



February 20, 2024

TO: Mayor Ted Wheeler
Commissioner Dan Ryan
Commissioner Carmen Rubio
Commissioner Mingus Mapps
Commissioner Rene Gonzalez

FROM: Portland Parks & Recreation Parks Levy Oversight Committee

SUBJECT: Parks Levy Oversight Committee Recommendations for
Portland Parks & Recreation FY 2024-25 Budget Request

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Council,

The Parks Levy Oversight Committee (PLOC) reviewed the FY 2024 -25 Requested Budget, including the Mayor's budget guidance and key financial issues, at our February 7th meeting. Voters overwhelmingly approved the Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) five-year Parks Local Option Levy (Parks Levy) in November 2020 to provide crucial operating funding for the PP&R parks and recreation system, supporting programs that provide recreation services and help conserve parks, nature, and clean water. The PLOC serves as an advisory body to PP&R Director Long, and our role is 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 supports the FY 2024-25 budget request and wishes to emphasize the following for your consideration.

The Parks Levy is a critical resource for delivering park operational services. The continued stable investment of Parks Levy funding, in what will be Year 4 of the Parks Levy, remains critical to PP&R operations and to delivering on voter commitments. The Parks Levy supports about one-third of PP&R's operating budget. Without it as an incremental resource for services—like swim lessons, planting trees, cleaning parks, and more—PP&R would have to reduce the operational services and activities it provides by approximately one-third. Additionally, as proposed in the FY 2024-25 Requested Budget and ongoing, the Parks Levy will enable PP&R to absorb city-wide General Fund reduction while preventing service cuts. Because the Parks Levy is so critical to park and recreation operations, we encourage PP&R to use other funding sources, such as the Portland Clean Energy Fund and maximization of General Fund, where possible to ensure that the Parks Levy is used in the most efficient way to meet voter commitments.

It is essential to share the impact that the Parks Levy is having on Portland's parks and recreation system. We commend PP&R for intentional and directed use of Parks Levy funds to meet voter commitments and encourage the City to increase communication about Parks Levy

Administration

1120 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 858
Portland, Oregon 97204
503-823-PLAY (7529) | Fax 503-823-6007

PORTLANDPARKS.ORG
Commissioner Dan Ryan
Director Adena Long



Sustaining a healthy park and recreation system to make Portland a great place to live, work, and play.

impact. Examples of programs and services that would not have happened absent the Parks Levy include:

- **Schools to Pools:** This brand-new initiative offers free swimming lessons to Portland Public School second graders.
- **Access Pass:** City of Portland residents can register for a free Access Pass to receive an ongoing discount of up to 90% for admission, registered activities, programs, and more.
- **Community Partnership Program:** Expanding on the Teen Collaborative Initiative, financial and space-use grants are awarded to community organizations centering underserved and underrepresented communities.
- **Holistic Park Tree Maintenance:** Proactive and holistic care of trees in parks and natural areas in a way that PP&R has never been able to support before the Parks Levy.
- **Expansion of Maintenance Teams:** Over 80 new maintenance-related positions have been added to remove litter and waste, clean restrooms, maintain landscaping, repair equipment in parks and community centers, and ensure playground safety.

Continuing communication of these achievements and educating Portlanders about the importance of the Parks Levy is imperative.

The PLOC also strongly recommends PP&R and City Council to continue to explore and prioritize funding sources to address the nearly \$600 million maintenance backlog. The Parks Levy is allowing PP&R to avoid devastating service cuts and make progress on operating services, but it provides funding for operations, and does not solve all the Bureau's capital maintenance needs. Because the Parks Levy is purely operational and cannot pay for large-scale maintenance or replacement of assets, a capital bond is necessary to repair and replace existing critical public park assets to continue services for Portlanders now and in the future. The growing and compounding backlog threatens the future sustainability of the parks and recreation system and, in effect, weakens the investments in programming and daily maintenance the voters are making. Most notably, the Parks Levy committed to "Prevent cuts to recreation programs, closures of community centers and pools" and the capital maintenance backlog threatens many PP&R facilities. Closure due to major maintenance could affect the success of the Parks Levy. Therefore, at the same time that PP&R makes progress on Parks Levy commitments, we encourage PP&R and City Council to plan and work towards a sustainable funding source for capital major maintenance.

We recommend that City Council approve PP&R FY 2024-25 Requested Budget. The planning and support from the Parks Levy is critical for supporting a healthy park and recreation system – one that is part of our vital public infrastructure and which supports ecological sustainability, equitable benefits, and healthy Portlanders.

Respectfully,

Parks Levy Oversight Committee

Alescia Blakely
Zay Conant
Mary Ruble
Silas Sanderson
Tim Williams