



CONNECT WITH NATURE

Planning parks and nature with communities of color

Resource guide and recommendations
June 2019



Metro

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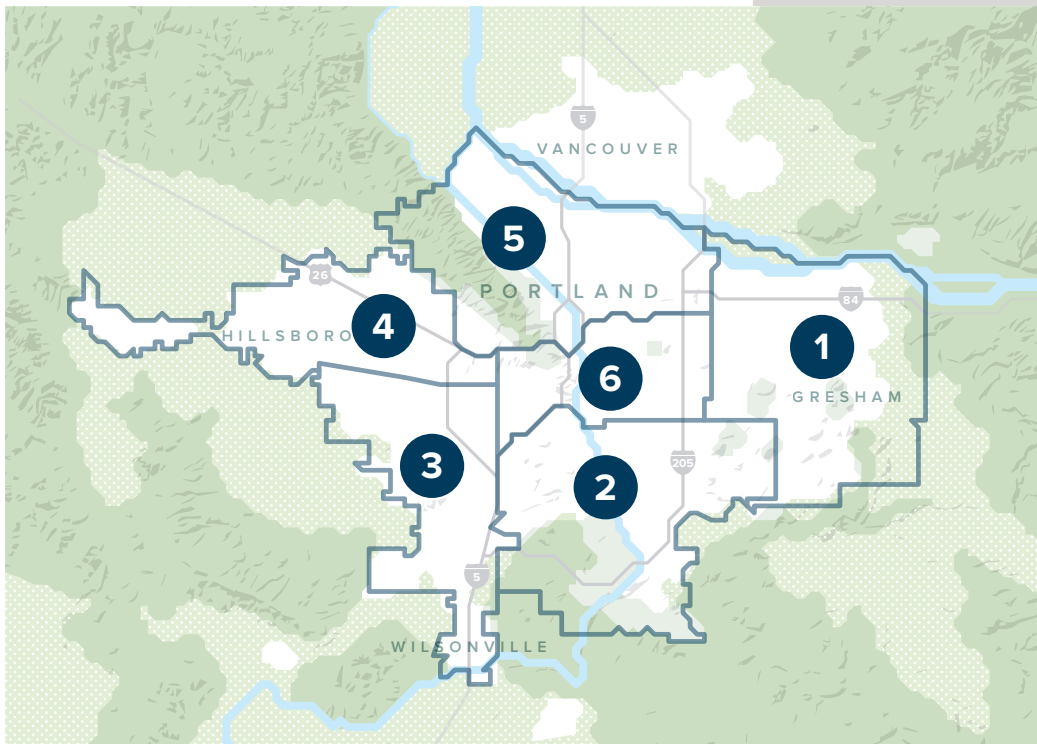
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Acknowledgments

Indigenous people

The Portland metropolitan region, which includes the parks and natural areas we focus on here, occupies the ancestral homelands of Indigenous peoples who have lived here since time immemorial.

Project advisory committee

Center for Diversity and the Environment (CDE)

Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC)

Families and Community Together (FACT Oregon)

Self Enhancement, Inc (SEI)

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Angelica Delgado Mora

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Mini-workshops

Gresham High School Asian and Pacific Islander youth and Gay Straight Alliance youth

Unite Oregon leadership cohort conversation

World Harvest Church

African American focus group

Supported by voter-approved parks and natural areas levy.

This document also includes lessons and recommendations from Metro's experiences and dialog with the following organizations involved in the Community Partnerships program:

Centro Cultural

Latino Network

Africa House

Asian Family Youth Center

Slavic Network of Oregon

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Executive summary

From the wild forests of Chehalem Ridge to salmon spawning grounds in Oxbow Park, Metro provides a regional network of parks and natural areas for recreation, beauty, connection and wildlife habitat. Time in nature connects people to themselves, their community and the natural world. As our communities become more urban, a little bit of green goes a long way.

Yet, not everyone benefits from parks and natural areas in our region. Some neighborhoods suffer from limited access to nearby open space or lack easy connections to nature. Some communities do not realize where nature parks or natural areas exist and what they offer, or they don't feel safe or welcome there. Data indicate that people of color are the most impacted and have the least amount of familiarity, access and connection to the region's green spaces.

Connect with Nature is a partnership between community members and Metro to transform the way Metro engages with people of color when planning, building and operating parks, and to learn how parks and natural areas could better serve people of color in the region.



Connect with Nature seeks to increase benefits of parks and natural areas for people of color, and remove barriers for participation in park planning and decision making.

As part of a three-year planning process for two new nature parks— East Council Creek in Cornelius and Gabbert Butte in Gresham— Connect with Nature explored how parks and natural areas could better meet the needs of communities of color. Through a series of community workshops, Connect with Nature asked people of color about their values and experiences with nature, parks and the outdoors. Connect with Nature workshops explored how to make parks and natural areas more welcoming and relevant for participants' communities, and how to incorporate these ideas into the new nature parks at Gabbert Butte and East Council Creek as well as inform future planning. New, more equitable practices were implemented that can be replicated agency-wide.

Equitable participation in government is critical to effectively serve all people. Connect with Nature highlights the importance of setting up a process whereby the community can lead and succeed, allocating sufficient resources for authentic community leadership, and changing policies that disproportionately exclude people of color. Connect with Nature created space for community leaders to set the agendas, guide the conversations while also reducing barriers for people of color to engage with the project as workshop participants, community liaisons, consultants and collaborators.

The lessons learned through Connect with Nature are documented in this report. This guide is intended to be a resource for staff, leadership and elected officials, other park providers, community organizations and advocates to more effectively work together in parks and natural area planning, design and operations.



Many of the lessons learned and processes developed through Connect with Nature are now broadly informing Metro's work.

The Connect with Nature resource guide summarizes what we heard from people of color who participated in the project. It is not intended to generalize about people of color's needs and preferences.

The summary includes specific feedback about values, park and natural area infrastructure, park programs and day-to-day park operations. Participants' insight shed light on what park providers can do to help make people of color feel safe and welcome in parks from clean facilities, to rangers and staff who look like the people they serve and visible, clear, multilingual signs at park entrances.

The intent of this guide is to share what we heard from community members and summarize themes that emerged in order to inform and inspire richer and more meaningful future collaboration. Reading this report is no substitute for directly engaging with communities of color. Real, earnest, thoughtful and time-intensive work of true community engagement and listening is required. When agencies engage with communities of color respectfully—providing time, space and resources for community leadership and authentic influence over outcomes—the results reflect community values, identities and needs.

The Connect with Nature resource guide serves as a tool to advance the regional conversation about how to ensure people of color fully benefit from investments in the region's open spaces, so that the region's parks and natural areas can truly benefit everyone in the region.

What we heard

The following values consistently emerged in the Connect with Nature workshops and offer a starting place for new or continued conversations about natural areas, nature and parks in the region.

- Nature
- Family, community and cultural connection
- Access to parks and natural areas
- Safe and welcoming places
- Access to usable and relevant information
- Meaningfully contributing to parks and natural areas



Metro's regional parks role

Metro Parks and Nature protects water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and creates opportunities for people to enjoy nature across the region.

Thanks to two voter-approved bonds and a public local option levy recently renewed by voters, Metro acquires, restores, build and manages parks, trails and natural areas across the greater Portland metropolitan region.

These places are for everyone.

From the wild forests of Chehalem Ridge to the salmon spawning grounds of Oxbow Park, Metro's system of parks, trails and natural areas provides habitat for endangered and threatened fish and wildlife, a regional network of trails and bike paths, recreation, scenic beauty, and nature programs.

Connect with Nature collaboration

What is Connect with Nature?

Connect with Nature is a partnership between community and Metro to better understand how to design parks and natural areas to serve people of color in the region. The project aims to transform the way Metro engages with and seeks participation from people of color in the work of planning, building and operating parks.

Through a series of community workshops, Connect with Nature asked people of color about their values and experiences with nature, parks, and the outdoors. Connect with Nature explored how to make parks and natural areas more welcoming and relevant for participants' communities. The workshops focused on the planning and design for two new nature parks, East Council Creek in Cornelius and Gabbert Butte in Gresham.

While the workshops focused on nature and park design, the Connect with Nature project also sought to engage people of color more broadly in the work of Metro. Community partners encouraged Metro staff to consider how people influence and benefit from Metro's work, including as hired consultants, contractors, managers and staff and serving on Metro committees. Community partners prompted Metro staff to recognize the ways that people of color have been excluded from these forms of participation, not just from public meetings. The project identified and removed barriers for people of color to engage with Metro as consultants and collaborators on the project, and endeavored to establish more equitable practices that could be replicated agency-wide.

Connect with Nature purposefully moved away from a business-as-usual model for planning and outreach. The project instead focused on relationship building, compensating people for their time, and attentive listening. The project gave control to community partners, empowering them to lead rather than just offering them a seat at the table. Metro park planners approached the Connect with Nature project with a willingness to relinquish control and allow the outcome of the project to evolve, shift and change based on feedback and guidance of community partners.

The lessons learned through Connect with Nature are documented in this report. It is intended to be a resource for community advocates, planners, field staff and policy makers to pursue more effective strategies of engaging with communities of color in park and natural area planning. Many of these lessons and processes developed through Connect with Nature are already being implemented in Metro's work.



Communities of color

Consistent with Metro's Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, for the purpose of this report, people of color and communities of color are Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Latinos or Hispanics, and immigrants and refugees who do not speak English well, including African immigrants, communities who speak Russian or other Slavic languages, and people from the Middle East.

Why Connect with Nature?

People of color don't benefit equitably from the region's parks, trails and natural areas.

Across the Portland metro region on any given day people bike, play and relax in parks, forests and natural areas. On foot, bike, stroller, or park bench people benefit from parks and natural areas for mental health, family fun, solitude, exercise, cultural connection, and to savor Pacific Northwest beauty. Time spent in nature is restorative; allowing people to connect with themselves, their community and the natural world.



People of color share similar barriers with other historically marginalized groups. By addressing the barriers experienced by people of color we will also identify and remove barriers for other disadvantaged groups.¹

For more than 20 years, Portland metro area voters have approved natural area investments in a regional system of parks, trails and natural areas. These investments have improved our region's quality of life by protecting wildlife habitat and water quality, and providing opportunities to experience nature close to home.

