



February 22, 2022

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Council,

The Parks Levy Oversight Committee (PLOC) reviewed the FY 2022-23 Requested Budget in February due to the investment of Parks Local Option Levy (Parks Levy) funding in what will be Year 2 of the Parks Levy, including several new proposals. The PLOC supports this FY 2022-23 request and asks for its approval by the Portland City Council.

Voters overwhelmingly approved the Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) five-year Parks Local Option Levy (Parks Levy) in November 2020 to, among other things:

- Enhance and preserve parks, rivers, wetlands, trees, and other important natural features in urban areas for the benefit of all Portlanders and wildlife;
- Provide park and recreation services to diverse populations including communities of color, seniors, teens, households experiencing poverty, immigrants and refugees, and people living with disabilities;
- Increase opportunities for communities of color and children experiencing poverty to connect with nature;
- Prevent cuts to recreation programs, closures of community centers and pools; and
- Enhance park maintenance to keep parks clean and safe, including litter and hazardous waste removal, restroom cleaning, and playground safety.

The PLOC found PP&R's FY 2022-23 Budget request is consistent with these commitments made to voters.

The PLOC was established in July 2021 as an advisory body to the PP&R Director to review and advise the Bureau on Parks Levy expenditures, commitments to voters, Parks Levy transparency and communication, and on a Parks Levy independent audit. The PLOC looks forward to sharing our thoughts on Parks Levy processes and delivery on voter commitments with City Council in their first annual report in fall of 2022, once Year 1 of the Parks Levy has concluded. PLOC compliments PP&R for continuing to plan for responsible use of Parks Levy funding in FY 2022-23 by budgeting Parks Levy funds towards: reducing the revenue target for Recreation Services, allowing for a focus on equity and access; expansion of community partnerships in FY2022-23; research and polling around sustainable funding options; and more.

Of note is that the Parks Levy allows for additional investment of \$6.8 million in Recreation Services to reduce cost as barrier for program participants and alleviates pressure to earn revenues in FY 2022-23. This offset is paramount as it allows PP&R continue programming and keep facilities open during demand uncertainties due to the pandemic. Even though programming has been limited due to COVID restrictions and

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associated staffing changes, without this Parks Levy support, it is unlikely that PP&R would have doors open right now –the Parks Levy support has been crucial to reducing further cuts to recreation offerings. Additionally, the investment allows PP&R to continue to develop and assess financial access programs to further reduce cost as a barrier for Portlanders living with low income to access PP&R programs like swim lessons, day camps, and exercise classes. As PP&R continues work to reduce barriers, the PLOC encourages PP&R to work with the community to understand what a welcoming environment looks like for them and ask what is keeping people from engaging in programming and activities to best be able to address barriers to participation.

The PLOC also appreciates the FY2022-23 investment in community partnerships, specifically to support a Community Partnership Program to expand PP&R’s capacity to reach underserved communities and center equity. The funding to support partner organizations in bringing knowledge and expertise to provide culturally appropriate and accessible services is an opportunity to greatly benefit underserved communities and build on existing and successful work being done by community leaders. Additionally, these funds build on the existing on-going investment of nearly \$3 million for community partnerships through PP&R Teen Collaborative Initiative grants and partner agreements with local community organizations like the Rosewood Initiative, SUN Schools, and Linnton Community Center. Continuing and expanding these partnerships will help PP&R meet the Parks Levy commitment to prioritize services for communities of color and households experiencing poverty, including equity-centered engagement and outreach, community partnership grants, and increased engagement with volunteer and partner groups.

All of this work will take time and commitment, not only from PP&R staff, but City Council and the community. We recommend that City Council approve the Parks Levy components of the PP&R FY 2022-23 Requested Budget. The investments being made with the Parks Levy are a step towards creating a healthy park and recreation system – one that supports ecological sustainability, equitable benefits, and healthy Portlanders.

Respectfully,

Parks Levy Oversight Committee

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