

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 24-XXXX, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY CHOICE GRANTS

Date: December 21, 2023

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Department: Parks and Nature

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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 Park and Nature bond's capital grants program includes the community choice grants pilot which 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 is presenting for Council consideration and approval a slate of funding awards recommended by the grant review committee based on the Council policy articulated in the bond measure, a community vote, applications submitted, the stated grants criteria, the focus communities, geographic distribution, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment. Feedback and lessons learned from this pilot will help shape and adjust any potential future funding rounds.

ACTION REQUESTED

Council consideration and approval of Resolution No. 24-5373 IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

By approving this initial round of community choice 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 community choice 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 Community Choice Grants Guidebook.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

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

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

Approval of Resolution No. 24-5373 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all fifteen proposed projects through successful executed funding agreements.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council consideration and approval of the recommended slate of awards for the community choice grants pilot marks the completion of a two-year pilot. Council received updates throughout the process via briefings, staff memos and emails. Council consideration and feedback during this initial round will help staff adjust and shape future potential rounds.

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

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. As a pilot of the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program, the community choice grants continue this tradition while expanding collaborative partnerships and community engagement.

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 (Nature in Neighborhoods) in September 2005 to establish 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 new criteria in the Parks and Nature Bond: racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience. Metro Council directed staff in the legislation to pilot a new “Participatory Grantmaking” approach within the Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program area, referred to as the Nature in Neighborhoods community choice grants. The community choice grants builds on Parks and Nature’s experience soliciting and awarding capital and community grants, matchmaking between park providers and community organizations and supporting external grant review committees and increases the community led aspect of all of these elements.

HOW DOES THIS ADVANCE METRO’S RACIAL EQUITY GOALS?

The Nature in Neighborhoods community choice 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 at every step of the process from the formation of the program design and review committee to the ways projects were designed and prioritized

The Nature in Neighborhoods community choice grants program and projects were designed by community members. The Nature in Neighborhoods 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 committee and stipends of \$200 per meeting were available for 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.

Community Engagement and Vote Process

Outreach for this grant opportunity was conducted through social media and online venues, email listservs, parks director meetings, non-profit events, and a series of open public events and tabling opportunities. Outreach was conducted with the help of local parks providers, grant makers, and other Metro teams. The resulting portfolio of projects reflect that outreach.

In Winter and Spring of 2023, through three community workshops, culturally specific idea generating events, tabling at community and cultural events, mailers and digital outreach across District 4, Metro received 118 individual project ideas and 93 community survey responses for the Community Choice Grants.

Metro and partner staff analyzed these projects for feasibility. The Program Design and Review Committee vetted the project ideas according to stated criteria and advanced 50 projects for further project development.

In Summer of 2023, through a series of three public community design workshops and two culturally-specific design workshops across District 4, culturally specific workshops – just idea generating and final design stage, community members working with consultant designers and partner jurisdiction staff refined project ideas into 44 project proposals.

Over three weeks in summer of 2023, Metro held an initial online community vote. Tabling at community and cultural events, mailers and digital outreach across District 4 resulted in 375 completed verified ranked choice votes to select the 28 projects to move on to additional development.

From August to October 2023, community members, partner staff, and design consultants, developed these projects' conceptual illustrations into 26 projects' schematic site designs at a second series of three public community design workshops, culturally specific workshops, and over two dozen individual design and feasibility meetings with idea submitters and jurisdictional staff.

In October 2023, Metro held the final online community vote. An exposition of the projects in Cornelius, tabling at ten community and cultural events, mailers and digital outreach across District 4 resulted in 1,6654 unique, complete, and verified ranked choice votes of on a bilingual ballot of the 26 projects.

HOW DOES THIS ADVANCE METRO'S CLIMATE ACTION GOALS?

The Nature in Neighborhoods community choice grants program advances Metro's climate action goals through implementation of the 2019 PN Bond and program criteria around climate resilience. The resulting projects 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. In addition, many of these projects are located in communities designed by Metro as equity focal areas.

Known Opposition/Support/Community Feedback /No known opposition. See above description of community engagement.

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

The Nature in Neighborhoods community choice grants program has been shaped at each step by community members, park providers and community 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 grants guidebook, review committee composition and focus for this pilot.

In Spring 2022, Metro staff worked with the Nature in Neighborhoods 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 to create the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants Guidebook that identified the desired outcomes for investments and eligibility requirements for the initial cycle of Program funding.

The 2022 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, 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 Program Design and Review Committee, staffed by Metro, was re-convened with additional members to implement the community choice grants process, review all projects, and make funding recommendations to the Metro Council. In November 2023, the committee considered the whole package of the 26 projects based on the community vote, the information submitted, the stated grants criteria, the focus communities, geographic distribution, 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 Nature in Neighborhoods community choice grants review committee met in November 2023 to review 26 projects totaling \$3.9M in funding requests. In total, the review committee is recommending 15 projects for funding.

The 2023 Nature in Neighborhoods community choice grants review committee included: Blanca Gaytan Farfan, Participating Budgeting Oregon (formerly East Portland Rising Community Projects); Theresa Huang, Intertwine (formerly Urban Greenspaces Institute); Kevin Hughes, Hillsboro Parks and Recreation; Andrew Butz, Portland Community College; Laura E Feldman, Community member; Kim Hack-Davidson, Columbia Gorge Stewardship Network; Isaiah Jackman, community member (formerly Urban League of Portland); Kate Sams, Friends of Zenger Farm.

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. 23-5342, "For the Purpose of Approving for Initial Round Funding of Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants" was adopted in June 2023.

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. 24-5373 allows staff to advance Council direction to award funding to all fifteen 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.

ATTACHMENTS

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