Communities with access to natural areas and parks enjoy more environmental benefits from cleaner air and water, reduced stress, lower rates of crime and domestic violence,² and higher states of wellbeing.³ Within an increasingly urbanized landscape, a little bit of green open space goes a long way. Parks and natural areas provide critical escape, respite, visual and mental relief from development, and offer rejuvenation.⁴

Yet, not everyone benefits equitably from the region's parks and natural areas. Some neighborhoods suffer from little or no access to open space within close proximity. Some communities lack walkable or bikeable connections to parks. Some communities do not have access to information about where to visit parks and what amenities and programs may be offered. Some communities don't feel safe or welcome visiting the region's parks and natural areas. People of color are the most impacted. People of color—historically and systemically—have the least amount of familiarity, access, and connection to the region's green spaces.⁵ Connect with Nature is one of the ways Metro is working to change that.

¹ <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/strategic-plan-advance-racial-equity-diversity-and-inclusion>.

² Kuo, F.E., and W.C. Sullivan. 2001. Aggression and Violence in the Inner City: Effects of Environment Via Mental Fatigue. *Environment and Behavior* 33, 4:543-571.

³ Wood, L.; P. Hooper; S. Foster and Fiona Bull; 2017. Public green spaces and positive mental health – investigating the relationship between access, quantity and types of parks and mental wellbeing. *Health & Place*, 48, 63-71.

⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272494495900012>.

⁵ Needham, M. D., & Rushing, J. R. (2017). *Resident needs and behaviors in Portland parks and natural areas: Understanding communities of color*. Final project report for Metro (Portland). Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society and Natural Resources, Tourism, and Recreation (NATURE) Studies Lab.



People of color are excluded from participating in community and government decision making and policy development.

Not sharing in the benefits of the region's parks and natural areas is just one way that people of color suffer from historic and ongoing racism built into the structures of government. People of color also experience the worst outcomes in nearly every category of social well-being, including housing, transportation, access to nature, education and health.⁶

These outcomes are a direct result of a long history of governments intentionally excluding people of color from opportunities for land ownership and participation in society and decision making. From forcibly occupying Indigenous lands to constitutional prohibitions against Black residents and race-based immigration restrictions, government has long marginalized people of color.

Today, the outcome of that history is that decision-makers and those who influence decisions continue to be disproportionately white, well-educated and well-off. This inherited privilege created a current system that is not changing quickly enough to enable all people of color to easily and meaningfully participate. Today, the most impacted communities still have little power to change systems that continue to exclude them and impact their everyday life and wellbeing.

Equitable participation in government is critical to effectively serving all people and equitable participation in the planning of parks and natural areas is critical to creating a parks and nature system that effectively serves all communities. It is inefficient and unjust to exclude any members of the public from participation. While laws may have changed, past history continues to impact the lived experience, representation and participation of people of color today.

⁶ Metro's strategic plan to advance racial equity.



Connect with Nature seeks to increase benefits of parks and natural areas for people of color, and remove barriers for participation in park planning and decision making.

Metro is taking meaningful steps to include and focus on people of color in the development of programs, policies and services. In 2016 Metro adopted the agency-wide Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion which directs the agency to focus on racial equity. The plan identifies a focus on racial equity as the most effective way to remove barriers for other marginalized people, and benefit all communities in the region.

Metro's Parks and Nature department has been a leader in this work. The 2013 parks and natural areas operating levy directed the department to increase opportunities for communities of color and children from low income families to experience the region's parks and natural areas. This has led to innovative community partnerships, relationship building, nature programming, grants, contracting and other work in the department. The Parks and Nature System Plan identifies developing and operating welcoming and inclusive parks, and incorporating equity across the Parks and Nature portfolio as key to the long-term success of the program. For the past five years, Metro's Parks and Nature department has been developing new relationships, programs and policy tools to remove barriers and advance racial equity.

Connect with Nature builds on the department's ongoing work to authentically include communities of color. With funding and a policy mandate from the 2013 parks and natural areas levy, and by working in partnership with communities of color, Connect with Nature approaches racial equity in the work of Parks and Nature in two ways. First, a strategic community engagement approach led by people of color aims to identify how parks and natural areas can be more welcoming, serve the needs of, and benefit communities of color. Second, Connect with Nature seeks to identify and remove the systemic barriers that exclude people of color from participating in the Parks and Nature department's work and decision making.

Metro is committed to continuing to learn from and with the community in order to create a Parks and Nature system that more equitably benefits all members of our community, and Connect with Nature is one of the ways Metro is doing that.

Connect with Nature vision

The vision for Connect with Nature grew out of early meetings with the project's advisory committee, representatives from culturally specific organizations serving people of color. Committee members consistently urged Metro staff to approach this project differently. Two themes emerged from those meetings and became the guiding vision for the project:

Let community lead

Community leadership meant making sure that communities of color had a lead role at each step of the project. It meant Metro coming to the table as a partner with community, rather than as a project lead. Instead of using a typical process to hire a landscape architect to conduct design workshops, Metro requested that community-based organizations and landscape architects partner on the project, and encouraged community organizations to lead the project team, with a landscape architect as a sub-consultant. Workshop participants—people of color and representatives of communities of color—also were at the table as designs were developed for the two new nature parks, giving them power to influence the designs as they were developed and before comments were solicited from the broader public.

Change business practices

The way that Metro and other agencies conduct the business of planning, designing, operating and programming parks is based on a model that serves to perpetuate the status quo. Connect with Nature worked to identify business practices that exclude people of color from participating in the work of Parks and Nature and established mechanisms to change those practices. This involved contracting with members of the advisory committee to share their expertise on the project, adapting the project proposal process to be accessible to community-based organizations, and piloting a process to provide stipends to community leaders and committee representatives. Most importantly, it meant questioning assumptions about standard practices, identifying where they are not working for people of color, and finding ways to change.

Connect with Nature purposefully put communities of color directly in the planner seat rather than just offering an invitation to a seat at the table.





Connect with Nature goals

1. Learn how to plan, design, build and operate parks and natural areas that meet the needs of communities of color.

Identify the specific elements, structures and features of parks and park programs that facilitate people of color feeling welcome and wanting to spend time in nature parks and natural areas.

2. Directly engage communities of color in master planning for East Council Creek and Gabbert Butte nature parks. Engage communities in such a way that the master plans for these two new nature parks reflect the desires and preferences of communities of color.

3. Build trust between Metro and communities of color and build participants' capacity to lead. Develop a working relationship where Metro and communities are learning from each other. Communities learn about Metro's work, regional nature parks and natural areas, and opportunities to participate in decision making; while Metro learns about the cultural preferences of communities of color in relation to nature, park facilities, and nature programming. Through the process, participants gain valuable skills and experience engaging with a government agency. People learn about one another in a new context, cultivating new ground for trust and relationship.

4. Share lessons learned. Share what the team heard from community members, summarize themes that emerged, and provide recommendations based on lessons learned in order to inform richer and more meaningful future collaborations.

We hope the work shared in this document advances the regional conversation with communities of color about how they can influence and participate as equals in parks and natural area planning as well as more fully enjoy and benefit from investments in parks and natural areas.



Community-led engagement approach

With a project envisioned by organizations representing communities of color, a team led by culturally specific organizations, and workshop activities designed and evaluated by people of color, Connect with Nature put communities of color directly in the planner seat. Communities of color guided the park design process and outcome.

Advisory committee

In 2014, Metro convened a committee to help envision a project to design parks and natural areas that better serve the needs of people of color. The advisory committee consisted of representatives of culturally specific organizations working directly with communities of color, environmental professionals of color, youth of color, and families experiencing disabilities. Staff from Metro's office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion also participated on the committee. Committee members were paid for their time and expertise. The advisory committee was key in guiding the vision of the project and drafting the initial project scope. The committee encouraged Metro to try a new approach—consult with community organizations to lead a park design project.

Project team

With the oversight of the advisory committee, Metro issued a request for proposals which specifically asked that community-based organizations and landscape architects partner on project proposals. A team led by Verde, consisting of five culturally specific organizations serving communities of color and a landscape architecture firm, was awarded the project. The Verde team included Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), Multicultural Collaborative, and landscape architecture firm Environmental Science Associates (ESA).

The project team conducted a precedent study of parks and natural areas designed in collaboration with communities of color as well as a demographic analysis of the area around two project sites. Project team members provided a trusted connection to community networks and potential leaders. They



Project Team Members

Verde: Verde serves communities by building environmental wealth through social enterprise, outreach and advocacy to ensure low-income people and people of color directly benefit.

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO): IRCO serves immigrants, refugees, and mainstream community members in Oregon and SW Washington by providing more than 200 culturally and linguistically specific social services.

Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA): NAYA provides culturally-specific programs and services to tribal youth and families to sustain traditions and build cultural wealth.

Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO): APANO is a statewide, grassroots organization uniting Asians and Pacific Islanders to achieve social justice through empowerment, organizing and advocacy.

Multicultural Collaborative: Multicultural Collaborative works to build capacity in institutions and empower communities of color to have a voice in policy and decision-making.

Environmental Science Associates (ESA): ESA works to plan and design parks spaces that minimize impacts to the natural and built communities through innovation, sound science, and technical excellence.

recruited community leaders to participate in a community involvement committee and designed and led community workshops. The project team ensured that communities' needs remained front and center throughout the project. The team's experience working with community members helped identify and remove potential barriers to people's participation. The team was instrumental in leading culturally appropriate workshop activities that empowered participants to lead design conversations. They reviewed workshop feedback and refined design preferences, lending community of color perspectives to conversations that are typically held in a dominant culture space.

Community involvement committees

When the request for proposal to hire a project team was prepared, Metro recognized that only some community organizations would have the capacity to learn about the project and partner with landscape architects to prepare a proposal. Metro reserved project resources for community leaders with geographic proximity or an interest in the natural areas to join the project.

The project team proposed the community involvement committee as a structure that would provide support and a capacity-building opportunity for the community leaders who were invited to participate. The goal was to ensure that each committee member benefited from their participation on the project. Committee members acted as liaisons to invite and bring their communities into the conversation and increase the level of awareness and interest of their communities in the project. Community involvement committee leaders facilitated the workshop discussions, reviewed the workshop results, provided direct feedback to Metro and the project team and gained transferable skills and experience.

