

MPAC Worksheet

Agenda Item Title: Regional Parks and Nature Bond: Potential Framework

Presenter: Brian Kennedy, Metro Parks and Nature

Contact for this worksheet/presentation: Craig Beebe, craig.beebe@oregonmetro.gov

Purpose/Objective

Provide an update on regional capital investments in parks and natural areas, including a discussion of a potential framework and next steps for a potential bond measure.

Action Requested/Outcome

Questions and advice regarding draft framework and next steps for bond development.

What has changed since MPAC last considered this issue/item?

The natural environment is a big part of what makes greater Portland a wonderful place to live and do business. Along with affordable housing and a safe, reliable transportation system, parks and nature are critical to the promise of livability Metro seeks to deliver to the region's residents – for which voters have affirmed their support through two parks and nature bonds, two levies and, most recently, the regional affordable housing bond measure.

With voters' support, 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 nonetheless significant natural areas that help protect vital habitat, prevent floods and improve water quality. Metro has also provided millions of dollars to local partners to support the acquisition and improvement of scores of parks and natural areas. Together, Metro and our partners have protected clean water, restored fish and wildlife habitat, and brought nature closer to hundreds of thousands of people. These investments have made greater Portland healthier, more resilient and more prosperous.

Although much has been accomplished, there is more to do as greater Portland grapples with growth. Development threatens treasured forests and watersheds. Existing parks need improvements to keep up with increasing demand. Climate change threatens the natural systems Oregonians have worked so hard to protect, and increases the urgency of investing in green infrastructure to prepare for extreme weather. And we need to do more to ensure that all people, particularly communities of color, enjoy the benefits of public investments in parks and nature.

The region's voters last considered and approved a parks and nature bond in 2006. As that bond's investments successfully wind down, it's time to work together to explore how to continue meeting the region's parks and nature needs, building on our momentum and advancing our shared priorities.

At the Metro Council's direction in late 2017, staff initiated a work plan to engage partners and the community in developing a potential measure to continue our bond authority and carry our shared work forward into a new decade. Future nature-focused capital investments by Metro would likely continue in three primary areas articulated in previous bond measures: protecting critical habitat and water quality; improving special places like Blue Lake and Oxbow parks and providing more public access to regional parks and natural areas; and increasing access to parks and nature in local communities through grants and local allocations.

The Metro Council has directed staff that regional investments must lead with racial equity. This means including in decision-making communities that have been left out in the past, and considering how future investments can support communities of color.

As with previous investment measures, community and partner input is playing an important role in shaping what's next. At MPAC on July 25, 2018, Metro staff presented plans for engagement with partners and the community to inform the creation of a potential bond framework, and received MPAC's feedback on priorities and issues to explore in the work.

Since July, Metro has conducted intensive engagement with key parks and nature stakeholders and partners. This has included focused discussions with the region's local parks providers, conservation advocates, Indigenous community and working lands community. Metro also worked with a cohort of community-based organizations and conservation groups to plan and facilitate two forums exploring how parks and nature investments should advance racial equity. These forums, held in September in Hillsboro and Clackamas, included voices of about 100 community members.

Also in September, Metro convened a Stakeholder Table representing a range of perspectives from local government, conservation, community and business to provide recommendations to the Metro chief operating officer on the bond. The Table has met four times to discuss parks and nature priorities, how to advance racial equity and specific recommendations for the bond framework. It provided recommendations to the Metro chief operating officer on Nov. 9.

After discussing the Stakeholder Table's recommendations with the Metro Council at its Nov. 13 work session, the Metro COO is now preparing her recommendation for a potential bond framework to the Metro Council. The recommendation will discuss the bond size, scope and criteria for investment, as well as recommendations for how Metro and our partners should advance racial equity and community engagement in a bond measure. The COO will present her recommendation to the Metro Council on Dec. 11.

In November, Metro staff are revisiting the key stakeholders and partners engaged so far in the process to discuss the draft COO recommendation and receive feedback to inform what is passed forward to the Metro Council in December. Given the importance of local partners in our shared success in parks and nature investments, the Nov. 28 MPAC meeting is an important opportunity for engagement during this period. Staff look forward to discussing the draft recommendation with MPAC, as well as next steps for developing a potential bond measure.

At the Metro Council's direction, in early 2019 staff would begin a new phase of engagement with partners and the public to identify specific investment priorities and processes that could be included in a complete bond package. In late spring, the Metro Council will consider whether to refer a measure to voters.

What packet material do you plan to include?

None