

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

January 22, 2020

Metro Council
600 NE Grand Ave.
Portland, OR 97232

**Re: January 23, 2020, Metro Council Agenda item 5.1
Parks and Nature Annual Report**

Dear President Peterson, Deputy President González, and Metro Councilors:

Metro Council will be receiving from staff an annual report on Metro's Parks and Nature program (File # 18-5351). I urge Council to:

- **Reject the Annual Report** and demand staff to include details of the program's skyrocketing administrative costs and include information requested by the program's Oversight Committee;
- **Replace the current members of the Oversight Committee** with individuals who have the time, energy, and expertise to provide adequate oversight to the nearly billion dollar Parks and Nature program; and
- **Provide the Oversight Committee with the information and staff support** necessary for them monitor the Parks and Nature program.

The remainder of this letter provides the bases for my recommendations.



REJECT THE 2018-19 PARKS & NATURE ANNUAL REPORT

In the last fiscal year, Metro spent \$42 million on its Parks and Nature program. Yet the annual report before you is only four pages and runs less than 1,400 words with high-res photos making up about one-third of the report. What little information is presented raises more questions than it answers:

- The table on the last page of the report (attached) indicates that **administration accounted for about 30% (\$13 million) of total Parks and Nature spending**. This is significantly higher than the 10% target promised to voters. **Metro Council should demand a revised Annual Report that provides an accounting for this shockingly steep increase**. In particular, taxpayers deserve to know whether—and how much—Parks and Nature funding was spent putting together the 2019 bond measure. It borders on dishonest for Metro to promise voters that their tax dollars would be spent on parks and nature, only to gamble it instead on cobbling together a bond measure to raise even more money from those same taxpayers.
- Comparing the current Annual Report with last year's, it appears **Metro purchased 258 acres for the Parks and Nature program**. The Annual Report provides no useful information regarding how many acres were purchased in the past year, where they were purchased, or how much was paid. Previous annual reports provide at least some of this information. **Metro Councilors and Metro voters deserve to know how much of their tax dollars are being used to buy land outside of Metro's jurisdiction and/or outside the Urban Growth Boundary. Metro Council should demand a revised Annual Report that provides details on Metro's land acquisitions over the past year.**
- Of the \$42 million spent last fiscal year, the Annual Report identifies only two specific expenditures: (1) \$375,000 for nature play areas at Oxbow Regional Park, and (2) \$800,000 for nature education and outdoor experience grants. Combined, these expenditures account for less than 3% of total spending. **Metro Council should demand a revised Annual Report that provides details on where the other 97% of Parks and Nature spending went.**

- In April 2019, the Oversight Committee requested the Annual Report include information regarding “extra resources (bond proceeds and grants) that helped pay for capital projects at Chehalem, River Island, etc.” The only mention of capital projects in the Annual Report are forward looking promises regarding the proceeds from the 2019 bond measure. The Annual Report has no discussion of Chehalem Ridge nor River Island. The omission of these items specifically requested by the committee demonstrates **the Oversight Committee has no sway over Metro staff. Metro Council should demand a revised Annual Report that includes information specifically requested by the Oversight Committee.**

REPLACEMENT OF OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Metro council and staff frequently repeat the tired phrase “promises made, promises kept” with respect to their Parks and Nature program—it even makes its way into the most recent Annual Report. One promise made to voters in every Parks and Nature ballot measure since 2006 has been vigorous oversight of the program by a citizen Oversight Committee. While Metro seems to have satisfied the letter of the promise by appointing committee members, Metro and the committee itself have abandoned the spirit of their promises of oversight.

Beginning with their earliest meetings, Metro staff made clear the committee would be denied key information required and requested to provide oversight. For example, the committee has repeatedly been rebuffed in its efforts to provide oversight on pending land purchases [emphasis added]:

- November 9, 2007: “It was decided that Metro will not include the seller’s name **or the purchase price** in the email to committee members.”
- February 5, 2008: “Segeni Mungai [committee member] asked for a list of acquired properties and pending acquisitions. Peter Krainock [committee chair] reminded the committee of the confidential nature of this information, and it was suggested the list show pending acquisitions by target area only, **not by specific transaction.**”
- December 8, 2009: “Kathleen [Brennan-Hunter, Metro management] reminded the committee that, in order to protect confidentiality, **pending acquisitions are**

usually not discussed with the public until they are final. However, there is a large and very special acquisition that will be discussed at the Dec. 10 Metro Council meeting and she wanted the committee to know that there may be some press about the matter. (Due to those same confidentiality issues, **Kathleen could not provide the committee with additional details about the acquisition.**)”

By withholding information until a deal has closed, the committee cannot provide effective oversight. It’s virtually worthless for the Oversight Committee to scrutinize a transaction only after “that ship has sailed.”

Over the past year, the already weakened Oversight Committee has become a farce. The Oversight Committee appears to have no interest in meeting regularly or attending meetings when they are scheduled. Apparently Metro staff do not take the committee seriously, as their requests for information are ignored, dismissed, or rejected.

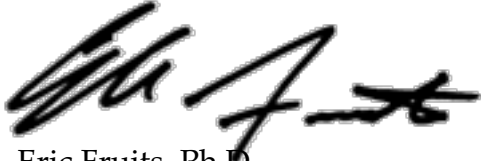
- **The last time the Oversight Committee met was April 5, 2019, or nearly 10 months ago.** This is the longest gap between meetings of the Oversight Committee.
- At the last meeting of the Oversight Committee, **only 2 of the 12 members were in attendance.**
- Minutes from the last meeting indicate that the Oversight Committee was expected to meet in Summer 2019, with a discussion of the Annual Report to be an agenda item. **That meeting was never held and there is no record of the Oversight Committee meeting to review the 2018-19 Annual Report.**
- Minutes indicate the committee requested specific information to include in the Annual Report regarding capital expenditures at Chehalem Ridge and River Island. **The Annual Report before you today has no discussion of any of these items requested by the Oversight Committee.**

The members of the current Oversight Committee should be replaced by individuals who have the time, enthusiasm, and expertise to serve. The newly formed committee must be provided the power—and support from Metro Council and staff—to exercise effective oversight of this billion dollar program.

