

Meeting: Parks and Nature Oversight Committee
 Date/time: March 3, 2022, 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.
 Place: Virtual meeting (Zoom)
 Purpose: Report back from small group sessions in last meeting, review possible workplan for 2022 committee work.
 Outcome(s): Solidify key takeaways for year one report; build agreement on workplan for 2022.

Committee Members:

Tana Colbertson
 Burt Edwards
 Lisa Freedman
 Georgena Moran
 John Ferguson
 Martita Meier
 PK Melethil
 Cary Watters
 Vivek Shandas

Shannon Leary, Metro
 Mychal Tetteh, Metro
 Humberto Marquez-Mendez -
 Allison Brown, JLA
 Ariella Frishberg, JLA

Connor Ayers?

Absent

Erin Upton
Bryan Mercier
Michelle Lin
Nicole Johnson
Eric Peterson
Owen Wozniak
Shantae Johnson
Michael Morrow
Shannon Shoul
Tabitha Palmer DuPrau

Council Representatives:

Councilor Shirley Craddick, District 1
 Councilor Gerrit Rosenthal, District 5
 Councilor Mary Nolan, District 3

Staff:

Beth Cohen, Metro
 Melanie Reinert, Metro
 MG Devereux, Metro
 Melissa Weber, Metro
 Dan Moeller, Metro

There were also three attendees, including members of the public and Metro staff, in the Zoom meeting.

Topics***Welcome and Agenda Review***

Allison Brown, JLA Public Involvement, began the meeting by welcoming everyone and reviewing Zoom tools and logistics, then took roll. A full record of the chat can be found in Appendix A.

Metro Councilor Rosenthal gave some welcoming remarks. Allison briefly introduced the staff present at the meeting and reviewed the agenda.

Committee Business and Updates

MG Devereux, Metro, thanked the group for their year-long efforts and invited members to provide feedback on the process. He provided additional committee updates:

- Council approved one- and two-year committee assignments.
- The process for appointing Lisa and Burt as committee co-chairs is in motion.

Public Comment

Allison called on members of the public to share their comments.

- Daniel Stuart, secretary and board member of the Northwest Trail Alliance, but giving testimony as a community member. I would like to bring to the committee's attention potential opportunities in leveraging the way the 2019 bond money is managed. After talking with staff, it sounds like the money is siloed into distinct program areas and that decreases the bond's ability to maximize success. Based on bond language, funds fall into one of six program areas. Within the Protect and Restore program, area refinement plans are being developed for acquisition targets. This approach may work well within the PRL program area, for example, but ignore opportunities to leverage funds from other areas to achieve the overall goals of the measure. The Multnomah Channel Headwaters under the Protect and Restore program is an example of this and passes through the conceptual Pacific Greenway Trail. This trail hasn't been funded yet, but funds could be achieved through both the Protect and Restore program and the Bike and Walk program. If Metro doesn't look across program areas to see how goals in different program areas might intersect and leverage each other, those opportunities might be lost. The Pacific Greenway Trail is conceptual and runs from Forest Park to the coast and the Multnomah Channel Headwaters area includes approximately five miles of Pacific Greenway Trail or 13% of its total length. The headwaters offer excellent opportunities to protect fish and wildlife habitat, protect future areas for the development of this trail, and provide access to nature via the existing trail system developed by the NW Trail Alliance in partnership with the existing landowner. The current landowner of this area is actively trying to sell this property. If an entity like Metro doesn't move to protect it, a significant chunk will be sold off to people looking to establish 160-acre hobby farms. This is based on the zoning and various land details. I encourage Metro and the committee to consider leveraging funds from different program areas to support important properties like the Multnomah County Headwaters to meet goals and objectives across programs.
- Dr. Eric Fruits, Research Director at Cascade Policy Institute. Cascade is a non-partisan 501c3 non-profit research and education organization. We do not solicit or accept funding from government or public agency. In 2019, Cascade published a comprehensive study on Metro's Parks and Nature Program and many of the problems we reported on then continue today. In the voters' pamphlet for the 2019 bond measure, Metro promised that the oversight committee – and that's you – would review bond expenditures and provide annual reports. So, your job is to advise and provide recommendations to Metro Council. Now Metro's staff may want you to focus on cheering the successes, but where you really add value is shining a light on possible failures and areas for improvement. You add value by telling voters and taxpayers where their money is going and how it's being spent. When we did our study three years ago, Metro promised new parks in the North Tualatin Mountains, north of Forest Park, at East Council Creek in Cornelius, on Gabbert Butte in Gresham and apparently all these projects have stalled. Metro says "promises made, promises kept." So, what is Metro doing to keep those promises? Why is Metro banking land outside of the Urban Growth Boundary, land that provides no direct benefit to Metro voters, residents and taxpayers? For example, Metro is sitting on 1,800 acres of land near the Sandy River that is off limits to the public and does not show up on any publicly available maps. Why is Metro buying land that is zoned for residential, commercial and industrial uses? How does locking up this land from productive use benefit Metro voters, residents and taxpayers? You need to push hard on the admin costs – they have skyrocketed over the past three years. Despite what Metro staff tell you, these admin costs are not part of the normal cycle of spending. It didn't happen with the 2006 bond, which you can see in the chart I provided in my previous written testimony. Also, you need to ask what Metro is doing with the so-called "extra money" it gets in the Bond premiums. From the staff report you were

