



## Parks Levy Oversight Committee (PLOC)

Year 3 Meeting #4 | May 20, 2024 | 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM



### Agenda

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5:30 PM	Welcome and Ice Breaker	All
5:40 PM	Topical Presentation Introduction	Claire Flynn
5:45 PM	City Nature West	Kendra Petersen-Morgan
6:10 PM	Natural Asset Assessment Program	Patrick Key
6:35 PM	BREAK	
6:40 PM	Urban Forestry Update	Jenn Cairo
7:05 PM	Parks Levy Forecast Update	Claudio Campuzano
7:25 PM	Administrative Items	Claire Flynn

### Attending

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#### Oversight Committee Members –

- Zay Conant
- Mary Ruble
- Silas Sanderson
- Tim Williams
- Alescia Blakely – *not in attendance (meeting materials shared)*

#### Parks Board Liaison – Casey Mills

#### PP&R Staff –

- Sarah Huggins | Sustainable Future Program Manager
- Claudio Campuzano | Finance, Property & Technology Manager
- Jenn Cairo | City Forester
- Kendra Petersen-Morgan | City Nature West Supervisor
- Patrick Key | Asset Mapping & GIS Engineering Technician
- Claire Flynn | Levy Coordinator

#### Members of the Public –

- None

### Administration

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 Commissioner Dan Ryan  
 Director Adena Long



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

### **Topical Presentation Introduction**

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Claire grounded the presentations on City Nature West, Natural Asset Assessment, and Urban Forestry by highlighting the committee’s interest in Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) actions and programs related to climate resilience, as well as the Parks Levy commitments that relate to climate resilience.

- The PLOC receives topical presentations on programs receiving support from the Parks Levy to hear about Parks Levy funding in action and adherence to the ballot language. The first meeting of Year 3 included a brainstorm and ranking of topics the committee was interested in hearing about. Climate resilience was a topic explicitly called out as high priority for the PLOC.
- Parks Levy commitments related to preserving and enhancing nature, protecting water quality and habitat, and planting and protecting park trees advance PP&R’s efforts and impact towards climate resilience.

Claire also gave an overview of the city-wide work and alignment around natural resources following two resolutions adopted by City Council:

- The “climate and environment” section of Resolution 37609 directed the City to develop a workplan and potential organizational structure that considers the integration and alignment of a range of natural resource services and enhances central service delivery, meets regulatory requirements, is responsive to community engagement, and supports the City of Portland’s recovery.
- Resolution 37635 adds “Citywide Operational Natural Area and Tree Management” to the Vibrant Communities service area with PP&R.

The City’s five key stakeholder bureaus for natural resources have assessed how the City currently delivers natural resources services, identified problems and opportunities, and developed a workplan which itemizes actions and implementation of primary deliverables and milestones. Most of the tasks in the workplan do not have budget implications for FY 2024-25 aside from tree planting responsibility on private property which will be shifted from Bureau of Environmental Services to PP&R.

### **City Nature West**

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Kendra Petersen-Morgan, City Nature West Supervisor, gave an overview of key City Nature West programs that contribute to meeting Parks Levy commitments around preserving and enhancing nature, protecting water quality and habitat, and planting and protecting park trees. The City Nature West team is responsible for managing and caring for 6,000 acres on the west side of the Willamette. With the Parks Levy, the City Nature West team expanded by adding two new positions to the Protect the Best team, an additional Park Technician, and made the Renew Forest Park Coordinator position permanent and full-time.

The Protect the Best team was restructured and updated with a new mission, including a climate change and wildfire mitigation focus. The team utilizes restoration, monitoring, and adaptive management strategies to prevent and reduce the spread of invasive species and meet emerging ecological needs to increase climate resilience and reduce wildlife risk.

The Renew Forest Park program also receives Parks Levy support; the Parks Levy allowed for the program’s coordinator position to be permanent which helps increase communications around

Forest Park, foster partnerships, and coordinate a response to the parks maintenance and habitat needs.

