



## Staff Report

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**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**THROUGH:** Keith Stahley, City Manager

**FROM:** Scott Archer, Deputy City Manager for Community Services

### **SUBJECT:**

Riverfront Park Playground Redevelopment Grant Application to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department Local Government Grant Program.

Ward(s): Ward 1

Councilor(s): Councilor Stapleton

Neighborhood(s): CANDO

Result Area(s): Welcoming and Livable Community

### **SUMMARY:**

Riverfront Park is Salem's premier urban event park, located along the scenic Willamette River in downtown. The park features a variety of amenities including a large playground structure that is scheduled for replacement in 2026, as it has aged beyond its useful life and requires replacement. The City is applying to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department for funds to incorporate additional project elements, including inclusive play and accessible design features, as well as other playground improvements identified in the *2018 Riverfront Park Master Plan*. A City Council Resolution is required as part of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department application process.

### **ISSUE:**

Shall City Council adopt Resolution 2024-9, authorizing the Deputy City Manager for Community Services to apply for and, if successful, accept an Oregon Parks and Recreation Department Local Government Grant to provide funding for improvements to Riverfront Park?

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt Resolution 2024-9, authorizing the Deputy City Manager for Community Services to apply for and, if successful, accept an Oregon Parks and Recreation Department Local Government Grant to provide funding for improvements to Riverfront Park.

## FACTS AND FINDINGS:

The voter approved 2022 Safety and Livability Bond includes funding to rehabilitate the Riverfront Park playground and replace the aging play equipment. Construction of these improvements are scheduled to occur in 2026. The project location is identified in Attachment 1.

Recognizing that the playground at Riverfront Park is likely the most utilized playground in the Salem Park System, the City is seeking to incorporate inclusive play design principals into its rehabilitation. Inclusive play is a philosophy that children and adults of all abilities can benefit from playing and interacting together. Concepts associated with inclusive play include the following:

- Whole Child Development. Providing a wide variety and range of play experiences is crucial to the learning and growth of children. Equipment should consider a range from simple to complex experiences for physical, sensory, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement which supports childhood development.
- Layout. The playground layout should have clear sightlines and seating at multiple locations for caregivers' comfort and visual access. The play area should also be easy to comprehend, logical for users, and separated from other park uses.
- Accessibility. Ensuring the playground access and equipment is usable for children and caregivers with disabilities. Playgrounds should exceed the minimum requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 for increased accessibility and opportunities to play.
- Supporting Elements. The space must support children and caregivers by providing comfortable seating and space for strollers and mobility devices, as well as providing fencing and shade.

Altering the layout within and surrounding the playground while incorporating inclusive play support elements adds significant capital cost. For example, it is widely acknowledged that all synthetic surfacing products come with a higher price compared to engineered wood fiber - the surfacing typically used in City park playgrounds - and requires full replacement after approximately 8-12 years. Synthetic surfacing is used as fall protection in inclusive play to provide accessibility throughout the play area. Additionally, colors and patterns are used to distinguish zones, routes, and increase predictability.

In 2018, the *Riverfront Park Master Plan* was updated and approved by Council. The *Riverfront Park Master Plan* includes two expanded playground elements, a slide mound and nature play. The park master plan graphic is included as Attachment 2, with the expanded playground elements identified as items no. 9 and 11. The City is proposing to deliver these additional play elements with the playground rehabilitation project to provide expanded play opportunities, and to ensure more park visitors can enjoy and engage in play within Riverfront Park.

Nature play refers to unstructured play activities that encourage children to interact with and explore natural elements such as trees, rocks and plants. Nature play contributes to fostering a deeper connection to the natural world and promoting creativity, collaboration, and imagination. A nature play improvement at Riverfront Park is envisioned to feature a stone terrace rock scramble.

On January 3, 2024, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) announced a new round of grant funding through the Local Government Grant Program (LGGP). The grant program helps local government agencies fund parks, outdoor recreation areas, and related support facilities. Notably, there is over \$30 million in grant funds available in 2024, to help local government agencies fund park acquisitions and improvements. This amount is more than double the available amount last year and the most ever available in one grant cycle. The recent increase in grant funding is the result of yearly increases in State Lottery funds, which are allocated in part to OPRD for Local Government grants.

Rehabilitation of the Riverfront Park playground area, with inclusive play elements and expanded play features, is eligible for funding under the LGGP Large Grant category. For large projects the maximum grant request is \$1 million. The City application will seek a grant award not to exceed the maximum request amount of \$1 million. The City will provide \$1 million in match funds from general obligation bonds (approximately \$600,000) and Parks System Development Charges (approximately \$400,000) to provide a 50 percent match required by the grant program. The total estimated cost of the project is \$2 million. Applications under the large grant category are due April 1, 2024.

If a grant application is successful, it will double the capital budget for rehabilitating and expanding the playground, leveraging the City's investment and emphasizing a commitment to be a good steward of City funds, all while providing exceptional recreation facilities to Salem residents and visitors.

The application requires a Council-adopted resolution, which is provided as Attachment 3.

Landscape architecture firm, GreenWorks, is assisting the City with the conceptual design of the project. Community engagement will drive the design process, with outreach and community involvement opportunities scheduled for spring and summer of 2024.

Potential project elements to be funded by a successful grant application including the following:

- Slide mound and nature play, as identified in the *Riverfront Park Master Plan*.
- Park path alterations, providing a clear playground entry and circulation system with an orientation path connecting and organizing the different play zones.
- A playground focal point, an exciting feature that is iconic, attracts attention, and is accessible to all.
- Ramps, surfacing, and accessibility features that allow children to remain in their mobility devices within the playground.
- Low perimeter fencing to keep users safely inside the play area.
- Seating for caregivers to observe play and places for children to sit close to each other for resting and socializing.
- Shade structure over the equipment - in addition to orienting play equipment and furnishings to take advantage of natural shade from existing trees.

On March 14, 2024, the Salem Parks and Recreation Advisory Board will consider endorsement of the

grant application. Staff are seeking additional support letters from park stakeholders.

The Local Government Grant Program Advisory Committee will evaluate and score all large grant applications to establish the priority ranking for state funding assistance. Recommendations for funding are presented to the OPRD Commission in September. If this grant award is approved by the Commission, the City will sign an agreement and receive a Notice to Proceed by October 2024. The OPRD Local Government Grant stipulates that grant projects must be completed within two years from award. Staff is confident that the project can be constructed by September 2026, the designated timeframe.

## **BACKGROUND:**

As defined by the *Comprehensive Park System Master Plan*, Riverfront Park is an Urban Park, meaning it services the entire city and can include facilities that are a regional draw. Riverfront Park is designed and managed to accommodate community-wide gatherings, such as festivals, fairs, and musical events. The park attracts a large number of people from a wide geographic area, and offers support facilities such as restrooms, convenient pedestrian and bicycle access, as well as parking.

The current playground at Riverfront Park is known as the *Rotary Children's Playground*. It was dedicated in November 1997, over 26 years ago.

Since 1968, the City has completed a total of 52 projects with grant funding provided through programs administered by OPRD. These include Local Government, Land and Water Conservation Fund, Recreational Trails, and Historic Preservation Grants. Most recently, the City received a Local Government Grant in the amount of \$500,000 to develop a skate park and associated improvements at Geer Park.

Rob Romanek  
Parks Planning Manager

## **Attachments:**

1. Project Location Map
2. Riverfront Park Master Plan graphic
3. Resolution 2024-9