given in the last meeting, it looks like that money, which is a lot of money – 20% of the total – has been used as a slush fund that was not authorized by voters. Metro is not alone in treating oversight committees as just a formality to placate good government types and Metro is not alone in charging oversight committees as cheerleaders, but that doesn't mean it's ok. Look, you're smart, knowledgeable people with a wide range of expertise. I urge you to put it to good use and help Metro keep its promises to voters. So, please ask questions and keep asking those questions if you don't get adequate answers. Thank you.

Beth confirmed no additional written public testimonies were received, though Dr. Eric Fruits provided a written copy of his verbal testimony. Allison asked Metro staff to share any additional written comments or questions they've received with the committee.

MG confirmed that Metro has prepared some written responses to Dr. Fruits comments from the previous two meetings and has forwarded them to the committee. Staff are also reviewing the two comments submitted for additional responses or clarifications and will forward that to the committee as well.

Small Group Report Out

Allison introduced the next section, asking a representative from each small group to share out what was discussed during the breakout rooms at the previous meeting.

- Lisa gave the report out for the Land Acquisitions group. The group discussion included:
 - Staff clarification and background on farmland issues raised in public testimony by Dr. Fruits.
 - Methodology for identifying the 24 target areas in the bond measure.
 - How community engagement shaped the target areas and the intersection between these different groups.
 - Opportunities to analyze target areas for any future land acquisition to provide more access and benefits to BIPOC communities.
 - How the Land Acquisitions program works with other programs in the Bond and other jurisdictional partners to increase access and benefits to undeserved communities.
 - Tom suggested prioritizing land purchases that provide interconnections to habitat areas in places undergoing rapid development.
- Cary Watters and Martita Meier gave the report out for the COBID group. The group discussion included:
 - A deeper look at how the COBID can help workforce equity and a desire to see more ways to look at the data.
 - Forward-thinking community outreach to marginalized groups helps increase trust, creates a better relationship, and should include finances as much as access.
 - Consider adding a self-designation option for business type.
 - COBID is the Certification Office for Business Inclusion and Diversity. It's the state-wide certifying agency for minority-owned enterprises, women-owned enterprises and more.
 - Cary noted the City of Portland is coming before Council to propose significantly expanding certification beyond State and comparable Agency standards.
 - Bert noted the group also discussed ways to reduce barriers in contract and workforce equity.
- PK Melethil gave the report out for the Community Engagement group which focused on feedback for the Year-End Report summarized below.
- Overall feedback from all three working groups on the Year-End Report included:
 - Add executive summary.

- Use plain language/avoid jargon.
- More accessible for public (include links, appendix, references to other documents, etc.).
- Include list of acquired properties with a summary of how they meet the Bond criteria.
- Include a projected admin spend three to five years out allowing for a measurable year-over-year comparison.

Discussion: Key Themes and Overlap

Allison introduced group discussion prompts and noted high-level feedback themes mentioned by each group during the Small Group Breakout Report Out section.