Relationship and trust building between Metro and the project team took time, and developed into a rewarding collaboration, where team members got to know and rely on each other's strengths to meet common project goals.



Precedent research

In Ontario, Canada, planners engaged local communities of color to help design a new public space for the Times Neighborhood Park. East Asian community engagement led to incorporating an inlaid pebble path to provide foot reflexology to relieve stress and improve balance. Designers moved beyond simple cliches of pagodas and koi ponds to include deeper cultural and socio-spatial features suggested through community engagement.

Precedent research

As a starting point, the project team researched project examples in other regions that have successfully developed culturally specific engagement and design for parks and facilities. The team reviewed place-based projects, partnerships and programs, and studies and research ranging from canoe journeys on the Willamette River to intergenerational trail building in Oakland to develop a project library of practices, methods and examples of successful culturally specific design. The research team found that visits and use of regional park systems largely depend on:

1. Whether people are aware of the regional parks;
2. Whether they would feel safe at the regional parks; and
3. Whether or not the regional parks provide the activity and amenity mix they prefer.

Most precedent examples highlighted programming or culturally specific community leadership. Few design examples were found.





Workshops

Connect with Nature included two tracks of four design workshops. One track focused on East Council Creek in Cornelius, OR, and one on Gabbert Butte in Gresham, OR. The workshops were designed to be safe spaces for participants to share needs, ideas and preferences. Workshop participants were invited by community involvement committee members, trusted leaders from their own community. Each community involvement committee member was tasked with ensuring that approximately 3-5 community members attend each design workshop. People from African-American, African-Immigrant, Asian-American, Burmese, Latinx, Native American, Russian and Vietnamese communities participated in the workshops.

The Multicultural Collaborative led highly graphic and interactive workshop activities to increase cross-cultural engagement of all participants. The workshops included culturally-appropriate hands-on activities where participants were asked to share ideas, critiques and aspirations about nature and nature parks. The workshops empowered participants to design features for the parks rather than select from a series of pre-selected options.

The workshops offered native language interpretation and facilitation and included multicultural share-back loops where participants listened to each other to help inform and further each other's ideas. The workshops emphasized listening, instead of presenting a series of prescribed design options. Workshops offered a full meal, refreshments, childcare, and language translation in Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese and Zomi. Participants received grocery store gift cards, zoo passes, parks passes, and other incentives to honor their time and feedback.

Each workshop built on key takeaways from the previous one.

Workshop 1 focused on people's experiences with nature and parks.

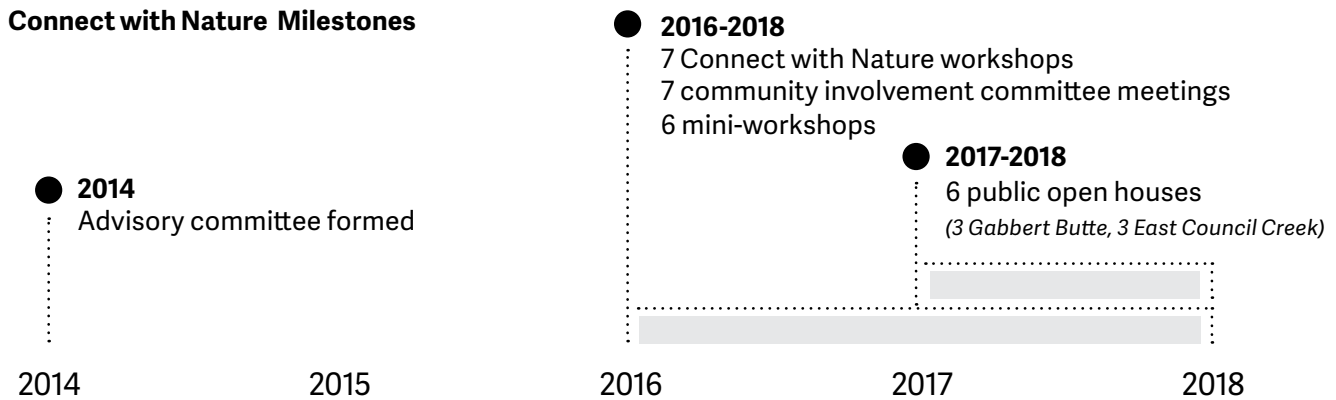
Workshop 2 included a visit to the proposed new nature park location and designing participants' ideal nature park experience.

Workshop 3 focused on the details and nature park amenities like picnic shelters or trails, and began refining three design alternatives.

Workshop 4 asked participants to reflect on their own experiences in the process and to review the draft proposed nature park design.

"Thank you for asking for our participation and actually implementing our feedback."

Connect with Nature Milestones



Nature storytelling

The first workshop and each mini-workshop explored people of color's personal relationship to nature with a focus on listening and storytelling. In one exercise, the project team asked participants to select a nature object (feathers, rocks, stones, flowers, pine cones, fur, bones, etc.) and share what it meant to them, personally. One person picked up a stone saying, "I chose this rock because nature is the foundation, it all comes after that."

Mini-workshops

In addition to the two primary tracks of multilingual workshops, Connect with Nature held several "mini-workshops" with community groups who were not able to attend the main workshops. The mini-workshops focused on similar topics of what nature means to the participants, what people like to do in parks and natural areas, and what makes participants feel welcome in parks and natural areas. Mini workshops and similar conversations were held with the following groups: African American families, Slavic families, Gresham High School Gay Straight Alliance, Gresham High School Asian & Pacific Islander Club, Unite Oregon PILOT cohort, and IRCO.

East Council Creek and Gabbert Butte general public outreach

During the planning for East Council Creek and Gabbert Butte, Metro also asked for the general public's feedback on the proposed designs. Public open houses and online surveys were hosted after the second, third and fourth Connect with Nature workshops. The open houses were an opportunity for the public at large to weigh in on ideas and designs first developed at the Connect with Nature workshops, through focused engagement with people of color. General public feedback was incorporated as the designs were refined through subsequent Connect with Nature workshops.

For Gabbert Butte, a stakeholder advisory committee was formed that included members of the public, conservation organizations and recreation groups. Connect with Nature community involvement committee members were also invited to participate to ensure transparency, authenticity and consistency between the committee and Connect with Nature workshops.

As a way to honor people's time and energy, stipends were offered for anyone participating on the stakeholder committee.

How to use this resource

A place to start

The goal of this report is to collect and share lessons learned through the Connect with Nature collaboration.

This information is a resource for agency staff, leadership and elected officials, other park providers and community organizations and advocates to more effectively engage in planning parks and natural areas.

The intent is not to generalize about people of color's needs and preferences, rather to share what we heard from community members, summarize themes that emerged, and provide recommendations based on lessons learned, in order to inform and inspire richer and more meaningful future collaboration.



Workshop in Metro Council Chambers. For most participants this was their first time in the room where so many decisions affecting the region are made.



There is no substitute for authentic community engagement

By no means should this report be used as a substitute for engaging with communities of color in the process of parks and open space planning. Real, earnest, thoughtful and time-intensive work of true community engagement and listening is required. Instead, this report hopes to shed light on a process and recommend more effective strategies in how to engage communities of color.

When jurisdictions and agencies engage communities of color with respect—allowing them direct leadership over a planning process and to authentically influence the outcome—the result will be a reflection of the cultural identity, values, histories, viewpoints and desires of the community.

“Fantastic work—so proud to have been a part of the process and to know firsthand how all communities matter.”

What we heard

This section summarizes what we have heard from people of color through workshops, and conversations with community leaders and participants. The summary includes specific feedback about values, park and natural area infrastructure, park programs and day-to-day park operations. Many of the themes that surfaced as part of the feedback also emerged in ongoing partnerships with culturally specific community organizations through Metro's Partners in Nature program. In addition, region-wide survey data highlight many of the same ideas. A few notable survey findings are included.

Values

The Connect with Nature workshops began with conversations about participants' experiences, preferences and traditions related to nature and the outdoors. In those initial conversations, throughout subsequent workshops and in other community conversations in which Metro Parks and Nature has engaged with people of color, some values consistently emerged. These values offer a good starting point for new or continued conversations with people of color about natural areas, nature and parks in the region.

- Nature
- Family, community and cultural connection
- Access to parks and natural areas
- Safe and welcoming places
- Access to usable and relevant information
- Meaningfully contributing to parks and natural areas

Value 1: Nature

Nature is fundamental.

Workshop participants shared different perspectives and experiences of nature, but nearly everyone identified nature or their own relationship with nature as fundamentally important.

Many participants responded that in their culture or language, nature is not considered separate from people, and some participants noted how the western way of talking and thinking about nature was inadequate to describe their own experiences or relationship with nature. Some participants said they hadn't spent any time in parks or natural areas, but still talked about things like the smell of fresh air, watching the clouds, finding feathers or throwing pinecones at their siblings.

What we heard

This section organizes feedback gathered through the Connect with Nature project into four topics:

- Values
- Park and natural area infrastructure
- Park programs
- Day-to-day park operations



"Where I come from, we don't drive out to nature on the weekends. You open the door and there is nature."

*“Nature isn’t out there,
it’s everywhere...”*

Respecting and caring for the land is important.

Workshop participants talked about how important health and resilience of land, air and water is to their communities.

Participants shared that they value and support protecting and caring for nature and wildlife for future generations.

Nature supports spiritual connections.

For many, being in nature is a way to connect with their own personal spirituality, sense of purpose or a way to feel close to God. Some feel a deep spiritual connection to nature and natural landscapes.

Nature offers a sense of belonging.

Being in nature, having the opportunity to explore natural areas and the regional landscape or cultivate and take care of the land can help people feel more connected to Oregon, and can foster a sense of belonging. This was especially important for some participants who immigrated, and left behind a place with which they have a deep sense of connection.

Nature contributes to health and well-being.

Participants shared that being in nature is important to them personally to relax and rejuvenate. People talked about the health benefit of exercising outside. Participants talked about how important nearby nature is to the long term health of their local communities. Participants appreciated the ability to relax and enjoy natural beauty while watching their kids play, and appreciated that parks and natural areas can be calming for kids as well. Participants also talked about how good it made them feel to be outside or in nature.





