

Health Department, Office of Sustainability & Department of Community Services



February 28, 2023

House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment
900 Court St. NE - HR
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 3016 - Community Green Infrastructure Grant Program

Chair Pam Marsh, Vice-Chairs Bobby Levy and Emerson Levy, and members of the Committee:

The natural and built environments in which we live, work, and play have substantial impacts on our health and quality of life. Within our urban areas, land use and development practices which reduce vegetation and increase imperviousness can affect local temperature regulation and air quality, especially when catalyzed by ongoing climate change, and risk substantial deleterious health impacts.¹ These land use planning practices and development trends have an uneven impact on Multnomah County residents and often produce disproportionate burdens for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and people with lower incomes. Based on our analysis, areas in Multnomah County with the highest proportion of BIPOC experience less tree canopy cover and access to parks and greenspaces than predominantly white areas.² These disparities in land use and vegetative cover produce heightened health risks for BIPOC in Multnomah County as tree canopy cover and greenspace proximity have been shown to reduce temperatures and improve air quality.^{3, 4}

Enhancing green infrastructure is an integral and relevant strategy for addressing climate change and environmental injustices as average temperatures in Oregon are

¹ Oregon Health Authority. (2014). *Oregon Climate and Health Profile Report*. <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/HealthyEnvironments/climatechange/Documents/oregon-climate-and-health-profile-report.pdf>

² American Community Survey 2020 5-year estimates; Metro RLIS

³ Kolosna, C., & Spurlock, D. (2019). Uniting geospatial assessment of neighborhood urban tree canopy with plan and ordinance evaluation for environmental justice. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 40, 215–223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2018.11.010>

⁴ Rigolon, A. (2016). A complex landscape of inequity in access to urban parks: A literature review. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 153, 160–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2016.05.017>

expected to increase by three to seven degrees by 2050.⁵ Prioritizing green infrastructure projects for environmental justice communities in Multnomah County can provide vital ecosystem services that reduce temperatures, improve air quality, manage stormwater, and reduce noise thus offering substantial health and environmental benefits.^{3, 4}

Green infrastructure helps to reduce pollution in our local streams, wetlands and rivers. Pollutants from stormwater runoff harm native fish, including species listed on the federal Endangered Species List (Chinook and coho salmon, and steelhead trout). Increasing the abundance of salmon and other fish benefits Tribes and other marginalized communities who rely on fish for subsistence. Maintaining healthy fisheries also protects the “beneficial use” of our waters including recreation. Increasing the workforce to provide green infrastructure services will improve water quality in Multnomah County streams and all tributaries of the Columbia River.

Additionally, enhanced proximity to greenspaces can provide opportunities for physical activity⁶ and cooler local temperatures from greater vegetation and ecosystem functioning could reduce energy burden, which our analysis found to be significantly higher for households in areas predominantly home to BIPOC.⁷

Despite the health and environmental benefits offered from green infrastructure, the cost of projects can be a barrier to fully realize needed environmental enhancements. Establishing the Community Green Infrastructure Grant Program, Fund, and Task Force can help bring these projects to fruition and offer funding directly to communities, community-based organizations, and local governmental departments to address environmental and health disparities while incorporating anti-displacement strategies.

In addition to establishing these programs, we ask the committee to plan resources to help eligible communities and organizations apply for funding and receive assistance with project planning and implementation to ensure that funding is prioritized to address current environmental injustices.

⁵ Oregon Health Authority. (2018). *Oregon’s State Health Assessment*.

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/ABOUT/Documents/sha/state-health-assessment-full-report.pdf>

⁶ Cutts, B. B., Darby, K. J., Boone, C. G., & Brewis, A. (2009). City structure, obesity, and environmental justice: An integrated analysis of physical and social barriers to walkable streets and park access. *Social Science & Medicine*, 69(9), 1314–1322. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.08.020>

⁷ USDE Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy. (2018). Low-Income Energy Affordability Data.

Multnomah County Health Department urges your support of HB3016. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Thank you,

Andrea Hamberg

Director of Environmental Health Services
Multnomah County Health Department

John Wasiutynski

Director of Office of Sustainability
Multnomah County

Jon Henrichsen, P.E.,

Transportation Division Director, County Engineer
Multnomah County