

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: December 3, 2020

Subject: 2021 Competitive Equity Grant Program Priorities

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 8, Strategy 4

Staff Prepared/Presented: Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner (651-602-1621), Amanda Lovelee, Parks Ambassador (651-602-1375)

Division/Department: Community Development

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

Background

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* commits the Council to develop a set-aside, competitive equity grant program to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System. The Regional Parks System Equity Grant Program (Equity Grant Program) was formally established in 2019 through a pilot program with capital funding that resulted in the awards for three Regional Park System equity projects.

There is just over \$2M available for the 2021 Equity Grant Program solicitation. This includes \$664,000 in Parks bonds and \$1.4M in Parks Interest Earnings. The Community Development Committee provided general direction for how to use the funds at their regular meeting on August 17, 2020, and funds were amended into the budget through the September 2020 Budget Amendment ([BI 2020-210 JT SW](#)).

At the September 3, 2020 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPSOC) meeting, staff shared lessons learned from the 2019 Pilot Program and feedback from the Community Development Committee, and Commissioners provided advice for the use of parks interest earnings for the 2021 Competitive Equity Grant Program. Following that discussion, Council staff met with the Implementing Agency directors and their outreach staff for additional feedback and program advice. These discussions shaped the program priorities now being proposed.

The goal of today's discussion will be to review the proposed program priorities based on input received and to invite final feedback for the 2021 Regional Parks System Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), which will be brought through the Council process as a recommendation in early 2021.

Proposed Priorities for the 2021 Competitive Equity Grant Program

Based on the feedback obtained, staff have developed the following program priorities for consideration and discussion.

Equity Focus Areas

Projects must advance equitable use of the Regional Parks System with a focus on race, ethnicity, income, ability, age, and/or national origin.

Total funding available for the 2021 Equity Grant Program: \$2,064,000

- \$664,000 in Council bonds for competitive capital projects.

- \$1,400,000 in 2018 and 2019 Council interest earnings. The Council prioritizes using these interest earnings for non-capital programming projects.

Application Categories and Priorities

Competitive capital projects

Agencies may submit multiple grant applications for capital projects. Applications may range from \$20,000 to \$200,000, but no agency may receive more than a total of \$200,000 in capital funds. Examples of capital equity projects include but are not limited to park and trail signage, mobile classrooms, accessible facilities, and public art. Engagement and outreach may be included in the budget for capital projects if it directly informs the capital work to be accomplished by the grant.

Competitive non-capital projects

The Council principally recommends prioritizing the use of interest earnings for non-capital programming-related projects. Agencies may submit multiple equity programming (non-capital) grant applications. Applications may range from \$20,000 to \$200,000, but no agency may receive more than a total of \$200,000 in non-capital funds.

Examples of equity programming projects include but are not limited to outdoor education and skill building, special events, outreach, partnership-building, engagement, bike fleets, marketing, external communications, training, translation and interpretive services, and new programming staff. Agencies may also request a grant of \$20,000 to create a new ADA Transition Plan or update an existing ADA Transition Plan if their current plan is more than ten years old.

Project Timelines and Reporting

Grant agreements will allow for a three-year project timeline with a possible one-year extension. In some circumstances a second one-year extension may be allowed. Agencies will be required to submit semi-annual reports to ensure projects are progressing as intended. Prior to final reimbursement, Agencies will be required to submit a final outcomes report.

Review Process

A review team will score the proposals and make recommendations for funding to the Council. The review team will be comprised of:

- up to four Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission members,
- up to three Community Development Committee members,
- up to two Equity Advisory Committee members, and
- up to three Implementing Agency representatives.

Agency representatives will recuse themselves of any involvement in scoring and ranking their own proposed projects.

Evaluation and Scoring Criteria

A rigorous scoring framework was developed for the 2019 Pilot Program. These criteria remain in place for the 2021 program but have been condensed into five categories to allow for a simplified review process. The Council recommends broad distribution of these funds across the Agencies. The scoring of these categories encourages the unique opportunity to support programming in the equity grant program. In addition, the criteria have been modified to encourage internal and inter-agency collaboration and new partnership building. The five categories are as follows:

1. Impact on equitable use
2. Community partnerships
3. Community engagement

4. Capacity building
5. Programming initiatives