



## **METRO COUNCIL RETREAT**

Meeting Minutes

May 21, 2015

Tualatin Hills Nature Park, Beaverton, OR

Councilors Present: Council President Tom Hughes and Councilors Shirley Craddick, Kathryn Harrington, Carlotta Collette, Bob Stacey, Sam Chase and Craig Dirksen

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: Martha Bennett, Alison Kean, Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, Justin Patterson, Ina Zucker, Alexandra Eldridge, Amy Croover, Andy Shaw, Ramona Perrault, Marybeth Haliski, Laura Oppenheimer Odom, Dan Moeller, Heather Nelson Kent, Rod Wojtanik, and Brian Kennedy

Council President Hughes noted a quorum was present and called the council retreat to order at 12:37p.m.

### **1. BRIEF HISTORY OF METRO AND PARKS & NATURAL AREAS**

Mr. Mike Houck, Urban Greenspaces, gave a presentation on the history of Metro and parks/natural areas, discussing early events and articles in support of regional parks planning, coordination between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Metro to help cover costs of early natural areas/greenspaces maps, and brief background on early regional plans and committees.

Councilors discussed Mr. Houck's presentation, noting the changes attitudes and policies relating to parks planning, regulatory programs, and property rights over the years, as well as relationships between NGOs and governments and where does the region go in the next twenty years.

### **2. OPENING AND RETREAT OVERVIEW**

Ms. Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, Interim Sustainability Department director, provided a brief overview of the Parks and Natural Areas System Plan, noting that in the past twenty-five years, Metro has acquired and protected 12,000 acres of natural area. She framed the retreat by providing two primary questions for the Council to focus on for the day:

- What is Metro's role relative to other providers in the region?
- What is the Council's vision with the following program areas: land acquisition, parks planning and development, trails planning and development, and grants and local share?

Ms. Brennan-Hunter discussed timelines, milestones, and overall schedule for the System Plan, providing handouts of System Plan timelines, which noted plans for engagement with the Metro Council, Metropolitan Policy Advisory Committee (MPAC), and outreach to local elected officials and other important community partners. She noted that the Council wouldn't be asked to make

any funding decisions at this time and that those decisions would occur during the implementation phase (currently set for March 2016 – June 2017).

### **3. STATE OF METRO'S SYSTEM OF PARKS, TRAILS, AND NATURAL AREAS**

Mr. Justin Patterson, Parks and Property Stewardship program director, started off the discussion about the current state of Metro's system of parks, trails, and natural areas by doing a recap of what the system is now and what some of the trends are that are likely to affect the system as Metro plans for the future. Mr. Patterson provided a presentation on Metro's evolution as a landowner, highlighting several key points, including:

- Strong voter support around the region for preserving land
- More than half of Metro's land is preserved for natural areas, spread across the region
- Importance of restoration – purchasing natural areas provided opportunity to restore natural habitats, improve water quality, and biodiversity
- Metro is the largest manager of parks and natural areas in the greater Portland region (with over 17,000 acres), ranging from Oxbow Park to Graham Oaks to Glendoveer Golf Course.

Mr. Patterson discussed trends that are likely to affect future planning, including increased diversity in Oregon, an aging population, the disconnect between young people and nature, physical inactivity, a growing population, the threats of invasive species and decreasing native species, and climate change. He also discussed Metro's role in developing the Regional Conservation Strategy, which is a guiding document for protecting habitat across the greater Portland area, and the suite of solutions from the Strategy that Metro is systematically applying. Mr. Patterson noted that the end goal of the System Plan is an interconnected system of natural areas and sustainably managed private land, which will help protect a diversity of habitat types, plants and animals across the urban and rural landscape.

### **4. METRO'S ROLE IN THE REGIONAL SYSTEM OF PARKS, TRAILS, AND NATURAL AREAS**

Ms. Brennan-Hunter pointed back to the first question to be discussed at the retreat, regarding Metro's role in the region versus other parks providers, explaining that there are two aspects of Metro's role:

- What is our niche relative to other providers?
- What operating model do we use to deliver those services?

Ms. Brennan-Hunter clarified that the first aspect would be focused on at this retreat and the second would be discussed at the next System Plan Council engagement. She stated that Metro provides parks and natural areas that protect habitat, while providing access to nature for the public, but what Metro doesn't do is provide local and neighborhood parks, indoor recreation centers, pools or other outdoor recreation facilities. She explained that it's important to be clear with our partners about what we don't provide and that since much of our work is built on strong partnerships with other local governments, we need to be clear about the value of the Metro system. Ms. Brennan-Hunter showed a draft graphic, which places Metro on a spectrum of park and natural area providers (Metro in the middle between State/Federal providers and county/city/parks districts/special districts), asking the Council if they were comfortable with where Metro was positioned. Councilors discussed keeping Metro in this midrange, as shown on graphic, although some concern was brought up over Metro's presence as an operator and the lack

of Metro parks and natural areas spread equally throughout the region. Councilors also discussed whether or not the community really understands our role in preserving natural areas and what we've already done in the region, in addition to possibly looking at a breakdown of where funding has gone (money spent per district, how are we investing in areas that are underserved, etc.).