- The program recently received a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant to reduce hazardous fuels for wildfires. This work removes ladder fuels, invasive species, and improves edge habitat; the work has reduced wildfire risk on 300 acres of City property.
  - Mary Ruble asked if PP&R uses all contractor services for this work or if volunteer and stewardship groups are involved and expressed interest in the Portland Parks Foundation sharing more volunteer opportunities.
    - Kendra shared that stewardship is a big part of the work that City Nature does across the city and is important to connecting people to place and mitigating climate change risk. The [Natural Area Volunteer Stewardship](#) program has resources, events, stewardship opportunities that assist with City Nature West goals.
  - Tim Williams asked how much time and resources, on average, a large-scale edge habitat location would take to clear of invasives.
    - Kendra noted that the grant for almost \$500,000 allowed for work on 300 acres. With a crew of 15 people, cost averages between \$1,000 to \$1,700 per acre depending on the level of degradation.
  - Zay Conant shared that they weren't aware of the volunteer opportunities prior to this and asked what is being done to share the opportunities out publicly to get more volunteers.
    - Kendra indicated that volunteers are a part of the hazard mitigation work, but the more intense and degraded areas are worked on by contractors. Related volunteer work is focused in areas that are not as extremely inundated with invasives. She also offered that a presentation specifically on volunteers and volunteer opportunities with PP&R could be beneficial for the oversight committee particularly with how many different programs and locations have strong volunteer support.
  - Silas Sanderson asked how the Parks Levy funding supports this work when the project is also funded by the FEMA grant.
    - Kendra shared that the reason that PP&R was able to administer the FEMA funding and get the grant was because the Parks Levy added a coordinator position to the team who can help meet deliverables and pull together reporting requirements.
- Access needs are also a key part of connecting people the place. The Renew Forest Park team is working on reducing transportation and ADA barriers and to broaden the public understanding of Forest Park. The team has improved and replace trail signage, hosted events with culturally-specific organizations, and created opportunities for affinity groups.
- The team created a series of trail profiles on the Forest Park webpage that provide information about trails grade and elevation, parking and trailhead locations, and other access information.
  - Mary asked if there were ways to determine and measure success with equity and if PP&R was doing any surveying.
    - Kendra shared that, currently, participants in specific activities and events are surveyed but not general visitors. The team would like to do a more comprehensive survey of visitor demographic in the future if resources become available.
- Zay asked if there is additional data to show the before/after effects of wildfire mitigation work.

- Kendra noted that the Natural Asset Assessment Program is working to measure health of natural areas and that, once that program is out of the pilot stage, measurements of natural area health across the landscape could be seen over time.

### **Natural Asset Assessment Program**

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Patrick Key, Asset Mapping & GIS Engineering Technician, presented on the work his team is doing to measure health of natural areas and assets. Assessing PP&R assets (including facilities, playgrounds, natural areas, etc.) allows the bureau to understand how to allocate resources for maintenance or replacement and more equitably distribute improvements.

The Natural Asset Assessment work focuses on assessing the condition of natural assets and establishes parity between build and natural assets. The work allows PP&R to track changes in condition over time and, ideally, assessments occur every 3-5 years.

- Casey Mills, Parks Board Liaison, asked how many acres of natural assets have been assessed to date. Patrick shared that, because this year was the initial year that the protocol was established, no natural areas have yet been assessed aside from those assessed in the pilot phase.
- Tim asked for an example of what an assessment looks like and noted that condition could be a subjective evaluation.
  - Patrick noted that there's a robust evaluation criteria that is typically a 1-5 rating with 1 being the best and with different subsections within the overall rating.
  - Sarah recalled that the playground assessment has a clear description for how to rate condition with examples for each rating 1 through 5.
    - Patrick shared the evaluation criteria for natural areas including percent native cover and percent of nuance plants present – with specific percentages matched with a rating.
- Zay asked if the frequency of use of an asset affects how much funding goes towards the asset or if more popular assets are rated more frequently with higher use.
  - Patrick shared that frequency of usage is not taken into account with the condition ratings. For natural assets, the focus of the assessment is on condition and that becomes one piece of the evaluation, combined with other things like usage, equity, etc. for prioritizing investment of time and funding.
- Mary asked if any of the assessment has been used in the City Nature West work.
  - Patrick noted that, in this early stage, Forest Park has not been visited for this project's assessment.

In 2024, the project will assess 31 natural area sites (1,700 acres) and seven nature patches. Patrick shared the development and methodology behind the assessment and mapping for natural asset health. The methodology looks at Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for site context and connectivity and on-site assessment for vegetation and soil condition; this results in up to 10 different metrics for evaluation. Patrick also shared early results from the 2023 assessments including a dashboard of location and condition.

### **Urban Forestry Update: Urban Forest Plan & Park Tree Maintenance Plan**

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City Forester, Jenn Cairo, gave a presentation with an overview of Urban Forestry for new members and an update on current Parks Levy supported projects including the Portland Urban Forest Plan community engagement and the new Park Tree Maintenance Plan.

The Urban Forest Plan is a project to update the City's vision and plan around trees. It was last updated in 2004 and this update is made possible by the Parks Levy. Urban Forestry and PP&R's Community Engagement team are working to host community engagement opportunities, survey work, and community advisory committees to ensure that Portlanders are part of the strategic direction of the plan. Additional information about the plan and engagement is available at [www.portland.gov/trees/portland-urban-forest-plan](http://www.portland.gov/trees/portland-urban-forest-plan).

Thanks to the Parks Levy, Portland's first proactive park tree maintenance work is occurring. As part of this new initiative, Urban Forestry published the [Park Tree Maintenance Plan](#) which outlines evaluation criteria, care standards, and goals. The program aims to be on a 3-year evaluation cycle and the plan will allow for a more equitable delivery of park tree maintenance. The first work began in a pilot stage in 2022 and, since then, staff have visited over 135 parks for inspection and maintenance.

