

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION FOR RESOLUTION NO. 24-5391, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING REVISED PROGRAM CRITERIA TO THE PARKS AND NATURE BOND LARGE-SCALE COMMUNITY VISIONS PROGRAM

Date: February 20, 2024
Department: Parks and Nature

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Presenter(s): Jon Blasher, he/him
Length: 15 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

On November 5, 2019, voters in greater Portland overwhelmingly approved a \$475 million parks and nature bond, creating the large-scale community visions program to support large-scale projects that uplift communities by leveraging nature to achieve benefits such as job opportunities, affordable housing, and safe reliable transportation.

In alignment with a Council approved pilot program handbook, a 2022 solicitation for projects resulted in Metro Council awarding three projects in May 2023 in the pilot round of large-scale community visions funding. Since spring 2023, staff have continued to engage in conversations with local government partners, community organizations, pilot round grantees and other stakeholders to assess how the pilot program worked, identify potential changes and apply any lessons learned to future rounds of the program in order to best serve the goals of the bond measure and meet the needs of the community in the future.

These findings were presented for Metro Council's consideration and discussion at the January 2024 work session. Council directed staff to move forward with updates that could expand opportunities and eligibility for subsequent round of solicitation and award planned for 2024. By approving Resolution No. 24-5391, Metro Council can advance a set of adjustments to program criteria that is intended to better meet the landscape of project opportunities on the ground and create more opportunities for park providers and community partners to apply and potentially receive funding for transformative nature projects.

Council's approval will allow staff to create a notice of funding availability (NOFA) to begin soliciting project ideas as soon as spring 2024. Staff will work with Metro's Chief Operating Office to keep Metro Council updated on progress of the NOFA and projects that are submitted.

ACTION REQUESTED

Council consideration and approval of Resolution No. 24-5391.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Council direction has and will continue to shape the large scale community visions program. The program is developed from bond goals and objectives described in the 2019

parks and nature bond as well as program implementation experience gleaned from the 2019 bond's other grant and allocation programs. Projects awarded under the program are expected to deliver on policy outcomes identified in the 2019 parks and nature bond which are to protect land and water and align with regional conservation goals, strengthen our region's climate resilience and benefit communities who haven't benefitted equitably from past investments. Projects awarded under this program will deliver significant capital investments that uplift communities by leveraging nature to improve jobs, housing, and safe transportation.

At the January 2024 work session, Council affirmed the continuation of the approach of the program, retaining the vision and pathway as a catalytic program that funds nature uplift in big-picture, multi-benefit projects of regional significance. Council directed staff to advance the suite of recommended changes to the program, which aim to strike a balance of broadening accessibility of the program across the region while ensuring project readiness and alignment with core bond requirements and criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Metro Council approve Resolution No. 24-5391.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

The six programs in the parks and nature bond provide a range of strategies to preserve priority habitat and to bring nature closer to communities across the region. In some ways, the large scale community visions program has similar aims as the Parks and Nature bond's Nature in Neighborhoods grant program, which strives to create nature that's accessible at the community scale and has completed the first of several funding rounds with Parks and Nature bond dollars. What distinguishes the bond's large scale community visions program is the scale of the potential grant awards and required nexus to housing, workforce and transportation elements.

Legal Antecedents

Metro Council approved the criteria, processes and desired outcomes described in the program handbook through approval of Resolution 22-5269 on June 23, 2022 and directed the Chief Operating Officer to implement the first cycle of funding for the program generally in accordance with the framework described in the program handbook.

Demonstrating impacts and transformation on agency priorities

Designating awards for projects that utilize investments in nature uplift to leverage regional outcomes in housing, community and economic development and transportation allows for alignment with agency priorities such as urban development, housing, workforce and transportation. The unique focus of this program on the intersection of nature and greening with existing or planned housing and transportation developments allows the agency to advance investments that strengthen climate resilience in communities across the region.

Community voice shaping projects and process

The Metro Council has directed that the large scale community visions program be driven by community voice in innovative ways. Since the completion of the pilot round, staff have been meeting with park providers, conservation and community partners to understand interest in and barriers to utilizing large scale community visions funding for priority projects across the region. This work involves supporting productive conversations and match making between community partners and jurisdictions across the region to ensure every project awarded has a public owner.

From this broad outreach, staff has also engaged in follow-up, in depth conversations with to further explore project opportunities, as well as following up for feedback with those who expressed interest in the first round and didn't apply. Those in-depth conversations were conducted with Latino Network, Unite Oregon, City of Tigard, Portland Botanical Garden, Street Trust, City of Tigard, Portland State University, Portland Audubon, City of Cornelius, City of Gresham, City of Portland Planning and Sustainability, Clackamas County, Multnomah County, City of Milwaukie, Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation. This engagement provided regional representation, a range of potential projects and a representative sample of what's both worked well and what's presented challenges.

Resolution No. 24-5391 will amend the program criteria to allow the program to better align with this Council direction and meet community need by focusing on specific criteria eligibility: project match, contiguous requirement and public partnership requirement, as well as introducing an ongoing cycle approach. Changes are illustrated in the table below:

Pilot Round Criteria	Updated Criteria
1:5 overall project match	1:2 overall project match
Projects required to have at least two contiguous components; complimentary elements of housing, transportation or workforce development must be adjacent to nature uplift	Complimentary elements of housing, transportation or workforce development do not need to be contiguous, but must demonstrate a unifying nexus that illustrates the connectivity, vision, and desired outcomes of all project pieces
Public partnership required but pilot round allowed conditional awarding for this criterion	Public partnership required to move forward in review process
Annual application cycle	Ongoing application cycle

BACKGROUND

An overview of the program and key updates:

- In June 2022, Metro Council approved a handbook that identified desired outcomes and eligibility requirements and initiated a pilot project solicitation of up to \$10 million.
- In Spring 2023, Metro Council and staff reviewed applications received for the pilot round of funding and the following projects were designated with conditional funding. Staff are coordinating with these projects to ensure eligibility requirements can be satisfied and lead to the successful execution of final funding agreements.

- Trust for Public Lands/Oregon State University - acquisition of private timber site in the Tualatin Mountains area, \$3.5 million
- OMSI/CRTFIC - Waterfront Education Park and OMSI district catalyst on the Willamette River, \$7 million
- Albina Vision Trust – Site acquisition adjunct to Willamette River, \$5 million
- After the completion of the pilot round, Council asked staff to ensure a successful and productive second round of solicitation by identifying potential project opportunities and feedback on the overall feasibility of the program from partners around the region in advance of the solicitation in early 2024.

ATTACHMENTS

- Is legislation required for Council action? ☒ Yes ☐ No
- If yes, is draft legislation attached? ☒ Yes ☐ No
- What other materials are you presenting today? Large scale community visions program updates (Exhibit A)