

Portland's Blue-Green Deal

Proposal to Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund (PCEF) Committee, November 21, 2024

Portland's image as a green city, reputation for leadership in sustainability and sense of community pride is directly connected to our natural spaces and their stewardship. With over 8,500 acres of natural areas, 150 parks, 2,500 green stormwater facilities, and 370 linear miles of rivers, streams, and sloughs, Portland is uniquely positioned to build climate resilience in public spaces while reducing economic disparities in how they are managed. The Blue-Green Deal provides a package of projects and programs focused on citywide land conservation, stewardship, workforce development, and climate change resilience.

Healthy natural spaces improve air quality by actively removing particulate matter and other pollutants, reduce urban flooding, lower summer temperatures, conserve water, improve habitat for a variety of wildlife species, and improve water quality in streams. Portland's parks and open spaces also provide sustainable access to nature for people, which is associated with positive physical, mental, and emotional health impacts.

Polling conducted in spring 2024 by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center showed that 78% of Portlanders believe that environmental protection is either essential or very important for the City to provide. About 71% of Portlanders believe that climate or earthquake disaster preparation is either essential or very important for the City to provide. The City received much lower ratings for how these services are currently provided – about 39% and 26% of Portlanders, respectively, believe the City is providing these services in a manner that is either excellent or good.

There is a clear need for the City to improve the delivery of these services to our communities, especially at this critical time of post-pandemic recovery and in the context of our new form of government. These services extend across several City Bureaus and Service Areas, including the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES), Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R), the Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), the Water Bureau (PWB), and the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS). Their correlating service areas are Community and Economic Development, Public Works, and Vibrant Communities.

This proposal leverages the existing workforce across these Bureaus and Service Areas, in order to:

- Secure and stabilize jobs that work directly in City parks, natural areas, open spaces, rights-of-way, and green stormwater infrastructure facilities to ensure continued care for these areas;
- Conduct an assessment of the resilience of land and water resources managed by the City for potential risks to land and water quality, watershed health, and infrastructure due to climate change and other significant events;
- Restore natural areas impacted by effects of climate change, illegal dumping and houselessness;
- Manage vegetation to reduce wildfire risk;
- Construct floodplain and climate resilience projects with a focus on front-line communities; and
- Create a Watershed Resilience Division and funding strategy.

Many of these efforts serve the dual purpose of sequestering carbon within City wetlands, stream corridors, and forests while providing strong climate, environmental, infrastructure, and community resilience benefits.

Caring for Land and Water

Foundational to this project is a comprehensive analysis of land stewarded by the City to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of current management regimes. This will allow the City to plan and prioritize work with a climate change lens that considers new threats including extreme weather events, an increase in nuisance pests, urban heat island effects, and more.

This project would address wildfire risk through fuel treatments. Reducing wildfire risk in this way can decrease burned area, fire intensity, loss of life, duration and intensity of poor air quality events, and damage to property. Fuel reduction can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions through declines in the extent and intensity of future wildfires that release stored carbon back into the atmosphere. It also reduces smoke and smoke impacts to communities, especially for populations who are at higher risk.

This project would also restore natural areas impacted by the effects of climate change and illegal dumping – addressing damaged trees, trampled vegetation, degraded water quality, and trash. Target areas would be focused by the land assessment to ensure that work efforts focus on areas most vulnerable to impacts and in underserved communities, and that further impacts from illegal dumping are immediately addressed. Regular inspections and maintenance will ensure sustainability of work actions.

This proposal would also support restoration of degraded sections of Johnson Creek to reduce flooding on private property, restore habitat for fish and wildlife, improve water quality, and increase open space in underserved neighborhoods. These projects have been prioritized by restoration need which typically correlates to neighborhoods that have historically been marginalized by City efforts, as demonstrated by the City's [Economic Vulnerability Assessment](#). These floodplain restoration projects are also needed to meet regulatory requirements for water quality, fish passage, and flood mitigation.

These projects provide safe and clean natural areas where community members can experience nature, and provide stewardship opportunities that allow residents and community groups to participate in caring for the land and water in their neighborhoods. This proposal would ensure that these initiatives provide economic benefits for the community, particularly in supporting workforce diversity and providing fair contracting opportunities.

