

## STAFF REPORT

### IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 24-5420, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING SECOND ROUND FUNDING FOR NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS CAPITAL GRANTS

Date: June 14, 2024

Department: Parks and Nature

Meeting: July 11, 2024

Prepared by: Crista Gardner, Elizabeth Arroyo  
Guzman

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. 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 awards.

Metro received many strong proposals 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 second round will help shape and adjust future funding rounds.

## ACTION REQUESTED

Council consideration and approval of Resolution No. 24-5420

## IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

By approving this second 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. 24-5420 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 second round, parks and nature staff intentionally broadened outreach about this opportunity through social media, online, email listservs, parks director meetings, and non-profit events.

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 to addressing new invasive threats to our tree canopy to nature play.

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 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 second 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 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 2024, 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 in a hybrid meeting on March 19,

2024 and in person for site visits on May 28, 2024 to review 8 pre applications and 5 full applications respectively. In total, the review committee is recommending inviting 5 proposals for full grant awards totaling \$2.583M.

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 returning members Chips Janger (Urban Green, Park Ave Station Grant Recipient, Former Review Committee member), Vio Rubiani (Seeding Justice) and new members Rachel Lingard (Range Studio), Lynn Lindgren (Housing Development Center), Lynda Moss (Moss Consulting, former Montana State Senate), Marisa Morby (Friends of Mt. Tabor Park, Board), Katya Reyna (Depave), Brenda Ray Scott (Adept Diva Consulting), Charlotte Trowbridge (Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District).

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” was adopted in 2005.

#### **ANTICIPATED EFFECTS**

Approval of Resolution No. 24-5420 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 second 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 and resulted in eight (8) pre-applications submitted. Five (5) of those projects were invited to submit a full application and in early May, five (5) projects submitted an application and completed site visits with the grant review committee.

The Metro Council has received updates on this program and progress to date in the second 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

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