

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 25-5507, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING SECOND ROUND FUNDING FOR NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS CAPITAL GRANTS

Date: June 2, 2025

Department: Parks and Nature

Meeting: June 26, 2025

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Presenters: Jon Blasher, Crista Gardner

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.

The bond's 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.

Metro received many strong proposals for the third solicitation this spring and is presenting for Council consideration and approval a slate of funding awards recommended by the grant review committee. Recommendations are based on the information submitted, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment. Feedback and lessons learned from this third round will help shape and adjust future funding rounds.

ACTION REQUESTED

Council consideration and approval of Resolution No. 25-5507

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

By approving this third 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)

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

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

Approval of Resolution No. 25-5507 to advance the grant committee's recommendation to award funding to 12 proposed projects for \$6,266,853. Council could also choose to award funds to some or none of the recommended projects.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that Metro Council accept the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants review committee recommendation to the Metro Council for the following twelve (12) 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 third round, parks and nature staff intentionally broadened outreach time and effort about this opportunity through social media, online, email listservs, parks director meetings, and relationship building with equity, conservation and community non-profits, school districts, affordable housing providers, tourism, economic development, planning and development, and transportation organizations. Staff continued bringing community organizations into grant review committees to learn more about grant opportunities that could be relevant for their own

organizations. In addition, staff directly reached out to organizations with potential projects identified in other Metro funding programs from Parks and Nature like Nature in Neighborhoods community choice grants and restoration grants, Large Scale Community Visions, Local Share, and from Planning and Development like Transit Oriented Development, Housing, Regional Flexible Funds Allocation Community Placemaking, and 2040 Planning Grants.

Staff continues to strengthen the connection between the Parks and Nature levy funded programs and bond funded projects and other Metro or externally funded programs and projects through this outreach and relationship building, monthly or quarterly coordination meetings across internal and external grantmaking programs, and capacity building with community, non-profits, and local governments.

In addition, Metro created more flexible match requirements to reduce barriers for jurisdictions and organizations to apply. Parks and Nature staff continued to reduce match from the 2023 grant requirement of 2:1 of 2006 Bond grants (66% match: 33% Metro) to 2025 grant requirement of 1:2 commensurate with PN grants (33% match: 66% Metro).

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 community organizations, park providers and public agencies. Projects range from wetland restoration for affordable housing project to new generation of community stewards to trail connections to community forest and river access. For example, the review committee recommends funding to several projects designed by and for culturally specific communities such as Afro Village, Lan Su, Unite Oregon, and the Portland State University ITECK projects.

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.

In addition, the bond also included a Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants pilot (now called community choice grants) that was designed by community members and Metro Council awarded grants through a participatory process in 2024 in modified Metro Council District 4 (Washington County) and is scheduled to award the second round in 2026 in Metro Council District 2 (Clackamas County). This community-led effort provided meaningful community engagement and partnership development that further the support for both programs. The two programs work in tandem to solicit ideas and projects from the community that meet the goals of the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program.

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

The Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program and second solicitation round has been shaped at each step by community members and partner organizations. The program's 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 round.

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 Winter 2025, 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 review committee met first on March 21, conducted site visits on May 16 and May 23, and then deliberated on May 30, 2025, to create a recommendation for Metro Council. The review committee selected the best and most compelling proposals based on the information submitted, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment. 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.

The review committee included community members with backgrounds in grant review, water quality and habitat restoration, landscape architecture, real estate, community development, job training programs, climate adaptation and resilience policies and practices, and sustainable development techniques.

The committee included:

New review committee members:

Carol Gossett, OMSI

Carrie Jones Bohara, Portland Public Schools, Climate Resilience

Jasper Lieber, Volunteer, Columbia Slough Watershed Council, Friends of Mt. Tabor, Portland Fruit Tree Project, Trail Keepers of Oregon, and Friends of Trees

John Van Nevel, ERM Scientist, Former US Forest Service

John Hoffnagle, Former Oregon State Parks Foundation

Mark Sirois, Clackamas County Development Services

Rosemary Fama, Portland State University

Thomas Kissinger, Oregon City, Parks Director

Valeria McWilliams, Metro, Housing

Returning review committee member:

Lynn Lindgren, Housing Development Center, architect

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” was adopted in 2005.

ANTICIPATED EFFECTS

Approval of Resolution No. 25-5507 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all 12 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 third 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 was built on a guidebook developed with a community committee. The Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants review committee received 20 qualifying pre applications, totaling \$9.45M in funding requests and 15 full applications requesting \$7.34 M.

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

[ATTACHMENTS](#)

None