Metro Council

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Fruits". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a prominent initial "E" and "F".

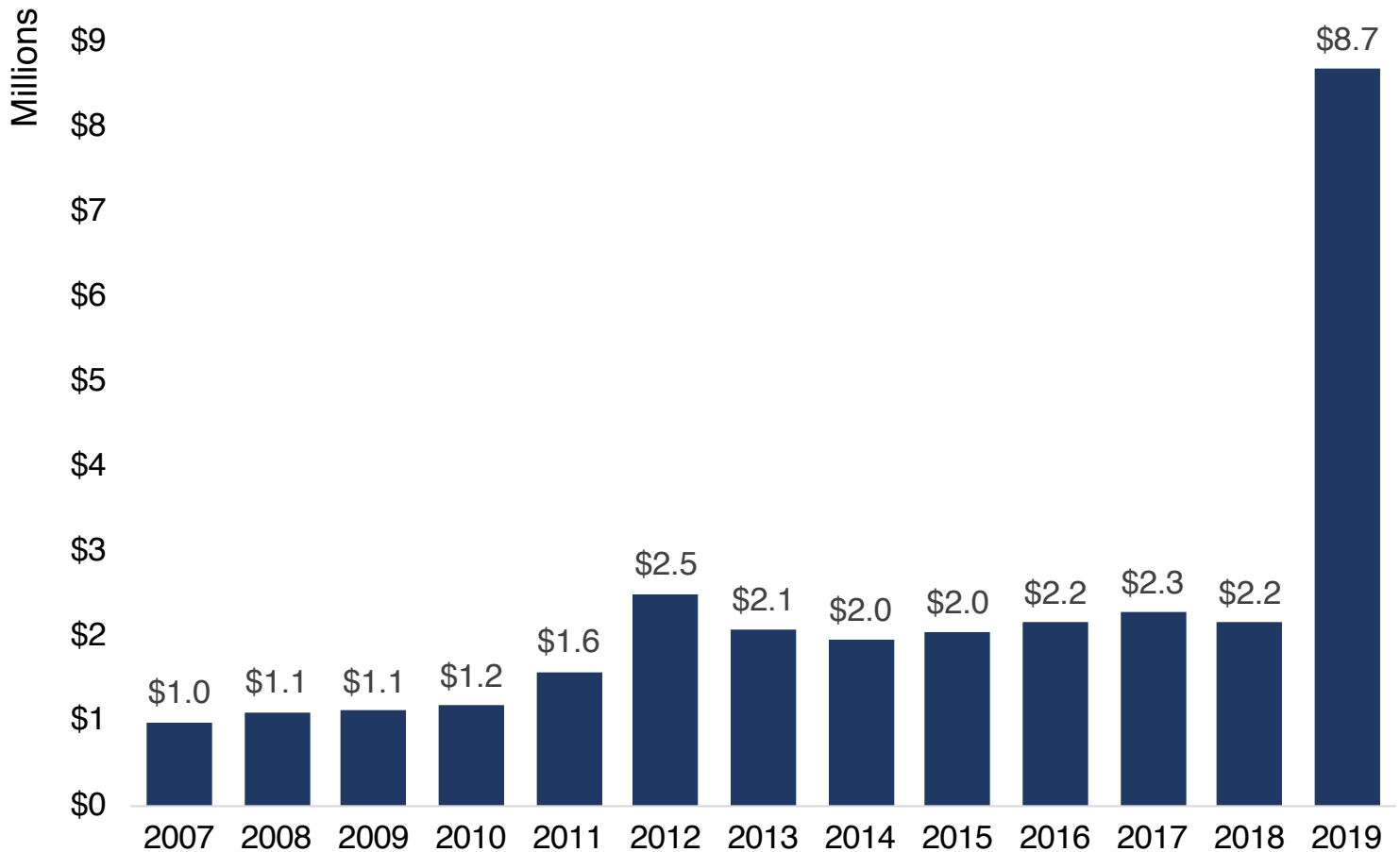
Eric Fruits, Ph.D.

Parks and Nature spending*

FY 2019

	General fund	2018 parks and natural areas levy	2006 natural areas bond	Total
Restoration/maintenance of parks and natural areas	\$2,564,761	\$4,386,330	\$0	\$6,951,091
Access to nature	\$663,216	\$563,742	\$1,349,230	\$2,576,188
Park improvements and operations	\$5,727,651	\$3,604,233	\$0	\$9,331,884
Cemeteries	\$892,200	\$0	\$0	\$892,200
Nature education and volunteer programs	\$265,384	\$787,870	\$0	\$1,053,254
Community investments	\$61,054	\$1,052,454	\$912,748	\$2,026,256
Land acquisition/stabilization	\$0	\$0	\$6,090,342	\$6,090,342
Administration**	\$4,136,642	\$4,672,456	\$4,013,635	\$12,822,733
Total	\$14,310,908	\$15,067,085	\$12,365,955	\$41,743,948

Administration exceed 30% of total costs in 2019*



*Excludes general fund administration costs

Source: Metro Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee, Meeting Materials, April 5, 2019