Value 2: Family, community and cultural connection

Outdoor and natural places for social connection and celebrating together

When asked about how they spend time outdoors and in nature, workshop participants talked about the importance of being able to celebrate outdoors with family and community. From family celebrations like birthdays or weddings, to culturally significant celebrations like a moon viewing festival, to community activities like stargazing and storytelling, having places for these activities to take place is important to communities.

Sharing cultural traditions and practices with future generations in natural areas and parks

Workshop participants talked about parks and natural areas as places to share values about nature with children and grandchildren. For some it was important to teach children how to plant seeds for the future or grow traditional foods. For some families, a relationship with the land was a big part of life in the places they left behind and places to renew that connection here are needed. Parks and natural areas can serve as important places for families and communities to reinforce and celebrate cultural identity.

Cultivating land and harvesting traditional foods

When asked about their experiences with nature and the land many workshop participants talked about the importance of tending the land, growing and gathering food. It's important for individual and community health and for engaging in and sharing cultural practices related to land, food and harvest.

“You don’t go to natural areas to be in nature by yourself, you go because the natural area is a good place to be with your family.”



“I feel a connection to nature, to Oregon and the present moment when I am outside.”

Value 3: Access to parks and natural areas

It is important to have parks and natural areas within walking or biking distance.

People consistently stressed the importance of parks and open spaces accessible near their homes and the need to have safe places for their kids to play outside close to home. People talked about the benefit to their health and well-being of being able to access parks and natural areas after a long day of work without having to drive or take transit somewhere.

Parks and natural areas should be easily accessible by public transportation.

In nearly every community conversation, transportation was highlighted as a barrier for some community members. Regional natural areas and many parks are difficult or impossible to get to without a car, which makes them inaccessible for many.

Workshop participants would like to see coordination between park and transit agencies, and creative solutions to provide accessible, safe and practical public transportation options to regional parks and natural areas.

Value #4: Safe and welcoming places

Parks feel welcoming when they are inclusive.

Many workshop participants discussed the importance of experiences, amenities and design features that are inclusive of elders, youth and people experiencing a disability, homelessness or mental illness. Parks and natural areas should accommodate all family members.



Clean parks feel safer.

When parks are clean and well cared for they feel more welcoming and safe. Cleanliness, facilities in good order, repairs made quickly, and overall consistent maintenance indicate that parks are well managed, watched over, and safe to visit.



People of color working in parks creates a safe and welcoming environment for other people of color.

People of color consistently shared that seeing people from their own community working in parks as rangers, educators, or staff, volunteering or enjoying the park made them feel safe and welcome. They also reported that seeing people like themselves in ads or materials about the parks contributed to their desire to visit the park.

Parks feel safe and welcoming when rules, protocols and potential dangers are easily understood.

Many participants told us that it is very important to know a park or natural area is safe for their kids. It is important for rules and park protocol to be clearly communicated and easily understood by park visitors, and also enforced. Signs should include warnings about potential hazards to be aware of, which activities are encouraged and safe to participate in and which are not. Many noted physical design elements like signs or fences make people feel safer in parks and natural areas.

Friendly staff make parks feel safe and welcoming.

Workshop participants shared that they appreciate when rangers take time to welcome, and socialize with them, not just interact with people to enforce rules.

“We were raised with the land. It is a part of who we are.”

“Being in nature makes me feel connected to my new home/reminds me of home”

Value #5: Access to usable and relevant information

Information about the park/natural area should be available in places where people are accustomed to getting information.

Communities of color value knowing where parks are, how to access them, and what resources they provide. People reported that information about parks and natural areas is not readily available in locations where they usually learn about opportunities in their community, or that information isn't available in their language or presented in culturally appropriate ways. It is helpful to know ahead of time how to get to the park, what's interesting about it, what to do there, and which amenities are available.

Information should be available at the park/natural area.

Participants reported feeling more comfortable visiting a park or natural area when signs at the entrance and main access points include information about what to see, rules, clear maps and way-finding, as well as possible hazards to be aware of (like poison oak). This information is most valuable when multi-lingual.



Value #6: Meaningfully contributing to parks and natural areas

Decision making and planning for parks and natural areas

Participating in and contributing to decision making about new parks and natural areas, or changes to existing open spaces makes people feel more connected and invested in these places for the long term. Working alongside agencies like Metro in planning and problems solving, and leading engagement efforts helps build trust between agencies and communities of color. People want to make meaningful contributions to their communities and their parks and value having access to many different types of opportunities to contribute as leader, as participant, consultant or advocate.



Caring for nature parks and natural areas

To keep parks clean and inviting to visitors, workshop participants suggested ways their communities could support caring for and maintaining parks and natural areas. Leading and partnering on invasive species removal events, trash clean ups, and other service events, were suggestions for helping to take care of while connecting their communities with nature parks and natural areas.

OSU Research Study: Interest in care and use of Metro parks

Interest in paid job or internships for youth



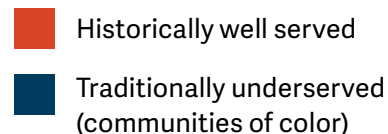
Harvesting seeds/installing native plants



Learning how agencies care for/manage land



Interest in cleaning/caring for trails



“Nature is the foundation, it all comes after that.”

Acting as park ambassadors

Workshop participants suggested people from their community could act as park ambassadors in order to welcome, introduce, educate, and share critical information with visitors and members of their own community. This would help more people feel comfortable, included, and build bridges between agencies and communities of color. In addition, ambassadors would be able to share information about parks and natural areas with fellow community members.

Opportunities to practice and teach cultural traditions in natural areas and parks supports developing authentic trust and relationships with communities of color.

Whether practicing tai chi, hosting a tamale feast, watching the solar eclipse, or harvesting first foods, participants shared ideas for how their communities could host events, and practice and teach cultural or spiritual traditions within parks and natural areas.

Teaching the next generation to respect and take care of parks and natural areas enhances communities’ relationships to parks and nature where they live.

Workshop participants shared the importance of leading their communities in accessing and connecting with parks and natural areas, creating culturally meaningful connections to those places, and teaching future generations a sense of responsibility, respect and care for parks, nature and the environment.





Park and natural area infrastructure

When asked about their preferences generally—or when asked what should be included in the design of the new East Council Creek and Gabbert Butte nature parks—workshop participants identified a number of desired infrastructure and park amenities. Many of these elements can be extrapolated for consideration at other parks and natural areas. However, this feedback should not replace direct conversations and engagement with people of color regarding the design and improvements planned for specific parks in their communities.

Access for all

Workshop participants consistently highlighted the need for park and natural areas to serve whole communities and to be intentional about considering the needs of youth, elders, and people experiencing disability, mental illness or homelessness.

Park and natural area entrance features and general amenities

Safe access

- Locate transit access near parks and natural areas, and parks near transit access when possible.
- Consider how people can safely walk, bicycle or skate from neighborhoods and transit stops into and out of parks and natural areas.
- Ensure that information is available online about what to expect, how to get there, and where to park.

Parking

- Provide plenty of parking for vehicles; offer bike parking.
- Provide information about parking and fees online.
- Make it clear where parking is allowed and not allowed.

Workshop participants identified a number of priority elements to include on kiosks:

- A site map
- Park/natural area rules
- Welcoming multilingual language
- Acknowledgment of the original inhabitants and Indigenous people of the area
- Emergency contact information
- Plant, animal and ecology educational information

Kiosks

A park or natural area kiosk is often the first thing that greets visitors. Kiosks help people get oriented when they arrive and they call attention to important information about safety, rules, and how to enjoy their visit. The following describes what we heard and includes recommendations about kiosk design and which information to prioritize when kiosk space is limited.

Kiosk Design:

- Simple, informative kiosks should welcome people at each entrance of a park or natural area.
- Kiosks should have plenty of space for information about the park or natural area.
- Kiosks should include a covered space.
- Provide drinking water near the kiosk.
- Kiosks should be located in a prominent, central location to focus people when they arrive.

Refer to “Signs and Wayfinding” section for additional recommendations for signs, content and incorporating multilingual information.

Restrooms

In general, workshop participants expressed a preference for more restrooms, in more locations, including along the trails in addition to entry areas.

- Offer gender-neutral bathrooms to provide safe places for people of any gender identity, while also benefiting individuals needing caregiver help from another gender, and parents wishing to accompany children who need a toilet facility.
- Some participants reported a preference for separate men’s and women’s facilities.
- Offer baby changing areas when possible in men’s, women’s and gender neutral facilities.
- Provide sharps disposal containers.
- Keep restrooms clean.
- Provide running water and flushing restrooms when possible.

Drinking water

- When possible, provide drinking water in accessible locations, especially near main entry areas, trail heads and picnic facilities.

Entry area aesthetics

Throughout the workshops, we heard about participants' desire to ensure parks are beautiful. Like nature, beauty has some universal qualities but also varies greatly among people and cultures. Participants shared a variety of suggestions for what beautiful parks and natural areas look like to them. Some appreciated parks and natural areas looking natural, while others appreciated curated design features like a grand alley of trees leading to a gathering space. When conducting specific outreach for new parks and natural areas, convene and engage the communities who will be using the nature park to ensure relevant design.

- Design entry aesthetics specific to the needs and preferences of local communities.
- Increase the density of native wildflowers, flowering shrubs and structural shrubs in planting design to make entry landscapes more designed rather than a restoration planting created to look "natural."
- Design places to sit with focal points that are beautiful to look at, or increase the density of flowering plants in areas where seating is provided or people are likely to linger.
- Incorporate cultural elements meaningful to the community using the space.
- Provide neat edges around native planting beds to indicate maintenance of what may otherwise look wild or messy.

When talking about parks and natural areas in the region, many people shared that the park names often don't seem meaningful, and that even when communities connect with a place, it is called by a different name.

Generally, people thought that park and natural area names could better reflect the history, culture and values of a place.



Signs and wayfinding

Signs provide important information for visitors, especially when staff are not present. Signs should be clear, welcoming and easy to understand. It is important to balance the need to include important information with not overwhelming the site and visitors with signs.

Multilingual welcome signage

Workshop participants advocated for entry signs that include the word “welcome” in many languages, including Indigenous languages. This could be located on an entry sign, kiosk or incorporated into the entry area.

- Work with Indigenous communities to include appropriate Indigenous languages.
- Consider making a welcome feature playful or incorporated into art to express more than just words.
- Consider including images of people of color on signs.

