

STAFF REPORT: RESOLUTION NO. 19-4988

FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUBMITTING TO THE VOTERS OF THE METRO AREA GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$475 MILLION TO FUND NATURAL AREA AND WATER QUALITY PROTECTION AND TO CONNECT PEOPLE TO NATURE CLOSE TO HOME; AND SETTING FORTH THE OFFICIAL INTENT OF THE METRO COUNCIL TO REIMBURSE CERTAIN EXPENDITURES OUT OF THE PROCEEDS OF SAID BONDS UPON ISSUANCE

Date: May 28, 2019
Department: Parks and Nature
Meeting Date: June 6, 2019

Presenter(s): Jon Blasher, Director, Metro
Parks and Nature
Length: 60 min.

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ISSUE STATEMENT

The Metro Council has recognized the need to work together as a region to make this a more livable place for everyone as greater Portland grapples with growth and its impacts. People across the region want a comprehensive approach to keeping greater Portland livable for all.

Our parks and natural areas have long set greater Portland apart from other metropolitan regions. 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 these special places.

With voters' continuing support, Metro has worked with partners to protect clean water, restore local streams and wetlands to improve the health of native fish, plants and wildlife, and supported hundreds of local projects that bring people closer to nature. Local and Metro investments have made our communities healthier and our economy stronger. Today, Metro manages more than 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 spanning the region from Cornelius to Oregon City to Gresham. Thousands more acres of parks and natural areas now provide essential habitat and are enjoyed by people every day thanks to local and community projects made possible by Metro bond funding.

Although much has been accomplished, there is still much 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 public investments in parks and nature.

This proposed bond measure will allow Metro to continue working with community and partners to make investments that will benefit people and wildlife for generations to come.

ACTION REQUESTED

Consideration of Resolution No. 19-4988, referring to greater Portland’s voters a renewal of Metro’s bond authority for protecting and connecting nature and people.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Based on community and stakeholder feedback, in January 2019 the Metro Council gave staff the following direction for shaping a potential capital funding measure for voters:

- Advance Metro’s Parks and Nature mission of protecting water quality, restoring habitat and connecting people to nature close to home, without raising people’s taxes
- Prioritize community needs, while continuing to protect water quality and fish and wildlife habitat
- Ensure that people of color are part of decision-making and benefit from public investments in parks and nature, in accordance with Metro’s Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Help make communities more resilient to a changing climate
- Align investments with other regional policies and investments in housing and transportation

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends Council adoption of the resolution.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Staff and stakeholders have worked together to shape the proposed bond measure now before the Metro Council.

The Metro Council has wanted to be sure that future parks and natural area investments are responsive to changing community needs and help ensure that continued growth doesn’t threaten what makes the greater Portland region such a special place to live, work and play. The council wanted to be sure that new funding increases benefits for more people, especially communities of color, consistent with Metro’s racial equity strategy. To

do that, the council encouraged staff to develop a robust and meaningful engagement process to shape this potential bond. The goals for this community engagement were to:

- respond to community needs
- elevate communities of color
- advance racial equity
- strengthen awareness and trust in Metro
- support stronger relationships between organizations
- report back to the community as to how their input has been used.

Over the last year, Metro has worked with and heard from many stakeholders and community members to help shape the bond measure the Metro Council is now considering. These have included conservation partners, community based organizations and culturally-specific community groups, local governments, local park providers and special districts, members of the region's Indigenous community, community advocates, non-profit land trusts, farmers and others with an interest in working lands. A Stakeholder Table convened in fall 2018 was particularly important for discussing and providing recommendations on investment priorities, accountability and programmatic criteria.

The Metro Council, staff and stakeholders agreed that this potential bond measure should reflect current regional policies, some of which have changed significantly since the 2006 bond measure. Stakeholders and the Metro Council have also recognized that investments in protecting and connecting nature and people should also align with and leverage other regional and local investments in affordable housing and transportation.