Resiliency Plan

This proposal also includes resources to conduct a vulnerability assessment for land and water managed by the City; potential risks to land and water quality, watershed health, and infrastructure; opportunities to improve resilience, mitigation, and adaptation efforts; and an analysis of disparate community impacts. This project builds on existing work needed to update the City's *Climate Change Risk Assessment*, which was last conducted in 2014, and is a technical assessment from which the Sustainability Officer intends to launch development of the City's next Climate Action Plan.

The plan will include a prioritized list of improvements to reduce the risk of infrastructure failure from climate change and seismic hazards and to increase the City's ability to recover from a natural disaster. Strategies could include infrastructure projects to make the built environment more resilient; natural systems protections that minimize harm to people and the built environment and restore the functions of natural systems; education and awareness programs that inform the public about natural hazards and ways to mitigate their impacts; and updates to plans, codes, and regulations.

Green Corps Pilot

Successes and lessons learned from this multi-pronged effort with central coordination in Portland's new form of government will be applied towards a Green Corps program pilot. The vision of the Green Corps is to create a green-industry employment program with on-the-job training for individuals with barriers to employment. The City of Portland has successful existing programs, including the Youth Conservation Crew managed by PP&R, that should be maintained and built upon to create this program. Additional research, coordination and consultation with existing programs is required to launch any pilot of this concept, intended for years four and five of requested funding.

Watershed Health Division

This task would establish a work unit within the Public Works Service Area to house select green and natural infrastructure programs that are currently housed in the Bureau of Environmental Services. The City of Portland and its new Public Works Service Area are navigating a "watershed moment." Building on a legacy of 25 years of watershed stewardship, the division will be the implementation arm of climate and sustainability initiatives that intersect with natural asset management. This unit will inform transformational planning and capitalize public efficiencies by connecting institutional knowledge and service delivery across existing work groups to leverage funding and streamline work efforts. Adaptive planning, adaptive process improvement, adaptive management solutions, and fiscal accountability will be primary drivers of this work. Housed within Public Works with a direct line of accountability to the Chief Sustainability Officer, this division will work closely with inter-bureau subject matter experts.

Funding will also support the development of appropriate carbon sequestration tools for all bureaus and PCEF-funded organizations to utilize, and a financial plan to help leverage and grow natural resource management and climate adaptation across the City.

The division would support the following programs and services:

- Watershed restoration planning and project delivery to address systemic issues including water quality, habitat degradation, riparian and upland shade enhancement, invasive species control, and wetland functions and values with a focus on vulnerable communities
- Green stormwater infrastructure development and maintenance
- Municipal Flood Management and flood insurance programs
- Land acquisition, banking, and management
- Watershed technical expertise and support for private property owners
- Botanical, wildlife, and wetland consultations

Climate Impact and Co-Benefits:

This proposal will support a number of activities that will sequester carbon, including planting native trees and shrubs; improving tree and ecosystem health and reducing wildfire risk by removing invasive plant species; and applying mulch and using other soil-building techniques. Healthy natural areas and green spaces store carbon, improve air quality by actively removing particulate matter and other pollutants, reduce urban flooding through stormwater capture, lower summer temperatures through shade and evapotranspiration, conserve water by limiting supplemental irrigation, and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

Implementation of this proposal would provide the following natural services:

- Carbon sequestration
- Reduction of flood risk, temperature-reduced wildfire risk, and noise pollution

- Improved water and air quality
- Increased urban canopy and biodiversity
- Restoration of watershed health
- Reduction of wildfire risk
- Improved citywide coordination around climate action
- Improved prioritization of climate risk reduction actions
- Reduced flooding

Outcomes

The collaborative and coordinated efforts identified in this proposal will deliver a robust approach to land stewardship that prioritizes ecological integrity and social equity.

- *Climate resilience*: strengthen our natural systems to accommodate growing climate impacts, focusing on nature-based mechanisms that sequester carbon, mitigate heat island effects, and manage flooding.
- *Improved water quality and ecosystem health*: restore ecological functions, enhance water filtration, reduce pollutant load entering our waterways, reduce stormwater runoff, and stabilize streambanks.
- *Community benefits and engagement*: increase community access to natural spaces, enhance public health and safety, increase awareness of environmental issues, promote community participation in sustainable practices.
- *Habitat improvement and connectivity*: enhance habitats for diverse species and improvement of ecological connectivity across the City.
- *Streambank stabilization and erosion control*: implement measures to prevent erosion and stabilize natural landscapes.
- *Asset management*: prioritize rehabilitation and improvements on the landscape based on equity vulnerability and other critical factors, ensuring fair distribution of resources and benefits.
- *Partnership and investment*: utilize collaborations and grants to enhance the scope and effectiveness of ecological restoration projects.