Information about park or natural area management

- Include the agency's logo and contact information at all access points to make people feel welcome and let people know who is responsible for the care and maintenance of the park.
- Include language stating the park or natural area is public land.

Identifying parks and natural areas as public land can help welcome visitors

We heard from immigrant and refugee communities that knowing the land is managed by public agencies on behalf of the public helped them understand that the park or natural area is theirs and made them feel more welcome.



Rules displayed clearly and prominently

Participants shared that when they don't know the rules, fear of inadvertently breaking the rules is a barrier to exploring or participating in park and natural area activities.

- State the rules in multilingual, clear, friendly and easy-to-understand language, using symbols as much as possible.
- Consider providing links to web content in additional languages.

Additional information to consider on signs or kiosks

- Information about park or natural area activities
- A community board to share ideas and local events, park programs, and ways to get involved in the park or natural area (e.g. citizen science opportunities)
- Seasonal information about the park
- Historical information
- A interactive board to list birds or other wildlife that people have seen or are likely to see
- Stories from many cultures about the plants and animals that are also here like frogs, salamanders, wetlands, oak trees or cedar trees.

Multilingual information on signs

- Signs should provide multilingual information appropriate for local communities and use symbols as much as possible.
- Hire professional translators to capture the concept and tone rather than simply translating the “literal” meaning.
- Test the translation of permanent signs and materials before installation or publishing to ensure they convey the intended message in the preferred tone.
- Identify and prioritize the most important messages. Balance the space needed for multilingual translation with the sharing of critical information.
- Supplement signs with pamphlets, flyers or digital information.

Trail and wayfinding signs

- Provide wayfinding signs to make it clear where you are, how to get back to the main entry, how far you have gone, and how far you have left to go to reach specific landmarks.
- Include trail signs at beginning, middle and end of trails.
- Include “you are here” markers, mileage notes and markers along the trail.
- Include length and description of trail difficulty and obstacles.





Designated activity areas

Trails

Offer a variety of trail experiences.

- Provide wider trails accessible to strollers and wheelchairs close to parking areas, and soft surface, more challenging trails farther from entry areas.
- Trails within natural areas don't need to be long; a 5-10 minute walk can be enough.
- Trails should lead to interesting places. Provide different trail surfaces in different situations. Soft surface (natural soil) trails provide more intimate experiences with nature and can be less impactful to natural resources; gravel or paved surface trails provide accessible routes and allow the opportunity to walk side by side.
- Ensure clear way-finding.
- Provide separate bike and walking trails when possible.
- Design trail layouts to be aesthetically pleasing, such as curved trails.

Shelters and picnic tables

- Convene and engage communities to help design shelters and picnic areas.
- Design shelters and picnic tables to accommodate large groups, families and celebrations of 100 or more people.
- When space is limited, provide several smaller shelters rather than one or two large shelters.
- Offer variety in the type and location of shelters and picnic tables.
- Allow people to reserve large shelters and keep smaller shelters first come, first served.
- Provide information online about how to reserve shelters and related rules in multiple languages. Provide contact information in case there are questions.
- Keep shelters simple and use remaining budget for additional amenities.
- Offer flexibility in the mix of shelters and tables.
- Spread out picnic tables rather than cluster them and consider providing movable tables where safe and appropriate.
- Provide trash cans.

“When we go spontaneously to the park we will bring the whole [immediate] family, so that’s like 30 people. When we celebrate together, it’s more like 100.”

Cooking facilities

- Cooking and eating together is very important to many communities we talked with, and they want parks and natural areas to include places to prepare food.
- In cooking areas there should also be a place to wash and clean up.
- Provide clean drinking water in accessible locations within cooking areas.
- Provide a water source near cooking facilities to ensure safety.
- Some participants indicated a specific preference for barbecue facilities or fire pits, while others indicated that gas grills or electrical outlets serve their needs.
- For some communities, cooking is very important while others prefer the ability to bring food, heat it up, and keep it warm.
- If not providing barbecue facilities, ensure there are places to bring food, a gas grill and share food with family.
- Providing electric outlets ensures a place to heat food and keep it warm, especially if barbecues are not available.
- Offer more than just one shelter or place to cook, barbecue, or picnic.

Flexible gathering spaces

- Design spaces that hold a larger community group for larger celebrations, but that also can accommodate several smaller groups and feel intimate with just one or two people.
- Work with the community to determine what type of flexible space will suit local cultural needs.
- Incorporate flexible space for specific cultural needs such as spaces for storytelling, prayer, reflection, gathering space, or religious ceremony.
- Design gathering spaces to serve multiple uses such as an outdoor classroom, for stargazing, and storytelling.
- Include seating, especially for elders, incorporate natural materials as much as possible.
- Keep gathering spaces simple and incorporate natural materials.
- Provide information about the local landscape and native animals.
- Include information that honors and shares local Indigenous peoples' stories.



Include picnic areas

In conversations with workshop participants, people reiterated a clear priority for places to gather and celebrate together outdoors. While the cultural groups represented had diverse traditions and preferences, cooking and eating together were highlighted as an important component of celebration.

Flexible gathering spaces provide another place for families and communities to celebrate together. To ensure gathering spaces are relevant, accessible, and desirable to communities of color, convene and engage communities to help design gathering and celebration spaces.



Quiet places for resting, reflection, prayer or wildlife observation

- Convene and engage communities to design quiet spaces to ensure relevant design.
- Offer prayer and/or quiet spaces.
- Preserve and highlight the natural beauty of an area.
- Offer places to sit and rest, especially for elders, with views of nature. Some participants expressed that being able to see/hear water near a quiet place for prayer/reflection was important and could help with meditation.
- Provide enough room for several people to sit and reflect.
- Design resting and reflection areas with minimum impact to the site and incorporate natural materials.
- Provide shade in resting areas.
- Provide a place for reflection in a place where you can see your kids playing.
- Some cultures prefer an east-west orientation, to align prayer/reflection space with the sunrise/sunset.
- Others requested space to watch the sunrise together.
- Allow gathering space design to accommodate a diversity of spiritual practices.
- Incorporate nature into the design of quiet places.
- Design space to be quiet but not isolated to ensure safety.
- Design spaces to be flexible in accommodating entire groups or as more intimate spaces.



People talked about the importance of having places for kids to run, jump, climb, and access play equipment like jungle gyms, sand and water, slides, or logs to play on.

Places for kids to play

- Provide a variety of sensory experiences and play opportunities for kids experiencing disability.
- Offer opportunities for kids to play, run, and get energy out in safe spaces where parents can keep an eye on them while relaxing.
- Having open areas to play ball, even if they are not formal fields, can accommodate many diverse preferences and provide a place for older kids and young adults to play.
- For older kids and adults, basketball and soccer fields provide great places to play.



Exercise equipment

Having opportunities to exercise outside frequently came up in workshop conversations. The connection between nature and being outdoors with health was an important theme throughout the workshop conversations. Consider ways to incorporate exercise equipment or even information about exercise opportunities in the park or natural area.

- Incorporate exercise equipment when possible.
- Allow trails to accommodate different forms of exercise.
- A loop is great for exercise.
- Where possible and appropriate, incorporate fitness stations like pull-up bars, or climbing.
- Include places for activities such as Tai chi, yoga, biking, running, skateboarding and stretching.

Art

Art should reflect the community and culture of the surrounding area. Art contributes to people's first impression of the site and is a vital element to include when designing parks and natural areas.

- Include cultural symbols in artistic rendition to provide a sense of place.
- Consider the location of art as part of the process.
- Display art in quiet spaces intended for prayer/ reflection and places where people linger, such as a bridge.
- Hire local artists when designing art installations, and consider working with local schools.
- Make art reflect local community values, traditions and history.

“Each neighborhood in the city needs a place to play, garden, exercise and have a dog park.”



Water

Participants want access to natural or created water features and other special places within parks and natural areas.

- Highlight and make accessible locations with great views, providing views of water.
- Provide sensory experiences within parks and natural areas. Where appropriate provide access to see, hear, touch, and interact with water, such as places to skip rocks.
- Consider adding elements that highlight how dynamic streams and wetlands are and how high the water gets.
- Offer views of water, opportunities to get close to water, and into water where possible.
- Provide benches with calming views of a lake or stream.

Plants

Participants value learning about and seeing native plants, wildflowers and meadows. For immigrant communities, plants are one important way that they can make a connection between the landscape here and the landscape of their home.

- Provide opportunities to learn about plants and their connection to various cultures.
- Landscape parks with native plants, botanicals and species that engage the senses.
- Incorporate plantings similar or consistent with the heritage and traditions of local, native cultures and/or the home country of nearby immigrant populations.
- Provide information about plants people can grow at home.
- Provide plant and animal identification and interpretation of their role in the landscape.
- Provide information about protected habitat, plants and animals.



Community gardens

Many people requested community gardens. Community gardens are especially important for people living in apartments and small homes. Family-sized plots are a good way for people to grow food, and teach kids about gardening, responsibility, nature, food and connection to the land. People highlighted the important benefits that community gardens provide—that many communities don't have access to—including the following:

A sense of community and fresh, organic produce

- Include gardening as a good way to stay fit and save money.
- Teach community about native plants and first foods through community gardens.
- Allow people to grow foods and preserve seeds from their home country.
- Provide gathering gardens such as those at Cully Park and Zenger Farm.
- Provide community gardens close to homes.

Places to forage

- Offer places to forage, gather wild foods, and collect seeds where possible.
- Consider alternatives to herbicide to manage invasive plants in areas with foraging opportunities.
- Create conversations and build relationships with Indigenous communities to identify ways for Indigenous people to practice traditional ecological knowledge in parks and natural areas.

One participant noted that only 60% of people in his community who need access to garden space had a place to garden.



Provide plant identification

Many people requested plant identification markers in order to help people learn about native plants, flowers, medicinal plant uses, and native history, and link people to place. Some participants from immigrant communities shared that some plants invoke memories of their home countries. They felt that by learning local native plants and their uses, they would feel more connected and at home here.

Wildlife

People appreciate knowing that areas within parks are set aside for the protection and benefit of native wildlife and species. Many people like to know the park or natural area is providing critical habitat for birds, pollinators, fish and other wildlife.