For more information and detail about the community engagement process and how it helped shape the proposed bond programs and investment criteria, see Attachments.

Known opposition

Staff is not aware of organized opposition to the proposed bond measure at this time.

Legal antecedents

Metro is authorized under the Metro Charter, Chapter III and ORS Chapter 268 to issue and sell voter-approved general obligation bonds to finance the implementation of Metro's authorized functions.

The bond measure also serves to advance the Parks and Nature System Plan adopted by the in February 2016 and the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion adopted by the Metro Council in June 2016.

Anticipated effects

The effect of this resolution will be the referral to voters of a general obligation bond measure in the November 5, 2019 General Election. The text of the ballot measure is included in Exhibit H.

If voters approve the proposed bond measure, Metro staff would work with partners and the community to implement the bond's programs in the manner described in Exhibits A through G, emphasizing continuing community engagement and criteria for advancing racial equity and increasing climate resilience across the programs.

Following this robust engagement, Metro Council will direct staff on narrowing the priorities for bond funding including adopting specific plans for land acquisition in each of the regional target areas and trail corridors identified in the measure.

Financial implications

If the Metro Council approves this resolution, Metro staff would work with eligible cities, counties and other park providers to support the local implementation of projects funded through the bond.

The Council President's 2019-20 Budget includes expenditures for information development and distribution through the Regional Investment Strategy. The referral of this measure to the voters will require Metro to pay for election expenses, estimated at approximately \$150,000. This amount can change based on the number of issues on the ballot, and the number of region-wide items on the ballot. The Council President's 2019-20 adopted budget includes appropriation for this expense.

Consistent with prior recommendations of the TSCC, budget authority for program expenses after the voters approve the measure is not included in the Council President's 2019-20 approved budget. The Metro Council can establish appropriation authority related to the successful passage of the measure once the election has been certified. If the measure passes, staff will work with Council on the development of the bond measure program and the necessary budgetary appropriation to be approved by Ordinance at a later date.

BACKGROUND

Metro has a strong track record of success delivering on commitments made to voters in these funding measures. In 2007 the Metro Council appointed an independent oversight committee tasked with monitoring the implementation of Metro's 2006 bond measure. Since that time the Nature Areas Oversight Committee has reported annually to the Metro Council and concluded that Metro staff has successfully and professionally implemented the bond program and found that Metro has met or exceeded the goals set in the 2006 bond measure.

Over the past decade, Metro has undertaken a systematic and comprehensive assessment of racial inequity in our region and the disparate impacts of Metro policies and investments. By valuing the experiences of communities of color and co-creating strategies, the Metro Council's Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, adopted in 2016, lays out a bold but achievable vision for making a more equitable greater Portland region. Also in 2016, the Metro Council adopted a Parks and Nature System Plan that spells out Metro's role in the region and the mission of protecting clean water, restoring fish and wildlife habitat and connecting people with nature close to home.

At the Metro Council's direction in late 2017, Metro began engaging partners and the community in developing a framework for continuing Metro's parks and nature bond investments to build on past efforts, maintain momentum, meet new challenges, and continue protecting and connecting nature and people for the next generation. 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 Metro Council provided clear direction that this bond must advance racial equity and Metro's Parks and Nature System Plan. This bond program will break new ground in advancing conservation and racial equity priorities together by considering not just *what* Metro does with bond funding but also *how* Metro does the work. In particular, Metro should consider who participates, who makes decisions, and who, specifically, benefits in the near term and the long run.

Throughout the development of the bond measure, the Metro Council has heard community input and provided direction on programs and priorities the measure should advance. This has included several work sessions and a Council retreat in 2018, and several work sessions in 2019. This iterative process has helped create a proposed bond measure that serves the council's priorities and direction while advancing community and partner priorities identified through engagement.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Engagement Summary Phase One - October 2018

Attachment 2 – Engagement Summary - May 2019