

Date: August 6, 2021

To: Columbia City Council and Parks and Recreation Department

From: Columbia Climate and Environment Commission

Subject: Project List for Parks and Recreation Sales Tax Renewal Input

The Columbia Climate and Environment Commission submits the attached input to the Columbia City Council and the Parks and Recreation Department for consideration and modification of the proposed projects list for the Parks and Recreation Sales Tax Renewal.

The Commission encourages the City Council and the Department to consider and prioritize three significant areas:

1. Land Management
 - a. Ecosystem management
 - b. Green space acquisition and conservation
2. Transportation
 - a. Supporting expansion of travel by walking and bicycling
 - b. Ensuring public transportation access to key recreation facilities
3. Accelerating improvements to building energy efficiency

The 2021 renewal of the Park Sales Tax represents one of the most significant opportunities to align with the Climate Action & Adaptation Plan goal of and contribute to reducing emissions 35% by 2035 by prioritizing investments in ecosystem management, trail development, and facilities energy efficiency. As Columbia moves closer to the looming climate crisis, the City of Columbia can no longer afford to maintain business as usual. We must shift funding to prioritize climate action.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Amparan

Chair

Climate and Environment Commission

Climate & Environment Commission (CEC)

2021 Park Sales Tax Renewal

25 May 2021

The Climate and Environment Commission (CEC) appreciates Parks Services Manager, Gabe Huffington, for taking the time to discuss the proposed renewal of the 1/8 cent Park Sales Tax at the April 27, 2021 commission meeting. At the meeting, Mr. Huffington requested that the CEC provide any feedback and suggestions that the CEC would like to see included in the 2021 Parks Sales Tax Renewal.

This memo serves as the CEC's response to Mr Huffington's request with suggestions that support Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) implementation that the CEC is responsible for overseeing. These suggestions are focused around the CAAP sectors of Natural Resources, Transportation, and Energy.

Natural Resources

Parks and Recreation is the largest land holding department in the City of Columbia. The CAAP goals for improving the City's adaptability to climate change rely on the management and expansion of healthy ecosystems. The ordinance approving the Park Sales Tax (Section 3., Ordinance No. 16686) states that "all revenue received from the local parks sales tax...shall be solely for local parks for the City, in order to purchase, improve and manage parks, trails and natural lands for water quality, wildlife, tree preservation, and recreation purposes." This statement implies that these funds may be used to improve and manage natural lands for water quality and wildlife, otherwise known as ecosystem management.

Ecosystem management includes adaptive conservation activities such as invasive species control, timber stand improvement, and natural community maintenance that occurs on a regular basis. This type of management is adaptive and requires planning and regular monitoring to be effective.

Ecosystem management increases biodiversity, stores more carbon in the soil and vegetation compared to turf and other non-native vegetation, preserves Missouri natural heritage, and improves ecosystem resilience to climate change impacts. All of these benefits support the CAAP goals for building climate resilience. However, the CEC was unable to find the number of acres under ecosystem management or any written plan to guide management activities and nowhere on the City web page or in any past Park Sales Tax projects has it been explicitly stated where the money is being used for maintaining ecosystems within our parks.

Therefore, we conclude that the current system for reporting Park Sales Tax project activities is either not capturing ecosystem management projects or that the City is not managing public park lands for natural communities at all. To date the CEC has

been unable to identify more than just a handful of Park Sales Tax projects that solely support a land management project and even then maintenance of these sites is not included.

Example. The development of the Garth Nature Area wetlands created habitat for many wildlife species and recreation opportunities for people. However, the Garth wetlands were only built with tax funds and no maintenance funds for the wetlands were planned thereafter.

Additionally, land acquisition seems less of a priority compared to capital projects which concerns the CEC. Land acquisition to protect greenspace and sensitive natural areas should not be the last item on the funding list and the first to experience budget cuts in a shortfall. Land acquisition is not less important than a new shelter or a new sports facility given the development pressures as well as the changing climate.

The park sales tax can support several actions in the CAAP including:

- Goal NR-1: Increase climate resilience and carbon sequestration potential of public and private lands.
 - Strategy NR-1.1: Increase the accessibility and quality of habitat for native plants and animals.
 - Action NR-1.1.1: Manage publicly-owned natural areas to enhance and maintain diverse native communities.
 - Action NR-1.1.2: Establish and effectively manage native-habitat corridors along trails and utility easement areas to restore and maintain landscape connectivity.
 - Action NR-1.1.4: Support the Urban Forest Master Plan to identify programs and suitable locations to maintain and expand Columbia's urban tree canopy.
 - Action NR-1.1.6: Assess whether or not to purchase and preserve greenspace in and surrounding the city by quantifying the equitable, environmental, and economic benefits, along with the costs of maintaining and owning the property.

