



October 7, 2021

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Council,

The Parks Levy Oversight Committee (PLOC) reviewed the FY 2021-22 Fall Budget Monitoring Process request (Fall BMP) in September due to the significant role of Parks Local Option Levy (Parks Levy). The PLOC supports this Fall BMP request and asks for its approval by the Portland City Council.

Voters overwhelmingly approved the Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) five-year operating levy in November 2020 (Parks Levy) to provide protection of natural areas; delivery of recreation programs; equity-focused delivery of events and programs (by, among other things, removing cost as a barrier for a greater number of community members); improving preventative and traditional maintenance of parks and natural areas; planting of trees in communities with low canopy coverage; protecting existing park trees; modernizing of data systems; prioritizing services to Black, Indigenous, people of color and households experiencing financial hardship (including through the use of partnership grants); and more. The PLOC found PP&R's Fall BMP 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 an independent audit. The PLOC looks forward to interfacing with City Council with an annual report, sharing program process and alignment with Parks Levy goals. This year, PLOC compliments PP&R for beginning to deliver on promises made to Portland's communities by providing COVID-19 responsive summer programming and stabilizing services since the City Council approved access to Park Levy resources in February 2021.

Of note is that the Fall BMP and Parks Levy proposes additional investment in Recreation Services to reduce cost as barrier for program participants and alleviates pressure to earn revenues in FY 2021-22. The proposed budget drops the revenue target by over \$4 million in the Fall BMP, which, combined with initial revenue adjustments in the FY 2021-22 adopted budget, add up to over \$10 million in tuition support for programs. This offset is paramount as it allows PP&R to address pandemic related demand and re-start challenges, particularly in a revenue-uncertain environment. Additionally, the investment allows PP&R to create new scholarship and financial access programs, such as the "Pay What You Can" program, to further reduce barriers for financially-strapped Portlanders to access PP&R programs like swim lessons, day camps, and exercise classes. Swim lessons are a vital safety program for our community, day camps provide structured activities for children and provide safe daycare options for parents, and exercise classes give people a variety of offerings to promote health and fitness.

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This investment in recreation services has significant impact, particularly given that historical levels of annual scholarships were in the range of \$600,000-\$700,000. As PP&R continues to center equity in decision-making, the PLOC encourages the continued acknowledgement of the wide variety of economic means across the community – and supports exploring donation options to help subsidize equitable access.

The PLOC also appreciates the investment in Land Stewardship division, particularly in continuing to protect water quality and ecological health. As this summer demonstrated, the harsh realities of a hotter and drier climate are here. PP&R's proactive work in creating resilient landscapes and prioritizing protecting and growing nature are essential in creating a climate resilient city. Part of that protection also includes caring for what the community has already invested in through their volunteer hours, use of outdoor spaces as innovative classroom experiences, prioritization of natural areas, and more. The Parks Levy commitment to improve maintenance will ensure that parks and natural areas remain safe, clean, and healthy spaces to learn and connect.

The Fall BMP and the Parks Levy are positive first steps to help improve and maintain critical parks services for all Portlanders. However, in order for Portlanders to continue to enjoy the parks, natural areas, and programs Parks and Rec offers for generations to come, the PLOC strongly encourages City Council to support PP&R's Sustainable Future work to identify alternative and sustainable funding sources to, among other things:

- Address PP&R's over \$500 million deferred maintenance backlog; and
- Close service and location gaps in parks, natural areas, recreation facilities, trees and tree maintenance, and programming.

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 Fall BMP request. 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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