

REGIONAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY: PARKS AND NATURE BOND DRAFT LEGISLATION

Date: May 3, 2019

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Department: Parks and Nature

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Work session date: May 14, 2019

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 previous Council direction, staff are prepared to submit a recommended bond referral package for Council discussion and consideration.

ACTIONS REQUESTED

Review of draft legislation; provide staff direction to finalize resolution and all exhibits.

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 the draft legislation referring a potential Parks and Nature bond measure to voters in November 2019?

- Is the legislation as drafted responsive to the Metro's Council's previous policy direction?
- Does the legislation as drafted advance racial equity and Metro's Parks and Nature mission, and reflect community and stakeholder input? What is missing and/or needs strengthening or changing?
- Are there outstanding issues that still need to be addressed and reflected in the legislation as currently drafted?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

At this work session, staff will review with Council draft legislation and exhibits for the renewal of bond authority for the purpose of protecting water quality, wildlife habitat and connecting more people to nature. The Council is scheduled to consider referring this legislation to voters on June 6, 2019 for the November 5, 2019 general election.

The Council has directed staff that the following principles should guide these investments.

- Ensure inclusive engagement, transparency and accountability.
- Advance racial equity through bond investments.
- Protect clean water for people, fish and wildlife.
- Protect and restore culturally significant plant communities.
- Protect, connect and improve habitat for native fish and wildlife.
- Take care of what we have.
- Make parks and natural areas more accessible and inclusive.
- Connect more people to the land and rivers of our region.
- Build trails for biking and walking.
- Support community-led parks and nature projects.
- Make communities more resilient to climate change.

Based on input gathered from community engagement activities, requests from local government partners and technical analysis, the Council directed staff in a work session on May 7 to prepare a measure that included investment across six program areas:

- **Protect and restore land**
- **Support local projects**
- **Award community grants**
- **Take care of Metro parks**
- **Create trails for walking and biking**
- **Advance large-scale community visions**

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 (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.

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 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 waters 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 Metro staff. 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 and shared with the Metro Council 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.

Over three work sessions in January 2019, the Metro Council discussed community and partner input, 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 discussed how a future bond could achieve the Council's desired outcomes by being more explicit and transparent about investment priorities, including racial equity and climate resilience, 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.

Input and feedback from community engagement is directly informing staff recommendations to the Metro Council. 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 heard feedback about the racial equity aspects of the bond measure programs from Metro's Committee on Racial Equity and the Parks and Nature Racial Equity Advisory Committee.

The Parks and Nature Stakeholder Table met in March and April to make final recommendations to staff. Members of the Table shared their feedback directly with Metro Council at the work session on May 7. Also on May 7, staff shared key themes of community and partner engagement and heard Council direction on key policy questions to shape the final draft bond package.

At the May 14 work session, staff will present the elements of the legislation the Metro Council will consider for referral to voters. Council direction will help staff complete a final bond package to be considered for adoption and referral to the region's voters by the Metro Council on June 6, 2019.

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