

Parks and Nature Department racial equity plan

External department-wide priorities

Through a yearlong staff and community engagement process, Metro's Parks and Nature Department has identified the following areas as the focus of its five-year racial equity plan.

- 1. Engaging communities of color in policy development and investment decisions**
- 2. Honoring indigenous and community connections to land**
- 3. Planning the regional and Metro parks and nature system**
4. Direct service and engagement for communities of color (marketing, events, nature education, volunteer services)
5. More accessible, relevant and welcoming nature parks for communities of color
6. Career pathways for communities of color and youth

We look forward to discussing the first three areas with the Committee on Racial Equity and incorporating the members' perspective into our draft plan

Engagement in policy development and investment decisions

Metro must use a racial equity lens in all of its projects and programs in order to shift its culture and the outcomes of its work. It must also create systems that empower communities of color to influence regional policy formation, improve Metro’s capacity to advance racial equity, and hold Metro accountable to its commitment to racial equity.

As part of this, the Parks and Nature Department aspires to change our policy and investment oversight bodies and decision-making processes. Instead of focusing on agency needs and perceived constraints, they should prioritize the needs of communities of color and members of marginalized groups.

Over the next five years, areas of focus for parks and nature could include:

- Using a racial equity and empowerment lens to plan future funding measures
- Prioritizing communities of color in engagement efforts around land acquisitions and investments in the regional parks and nature system overall
- As standard practice, build timelines that allow the time and resources to engage and listen to communities of color and respond meaningfully to community direction
- In policy and practice, prioritizing engagement with communities of color and historically marginalized groups (via community organizations and at large)
- Shift advisory and oversight committee focus, formation and representation to include more explicit efforts on racial equity outcomes and true representation of our region.

Years 1 and 2 implementation:

	Action or project
1.	Coordinate with other Metro departments on bond planning, investment and development. Connect parks and nature’s work to the affordable housing and transportation efforts to create a plan for whole healthy communities that includes access to transit, housing and parks and trails.
2.	Establish an explicit process to empower communities of color to be part of decision making on potential future parks and nature bond investments. Involve municipalities to build shared understanding of community priorities, with the goal of influencing decision making across the region.
3.	For future funding proposals, prioritize engagement with communities of color to shape the conservation plan, land acquisition goals, policy priorities, and the funding allocation model. Convene regional partners, including culturally specific community organizations and traditional conservation partners, to address questions of equity and environmental justice.
4.	Change local share and/or capital grant programs to include grants or funding focused on acquiring land or investing in projects identified as important to and for communities of color.

5.	Explore the possibility of expanding the definition of local governments eligible for pass-through or grant funding to include local tribal governments.
6.	Establish a standing parks and nature advisory group composed of members of communities of color from across the region. Review the Committee on Racial Equity recruitment and formation process for examples of promising practices.
7.	Incorporate racial equity outcomes and discussions into guidance, by-laws, participation and processes for existing parks and nature advisory and oversight committees. Increase the participation of people of color, including youths and emerging leaders.

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Honoring indigenous and community connections to land

Metro is steward of parks and natural areas that are ceded tribal lands. This creates a special duty to building relationships and trust with Indigenous people in the region, both those who are members of local tribes and those from other parts of the country. Fulfilling this duty will result in greater awareness and understanding of how Native American communities relate to these lands and how the department can best facilitate meaningful experiences and cultural expression in the parks and natural areas.

The Parks and Nature Department has other historic relationships with certain communities. Like with Native Americans, these communities deserve particular focus and engagement by Metro staff. We believe this will improve the department's ability to fulfill its mission and create greater ownership of Metro-managed by people from the entire community.

Over the next five years, areas of focus for parks and nature could include:

- Continuing to build relationships with urban Indigenous communities and tribal governments
- Identifying and advancing shared, site-specific community-driven goals
- Seeking firsthand perspectives about the qualities that make a place special to individuals and communities of color, and learning about the sites that are important to communities of color
- Increasing staff understanding of places in Metro's system that may be especially significant to communities of color in the Portland area
- Using Metro properties to better tell cultural stories and honor Indigenous people.

Areas of potential collaboration include:

- Inviting the Native American Community Advisory Council and regional tribes to help Metro create meaningful ways of recognizing ceded land
- Inviting Indigenous communities to use Metro resources to identify or locate culturally significant lands and cultural resources within the parks and nature system or Metro region
- With tribal governments, exploring a policy that allows Metro to give rights of land or a return of lands to local tribes
- Begin to explore the possibility of reparation to communities who had land taken away in Oregon history, including Native American, African-American, Japanese-American and Chinese-American communities.

Years 1 and 2 implementation:

	Action or project
1.	Informed by the recommendations of the intertribal cultural resource specialist, create a new position and redefine it to ensure it is filled by an Indigenous person.
2.	Invite the Native American community to explore and identify appropriate and respectful ways to apply traditional ecological knowledge in Metro's land

	management practice. Invite greater community access of our sites and advance shared land management and conservation goals.
3.	Chart a transparent and adaptable path for rebuilding Metro’s relationship with the Chinese-American community around Lone Fir Cemetery’s “Block 14.”
4.	Allocate funding and staff resources to construct a Lone Fir Block 14 memorial and garden for the Chinese community and the asylum patients of early Portland.

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Planning Metro's parks and nature system and the regional system of parks, trails and natural areas

The Parks and Nature Department has identified a number of priorities to make it easier for communities of color to access Metro's parks and natural areas and make sure they have a great experience when they visit. Staff also recommended actions that suggest the department has an expanded role in region-wide access to parks, natural areas and trails for communities of color.

Parks and nature currently supports direct investments in community parks and natural areas beyond our portfolio through the Nature in Neighborhoods grants and Partners in Nature programs. These funds support community-driven projects across the region.

Over the next five years, areas of focus in planning for Metro's system of parks and natural areas could include:

- Creating a systems approach for planning and managing Metro parks and natural areas using a racial equity lens. Additionally, consider how to avoid the negative impacts of gentrification and displacement of communities of color related to the creation of parks, trails and natural areas
- Making an inventory of the geographic locations of parks and nature sites and program offerings. Identify geographic gaps in program provision and outdoor facilities relative to the geographies of communities of color.
- If a funding stream is established, acquire land important to communities of color. Ensure target area plans prioritize local parks and nature access in neighborhoods where little exists
- If a funding stream is established, compensate culturally specific organizations to develop plans for future land acquisition. Engage communities of color in identifying future land acquisition priorities
- Review and implement priorities identified by communities of color during the Blue Lake Regional Park master plan process, including investments in core infrastructure and site environmental health

Over the next five years, areas of focus for parks and nature at the regional level could include:

- Bring park providers and communities of color together to create a comprehensive plan – using a racial equity lens – for urban nature parks and regional trails in underserved areas
- Convene regional land organizations and agencies with community-based organizations to develop and prioritize resources to acquire property and easements in underserved areas
- Work with community-based organizations, local governments, trail advocates and planners to identify owners and operators for regional trail system gaps that directly benefit underserved communities
- Prioritize investments in parks, natural areas and trails that serve communities of color and/or directly benefit underserved areas and communities. Investments include: grant resources, staff time and staff expertise in support of the work of other organizations.

Note: the Parks and Nature plan will include a body of work focused on a) removing specific barriers to accessing Metro-managed parks and nature sites and b) making Metro-managed sites more relevant and welcoming for communities of color. Related actions are presented in a separate section.

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