2. Do not adopt the Natural Areas Work Plan update.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff recommend the Metro Council adopt Resolution 24-5389.

## **STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

The Metro Council and voters in the region have strongly supported the 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure, which sets aside funds for acquisition of land and trail easements from willing sellers to protect fish and wildlife habitat and connect people to nature. The Metro Council has adopted Resolutions directing staff to acquire properties that meet certain goals and objectives in each target area and set the process through which the Council delegates authority to the COO to acquire properties (“Natural Areas Work Plan”). The Natural Areas Work Plan was last updated in 2014. The Council anticipated further updates as the regional real estate economy and the bond programs have evolved, and in 2019 reaffirmed that staff should continue to use the 2014 Natural Areas Work Plan until a future update is brought to the Council. Staff will continue to review the Natural Areas Work Plan for improvement opportunities and have identified this topic as a point requiring clarification immediately.

As established in the 2016 System Plan, Metro’s role in the region is big nature close to home. Metro does not typically manage small parcels within other park providing jurisdictions. Local park providers are the experts on providing nature or outdoor experiences within their communities. Related, Metro’s role in the regional trail system is to convene jurisdictions to plan, adopt a Regional Trails System Plan every five years, and provide funding and support for trail right of way acquisition. The local park providers’ role is to hold the property interest, design, build and manage the trails.

The goal of the current Natural Areas Work Plan update is to clarify that the Council supports Metro contributing funds to public partners’ property purchases that meet shared goals, but do not result in Metro owning the property or an interest in the property, and to outline the general terms for this partnership contribution. If Council adopts the Natural Areas Work Plan update, Metro will be able to leverage our financial and staff capacity

resources more effectively alongside partners in the region who have shared priorities. The Natural Areas Work Plan will clearly state the Council's support for the Bond Acquisition Programs to contribute to property purchases that meet the 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure intent and criteria, as well as the Target Area Refinement Plan goals and objectives, regardless of whether Metro is leading a real estate transaction or will have an ownership interest.

Alternatively, if the Council does not adopt the Natural Areas Work Plan update, the COO will not be authorized under the current Natural Areas Work Plan to contribute funds to partner-led transactions that meet the 2019 Parks and Nature bond measure intent and criteria, as well as the Target Area Refinement Plan goals and objectives. Instead, opportunities to contribute funds to partner-led transactions will come to Council individually for approval. The COO will continue to have authority under the current Natural Areas Work Plan, which only contemplates Metro acquiring property under the existing process. This option will not leverage Metro's resources effectively or recognize the expertise of our partners. It would also result in Metro owning partial interests in property or easement interests in urban areas across the region which is inconsistent with Parks and Nature's role as established in the Parks and Nature System Plan and Metro's role in planning and supporting the development of the regional trail network.

#### *Legal Antecedents*

- Metro Council Resolution No. 22-5250, For the Purpose of Approving Acquisition Target Area Refinement Plans for the 2019 Parks and Nature Bond Measure (April 14, 2022)
- Metro Council Resolution No. 19-4988, For the Purpose of Submitting to the Voters of the Metro Area General Obligations Bonds in the Amount of \$475 Million to Fund Natural 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 (June 6, 2019)
- Metro Council Resolution No 19-5055, For the Purpose of Accepting the November 5, 2019 General Election Abstract of Votes for Metro and Authorizing the Continuation of the Parks and Nature Program During Refinement Planning (December 12, 2019)
- Metro Code Chapter 9.02.040(d)
- Metro Council Resolution No. 14-4536, For the Purpose of Amending and Updating the Natural Areas Implementation Work Plan (August 14, 2014)
- Metro Council Resolution No. 15-4670, For the Purpose of Adopting the Parks and Nature System Plan (February 4, 2016)
- Metro Council Resolution No. 92-1637, For the Purpose of Considering Adoption of the Metropolitan Greenspaces Master Plan (July 23, 1992)
- Metro Council Resolution No. 95-2074A, For the Purpose of Changing the Election Date of the Submission to the Voters of a General Obligation Bond Indebtedness to Proceed With the Acquisition of Land for a Regional System of Greenspaces (January 15, 1995)

- Metro Council 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 (March 9, 2006)

*Anticipated Effects*

Adoption of Resolution No. 24-5389 will support further acceleration of 2019 Parks and Nature bond spending as the agency will be able to contribute funds to acquisition projects that meet shared goals of Metro and local park providers, while retaining Metro staff capacity for acquisition projects that meet Metro goals.

**ATTACHMENTS**

n/a

[For work session:]

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