PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION℠
Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

Parks Levy Oversight Committee (PLOC)

Year 5 Meeting #2 | November 18, 2025 | 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

Agenda

5:30 PM	Welcome and Ice Breaker	All
5:40 PM	Bureau Updates & Year 5 Financials to Date	Sonia Schimanski and Sarah Huggins
6:00 PM	Overview of PP&R FY 2024-25 Parks Levy Annual Report	Claire Flynn
6:25 PM	BREAK	
6:30 PM	PLOC Annual Report	All
7:10 PM	Presentation and Meeting Topics	Sarah Huggins

Attending

Oversight Committee Members –

- Jacob Van Baalen
- Josh Norton
- Mary Ruble
- Silas Sanderson
- Tim Williams

Youth Liaison – Samantha Harder

Parks Board Liaison – Andre Buenacosa

PP&R and City Staff –

- Sonia Schmanski | Interim PP&R Director
- Sarah Huggins | Sustainable Future Program Manager
- Claire Flynn | Parks Levy Coordinator

Members of the Public –

- None

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Claire Flynn, Levy Coordinator, welcomed participants and lead the group through an icebreaker.

Bureau Updates and Year 5 Financials to Date

Director Sonia Schimanski gave and overview of recent bureau updates, specifically:

- The passing of the 2025 Parks Levy sustains operational service levels and include $0.03 for capital maintenance. It is a new levy with new voter commitments and new ballot language. The 2025 Parks Levy starts July 1, 2026. There will be some overlap between wrapping up reporting and analysis for the current 2020 levy and the start of the new 2025 levy.
- In October 2025, the City Auditor released an audit about PP&R's fiscal management. PP&R confirmed that the bureau intends to move forward with all the recommendations from that audit, including a long-term level-of-service and funding plan by June 30, 2028, a website to communicate cost efficiencies, and stronger communication about capital project cost impacts.
- The 2025 levy resolution directed the Bureau to work with Council on short list of key performance indicators (KPIs) for new levy by the end of this December. PP&R has been working with two Councilors initially and will engage stakeholders to refine a list of ten KPIs to deliver to Council by the end of December.
- With the 2025 Parks Levy, there are different expectations of how the PLOC supports PP&R and City Council. PP&R anticipates an evolution of the PLOC for the 2025 Parks Levy and plans on engaging stakeholders on what the next PLOC will look like.

Mary Ruble asked about collaboration or restructuring with PP&R related to open spaces and natural resources.

- Sonia shared that there is a natural resources unit in the Public Works Service Area, currently within the combined utility bureau. The current work is to determine if other work that the City does related to natural resource care and stewardship would be better served by being organizationally together, not just coordinated together. That will be determined in the next few years. In the meantime, the currently structure of PP&R will remain the same. If levy-funded programs or services move out of PP&R, the accounting and oversight process will reflect levy voter commitments.

Tim Williams asked if there was an update on where PP&R is in terms of hiring a permanent director.

- Sonia noted there is an intention to recruit a permanent director but that there is a not a defined timeline.

Silas Sanderson noted that the 2025 election data shoed that there was a split between east and west of I-205. He asked for time in a future meeting to better understand what needs aren't being satisfied east of I-205 and how to best serve East Portlanders.

- Sonia echoed the analysis and asked that the PLOC share experiences and input about how Portlanders experience the park system. PP&R and City Council hopes to better connect people who were less supportive of the 2025 Parks Levy to PP&R services.
- Mary added that looking at some of the original polling and understanding the polling comments would be help for the PLOC since the November vote followed closely to polling.
- Samantha Harder asked where the data on voting is available.

    - Silas shared that Multnomah County Elections Office had the data and that news sources had write ups. Claire sent out the link to the group.

Tim Williams shared that he had a conversation with a voter who didn't understand the financial situation of PP&R and gets the impression that a lot of people voted yes but had hesitation.

- Sarah Huggins noted that PP&R is always open and interested if PLOC members have ideas around how to share information, including cost changes and pressures over time.
- Jacob Van Baalen echoed that he found it hard to explain how much of the levy rate increase was because of costs increasing versus the spending model versus expansion because of the 2020 levy.
    - Sonia shared that additional information and conversations can always be available to ensure that PLOC members feel they have the information they need.
    - Mary noted that past PLOC meetings have laid some of that groundwork so additional meetings with new members might be helpful to educate on the dynamics of the PLOC.
    - Tim shared that he speaks to revenue, not just cost, since commercial property tax revenue has been down, which impacted revenue projections for the levy.
- Sarah noted that follow-up meeting items can include summaries of the cost changes and percentages that are due to personnel growth versus cost per hour worked increased.

Sarah shared an overview of finances for FY 2025-26 to the latest accounting period. In general, spending is on track and the 2020 Parks Levy is still on track to land, at the end of its fifth and final year, at a zero balance. Some budget adjustments will be made in the spring technical adjustment to allow for ramp-up to summer 2026 programming (hiring, training, etc.). This adjustment is being made because the passing of the 2025 Parks Levy gives clarity that FY 2025-26 one-time funded programs will continue—this included summer camps and programs.

