



Discussion Draft: Strategic Framework Proposal

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Where we are

Before the pandemic, Metro Council gave direction to the Chief Operating Officer (COO) to begin the process of composing a strategic plan for Metro. Metro had recently staked its reputation on a bold regional vision, committing to a significant expansion of its role in affordable housing, homeless services, parks and nature and garbage and recycling. The Regional Investment Strategy (RIS) resulted in three successful tax measures to expand parks and natural areas, affordable housing and supportive housing services. The Regional Solid Waste Plan set aggressive targets to transform the solid waste industry and address racial equity and climate change. At the time, these investments were viewed as a chance to finally get on top of long-standing regional gaps in resources and services.

However in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted what appeared to be a clear path to implementation. When Oregon Governor Kate Brown issued her first shut-down order, Metro was rocked by a near complete freefall in revenues at its venues (Portland Expo, Portland's Centers for the Arts, Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo). Multiple rounds of employee lay-offs and budget adjustments rippled through the organization for most of 2020 as what was anticipated to be a short term shut-down unfurled into months and exceeded all worst case financial scenarios. The financial devastation devoured institutional capacity as Metro made multiple bids to cut spending fast enough and deep enough to survive with critical operations and services intact.

With multiple tax measures on the November 2020 ballot and amidst historic unemployment, a fourth leg of the RIS, a transportation measure, on the ballot mid-pandemic, failed to overcome questions about whether the timing was right for a new tax burden of this size and type. But even in this most crushing climate, returns and community engagement signaled trust and support for Metro to lend its regional thinking to this ever-growing and pressing problem.

At the same time, the problems Metro had committed to help solve were growing with alarming speed. The pandemic's job losses hit the communities Metro had committed to center, falling disproportionately on women, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Pacific Islander and low-income families.¹ In fact, the pandemic has both widened gaps in housing and homeless services as it has introduced a high-uncertainty environment into the implementation. It is unlikely that current investment levels will be enough under these circumstances. The pandemic has also clearly demonstrated how susceptible our community, and people of color in particular, is to poor air quality and the associated increased risk of COVID-19. Our region is experiencing the impacts of the climate crisis, most notably in the form of more frequent and devastating/severe wildfires and some of the highest rates of heat island effect in the country. This has called into question existing strategic plans – Are they still relevant? Do they still speak to the needs of the region? Can we afford them? Or have things shifted so fundamentally that we need to start anew?

¹ <https://portlandalliance.com/2021>

In the haze of the pandemic, wildfires, the fight for Black Lives, Metro's lofty set of six desired outcomes² at times feels more out of reach and unattainable than ever. Many in our community are fighting for their lives or their businesses and they are focused singularly on survival. At some point, we need to begin a path to recovery, but the timing is dependent on efficacy of vaccines, distribution and many other factors that are outside Metro's control.

To further complicate matters, we know that pandemic-era efforts to address racial disparities in health and economic outcomes related to the virus largely failed. Therefore, there is a real risk that the path to recovery will also strand people of color and small and emerging businesses in survival mode, or worse. As a regional government in service of the public, Metro must ensure that its actions do not contribute to these disparities, and in fact, should lead and actively contribute to correcting them where ever possible. While at the same time making good on the bold promises it has made to contribute thousands of units of affordable housing; direct hundreds of millions of dollars to get chronically homeless people into housing; expand and protect parks and critical habitat; and divert waste from landfills and reduce greenhouse gases.

Challenges and choices to make

If we could climb to the top of the spires of the Oregon Convention Center and look out at our region and Metro, what would we see? Most likely Metro looks like a patchwork of services built up over different periods of time. And, just like our larger society, we would see an uneven landscape of impacts from the pandemic and very different investment needs amongst our programs and services. Where revenues were secured by stable sources like fees, property taxes or new taxes – operations are stable to growing. Where revenues were dependent on economic activity and large gatherings – operations have been dramatically cut or shut down.

However, most of those stable revenues come with hefty promises that we've only just begun to make good on – and the political heat and pressure is already turned all the way up. Most of our Visitor venues face a long, uphill battle to attract the shows and business that keep our region teeming with visitors and economic activity.

What do we do?

While we can define a universal set of strategic values to guide our work across the organization, the stance, focus, opportunities and challenges on the tailwind side of Metro will be very different than those we need on the headwind side. This means that centrally, in the Council and COO's Office and in Support Services, we need to maintain capacity to support all the activities and be very clear

Metro leadership finds itself in a place where it must support two vastly different courses of action while meeting an unbending imperative 1) Making good on hopeful promises with a financial tailwind in Housing, Parks, and Solid Waste, and 2) Rebuilding business and economic activity with a financial headwind in the MERC Venues and the Zoo. AND, while we keep our promises and rebuild, Metro must boldly rethink and reimagine its public service to center and advance those who have been historically, systematically and intentionally disadvantaged.

