

PARKS AND NATURE LOCAL OPTION LEVY: PROPOSED MEASURE DEVELOPMENT WORK PLAN

Date: May 25, 2026

Department: GAPD, Parks and Nature

Work Session Date: June 11, 2026

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Length: 45 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

The Metro Parks and Nature levy is critical to protecting water quality, restoring fish and wildlife habitat, and providing nature experiences across the region. At this work session, staff will present a proposed work plan to develop a viable funding measure to sustain these operations prior to the current levy's expiration in June 2028.

ACTION REQUESTED

Affirm key tracks of work for proposed work plan, including engagement priorities, analysis of funding and investment options, and timeline for Council discussion and decision-making.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Metro Parks and Nature investments are guided by several policies and commitments, including:

- the Parks and Nature System Plan;
- the frameworks adopted by the Metro Council when it referred the 2022 levy renewal measure and the 2019 parks and nature bond to voters
- ongoing commitments to operationalize agency values in program delivery, including deepening Tribal relationships and engagement, prioritizing improvements to address ADA barriers, and advancing actions and outcomes outlined in the department's racial equity, diversity and inclusion plan

The Metro Council has also emphasized the importance of building broad coalitions of partnership and support in the development of potential regional funding measures.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

- What options for parks and nature operations funding should Council consider exploring for a potential referral to the May 2027 election?
- What are Council's priorities for engagement, input and analysis to inform its decisions?

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Nature close to home is essential to quality of life in the Portland region. For 30 years, voters have repeatedly asked Metro to protect and restore this critical asset as our region grows – ensuring clean water, healthy fish and wildlife habitat, and opportunities to

experience nature for generations to come. Metro has established a core role in the region's parks and nature system as a land protector and steward, park provider and funder, with a unique regional scale and vision.

The Metro Parks and Nature levy works in close tandem with bond investments that have also been repeatedly approved by voters – as Metro's portfolio has grown to nearly 20,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas. Metro's work also complements the conservation and park priorities of a wide array of partners, including local park providers, Tribal and state governments, nonprofit conservation partners and community organizations.

Maintaining this mission requires ongoing adaptation: being responsive to the needs of nature as well as communities, working closely with partners, and accountability to voters.

With the current levy expiring in June 2028, staff are evaluating options for future funding. To date, this work has included:

- Quantifying and qualifying elements of Parks and Nature's current service delivery
- Consulting Tribal partners on draft service delivery priorities
- Gathering preliminary input from stakeholders on timing, feasibility and support
- Reviewing recent election results and the findings of public opinion research by Metro and external organizations

While voters in the region continue to strongly value natural areas and parks as core priorities for the region, this effort also takes place amid rising public concerns about the cost of living and other regional challenges. Advancing a successful funding measure will require expanded outreach, careful analysis and clear communication about the value of ongoing investment.

Stakeholder groups and individuals who have been involved in policy development:

In recent months, Parks and Nature and GAPD staff have engaged with a variety of conservation partners, community organizations, and jurisdictional partners, and consulted with Tribal governments, to discuss the current levy and receive input on potential priorities and considerations for the future. Metro has received technical assistance from Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy and The Intertwine Alliance.

The proposed work plan includes further engagement and consultation priorities for staff and Councilors over the next six to eight months, to inform policy development and broaden support for regional investment.

Financial implications

Since the levy's initial passage in 2013, Metro's parks and nature portfolio has grown from 15,000 acres of natural areas and 13 developed parks and marine facilities to nearly 20,000 acres and 20 developed parks. At the same time, Metro is working to keep up with changing

visitor needs in developed parks, along with evolving land management challenges across all our properties, such as invasive species and growing wildfire risk. The levy rate remains unchanged from 2013, while the cost of maintaining parks and natural areas, from trail repairs to habitat restoration to restroom cleaning, continues to rise.

The levy currently funds more than two-thirds of the Parks and Nature department's operating budget. Metro's Parks and Nature Department has already implemented cost-saving measures to protect core functions that the levy is meant to fund, reducing the Parks and Nature operating fund budget in FY 2025-26 by \$2.6 million and 17.8 FTE. A third renewal at the current rate would likely mean further cuts in the future.

Together, these trends require a close look at what can be achieved with available funding as well as what may be possible to secure in the future – whether a constrained renewal, a levy replacement to restore service levels, and/or alternative funding options.

BACKGROUND

The levy was originally approved by voters in 2013 to restore Metro's natural areas, maintain and operate parks, and improve opportunities for people to safely enjoy parks and natural areas. At 9.6 cents per \$1,000 assessed value, the levy costs the average household around \$28 a year and raises about \$19 million annually. Voters renewed the levy at the same rate in 2016 and 2022, with more than 70% support each time.

2022 levy program areas

When the Metro Council referred the 2022 levy renewal to voters, it adopted a framework for investment that included the following program areas:

- **Habitat restoration and land management.** Restore fish and wildlife habitat, improve habitat quality for priority species, and improve water quality and quantity at Metro's parks and natural areas and provide ongoing maintenance to ensure ecological health, restore culturally significant plant communities, and reduce the long-term costs of maintenance.
- **Regional park operations.** Support visitor services, maintenance, and amenity improvements at Metro's parks, trails, natural areas, and cemeteries so that they are welcoming, safe and inclusive, and meet or exceed standards for accessibility.
- **Community-led investments and education.** Co-create culturally specific interpretive programs, materials, and events, and provide resources (financial and programmatic) to support communities in their efforts to strengthen connections with nature.

In work sessions on January 6 and April 23, 2026, Council reaffirmed these core program areas for Metro's parks and nature work.

The work plan presented on June 11 will provide more information on how staff intend to develop, explore and provide options for Council to consider and advance in the development of a viable funding measure targeting the May 2027 election.