Comment: There is intersection in the programs but would like to hear what the group has to say before providing feedback on specific intersections.

Comment: A document like this report and all the questions that the working group discussed can be included in an appendix. How transparent does Metro want to be in its decision-making process? This committee is finally beginning to understand how Metro works, so the public might have a hard time understanding a complex document like this.

Intersections

Allison introduced the next section and Beth thanked the working groups for their valuable input. The working group's role is to provide input on the report and to elevate comments or concerns to Metro Council in an executive summary report from the committee to Council. Staff will ensure the working group's notes are captured in that summary.

Beth reiterated staff's appreciation for the committee's feedback and then committed to providing more context and specific examples in staff reports including the Year-End Report and future quarterly reports. Staff also want to explore different ways to build more visual tools to make report information more accessible to the public.

Beth also acknowledged that more time is needed to address racial equity and how it is prioritized across all the bond programs and not just siloed into community engagement or contracting. Staff have heard the committee ask, "What has been done, what are the examples of that work that has been done, and what are current and future tools to evaluate progress in advancing racial equity?" These questions stand out as key recommendations for staff to integrate into future work group discussions.

Comment: When we're talking about examples or tools to evaluate progress in advancing racial equity, I feel like that is crucially important. Would like to add that people that are differently abled are usually neglected or told what might be most beneficial rather than learning how to gather information about what they need specifically to advance equity. We need to look at this through a different lens for people with disabilities starting from the definition of disability as being "less than," instead of a person with a disability as approaching life in a different way and needing different resources to achieve the same end.

Comment: Didn't see the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to the first year of the Bond included in the report, specifically in administrative, land acquisition or community engagement programs.

Comment: The most important way to achieve developing tools to evaluate progress in advancing racial equity is taking a discovery approach by collecting information to figure out what people want and collecting feedback through the development process to make sure the result is effective and beneficial.

We need new tools to understand the data while making sure there is a hands-on approach to talking to people and finding other ways to engage different communities. There are different reasons why something might seem workable in theory, but when we talk about systemic racism, the people benefit the most from that structure notice the problems the least. Other communities must accommodate that structure and might have to work three times as hard to get from point A to point B. So, if we come at this from an automatic assumption that we know how to do this and then we check in at the end, we're going to miss the point of the bond. There are groups and businesses that do this kind of information collection work. It would be worth extending the life of the bond if we took additional time to make sure we did it right.

Allison asked the group if the intersections outlined by Metro staff are in alignment with the committee's goals.

Comment: A committee member shared that they felt like they could participate in any of the three working groups but didn't want to lose sight that the other intersection goals need to be inclusive. For example, financial discussions need to use a racial equity lens, land acquisition needs to examine areas without parks and make sure that resources are well spent in that way.

Question: Does Metro have a rough number on what it takes to administer these bonds, specifically the \$470M Bond? How much of Metro's overall operating costs are allocated to overhead? Any additional information is helpful because any contextual information is relevant.

MG: The goal answer for Metro is 10%, which is where we came in the 2006 bond and I believe the 1996 bond – Melissa can confirm that since it was before my time at Metro. The pandemic and the nature of this bond have highlighted the need to do work differently, and that is one reason why the current administrative rate is much higher than we want over the life of the bond. That rate reflects how we've had to change the way we work during a pandemic. It's been very challenging for Humberto and the other folks that have been developing our community outreach strategies to think about how we gather people together. I love the idea of knocking on people's doors, but that wasn't feasible for us to do during the pandemic. Part of the push-pull of where we've been with the bond is wanting to move and make progress because the voters were very clear in the directionality of where this Bond should go. We're wrestling with big questions of "What does community engagement look like in a pandemic or how has the understanding of measuring racial equity not as a secondary or ancillary element, but as a key element of how we make decisions?" We appreciate your questions on this because it helps highlight where we need to do some additional work. The reason why we wanted to go slow at the beginning of this committee process, which was frustrating for some, was to make sure we had time to understand the foundational pieces of how this bond comes together and the complex language used in the bond.

Beth: Yes, the current administrative costs are \$4.17M, which is 23% over bond spending to date. The caveat is that in April 2020, we issued 200 million out of the total \$475M, so the current rate is from the initial bond issuance. This information is included in the staff report and another good reference for this is in response to the written testimony. Metro staff are available to answer any follow up questions outside of the committee meeting.