² Metro's Vision

"People live, work and play in **vibrant communities** where their everyday needs are easily accessible. Current and future residents benefit from the region's **sustained economic competitiveness and prosperity**. People have **safe and reliable transportation choices** that enhance their quality of life. The region is a **leader on climate change**, minimizing contributions to global warming. Current and future generations enjoy **clean air, clean water and healthy ecosystems**. **Equity** exists relative to the benefits and burdens of growth and change to the region's communities." - Metro's Six Desired Outcomes

about which space we're working in and when. For our Visitor venues in particular, it will be crucial that Metro leadership demonstrate its commitment to these beloved cultural institutions by recognizing and accounting for the extreme challenges they have experienced and will continue to experience in the coming years.

Both parts of the organization can still move toward a more just, equitable metro region, but one will be doing so through creation and growth of new programs and systems, while another will be doing so through the rebuilding and renewal of previously existing programs and systems. Using a home-building analogy, parts of Metro are building a new home, with a fresh mortgage loan, able to design the systems from scratch. Our Visitor venues will be scraping together the revenue to repair damage and rebuild what were existing, mature operations in an environment of fierce competition and pressure. Application of our values will look different in each area.

Three key values were identified at Metro Director's retreat in January: Public Service, Safety, and Resilience. At a follow-up retreat in February, we examined the problem statement and zeroed in on two main commitments of a strategic framework to guide us through 2024:

Committing to keeping our promises and building back better

How we keep our promises and build back better should be guided by our values – Safety, Public Service, and Resilience. We embody those values through organization-wide guiding principles¹ that define the meaning and scope of those values: Racial Justice, Climate Justice and Resilience, and Shared Prosperity. For example, there is no “safety” for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander peoples without operationalizing racial justice to prevent harm and create belonging. Providing Public Service must include all people in our community, through a targeted universalism³ approach to ensure that people situated in different positions in society because of institutionalized racialism can access the same opportunities and benefits as their privileged counterparts. And finally, we commit to building resilience by committing to a Shared Prosperity, in which the burden of cost and the benefits of growth are examined and distributed in a racially and economically just way.

Racial Justice: “Operationalizing racial justice means reimagining and co-creating a just and liberated world and includes: understanding the history of racism and the system of white supremacy and addressing past harms, working in right relationship and accountability in an ecosystem (an issue, sector, or community ecosystem) for collective change, implementing interventions that use an intersectional analysis and that impact multiple systems, centering Blackness and building community, cultural, economic, and political power of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), and applying the practice of love along with disruption and resistance to the status quo.” – *Operationalizing Racial Justice, 2019*⁴

Climate Justice and Resilience: Communities of color now live on the frontlines of the climate crisis and experience the worst impacts of it, while those with power and privilege remain relatively protected and resourced to respond to a changing world. Tackling the climate crisis requires confronting racial inequity and working toward climate justice through a racial justice lens. As we recover, we can seize this opportunity to implement climate solutions and transform our systems to foster resilience, health and equity.

³ **Targeted universalism** means setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism>

⁴ http://www.mpassociates.us/uploads/3/7/1/0/37103967/operationalizing_racial_justice_-_np_edition._mpassociates._final_draft_aug_20.pdf

Shared Prosperity: “ensures that the benefits of economic growth are widely shared and distributed equitably across racial and gender groups. While the specific approach of each city is unique, there are three common principles that underlie the strategies to ensure shared prosperity in cities:

- Continuously creating new, high-quality opportunities for workers and businesses in an expanding nation;
- Increasing economic mobility for individuals and families while narrowing significant disparities by race, ethnicity, and gender; and
- Building and supporting communities where all residents can experience a high quality of life and actively participate in charting their local future.”⁵ – *Brookings Institution*

These principles should guide our work at all levels – leadership, departmental, programmatic. They should also inform our role as an employer, investor, policy maker, convener, collaborator, influencer, regulator, operator, and service provider.

Next steps

Consult Metro Council on the problem statement, two commitments and three high level guiding principles at the Tuesday, April 6 Work Session. With the Council’s direction, immediately apply the framework to day-to-day decision-making and work with departments to create high-level department specific goals in service of the framework to be presented as part of the department’s FY 22 budget presentations.

COMMITMENTS

Keep our promises and build back better

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Racial justice

Climate justice and resiliency

Shared prosperity

HOW AND WHERE

The roles we play	Our service areas	Our programs
Employer	Garbage and recycling	Affordable housing
Investor	Visitor venues	Supportive housing
Policy maker	Oregon Zoo	Parks and nature investments
Service provider	Parks and nature	Economic development
Influencer	Land use and transportation	Diversity, equity and inclusion
Regional convener		





ⁱ These are placeholder definitions for discussion purposes

⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/building-shared-prosperity-in-americas-cities/>