OSU Research Study: Desired amenities, services and programming

Interest in storytelling in nature



Interest in how/where to fish



Interest in outdoor survival skills



- Historically well served
- Traditionally underserved (communities of color)

Park and natural area programs

Once a park's or natural area's amenities are built, park staff embark on an ongoing relationship with park visitors to take care of that park or natural area. This includes maintaining the park, providing programs within the park, and actively working to connect the region and nearby communities to the park. Successfully connecting people to parks and natural areas requires relationship building as well as program planning.

During the design workshops, participants shared their interest in the following types of programs and services.

Traditional, Indigenous uses and education

Work with urban Indigenous community to ensure that the parks and natural areas are available for gathering, harvesting first foods, celebrations, and engaging in cultural practices. Metro's Cultural Use Permit, available to Indigenous people, is an example of a process developed in partnership with the Indigenous community to ensure access to public lands managed by Metro.

Year-round activities, especially for kids

- Work with communities to develop culturally relevant programming that can be led by community members.
- Provide hands-on learning opportunities.
- Offer volunteer opportunities.
- Include scavenger hunts.

Storytelling

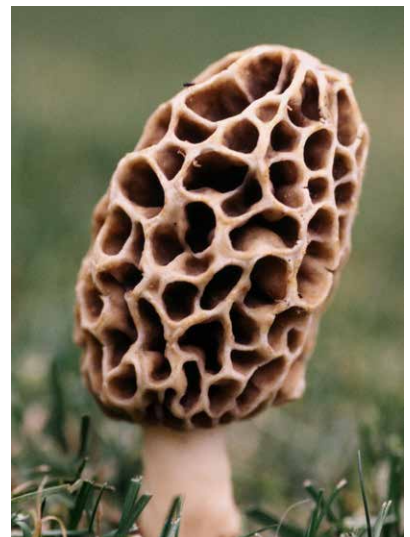
Provide opportunities for community storytelling.

Youth advocacy, internships and jobs for communities of color

Parks and natural areas are great opportunities to empower youth, and work with communities of color to create youth advocacy positions, internships and jobs specifically for their community members.

Foraging areas

Work with community members, especially Indigenous communities, to ensure access to harvest first foods, and culturally significant plants or mushrooms. Forage areas should be devoid of sprays, pesticides or herbicide residues. Information should be available about where and when spraying has occurred.





Classes, guided walks, kids activities

Many people expressed interest in organized hikes, guided walks, birding expeditions, kids activities and other active uses to help them learn about the wildlife, habitat and plants within parks and natural areas. Developing a sense of connection to place through community activities helps people connect to nature.

People specifically expressed interest in the following for kids and adults:

- Native, edible, medicinal plant classes
- Wildlife, bird, plant identification opportunities
- Outdoor skills for camping and hiking classes
- Host guided walks and tours



Stargazing opportunities

Many people expressed interest in gathering with community for stargazing and other community celebrations in the evenings after general park hours of operation.

Places to explore, relax and have fun

Whether park benches, open meadows, lawns, sports fields, hiking trails or picnic areas, people like areas within parks to explore, relax and have fun with their family and friends. For each park, the preferred amenity mix may be different but the desire to enjoy space for recreation, relaxation and reflection remains consistent across various cultures and backgrounds.

Play traditional games

Many people expressed interest in having space within parks to play and watch traditional games. Areas set aside for such use and that include shade are an important draw for many cultures and backgrounds.

Day-to-day park operations

The day-to-day operations within parks and natural areas set a tone for how welcome and safe people of color feel in the space. The following includes preferences and suggestions workshop participants shared about daily operations within parks.

Staff park rangers

Park rangers, staff or volunteers working in parks and natural areas make many people safe. They provide important information and resources and can help in case of an emergency. People reported feeling safer and more comfortable when park staff and volunteers look like them. Agencies should hire people of color to work in parks.

Engage in relationship building

Park staff should spend time interacting, talking and connecting with park visitors as a core part of their job. Park ranger interactions should focus on relationship building rather than just rule enforcement or maintenance. Time spent talking and connecting with visitors makes people feel welcome and empowered to explore and enjoy the park.

Uniforms

Park ranger uniforms and badges can appear like law-enforcement uniforms and can make people feel vulnerable and unsafe. People in uniforms can also exacerbate people's fears of breaking rules they may not know about.

- Consider adopting uniforms to look more welcoming and less like law enforcement.





Community ambassadors

- Work with community leaders to identify, train and pay community members to be ambassadors of parks.
- Provide funding and support for culturally specific organizations to bring their communities out to nature. Funding support could include gear, transportation or fee waivers.
- Identify people from the community to lead programs and mentor youth.

Cleanliness

Parks feel safer and more welcoming when they are clean and well maintained.

Fees

Fees can be a barrier for people. Workshop participants also reported that fees make them feel safer.

Other people in the park

When parks and natural areas are crowded, they can feel less safe. People want to see other people that look like them using and working in the park. People do not like to see others disrespecting park facilities or breaking rules.

Compassionate engagement with people experiencing mental illness and homelessness

- Park agencies should coordinate with other organizations to provide services to support people experiencing homelessness. Some expressed a hope that houseless people should be included in general park conversations and planning.
- Participants also reported that people camping in parks can make some people feel unsafe.

Work with Indigenous communities to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge in management of natural areas.

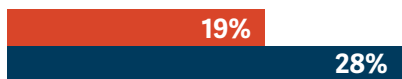
- Work with Indigenous communities to identify areas to harvest.
- Work with Indigenous communities to manage park maintenance care and practices.
- Empower Indigenous communities to assume leadership roles in the care and programming of parks or natural areas.

OSU Research Study: Constraints to visitation

Not enough staff representing my racial, ethnic or cultural group



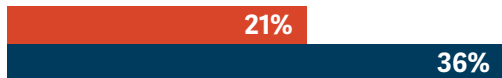
Constraint felt by number of rules and regulations



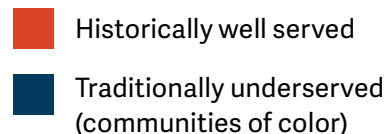
No online reservations of picnic areas/ shelters



Difficult to access for people with disabilities



Not enough developed of facilities/services



Planning East Council Creek Nature Park



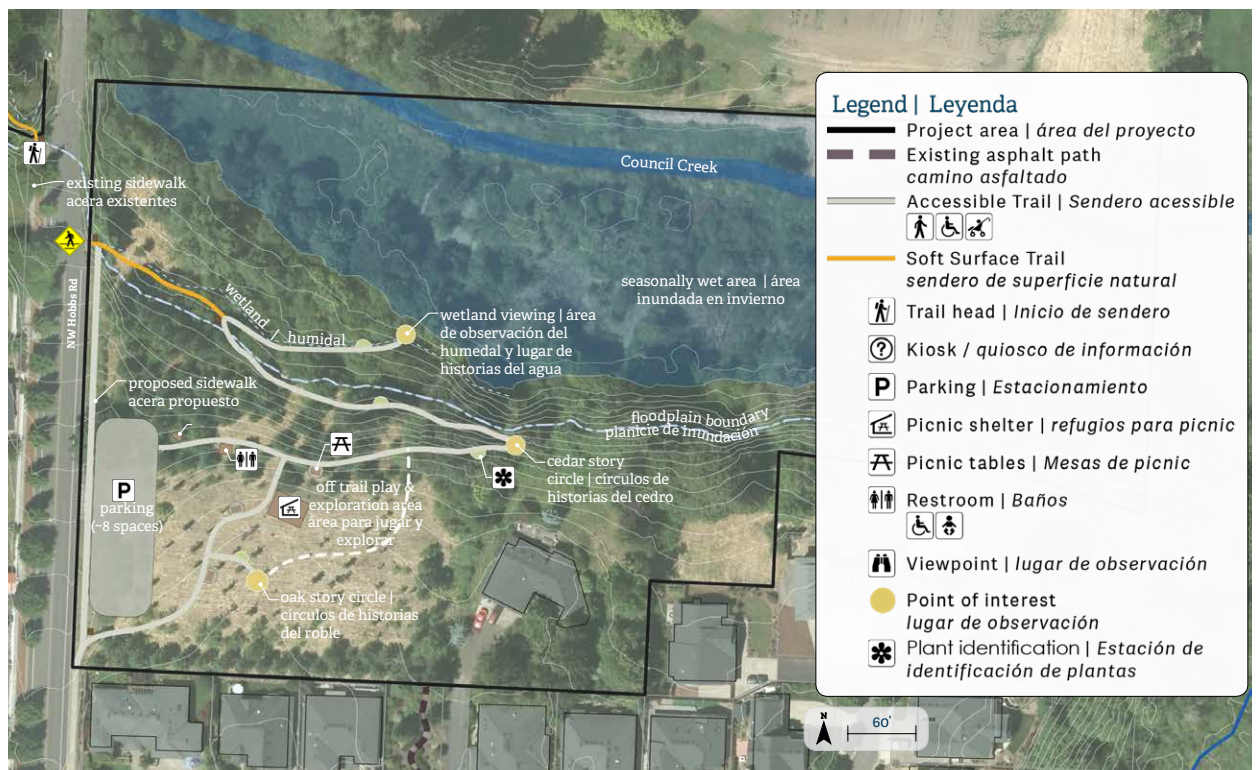
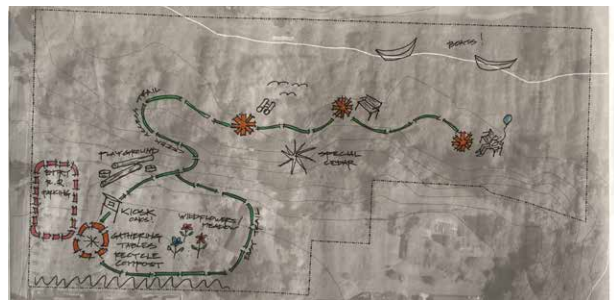
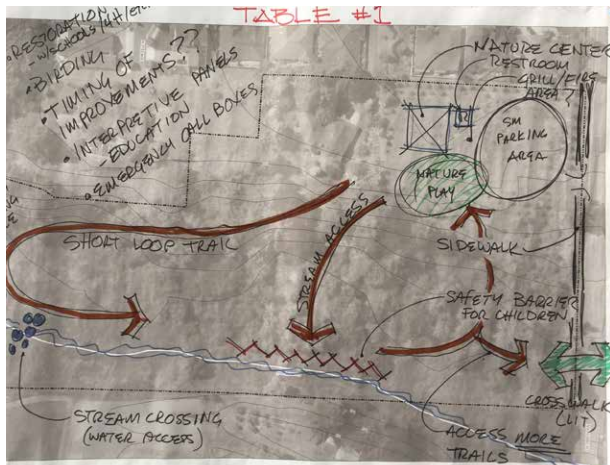
East Council Creek is in Cornelius, Oregon, in the Tualatin River's watershed. Council Creek flows slowly, inundating floodplains and wetlands during heavy rain, and narrowing to a slow stream in dry weather. At the edge of a residential neighborhood, the natural area is divided in two parts, and workshops focused on developing ideas for the nature park entry.

