

2019 PARKS AND NATURE BOND LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM: UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

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Department: Parks and Nature
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ISSUE STATEMENT

On November 5, 2019, greater Portland voters overwhelmingly approved a \$475 million parks and nature bond measure to improve water quality, protect fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature close to home. Bond refinement, the work to implement the six programs included in the 2019 parks and nature bond, will be mostly complete by spring 2022, including the finalization of action plans for land acquisition to protect and connect greater Portland's special places through the protect and restore land program and the create trails for walking and biking program.

ACTION REQUESTED

Review the upcoming milestones leading to Council action in March to formalize priorities for land acquisition and trail gap acquisition. Council's affirmation of the proposed process and initial program direction at this work session will allow staff to continue refining deliverables for further Council direction over the next few months.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

The Metro Council set policy direction through the bond measure, which emphasizes the importance of continuing to protect land and water to achieve regional conservation goals, strengthen our region's climate resilience and to benefit communities who have been historically excluded from decision making or haven't benefitted equitably from past investments. The bond-wide principles, program criteria, and geographically specific 24 target areas and 39 regional trails identified in the bond measure for potential acquisition reflect community priorities heard during bond development. The bond measure acknowledges that these areas contain more natural area and trail land than Metro could ultimately purchase through this bond measure and directs staff to further define acquisition priorities through the refinement process, currently underway.

The protect and restore land program refinement process has focused on learning more about the ecological elements and local knowledge of each target area and working with community members and partners to draft proposed strategies to best achieve the goals outlined in the bond measure and identify parcels that would be most important to protect.

The refinement process for trail gap acquisition in the create trails for walking and biking program has involved working closely with community members and partners to understand their priorities for buying new properties, like safety, connections to work or access to nature, which will inform the ranking of specific trail segments for acquisition.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

At the January 18 work session, staff will preview upcoming milestones in March where staff will be asking for Council direction including an executive session on the real estate specific properties proposed for purchase, and formal adoption of refinement plans containing specific land acquisition priorities and strategies and a real estate work plan.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

How does the approach to finalizing and launching Metro's bond funded land acquisition work through the protect and restore and create trails for walking and biking programs align with Council's expectations?

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Building on success of previous measures and strategies: The region's voters have strongly supported the creation of a unique regional park system with nature at its heart. Metro-led land acquisition has been at the core of Metro's parks and nature bond measures and continues to build on the legacy of the Metropolitan Greenspaces Master plan, which was adopted by Metro and many cities and counties in the region in 1992. This laid the foundation for natural area protection in the region and since then, Metro has purchased over 15,000 acres of natural area land and trail gaps through a willing seller program. Even as work is underway to refine the 2019 parks and nature bond's land acquisition priorities, staff have continued to acquire land, focusing on once-in-a-generation properties that are critical to protect.

Operationalizing Council's policy direction:

Over the last 25 years and through over 500 individual transactions, Metro's land acquisition program has utilized an efficient and effective process that delegates the authority to execute individual land acquisitions from Metro Council to staff. Council's approval of refinement plans for each of the 24 target areas and one for trail segments as well as a real estate work plan will allow staff to complete individual transactions that fall within Council's established parameters without seeking Council approval each time. The refinement plans articulate the "what" of the program's strategic direction in the form of conservation goals and objectives, or priority trail gaps to complete. The real estate work plan articulates the "how" staff will execute these real estate transactions, by following commercially reasonable acquisition parameters and due diligence guidelines in partnership with the Office of Metro Attorney.

The Metro Code requires Council to approve any contract for the purchase, sale, lease or transfer of real property, but for property acquired under all three parks and nature bond

measures, Council has delegated authority to the COO to enter into purchase agreements provided such acquisitions are in accordance with the Council-approved real estate work plan.

Once approved by Council, the refinement plans can also serve as a land acquisition road map to share with members of the public and partners. Once the land acquisition work is launched this spring, staff will continue to provide updates on property purchases and how these purchases fulfill community priorities and policy direction set in the bond measure.

Deepening engagement and partnerships with Black, Indigenous and people of color: The bond measure emphasizes meaningful engagement with and prioritizing projects and needs identified by communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with low incomes and other historically marginalized communities. In the engagement leading up to the bond measure, members of greater Portland's urban Indigenous community specifically expressed great interest in continuing to partner with Metro particularly around land acquisition and stewardship. Respecting the knowledge and expertise of those who have been stewards of this place we call Portland since time immemorial has been a driving force for this work and has resulted in specific feedback that has helped shape each step of this refinement process.

In addition, staff held sessions over the last year with a range of specific affinity groups including Black, Indigenous and people of color and the disability community to understand priorities that helped shape the tools that will ultimately guide priorities for acquisition of natural areas and trail gaps.

BACKGROUND

The protect and restore land program uses bond funds to protect and connect greater Portland's special places, especially river and stream banks, headwaters, floodplains, wetlands, oak and prairie habitat, forests and culturally significant sites by purchasing land from willing sellers and restoring it to support plants, animals and people. The create trails for walking and biking program sets aside up to \$10 million in bond funds to purchase land from willing sellers to build new trails in the future, fulfilling greater Portland's vision for a network of trails where people can relax, exercise and commute.

Both the 1995 and 2006 bond measures included funds for land acquisition for conservation and future trail development in one program. The 2019 bond dedicates up to \$40 million for the region's walking and biking trails and the trail acquisition component will be implemented in conjunction with the land acquisition program.

ATTACHMENTS

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