



May 7, 2021

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Capital Construction
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Co-Chair Girod, Co-Chair Holvey, and Members on the Committee,

We write to you today in strong support of \$2 million in lottery funding for the City of Gresham's Gradin Community Sports Park. Gradin Park provides much-needed outdoor recreation opportunities for Gresham youth and families, and this investment in Phase II of the project will increase the facility's capacity and help it to become a significant asset for all of East Multnomah County.

Gradin Sports Park serves a young, diverse, and economically disadvantaged community in our districts. There are more than 29,000 residents under the age of twenty in Gresham, and thirty-six percent of our population are residents of color. The majority of students in Gresham are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and more than twenty percent of households city-wide receive federal food assistance. Research from the Oregon Employment Department shows that East Multnomah County has the highest concentration of poverty in the state.

The challenges our communities face include increasing gun violence. In 2021, the number of shootings in Gresham have doubled compared to this time last year. Shootings create trauma for the people directly involved, as well as the surrounding neighborhood and community. The issues that lead to increased violence are complex, and the solutions require investments in community development and public health. We recognize that the communities most impacted by gun violence are also communities that have suffered from a history of underinvestment. Our legislative districts desperately need immediate action that includes investment in safe community spaces for providing recreation and mentoring opportunities.

The City of Gresham's ability to address all of these community needs is compromised by a permanent property tax rate of \$3.61 per \$1,000 Taxable Assessed Value, one of the lowest of any full-service city in Oregon. This means that on a per capita basis, Gresham's revenue is less than half of comparable cities, limiting resources available for new capital construction. System Development Charges are the other primary source of funds for investment, but these funds are used for expanding services to accommodate *new* population growth, not for existing areas that suffer from a historic lack of investment. Gresham relies on collaboration at the regional,

county, and state level for investments to address the historic disinvestment in East Multnomah County. State funding for Gradin is critical to address the financial needs in our districts.

The pandemic and economic crisis have only worsened these systemic inequities and disproportionately impacted Gresham residents: five of the six zip codes with the highest COVID cases in the Portland Metro area are located within Gresham. As our constituents work to recover from this pandemic, it will be vitally important for East Multnomah County children to have access to healthy outdoor activities that reduce isolation and build community.

Before the pandemic, 28,000 people a year, mostly kids, practiced and played at Gradin Sports Park, but the facility has no running water, no permanent restrooms, and no concessions. Gradin is currently home to two baseball/softball fields and two soccer fields, but it is master planned for two more of each. There are no tournament play spaces anywhere in East Multnomah County, but the addition of these fields, restrooms and concessions would allow Gresham to host travel tournaments and make Gradin Sports Park a true community recreation centerpiece for East County.

Gresham was slated to receive an appropriation of \$2 million in lottery funds to fund Phase II of the Gradin Community Sports Park Project in the 2019 legislative session. However, due to the economic impact of the pandemic, the bond sale for these funds did not occur. This project is critically needed in our legislative districts now more than ever, and we urge you to allocate the lottery dollars necessary to fund it. The Legislature’s investment in the Gradin Community Sports Park is an investment in generations of East Multnomah County kids.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Senator Chris Gorsek
Senate District 25



Representative Ricki Ruiz
House District 50