5. **BREAK**

6. **VISION FOR FUTURE – PROGRAM AREA DISCUSSION**

Ms. Brennan-Hunter and Mr. Patterson focused the program area discussion relating to future planning on four areas: land acquisition, parks planning and development, trails planning and development, and grants and local share. They displayed dials for each of the four areas, which had three levels of investment:

- 1) **Current commitments:** investments that are currently planned for and funded by either the 2006 Natural Areas Bond or the 2013 Parks and Natural Areas Levy
- 2) **Strategic expansion:** investments that are envisioned in current plans or policy, but not currently funded
- 3) **Aspirational growth:** big ideas beyond what is current policy and not yet funded.

Ms. Brennan-Hunter explained that the dials exercise that they were about to do would provide staff with general direction on the level of investment that the Council is interested in considering. She added that this direction would help staff bring back more specific proposals with more detail on each program area, as well as cost estimates and assessments of political and technical difficulty to implement.

**Land Acquisition dial**

**Current commitments:** Ms. Brennan-Hunter stated that current commitments are focused on spending down the 2006 bond, providing a map showing current target areas and acquisitions. She discussed pros and cons relating to the current commitment level of investment, noting that the current portfolio is incredibly valuable but we have to look at how to maintain all of the acreage.

**Strategic expansion and aspirational growth:** Councilors requested some changes to both of these investment areas, discussing what it means to have fulfilled our bond commitments and issues surrounding maintaining the land, with councilors divided on the need for more land acquisition. Councilor discussion also focused on gaps in the current system, more focus on underserved areas and habitat connectivity.

**Local Share dial**

Ms. Brennan-Hunter noted that they split Local Share and Grants into two separate dials. **Current commitments:** Councilors agreed that having a system of regional parks and trails is critical and that Metro is definitely the right agency to help make that happen.

**Strategic expansion and aspirational growth:** Councilors discussed issues relating to funding for local communities (possibly through grants or contracts) for maintenance and operations, whether or not there should be permanent funding strategies towards those or if local share should be expanded, and if funding should come from another levy. Councilors also discussed Metro's role with the Intertwine and if the public knows about the partnership, as well as noting the difference in local share in some parts of districts compared to others. As there was not a clear agreement on this dial, COO Martha Bennett noted that this conversation would need to carry over to a later date

but that it was helping to start the conversation for staff on what are the next steps for the system plan.

### **Grants dial**

Current commitments, strategic expansion: Councilors agreed on the items in this section of the dial, noting that the Nature In Neighborhoods (NIN) grants and other grants were one of the most important services that Metro provides, but did inquire about how Metro will continue to fund the NIN grants and what this might mean a future levy. Councilors noted that grants have provided Metro with a tool of added flexibility, helping Metro reach out to communities/groups that we might not normally connect with, and provide residents in unincorporated areas get access to bond money that they might not otherwise have access to. Councilors also discussed the possibility of adding to these grants or expanding the programs, in place of other investment types, as they can promote equity and better access for all communities, increase projects in jurisdictions without as many natural areas.

### **7. NEXT STEPS**

Ms. Brennan-Hunter noted that within the time allotted for the retreat, they had only been able to discuss a couple of the program areas so scheduling an additional work session would be important in order to get Council direction on the other areas. She mentioned that staff had further refining and follow-up work to do, so they would bring back more refined questions to Council at the next session.

### **8. ADJOURN**

The Council agreed to continue the discussion at an upcoming Council work session (date to be determined) and with no further discussion, Council President Hughes adjourned the Council retreat at 4:24 p.m.

Prepared by,



Alexandra Eldridge, Regional Engagement & Legislative Coordinator

**ATTACHMENTS TO THE PUBLIC RECORD FOR THE MEETING OF MAY 21, 2015**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Doc. Date</b>	<b>Document Description</b>	<b>Doc. Number</b>
1.0	Handout	05/21/2015	Updated agenda	052115c-01
2.0	Handout	05/07/2015	System Plan Timeline	052115c-02
2.0	Handout	05/13/2015	System Plan Timeline Extended	052115c-03
3.0	Handout	05/01/2015	Current and future destinations map	052115c-04
4.0	Handout	05/21/2015	Dials exercise handouts	052115c-05