Our suggestion for better incorporating the natural resources goals of the CAAP into Park Sales Tax projects is to create a specific land management plan that emphasizes the enhancement and restoration of ecosystems in parks and along trails. This plan should incorporate goals from other city plans including the Urban Forest Master Plan to support urban canopy growth and planning, Climate Action and Adaptation Plan to help meet the City's GHG emissions goal of net zero by 2060, Columbia Imagined to plan connectivity between and create opportunity for preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, and the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan to help meet park user expectations.

The land management plan should identify practices to be used, natural communities to be managed, priority locations for management and acquisition, timeline for management activities, a monitoring and reporting mechanism and a roadmap for implementing it. The result of the land management plan will be a list of natural capital projects and their timelines of management activities that can be included in the process for adopting the renewable Park Sales Tax. We recommend that the plan be reviewed by the City's Tree Board, Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Climate and Environment Commission before adoption and that future oversight of this plan be monitored by these three commissions as well.

Transportation

Transportation is Columbia's second-highest source of greenhouse gas emissions. The City Council-approved CAAP goals are to reduce community-wide emissions by 35% by 2035 and 100% by 2060. The City's ability to achieve these emission reduction goals is in large part dependent on achieving the Transportation Sector goals.

In 2015, walking, biking, and transit accounted for only 7% of trips in Columbia. In order to achieve the City's emission reduction goals, Columbia must shift trips from single occupancy vehicles to walking, biking, and transit. The CAAP establishes mode share goals of increasing these forms of transportation to 40% of trips by 2035 and 85% of trips by 2050.

The CAAP includes many goals, strategies, and actions that are relevant to the Park Sales Tax. In the Transportation Sector, these include:

- Goal T-1: Reduce travel by car
 - Strategy T-1.1: Prioritize safety and convenience of walking, biking, and riding transit
 - T-1.1.3: Prioritize transportation funding to achieve mode share goals.
 - Strategy T-1.3: Create a bikeable community.
 - Strategy T-1.4: Create a walkable community.

Trails form the backbone of Columbia's walking and biking transportation network. As the City works towards the CAAP emission reduction goals, trails will be especially crucial for residents who are new to walking and biking for transportation, as trails provide the highest level of safety and comfort of any type of walking or biking infrastructure.

The Park Sales Tax is the primary way that the City of Columbia currently funds the construction of new trails. The current draft Park Sales Tax project list would build only 2.5 miles of new trails over the next 10 years. These projects are estimated to cost a total of \$2.54 million, less than 9% of the entire \$28.8 million Park Sales Tax funding over 10 years.

This level of investment in Columbia's trail system will be insufficient to achieve the transportation mode shift necessary to achieve Columbia's emission reduction goals. **The CEC urges the Parks & Recreation Department to reallocate the Park Sales Tax funding to place a higher priority on trails, fund additional, high-**

connectivity trails, accelerate trail building, and improve equitable access to parks.

The 2021 Park Sales Tax will fund park construction projects through 2031. In light of Columbia's 2035 goals of reducing emissions by 35% and increase walking, biking, and transit trips to 40%, the Park Sales Tax stands as a prime opportunity to fund the infrastructure necessary to achieve these goals.

In addition to support of trails, the CEC would like Parks and Recreation to improve equitable access to parks by using Park Sales Tax funds to support public transportation to the popular parks within neighborhoods that are most likely to need transportation assistance. The transportation should support equitable public access during the most likely time of usage such as weekends and after school. Consideration should be given to both arrival at the park and return home.

Building Energy Efficiency

Parks and Recreation not only manages thousands of acres of land but also the large recreation facilities such as the ARC and public swimming pools. Improving the energy efficiency of these facilities will help the City reach our emissions reductions goals, but only if these improvements are on an accelerated timeline. The CEC asks Parks and Recreation to prioritize and fund more energy efficiency projects with the Park Sales Tax.

The 2021 renewal of the Park Sales Tax represents one of the most significant opportunities to align with the Climate Action & Adaptation Plan goal of and contribute to reducing emissions 35% by 2035 by prioritizing investments in ecosystem management, trail development, and facilities energy efficiency. As Columbia moves closer to the looming climate crisis, the City of Columbia can no longer afford to maintain business as usual. We must shift funding to prioritize climate action.