Mary asked if Urban Forestry handles trees on golf courses.

- Jenn clarified that golf course trees are not part of the Park Tree Maintenance program. Urban Forestry handles those trees as work is requested for them but as a client, not as part of normal Urban Forestry operations.

Mary also commented that this is a great news story for the Parks Levy because so much has been done and the ramp up has occurred more quickly than other programs. She encouraged that this story be told about how dollars have been used effectively and quickly.

- Claire shared that both the Urban Forest Plan engagement and the Park Tree Maintenance Plan will be spotlighted in the Year 3 Parks Levy Annual Report.

Silas asked how the Parks Levy funds can be used in comparison to the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) funding that PP&R will be receiving for tree care.

- Jenn shared that both the Urban Forest Plan and the Park Tree Maintenance Plan are funded by the Parks Levy, not PCEF. With PCEF, PP&R wanted to make sure that PCEF was not replacing what the Parks Levy is already supporting, but instead would add additional services that are not able to be funded with current funding levels. To date, PCEF has added a new arborist trainee program, funding for tree maintenance focused on private properties, an equitable tree canopy initiative to increase planting and stewardship in priority planting neighborhoods, and having street tree maintenance be part of the City's work (currently the responsibility of adjacent property owners).

Tim asked how weather events like the January 2024 freeze affect Urban Forestry operations.

- Jenn noted that it is highly impactful to operations. When designing the park tree care program, Urban Forestry kept emergency services in mind when setting goals, particularly for how storms pull arborist away from normal scheduled care to help manage emergency maintenance. The bureau also engages with contractors during storm response to help quickly manage the large volume of requests.
- Tim shared that would be another story to highlight, particularly in how large the event was and the media coverage around the storm's impact.
  - Claire noted that there will be a storm response story in the Year 3 Parks Levy Annual Report showcasing both Urban Forestry and other PP&R Division work that went towards managing and repairing post-storm.
  - Tim also indicated that Portlanders are probably also thinking about the next storm and that could play into the story around need for continued funding.

## Parks Levy Forecast Update

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Claudio Campuzano, Finance, Property, and Technology Manager, shared impacts of recent changes on the Parks Levy forecast. A revised revenue forecast from the City Economist indicated a reduced estimate of the amount of Parks Levy revenue coming in. This reduction is related to the decline in property tax values downtown, which has an impact on local option levies. Additionally, a General Fund cut of \$4.6M affects the need for additional Parks Levy funding usage in future years, due to the Leveraged Funding Model.

Additionally, personnel costs have and will increase more than expected due to four labor agreements being approved in FY 2022-23. General Fund covers some of that increase but an additional \$1.6M annually will be needed from Parks Levy to cover the remaining of the increase.

Seasonal and casual costs for labor also increased, driven by new labor contracts, inflation, and increased minimum wage. Seasonal and casual hours are back to pre-pandemic levels, thanks to the Parks Levy, with many staff working enough hours to be on City benefits. An additional change in health benefit rates for the City was unintentionally underestimated for PP&R, meaning that the cost increase of \$2.6M annually was only covered by \$0.7M General Fund. PP&R is working with the Bureau of Human Resources to reassess that allocation to match the increase impact.

- Mary asked what constituted casual staff and Claudio clarified that casual staff is similar to seasonal staff. The bulk of casual staff are positions in Recreation and Land Stewardship who work seasonally.
- Tim asked what the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) amount is when staff start qualifying for benefits.
  - Claudio confirmed that it is based on position type and hours worked in a fiscal year.
- Tim asked why the City's adjustment for the benefits increase was not enough to cover the full increase. Specifically, Tim noted that additional Parks Levy dollars will need to cover the financial gap created by the change in the City's benefits allocation unless the allocation is rightsized with Bureau of Human Resources. This use of Parks Levy funds, as a supplantation to General Fund need, is not aligned with the intent of the Parks Levy.
  - Claudio indicated that PP&R has more single and two-party insured members than the typical bureau, which meant costs would go up when a standard/blended healthcare cost is applied. PP&R will be going back to review the impacts and explore trying that up to work to ensure that the Parks Levy is not filling the General Fund gap.

Cost per hour for staff has been increased, FTE growth has also increased with the Parks Levy, and internal costs within the City (like CityFleet Services, Technology, etc.) have increase – further impacting overall costs.

In the interest of time, Claire and Claudio shared the remaining slides related to quarterly projected spending and forecasted year-end levy spend with the PLOC via email. Overall, PP&R expects the fiscal year 2023-2024 Parks Levy revenue to be fully spent down this fiscal year and expenses to exceed revenue. This means that PP&R will dip into the balance remaining from Years 1 and 2, and is functioning in a fully ramped-up capacity with the Parks Levy.

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iyo soojeedin, isbadalo, adeegyo caawimaad ah, noocyo kaladuwan, iyo caawimaado iyo adeegyo dheeri ah. Si aad ucodsato adeegyadaan, wac 503-823-2525, Adeegga Caawimada: 711.

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