

March 16, 2026

Word Count: 332

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QuickPoint! Cascade's Testimony on Metro Spending \$50M, 40 Years, Turning Superfund Site to a Park

By Naomi Inman with Testimony by John A. Charles, Jr.

This March, the Metro Council [approved](#) the Willamette Cove nature park [master plan](#). On March 12, John Charles [testified](#) before the Metro Council [meeting](#) on [Resolution 26-5582](#) cautioning their use of \$15.6 million from the [2019 Parks Bond](#) towards the next phase of the Willamette Cove nature park. He was the only person to submit comment. The resolution passed unanimously.

“This is only a down payment,” Charles cautioned. “As fiduciaries you could be held personally liable for mismanagement of public funds if things go sideways, as they frequently do with Superfund sites.”

Charles' testimony represents decades of research, analysis, reporting and testimony before Metro as taxpayers have generously handed over \$1 billion in funding for its natural areas acquisition or “parks and nature” program. Since the early 90s, Metro has received funding to landbank more than [19,000 acres](#), most of which are not open to the public or far from populations it is meant to serve, according to several [reports](#) by Cascade.

In 1996, Metro purchased the 27-acre [Willamette Cove](#) property from the Port of Portland to develop as a natural area along the Willamette River. In December 2000, that stretch of river became part of [Portland Harbor's Superfund](#) site, one of the largest environmental cleanups in the Pacific Northwest. Oregon DEQ then established a “remedial action for hazardous waste clean-up” of the [Willamette Cove Uplands](#).

Now 30 years since the acquisition, the site remains closed while environmental cleanup and planning continue. A July 2022 Metro [Staff Report](#) estimates a baseline of \$17.5 million in the first phase of the upland cleanup. Oregon Metro's investor relations [page](#) projects a cost of \$50 million, pushing the costs to nearly \$70 million combined.

A 2012 Metro audit by Suzanne Flynn, cautioned that Metro had expanded its natural areas portfolio without fully defining long-term maintenance and stewardship. Willamette Cove serves as an example of how acquiring industrial land for parks creates long-term financial and management risks and delays public access to promised parks for decades.

[READ JOHN CHARLES' TESTIMONY BEFORE THE METRO COUNCIL, MARCH 12, 2026](#)

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John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization. He researches, writes, and presents testimony and analysis on state and local issues important to the freedom and opportunity of all Oregonians.

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