

REGIONAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY: PARKS AND NATURE BOND PROGRAM OPTIONS

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Length: 60 min

ISSUE STATEMENT

The Metro Council is seeking regional funding to protect and connect nature and people throughout the greater Portland region. The Metro Council has directed staff to develop a potential bond renewal for referral to voters in November 2019. Building on Council direction regarding the measures outcomes, programs and size, staff seek further direction on recommendations and outstanding items in order to finalize key elements of a potential bond package. The Metro Council is scheduled to adopt legislation referring the measure to voters on May 30, 2019.

ACTIONS REQUESTED

Provide staff direction on key policy questions for potential bond package prior to completion of final draft legislation.

Provide time for members of the Parks and Nature Stakeholder Table to provide direct feedback to the Metro Council on the current bond framework as presented by staff in April 2019.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

- Build on momentum of past Parks and Nature bond investments, while meeting new challenges, particularly population growth, racial disparity, and climate change
- Advance Parks and Nature System Plan and Metro's work with partners to connect people to nature, protect fish and wildlife habitat, improve water quality
- Advance racial equity, diversity and inclusion in bond development, programming and implementation
- Integrate with regional investments in affordable housing and transportation.

POLICY QUESTIONS

What additional direction does Council have for staff with regards to bond scope, scale or program criteria in order to move toward a recommended bond package for referral consideration?

Staff have identified the following outstanding issues for Council discussion:

- Final amount of funding directed to each of six program areas

- Total bond measure amount
- Funding for conservation easements in partnership with soil and water conservation district purchases of working lands easements
- Advancing large-scale community investments” program area purpose, definitions and criteria.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

In January staff received direction from the Metro Council on a set of draft outcomes, six priority investment areas and key criteria for project selection, advancing racial equity and increasing the region’s climate resiliency. At work sessions on Feb. 19 and March 19, Council provided further direction on the bond renewal’s size, relative level of investments in each program area, potential investment criteria and target areas. Since that time, staff has engaged a wide variety of stakeholders and returned to community members to share the potential bond package and program area details and receive feedback on how well it is meeting community needs.

At this work session, staff will share recommendations for refinements to the potential bond proposal based on feedback received through engagement with community partners this spring. Staff seek Council direction on the policy questions listed above. Council may choose to accept staff recommendations or provide alternative direction.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

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 address the challenges of growth and keep greater Portland livable for everyone. The passage of the regional affordable housing bond in November demonstrates greater Portland voters’ eagerness to work together to address these critical issues.

Residents of the region have repeatedly supported investments in parks and nature, an essential element of greater Portland’s quality of life and our national reputation. Over two decades, the region’s voters approved two bond measures (in 1995 and 2006) that allowed Metro to create a unique regional park system with nature at its heart. Voters have also passed two levies to care for this system, in 2013 and 2016 and the Metro Council approved additional capital investments in 2014 to increase the public’s use and connection to the natural areas that have been protected and restored.

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, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and bring parks and nature closer to hundreds of thousands of people. Parks and nature investments have made our communities healthier and our economy stronger. Metro now manages 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas across greater Portland, including beloved places like Oxbow and Blue Lake, as well as lesser-known but invaluable natural areas. Thousands more acres

of parks and natural areas have are enjoyed by people every day thanks to local and community projects made possible by regional funding.

Although much has been accomplished, there is more to do. 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 – need a more equitable share of the benefits of investments in parks and nature.

The Metro Council adopted a Parks and Nature System Plan in 2016, spelling out Metro’s regional role in addressing these needs with partners and the community. The Metro Council has also directed staff to advance racial equity throughout the development and framework of a potential bond, incorporating actions from the Parks and Nature Department’s 5-year Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. 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 provide benefits to communities of color, Indigenous community members and other historically marginalized populations.

BACKGROUND

In fall 2018, Metro engaged a wide range of partners and community members to explore options for a potential bond. Staff conducted focused discussions with members of the conservation community, fellow park providers, Indigenous community members, and farmers to discuss priorities for a potential bond measure, including how it could advance racial equity. Working with a cohort of culturally-specific organizations and conservation groups, Metro also co-hosted two community forums, hearing directly the voices of more than 100 community members who were not included in creating previous Metro parks and nature bond measures.

In September, Metro convened a Stakeholder Table to explore options and provide recommendations to the Metro chief operating officer. Members include roughly 30 people representing perspectives from the conservation community, culturally-specific organizations, business, working lands and local elected officials.

Through the rich insight of these community members and partners, staff identified potential priorities for a third parks and nature bond, as well as ideas that could help a bond meet 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 Nov. 13 work session and continue to share with Council feedback received from organizations and individuals about future capital investments in the region’s system of parks, trails and natural areas.

Over three work sessions in January 2019, the Metro Council discussed and provided direction to staff on the key outcomes the potential bond measure should prioritize in order to serve the needs of people and nature in greater Portland. Staff and the Council also considered possible gaps between Council’s desired outcomes and previous parks and nature bond investments and how a future bond could achieve the Council’s desired outcomes by being more explicit and transparent about investment priorities as well as by

adding new program areas for funding in the future. In February and March 2019, Council provided further guidance on the bond renewal's size, relative level of program investments, and draft program criteria and targets.

This spring, staff has increased engagement with stakeholders, local government partners and the general public to gather additional feedback on Council direction and draft bond programs. These activities included community workshops and forums, focus groups with communities of color and key partners, discussions with park directors and city managers, presentations to MPAC and local governing bodies, and an online survey. Three additional meetings have been held with members of greater Portland's Indigenous community and Metro staff. Staff also presented information about the racial equity aspects of this bond measure to Metro's Committee on Racial Equity and the Parks and Nature Racial Equity Advisory Committee. The Stakeholder Table met in March and April to make final recommendations to Metro's Chief Operating Officer. Input and feedback is informing staff recommendations to the Metro Council.

Council direction on May 7 will help staff complete a final draft bond package to be presented at the Metro Council's May 14 work session. Council is expected to consider referring the bond to voters at its business meeting on May 30, 2019.

- Is legislation required for Council action? **Yes**
- If yes, is draft legislation attached? **No**