Connect with Nature participants toured the site on a rainy afternoon. When asked what they noticed, they talked about the song birds, the smell of fresh air, and the sound of the water. A few participants shared that they lived within walking distance of the site and had not realized it was there. When asked what they wanted us to know about East Council Creek, participants shared:

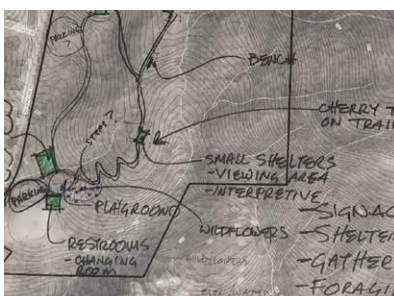
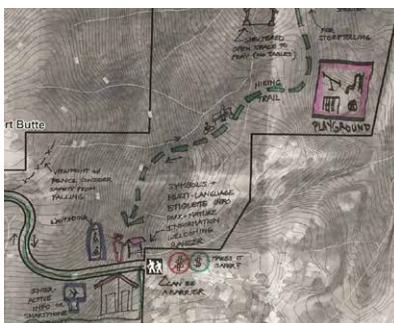
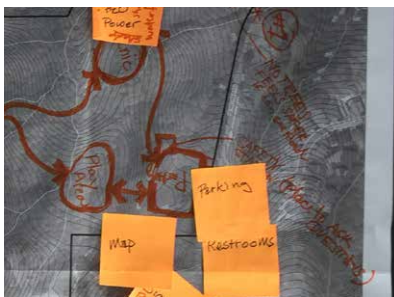
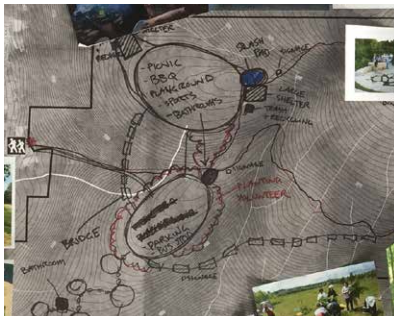
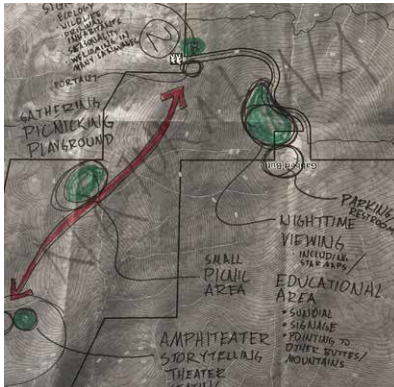
- East council creek is special because of the ecology, biology and wildlife that lives there.
- The water fluctuation makes it a dynamic place to visit.
- The name is not meaningful to the community.
- Appreciation for a new park to enjoy and an opportunity for participating in creating the park.
- Minimal impacts to the site and wildlife is important.

When asked, "What would it take to bring your family here?" safety, a place to play and readily available information were high priorities in addition to being able to eat together and celebrate. Through a series of workshop a participants sketched their ideal parks, their ideas were incorporated into designs and ultimately the proposal for a new nature park, and into this resource guide.





Planning for Gabbert Butte Nature Park



Gabbert Butte is an ancient volcanic lava dome, one of six buttes in Gresham. Gabbert Butte offers opportunities to be in nature, to walk, run or bike ride, or find respite and renewal. A visitor to Gabbert Butte might hear woodpeckers or song birds, and see dripping mosses or native flowers in spring. A walk in the forest leads through mossy maples, spring wildflowers and shady cedars.

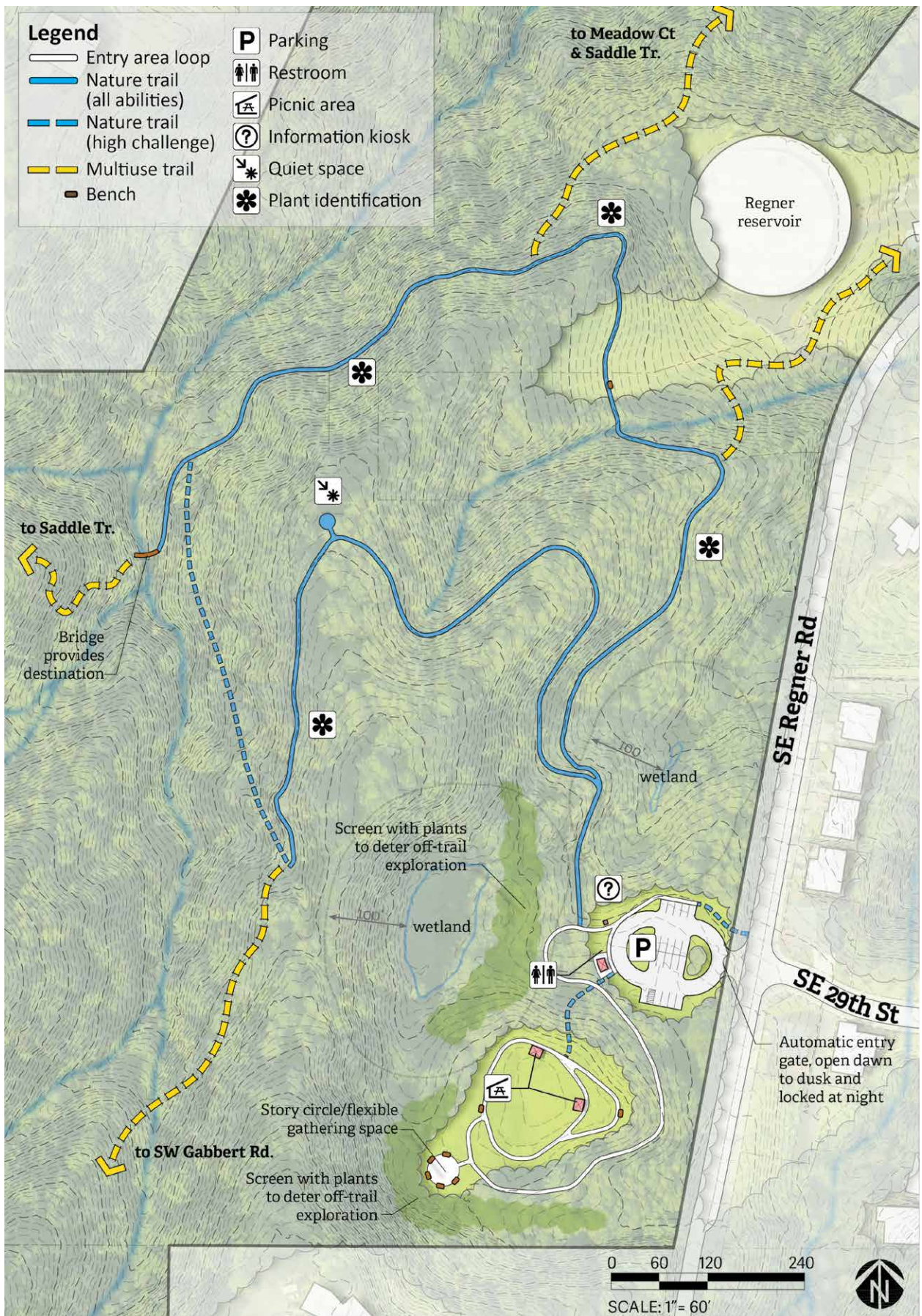
Connect with Nature participants engaged in a series of workshops focused on Gabbert Butte. Participants toured the site on a sunny but chilly February afternoon, first noticing the sound of traffic along the adjacent road, then walking deeper into the forest, hearing song birds, woodpeckers, the sound of the wind and feeling the peacefulness of the forest.

Workshop participants created drawings of their ideal nature park at Gabbert Butte, and many of these ideas were incorporated in the plans for the site. Features that are not feasible at Gabbert Butte are documented in this resource guide. Some of the ideas for connecting to nature and the community included:

- Community gathering space for storytelling, learning about nature or celebrating
- Beautiful spaces
- Native plant identification
- Quiet places for prayer or reflection
- Habitat protection
- Access to water
- Art
- Star-viewing opportunities
- Places for birds and wildlife

At subsequent workshops, participants identified their favorite designs and why they liked them. Preferred features included a trail that is accessible for all ages and abilities, places where family activities can take place.









“Metro staff seem to be so excited to talk to people of color that you just want to share everything. Just stop talking and listen to us.”

Lessons learned

The lessons learned through Connect with Nature fall into two categories: how to engage communities of color in the parks and natural areas planning process as well as how to best to engage communities of color in policy strategy recommendations.

Engaging communities of color in park and natural area planning and design

The following describes recommendations for engaging communities of color effectively, strategically and meaningfully.

1. Listen first.

Prioritize relationships and building trust.

- Take time to actively listen to the concerns, viewpoints, perspectives and voices of the communities you want to engage.
- People may feel planning a park is not their number one priority or concern and prefer to discuss how your agency is addressing other challenges facing their community. Ultimately, building the relationship is more important than a conversation about park planning; you can return to that later.
- Question your own assumptions and biases regarding the communities, projects, processes or efforts you are involved in.
- Continue to listen with an open mind and put emphasis on building trust.

Allow the community to set the agenda

During Chehalem Ridge planning, Centro Cultural organized a tamale night to bring the Latino community together. Organizers soon realized participants wanted to talk about the implications of the recent presidential election on their community rather than the park. Shifting focus, the planners spent the night hearing concerns, sharing in important conversation and, most importantly, listening. Providing a safe space to talk built trust in the community and ultimately led to greater participation, engagement, and investment in the successful completion of the project.



