

METRO COUNCIL

Work Session Worksheet

PRESENTATION DATE: November 13, 2018

LENGTH: 60 min.

PRESENTATION TITLE: Regional Investment Strategy: Parks and Nature framework

DEPARTMENTS: Parks and Nature, COO

PRESENTER(S): Martha Bennett, COO
Jon Blasher, Parks and Nature Director

WORK SESSION PURPOSE & DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Purpose: Present timeline and key issues for completing a COO framework recommendation for potential Parks and Nature bond
- Outcome: Feedback and input from Council to help complete recommendation

TOPIC BACKGROUND & FRAMING THE WORK SESSION DISCUSSION

The Metro Council has recognized the need to work together as a region on big-picture solutions to make this a more livable place for everyone, as greater Portland grows more congested and costly. The council also seeks to give more people more say about how to do this – especially those who have faced barriers or discrimination. In late 2017, the Metro Council directed staff to work with partners and the community on a coordinated regional strategy for potential investments in housing, parks and nature, and transportation to build on greater Portland’s many years of successful collaboration and meet our communities’ changing needs.

Parks and natural areas have long set greater Portland apart from other metropolitan regions. They are something nearly everyone appreciates as essential to quality of life. And people have repeatedly supported investments in parks and nature here. Over the past quarter-century, the region’s voters have passed two bond measures that allowed Metro to create a unique regional park system with nature at its heart – and two levies to care for it.

Metro has a strong track record of success delivering on commitments made to voters in these funding measures. With voters’ continuing support, Metro has worked with partners to protect clean water, restored fish and wildlife habitat, and brought nature closer to hundreds of thousands of people. Parks and nature investments have made our water cleaner, our communities healthier and our economy stronger. Metro now manages 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas across greater Portland, including beloved parks like Oxbow and Blue Lake, as well as lesser-known but invaluable natural areas.

Although much has been accomplished, there is more to do. Investing in parks and nature remains an urgent priority in greater Portland. A growing population and changing climate threaten the streams and habitat Oregonians have worked so hard to protect. Treasured parks and trails need improvements to keep up with demand. And some communities – particularly communities of color and other historically marginalized communities – still need access to the benefits of investments.

At the Metro Council’s direction in late 2017, staff initiated a work plan to engage partners and the community in developing a potential framework for continuing Metro’s parks and nature bond investments to build on our momentum, meet new challenges, and continue protecting and connecting nature and people into a new decade. The Metro Council identified November 2019 as a potential date for putting a new parks and nature bond measure before the region’s voters.

The council also directed staff to advance racial equity through this framework, incorporating lessons learned through past investments and partnerships with community organizations. This means including in decision-making those communities that have been left out in the past, as well as looking at how future investments can support communities of color.

Staff presented an engagement plan for this work at a Metro Council work session on June 26, 2018, and at MPAC on July 25, 2018. Since that time, staff have actively engaged a variety of partners and community members to begin developing a framework for a potential measure, including scale, scope and criteria for prioritizing investments.

Through the fall, staff conducted focused discussions with members of the conservation community, fellow park providers, Indigenous community members, and farmers to discuss priorities and concerns for a potential bond measure, including how it could advance racial equity. Working with a cohort of community-based organizations and conservation organizations, Metro also co-hosted two community forums with more than 100 total attendees.

In September, Metro convened a Stakeholder Table to explore options and provide recommendations to the Metro chief operating officer. The table includes roughly 30 members representing perspectives from the conservation community, culturally-specific organizations, business leaders, working lands representatives and local elected officials. At its fourth meeting on Nov. 9, the Stakeholder Advisory Table will make recommendations for a bond measure framework to submit to the Metro chief operating officer.

Through the rich insight of these community members and partners, staff identified several common priorities for shaping a potential third parks and nature bond, as well as unique ideas that could help a bond be more successful meeting community and conservation needs in the future. Staff presented a summary of engagement to date to the Metro Council at an Oct. 11 retreat, and received feedback for moving forward with developing a measure framework.

Staff are working toward a Chief Operating Officer framework recommendation to present to the Metro Council in December. The framework recommendation will include the potential bond's scale, scope, funding allocations and criteria for investment. Beyond recommending *what* should go into a potential bond, the recommendation will also discuss *how* Metro and local partners will advance racial equity in a bond through community engagement, investment prioritization, decision-making, planning, implementation and accountability.

At the Nov. 13 work session, staff will discuss areas of alignment between community and partner feedback, the Stakeholder Table's recommendations, and potential staff framework recommendations, as well as areas where there is less alignment. Staff will also discuss a timeline for engaging community and partners to complete the recommendation.

On Dec. 11, staff will present the COO's recommendation and seek direction from the Metro Council. At the Council's direction, staff would then proceed into a second phase of engagement and technical work in early 2019 to identify investments that could be include in a potential bond measure referral. The Metro Council could consider referral of a bond to voters in late spring 2019.

QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

- Does Council have feedback on staff's proposed next steps to complete the Chief Operating Officer's framework recommendation?

PACKET MATERIALS

- Would legislation be required for Council action? X Yes No
- If yes, is draft legislation attached? Yes X No