Alignment with City Climate Goals

City Climate Emergency Workplan action items advanced by this proposal include:

- Land Use: LU-2;
- Flooding: F-1 to F-5;
- Natural Resources/Green Infrastructure: NR-1 to NR-4;
- Wildfire: W-1 and W-2
- Infrastructure Planning & Construction: IP-1
- Emergency Planning: E-4

Community Connections and Strength of coalition partnerships

The Bureaus that are partners on this proposal have existing partnerships with neighborhoods, watershed councils, culturally specific organizations, and other community-centered groups. The list of existing partnerships is long and includes organizations such as Wisdom of the Elders, Zenger Farms, Backyard Habitat, Johnson Creek Watershed Council, Columbia Slough Watershed Council, PSU's Indigenous Nations Studies, Forest Park Conservancy, Friends of Tryon Creek, the Green Workforce

Academy, and numerous schools within the five school districts of Portland. The focus will be engagement toward organizations and groups serving people of color, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes.

Equity

Over 40% of the natural area sites managed by PP&R are located within equity areas (disproportionately serving low-income households, people of color, and youth). Portland Climate Emergency Action plan acknowledges that Black, Indigenous and communities of color are hit first and hardest by day-to-day impacts of climate change. Natural area equity scores and wildfire hazard scores are two of many metrics used to determine work plans and capital project investments in natural areas.

This proposal also supports workforce development and equitable contracting to ensure the economic benefits of these initiatives are equitably shared among the community, particularly in supporting workforce diversity and providing fair contracting opportunities. The City conducts extensive outreach to the community to ensure minority contractors are aware and prepared to participate in opportunities for land management, ensuring diverse and qualified bidders can participate in City projects. The City also promotes workforce equity by ensuring that workers performing the physical labor of maintaining green and natural assets and implementing watershed projects are fairly compensated for their labor with livable wages, health insurance, retirement programs, and other benefits, along with representation by a labor union. Preliminary discussions with community college and non-profit workforce development partners have taken place regarding the co-creation of a training program to support development of new hires and promotions.

Leverage

This proposal would leverage existing funding and resources from multiple sources including Metro bond funding and state and federal grants from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). It would also leverage existing staff, subject matter experts, partners, and programmatic resources to provide a foundation for successful and sustainable implementation.

Portland Blue Green Deal Budget (11/19/24)						
Task	FY 25-26	FY 26-27	FY 27-28	FY 28-29	FY 29-30	5-year total
Conduct analysis of land stewarded by City to maximize effectiveness and efficiency to deliver climate and community benefits	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000
Conduct ecological restoration and wildfire risk reduction in City-managed natural areas, green stormwater facilities, rights-of-way, and other infrastructure: -Mitigate wildfire risk through fuel treatments -Restore natural spaces impacted by climate change and dumping - Expand or establish workforce development contracts for land stewardship, including Wisdom of the Elders, Relay Resources, SE Uplift, SOLVE, PSU Indigenous Nations Program, NAYA, Portland Refugee Groups -Construct floodplain and revegetation efforts with a focus in vulnerable communities (West Lents, Crystal Springs Lake, Johnson Creek Oxbow) -Establish long-term maintenance fund to ensure sustainability of work actions	\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$7,500,000	\$9,000,000	\$11,000,000	\$34,500,000
Establish Green Corps pilot program including wages, benefits, training, certifications, mentoring, coordination	\$100,000	\$150,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$1,750,000
-Establish climate adaptation office under Chief Sustainability Officer for oversight and coordination across service areas -Establish a Watershed Resilience Division in Public Works Service Area and conduct alternative funding strategy	\$1,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$11,500,000
Develop Citywide Land and Water Resources Resiliency Plan	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$500,000
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$4,350,000</i>	<i>\$8,400,000</i>	<i>\$10,500,000</i>	<i>\$12,000,000</i>	<i>\$14,000,000</i>	<i>\$49,250,000</i>
Total funds requested						\$49,250,000