Contextualize your listening.

- Some people may feel like their communities have never been asked to share their perspective or have been used to advance an agenda in the past. Acknowledge this reality and don't make excuses or explain away what happened.
- People may feel like their communities have been asked these questions over and over, and have seen little positive change. Share what you or your agency has already heard, and acknowledge that your agency may not have done the best job following through with results.

Communicate clear expectations.

- Communicate clearly about your agency, who you are, what you do, and what you don't do to set clear expectations from the beginning.
- At the same time question your own assumptions about what you are able to do. Before saying "no," ask yourself and your agencies' leadership "why not?"
- Communicate about what impact people can have in the process and how.

Work with community to create a safe, welcoming space for conversations.

- Co-create the agenda for meetings in partnership with community and identify an appropriate host and facilitator to support the conversations.
- Create a meeting environment where people feel safe, comfortable, welcome and heard.
- Host events in locations that are comfortable, familiar and accessible at convenient times.
- Recognize some may never have attended a public meeting before or they may be unfamiliar with a planning process. Go slow and back up if need be.
- If conversations take longer than planned, be willing to hold more meetings. Addressing the community's priorities requires flexibility and releasing expectations regarding outcomes.
- Provide language interpretation, remember to pause briefly during presentations to allow time for interpretation.
- Provide food, preferably a hot meal, especially when the meeting is during a mealtime hour.
- Provide childcare so parents can fully engage in the planned activities.

2. Set the community up to lead and succeed.

Engage community at each step.

- Find ways to embed community leaders in all stages of a project from conception to implementation and not just during a “community involvement phase.”

Identify experts, leaders and liaisons within the community and pay them to provide outreach and expertise.

- Identify leaders within communities that provide access and influence within that community.
- Compensate community leaders for their work. Their time and expertise are valuable resources and should be treated as such.

Let the community lead while providing supporting framework and logistics.

- Let community lead in setting the agenda and facilitating the discussion.
- Have community leaders help design culturally-appropriate engagement activities and efforts.
- Allow the community to select the best time and meeting location. Don't expect them to come to your space.

Get to know the strengths and capacities of local organizations and community leaders.

- Take time to get to know the unique strengths, capacities and goals of local community organizations and leaders.
- Develop partnerships to collaborate with organizations and leaders on projects where both parties benefit.
- Be sensitive and flexible in determining when to lead and when to step back and provide support.
- Recognize that as an agency partner you have more resources—while organizations and community leaders may have more flexibility.

Encourage elected officials, people in leadership roles and decision makers to attend meetings and events with the community.

- Fold decision makers into the process allowing them to engage as participants and co-collaborators in the process so that they can listen and interact with the community.
- Consider the planner role as a conduit rather than a filter or gatekeeper.





3. Allocate sufficient resources for community leadership.

Include budget for community leader stipends, childcare, food, translation services and incentives like gift cards.

- Create flexibility within the schedule, scope and budget.
- Consider scaling back the project in order to do less, better. The results will be of greater quality with better community buy-in.

Invest time and energy in building personal relationships with community members

- Create balance between taking enough time to build relationships and trust with sustaining momentum. You can lose people along the way if the project takes too long and fatigue sets in.
- Be clear with community about how much time they can commit to and pay them for that time.
- Be realistic about what is possible to achieve in the time you have.
- Work to maintain momentum and keep the project moving forward while staying flexible.

4. Question assumptions about what can and can't be done.

- Make an effort to not filter community's requests through what you assume to be true—ask questions on behalf of the community even if you think the answer will be no.
- Question why your agency does business the way they always have and change standard business practices so they work for people of color or community organizations.
- Review standard planning processes and expectations to find where policy improvements can be made.



5. Make events welcoming, friendly and fun.

Provide language translation and interpretation.

- Provide bilingual materials at all events.
- Hire native speakers to ensure the interpretation correctly conveys the intended meaning.
- Recognize that young people may prefer to engage in English.
- Staff enough interpreters, or people who speak community languages, at all events.
- Meet with the interpreters ahead of time to ensure they understand the intent of the event and conversation.

Have community leaders design and lead the conversation.

- Engage community leaders in designing the structure, activities and event discussions.
- Have community leaders lead and facilitate the conversation at events.

Provide a meal.

- Hire catering from within the local community.
- Provide food, preferably hot food, if the meeting occurs during a mealtime hour.

Visit the site.

- Plan ahead, so community has ample time to learn about and get to know a place before being asked to weigh in on the planning and design decisions.
- During the project planning, plan a site visit.
- Organize the site visit to help shed new insight into how communities interact and enjoy a place beyond just sitting in a room talking about the location.



Right size engagement events.

- At events make sure you have enough time for each activity.
- Don't try to cover too much.
- Retain some flexibility in the scope, approach and execution of events.

Provide family-friendly engagement events.

- Offer childcare at events.
- Make events fun for kids and host kid-focused activities.

Choose convenient, accessible event locations.

- Work to overcome any transportation barriers people may have in attending meetings and events.
- Pick locations on or near transit stops.
- Choose locations familiar, comfortable and welcoming to local communities.
- Provide parking/transit vouchers.

Offer incentives.

- Provide incentives for attendance including gift cards, meals, childcare, raffle prizes, etc.

Policy recommendations for parks and nature agencies

Metro and other agencies exercise significant power in shaping our region's urban footprint, transportation system, parks, open spaces, and overall quality of life. Through Connect with Nature, the project team gained insight on challenges and opportunities that agencies face in providing equitable services to communities of color across the region.

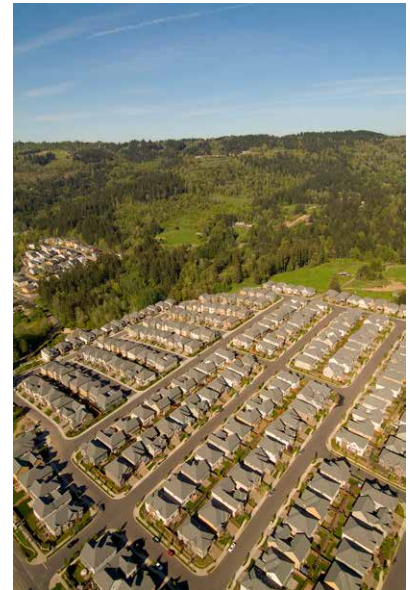
Agencies should consider the following policy guidance and strategic approaches to better support communities of color in sharing in the benefits of parks and natural areas and in enjoying nature.

Communities of color need accessible parks and natural areas.

- Communities of color value access to developed parks and natural areas and face disproportionate challenges in accessing these resources. Regional parks on the urban periphery are often inconvenient or inaccessible to many.
- Transportation barriers like needing a car, the inconvenience or lack of public transportation or parking fees limit the use of regional parks.
- Communities of color may not know about existing parks, or see information about natural areas in their language, in culturally meaningful ways or in the places they are accustomed to getting information.
- Additionally, many people don't feel safe driving or walking outside of their surrounding neighborhood or residential community, or through rural areas to access a regional park and may not feel safe or welcome in the park or natural area.

Develop new parks and natural area access where people of color live, work and play.

- Invest in parks and natural areas within walking distance of communities of color - close to neighborhoods, schools and community centers where people of color live and spend time.
- Invest in designing and building parks and natural areas that create places where people of color can enjoy a variety of outdoor activities from active sports, gathering with family and friends, growing food for sustenance or connection to the land to hiking, biking or viewing wildlife in a wilder natural area.
- Engage in partnerships with community of color serving organizations to guide these investments.





Make existing parks and natural areas more welcoming and easier for communities of color to identify and access.

- Partner with communities of color to identify or develop transportation solutions for accessing existing parks and natural areas.
- Invest in community partnerships and leadership to improve the availability and effectiveness of information about parks and natural areas.
- Prioritize infrastructure improvements and programs that will make existing parks and natural areas more welcoming and better serve communities of color. Work with communities of color on design and implementation.
- Invest in improvements to parks that are already close to or popular with communities of color to make sure they stay safe, welcoming and up to date.

Leverage parks and natural area investments with other community investments such as affordable housing and transportation to benefit communities of color holistically.

- Regional parks fall low on the hierarchy of needs for many communities of color. Bring parks and natural areas into park deficient communities to better serve those communities while also coordinating with community investments that benefit other critical aspects of people's lives.
- Coordinate community investments like housing, transportation and parks in communities of color to benefit and support the communities and the people who live in those communities so that people of color are not left out or driven out from areas that benefit from investments.

Leverage public funding to include money for local parks and partnerships.

- In public levy or bond measure campaigns, Metro and other agencies should include language that allocates funding for acquiring, planning, and building parks and natural areas to better serve communities of color.

Prioritize partnerships with community of color serving organizations and opportunities for people of color to lead parks and natural area system planning, community engagement, design, construction and park operation.

- Partner with community organizations, other government agencies and private sector entities to identify, acquire, and plan nature parks and natural areas within urban areas where communities of color live.
- Consider innovative models for natural area acquisitions, development and protection and habitat restoration such as management agreements, creative partnerships, long term leases and other solutions that bring more parks and natural areas under communities of color leadership.
- Work with Metro and other agencies to use available data, resources, and planning services to support community led efforts and partnerships with land trusts, parks organizations, and other community organizations working to restore, create, or establish parks and natural areas within the urban areas where communities of color live.



Invest in building the capacity of community leaders and organizations serving people of color to engage in policy development and decision making.

- Build capacity in community leaders and community of color serving organizations in your jurisdiction to engage in making policy decisions and developing policies and practices that result in better serving communities of color.
- Prioritize transparency and accountability in decision making. Provide opportunities for people to learn about processes and system and find ways to make decision making systems more accessible.

Incorporate racial equity policies and practices into parks and natural area system planning, park and natural area design, construction and operation.

- Use existing tools like the Coalition of Communities of Color equity audit tool or engage consultants to identify institutional and policy barriers in parks planning, priorities and policies that stand in the way of prioritizing racial equity outcomes.
- Use information gathered in this report to incorporate policies and standards that eliminate structural racial inequities in your agency and promulgate racial equity outcomes.