- Mary noted that the personnel and EMS expenses nearly doubled in the 5 years and that clarity on that increase would be helpful in communications.
    - Sarah shared that the follow-up item on cost changes will include that about half of the increase in the personnel number was new FTE brought on to meet Parks Levy commitments, particularly park maintenance. The other half was related to increases in the cost per hour worked—even without adding any FTE, the personnel cost would have increased by half. Additional increases in cost for fleet or printing and other materials and services also increased over time.

The PLOC had no further questions.

Overview of PP&R FY 2024-25 Parks Levy Annual Report

Claire gave an overview of the FY 2024-25 Parks Levy Annual Report (link to come). The report includes information about activities and programs meeting 2020 Parks Levy commitments, detailed financials of Parks Levy expenses, performance measure and visualizations, and interview with PP&R staff and participants.

- Mary commended the use of performance visualizations and graphs in this year's annual report.
- Jacob emphasized that the new work order system is a big lift and asked when the new system will be rolled out. Sonia shared that the work is happening quickly and is anticipated to roll out over the next year.

- Mary asked if there was a way to talk about the difference between the two audits. The levy audit highlighted in the annual report is different than the broader audit that was critical of PP&R's fiscal management. Clarification would be helpful, possibly not in this annual report, but as part of talking about each audit.
    - Sarah noted that the larger audit is up on the City's website and the levy audit is on the Parks Levy webpage. The levy audit had no findings and said that the bureau was managing the Parks Levy well from a financial and voter commitment standpoint.
    - Mary emphasized that the PLOC is more in the weeds than most people and that it is important to communicate that, for levy-related actions and management, this levy has been successful.
- Jacob noted that additional transparency can be added to the section about financial assistance and the Access Discount. Specifically, information about the where the discount is being applied, the median user, and how much the average discount holder is using would help understand how the program is being used by Portlanders. Claire confirmed that additional information can be added to the Access Discount section.
    - Mary observed that 75% of people who are using the discount are at or below the Oregon poverty line, meaning 25% of users may or may not need as much discount. She suggested that PP&R might consider adjusting guidelines to better serve the lowest income Portlanders.
        - Sarah shared that, later in the meeting, the committee will review topics of discussion and feedback to prioritize, and that the Access Discount and its implementation is a topic that the PLOC could help shape.
- Mary also shared that the sentence in the summary that described the use of the Parks Levy fund balance was confusing. Claire committed to rewriting the sentence to better clarify the fund balance use.
- Jacob asked for clarification on the outside contractors value in the hours spent on restroom cleaning and care. Specifically, why were outside contractors used instead of internal teams and are there trade offs in hiring specific contracts for certain tasks. Claire said that she would add a note to the restroom hours graph to clarify.

There were no additional questions on the bureau's report.

PLOC Annual Report

Claire reviewed the sections of the PLOC annual report and collected feedback from the PLOC on thoughts to include in the report:

- Jacob asked how forward-looking the report should be and whether aspects of the 2025 levy should be referenced or spoken to.
    - Claire recommended that, as the oversight committee for the 2020 Parks Levy, the PLOC recommendations should be framed in terms of the 2020 Parks Levy commitments, but it would be fair to recognize that the passing of the 2025 levy will inform the bureau's actions moving forward.
- Mary commended PP&R on the clear information included in the Year 4 report, specifically around distilling performance numbers and putting that information into a graphic format that is easy to understand. Particularly, that was feedback provided by the PLOC in the last couple of years and the adjustment is a reflection of PP&R listening and adapting based on committee input. Mary also shared that she has never questioned whether the bureau was adhering to the ballot language and that providing information in a viewer-friendly manner makes it easy to see where dollars are going to specific ballot language.

