

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 24-5390, FOR THE PURPOSE OF
APPROVING THE EAST COUNCIL CREEK NATURE PARK MASTER PLAN

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Department: Parks and Nature

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Meeting Date: March 7, 2024

Length: 30 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

This matter involves Metro Council consideration of the East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan. Council Creek flows from Forest Grove and nearby agricultural areas, meandering through wetland, floodplain, and forest before joining Dairy Creek, which flows into the Tualatin River. The East Council Creek Natural Area offers a unique opportunity to experience nature close to home in Cornelius. It protects 33 acres of wildlife habitat along the stream and adjacent to residential neighborhoods of northeast Cornelius.

This master plan outlines a vision and recommendations for developing public access in a way that maintains water quality and wildlife habitat and highlights experiences of the stream, wetlands, and floodplains and their connection to the Tualatin River watershed.

The master plan was developed in collaboration with the City of Cornelius and the Connect with Nature initiative, a partnership between Metro and a coalition of community organizations serving people of color. The Connect with Nature Resource Guide documents the initiative's engagement model and is available as a resource for other agencies to advance meaningful engagement with communities of color and historically marginalized groups.

East Council Creek is one of two Metro natural areas along Council Creek. West Council Creek Natural Area was not included in the planning and was not considered for public access.

ACTION REQUESTED

Metro Council is asked to approve the East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

The East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan will guide potential future development of access and trail improvements at East Council Creek, a key natural area for forest habitat and connectivity in the Dairy Creek watershed.

Following the adoption of the East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan, Metro will continue to coordinate with the City of Cornelius to identify long-term operations and management responsibilities for the future nature park and identify development funding. When funding has been identified for construction and operation of the nature park, staff will proceed with project development.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

There are three options for Council to consider:

1. Adopt the master plan as presented. If Council approves the resolution and adopts the master plan, Metro will continue to coordinate with the City of Cornelius to identify long-term operations and management responsibilities for the future nature park. When funding has been identified for construction and operation of the nature park, staff will proceed with project development.
2. Reject the master plan. If Council rejects the master plan, staff will take no additional actions toward further development of this project.
3. Direct staff to evaluate additional considerations. If Council directs staff to evaluate additional alternatives, staff will undergo that effort and bring back an amended master plan for future Council consideration.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends the Metro Council adopt Resolution No. 24-5390 and the East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Parks and nature system plan

The East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan supports Parks and Nature's mission to protect water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, and provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature close to home through a connected system of parks, trails and natural areas.

Racial equity goals

The master plan was developed in collaboration with the Connect with Nature initiative, a partnership between Metro and a team of community organizations serving people of color. Connect with Nature engaged with communities of color to learn how to more inclusively plan and design parks and natural areas so they serve the needs of communities of color.

Connect with Nature included multilingual workshops and site visits focused on planning for East Council Creek. The workshops were also designed to inform work throughout Metro's system of parks and natural areas. Outcomes of Connect with Nature are documented in the Connect with Nature Resource Guide and helped shape the master plan

for East Council Creek Nature Park. Lessons from Connect with Nature workshops also influenced and are reflected in Parks and Nature's Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. The guide is intended to be a resource for agencies and organizations to lead with equity and center people of color in park planning and community engagement.

Tribal government engagement and historic and cultural resource protection

A historic and cultural resource survey will be completed prior to proceeding with design of the nature park. Metro will engage tribal governments in this effort in accordance with the agency's Tribal Policy guidelines. If historic or cultural resources are found to be present, the plans will be revised as needed prior to continuing with design and engineering. Adoption of Resolution 25-5390 will name the park "East Council Creek Nature Park", however during future tribal consultation for the project, the nature park name should be reviewed, and if recommended a new name may be adopted in the future before the nature park is opened to the public.

Known Opposition

There is no known opposition to the plan. Some individuals have raised concerns about the plan due to Metro's pet policy and their desire to walk dogs throughout the natural area. Metro's Title 10 pet policy will continue to be enforced consistent with all other Metro-managed nature parks and natural areas.