Comment: A committee member agreed the intersections capture the committee's comments and thought the intersections are a great start. The member suggested adding "accessibility for differently abled people" to "...evaluated the progress of advancing racial equity and accessibility for differently abled people across bond programs..."

Councilor Rosenthal commented that equity includes more than just racial equity like low-income, single parent families, different abilities, etc. He agreed that accessibility is a key component in addition to COVID concerns. For example, environmental cleanup and water quality improvements tends to happen in places with limited accessibility. He also commented that “community” is not a monolith and it’s important to use less bureaucratic and more understandable terms with the public. He also added that the comments from the Cascade Policy Group are worth exploring.

Discussion: 2022 Work Plan Discussion

Allison introduced the next section. Beth provided an overview the Staff Report timeline and introduced possible discussion topics including the committee’s oversight role, bond implementation work in 2022, or potential topics for the committee to focus on for the year. MG introduces possible oversight activities and proposed topics for the group to consider. Allison asked the group for their feedback on proposed ideas.

Comment: A committee member would like to focus on oversight in acquisition and financial goals.

MG clarified that Staff would like to know about information needs or topics that the committee might want to explore, however staff do not expect these answers right now. Staff will continue to bring the committee more information about community engagement and financial updates, but also want to make sure they’re bringing information that the committee wants to see for better transparency.

Question: How much are Metro staff interested in substantive feedback specifically about aligning the expenditures to the goals of the program? Is the committee seen as a body that can direct the bond?

MG: Yes, that’s one of the reasons why we pulled together a large committee with a wide variety of perspectives and lived experiences. What we’ve heard from one-on-one meetings is the question of “where is the line between oversight responsibility by providing staff and Council feedback on how the work is progressing and then more forward-looking considerations for staff to consider how they can adapt the bond moving forward or other efforts that intersects between the bond categories and other work that Metro is doing?” The committee has a direct voice with Council, so there is some push-pull.

Comment: A committee member comments that they would like to see some metrics about minority or small businesses participating in the activities.

Comment: Important that the committee get tours of the Metro sites going soon; there is only so much you can learn from looking at a map and reading a description.

MG: That is something we are considering. Metro is coordinating with OHA on safety guidelines and we’re figuring out where folks feel comfortable and how we can best organize that.

Comment: Even one person visiting a site and reporting back to the committee or bringing people along virtually could help.

Question: Is the report from staff to Council happening in April?

Beth: Yes, the report in April will be directly from the committee with the co-chairs representing the committee to Council. The report will be made available to the public and will encapsulate the committee’s themes and topics to council. The final staff report will include the edits and comments received at this meeting.

Next Steps and Closing

Allison and Beth shared the following items:

- Committee members can continue to email or contact Metro staff with their thoughts or feedback on the report. Staff will continue to refine the staff report and then draft up a report that is from oversight committee to Council based on received feedback. The committee can expect this draft in two weeks. Staff also offered review over email and a virtual drop-in session to review the draft with staff.
- Follow up survey on 2022 workplan
- Reminder to put holds on calendars for the meetings for the rest of the year (May, September, December)

MG informed the group about an upcoming in-person celebration for Mill Creek Canyon and hopefully one for Chehalem Ridge in the spring. The committee will be invited and hopefully they will get to meet in-person!

Allison thanked members for attending and the meeting was adjourned.

Appendix A: Zoom Chat

Georgena Moran: I will be off camera for now.

Melanie Reinert: Hi members- you should have received a copy of the comments earlier today as well as the response. If you did not, please let me know

Melanie Reinert: Sorry- I have a very slow response on my keyboard.

John Ferguson: Is the acronym COBID? What does it stand for?

Georgena Moran: Access for All, LLC is about consultation, training and advocating for people of all abilities. It is WBE, ESB & DBE certified. 50% African-American owned, 100% women owned.

Dan Moeller: COBID = Certification Office for Business Inclusion and Diversity

Beth Cohen: no pressure!

Melanie Reinert: coming soon!

Recording: <https://vimeo.com/684750150/f1956a3edc>