    - Silas echoed Mary's point and found the Year 4 report a lot easier to follow that past reports in regards to the data and where benefits can be illustrated.
    - Jacob added that, despite General Fund constraints and post-COVID bounce back, PP&R's participation and performance indicators continue to increase.
- Mary noted that meaningful programs, such as Schools to Pools or wildfire prevention in Forest Park, are the result of the early years of building and ramp-up. Now, in Year 4 of the Parks Levy, Portlanders are seeing the Parks Levy perform fully as it should.
    - Tim shared that it's hard to make that connect for the general public.
    - Mary stated that it's most important to communicate that it happened and that the things that the levy promised to do are now happening, acknowledging the steps and ramp up that it takes to get to this point.
- Tim added that the audience of the PLOC report is City Council. So, the ramp up nature might be more clear for City Council.
    - Mary noted that it might be worth doing smaller briefings with Council members on the reports instead of one large City Council meets to ensure that districts or committees are educated about the Parks Levy.
- Silas asked and clarified that there would be one additional PLOC report after this for the 2020 Parks Levy. He noted that, in the spirit of continuous improvement, PP&R might consider communicating and reflecting on aspects of the 2020 Parks Levy that could be improved upon, particularly around ramping up and the speed at which levy commitments can be delivered.
    - Sonia emphasized that PLOC forward-thinking, lessons learned, and counsel to the bureau is always welcome.
- Andre Buenacosa shared that it's important to push the communication of successes and the impact of the Parks Levy. Jacob echoed that additional communication aligned with Mary's suggestion for more connection points and briefings with City Council around the Parks Levy.
- Mary said that an absolute for inclusion in the report is a clear message that the levy has adhered to the ballot language and that PP&R has managed the levy money properly, particularly given the larger audit about fiscal management. Mary noted that a lot of the issues in the larger bureau audit was around capital projects and that clarification on the levy audit versus the larger audit might be woven in.
    - Andre asked if there should be clarification in the report between the two audits.
    - Josh Norton and Claire suggested emphasizing the findings of the Parks Levy report to define the focus of the levy-related audit.
- Mary shared that the City has to be caution about assuming that the levy, both 2020 and 2025 will take care of PP&R's needs and general fund dollars can be cut from the PP&R budget.
    - Tim noted that the levy is needed because PP&R is not adequately funded through general fund.
    - Samantha agreed and shared that better highlighting the essential nature of the Parks Levy, such as for life-saving swim lessons, is critical. Mary agreed and shared examples such as restroom cleaning and trash removal of why the Parks Levy is so important.
    - Tim emphasized that, beyond just sharing the percentage of operations that the Parks Levy supports, illustrating what those operational cuts would be without the levy could help with messaging to the public. Tim noted that these funding issues are going to continue, particularly with decreased revenue, unless PP&R funding is addressed by City Council—and speaks to the need and difficulty of the long-range financial plan.

    - Mary noted that a clean park or restroom affects more that just the park itself but also other City bureaus. The work of PP&R is fundamental to city operations.
        - Tim shared that he was surprised by Community Needs Survey results that indicated that people didn't go to parks because of safety issues.
            - Andre noted that it's hard to know if people don't feel safe because of experiences or because of perception and unknown. Sonia agreed that making parks welcoming and safe can transform the city.
- Jacob asked if the levy was overstretched and if the report can be clear that the levy was doing all it could do. Sarah observed that the levy is providing funding for essential services that Portlanders have said they want, that the City should be providing. Sonia echoed that the City is leaning more and more on the levy to pay for essential services and less on the General Fund.
    - Jacob clarified the risk of the percentage of essential operations being supported by the Parks Levy.
    - Mary noted that, in Year 4, the Parks Levy is finally working on all cylinders. As the City relies on the Parks Levy and pulls General Fund dollars, that service level becomes impossible to do—and that erodes the trust of Portlanders particularly when they're being asked to pay a higher rate.
        - Sonia noted that General Fund may continue to be cut and that there are not a lot of bureaus that have significant General Fund outside from PP&R and public safety bureaus.
- Mary asked if the reports have to go to City Council by the end of the year. Sarah clarified that timeline was the practice in Years 1 and 2 but that a later presentation is possible and occurred in Year 3 to align with the new Council.

The PLOC didn't have any additional questions or feedback.

Presentation and Meeting Topics

Sarah walked through a list of presentation and conversation topics that the PLOC could engage with to provide meaningful feedback to PP&R. This was in response to feedback from the PLOC that more active engagement and recommendations would be a stronger committee experience and purpose.

- Andre shared that it would be helpful to know where PP&R saw opportunities or gaps where things could be improved.
- Josh shared his appreciation for the list and said he looked forward to diving into the opportunities for feedback.
- Mary asked if there would be opportunities to include feedback about trees or natural areas. Sonia shared that the Urban Forestry Management Plan was recently adopted by City Council but that tree goals and canopy are becoming the primary focus of the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund (PCEF).
- Mary emphasized that she appreciated the shift to collecting actual input from the committee on these topics, instead of primarily being an absorb-information body.
- Josh asked if the topics could be used, not only as opportunities for input, but also as training topics to learn more about the topics and background.

Sonia noted that cross-walking PLOC areas of interest with areas of Council interest and activities would be a useful activity to see where PLOC engagement could inform Council decisions and increase engagement. Providing input on the structure of the Access Discount is an opportunity for the PLOC to provide recommendations to shape the program approach.

- Tim clarified if the feedback would be through the lens of the Parks Levy or through the lens of the larger bureau.
    - Sarah confirmed that feedback would be through the role as the PLOC and that the list of topics are ones that intersect with the commitments of the Parks Levy. But, the levy falls in the larger context of the bureau.
- Tim echoed Mary's sentiment and shared excitement about the opportunity to influence and advise on Parks Levy implementation.

Claire thanked members for attending, noted follow-up items would be forthcoming, and adjourned the meeting.

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