In November 2017, Metro's Title 10 Pet Policy was unanimously supported by a community stakeholder table composed of advocates for wildlife, dog walking, and recreation, as well as representatives from communities of color.

Known Support

The City of Cornelius Parks Advisory Board expressed their support for moving forward with the Master Plan at their July 11, 2023 meeting.

Legal Antecedents

Council Creek is identified in the 2013 Parks and Natural Areas Levy as potential site improvement for the benefit of people visiting natural areas. Completion of this project is an effort to complete the obligation of the levy.

Anticipated Effects

Following adoption of the East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan, Metro will continue to coordinate with the City of Cornelius to identify project development funding and long-term operations and management responsibilities for the future nature park.

Financial Implications (current year and ongoing)

The 2013 Parks and Natural Areas Levy funded this master plan. Funding has not been identified for park development or long-term operations and maintenance of the park.

Preliminary cost exercises estimate that construction of all elements in this master plan will cost approximately \$2.5 to \$3.5 million (in 2019 dollars). Given the inflationary environment of the past several years, costs are likely to be higher than the preliminary

estimated range. Long-term operations and maintenance costs also need to be taken into consideration. Prior to implementing any recommended improvements, a long-term management strategy and funding would need to be developed by Metro or the City.

BACKGROUND

The East Council Creek Natural Area sits on the northern edge of the City of Cornelius and protects 33 acres of wildlife habitat along Council Creek and adjacent to residential neighborhoods of northeast Cornelius. East Council Creek Natural Area offers a unique opportunity to experience nature close to home in Cornelius.

Council Creek is one of many tributaries of the Tualatin River. It flows from Forest Grove and nearby agricultural areas, meandering through wetland, floodplain, and forest before joining Dairy Creek, which flows into the Tualatin River. In contrast to the faster-flowing, gravel substrate rivers like the Sandy or Clackamas in other parts of the region, the Tualatin and its tributaries flow slowly due low gradient, silty soils, and broad floodplains. East Council Creek is one of two Metro natural areas along Council Creek.

Natural areas like East Council Creek protect important forest habitat. The streams flowing into the Tualatin River, adjacent wetlands and floodplains, and connectivity between them are critical for the long-term health and diversity of species facing habitat loss and the effects of climate change. For people living nearby, these areas can also offer places of respite, to relax, walk, view wildlife, and be in nature with family and friends.

The lands to the south of East Council Creek are residential neighborhoods built within the last 20-30 years; new homes continue to be built nearby. The land to the north of the site is outside of the urban growth boundary and is currently designated as rural reserve.

The East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan is critical to guide increased public access to the site and to proactively protect water quality and wildlife habitat. The master plan looks at East Council Creek as part of a broader system of open space, trails, and neighborhoods and aims to protect a regional resource, provide opportunities to experience nature close to home, and celebrate the East Council Creek landscape.

In 2017, Metro and City of Cornelius staff began working with community members, stakeholders, and regional partners to create a master plan to guide public access improvements at East Council Creek. The plan was shaped by extensive public outreach, open houses, stakeholder meetings, Connect with Nature workshops, presentations, tours, and surveys. These outreach efforts specifically engaged people of color, members of the community and regional stakeholders.

This master plan outlines a vision and recommendations for developing public access to the site in a way that maintains water quality and wildlife habitat, and highlights experiences of the stream, wetlands, and floodplains and their connection to Tualatin River watershed. The plan includes recommendations for a new trailhead, parking lot, and entry area to welcome visitors and provide access for people of all ages and abilities. The plan

identifies places for wildlife viewing, learning about nature, picnicking, walking, or exploring nature, and recommends a route for a soft surface trail along the south side of Council Creek, with bridges or boardwalks through wet areas, and clear way-finding signs.

East Council Creek provides important wildlife habitat that contribute to the experiences of people visiting the site. Wildlife viewing opportunities are abundant: from beavers chewing on alder trees and building dams in the stream, nesting waterfowl, to red-legged frogs and willow flycatchers. The East Council Creek Nature Park Master Plan is the next step in inviting visitors to walk through the forest, listen to songbirds, view native flowers, and enjoy being outside with family and friends.

ATTACHMENTS

Exhibit A