

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board
One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 22, 2024

EOB members present:

Carolline Pontoppidan, Jim Kennedy, Betsy Neptune, Carla Stovell, Lisa Hy, Marilyn Forman, Khalid Mustafa

Staff present: Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting and Cynthia Lin, Chief of Staff

Director Castelo called to order the External Oversight Board meeting, did a roll call, and shared an overview of the agenda. He then asked if there were any comments or corrections on last week's meeting minutes. With no comments from the Board, Director Castelo called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo shared an update on the timeline for the rulebook process. He noted that the next two meetings will focus on the Rulebook draft, no meetings will be held on March 14 or 21 to allow for public comment, the public meeting is scheduled for March 28th, and the Rulebook adoption is scheduled for the April 11th meeting. Board member Lisa Hy suggested recording the public comment meeting for those who cannot attend.

Director Castelo continued with the next agenda item, process considerations, which addressed public comments from the last meeting. In regard to the comment noting the PB timeframe for Idea Collection and overall process was too short, the Director discussed that what Boston is proposing is generally consistent with what other municipalities are implementing. Based on our local context, OPB is proposing a process that complements the larger city-wide budget process.

The next comment noted the PB process being extended to the full year. The Director explained that he may have miscommunicated the timeline process in past meetings, which made it appear as though there was a gap in the PB process. He clarified that the PB process will be a full year process- although from idea collection to voting for seven (7) months, the other five (5) months will be focused on background work that is not public facing. This also coincides with the City's larger budget process. He noted that this is subject to change after the pilot year.

OPB's Chief of Staff, Cynthia Lin, led the review and discussion of the draft Rulebook. She provided an overview of the table of contents walking through each of the four (4) main sections, subsections, and pausing for Board questions and comments.

The first section focused on an overview and introduction of Participatory Budgeting which described the history and background of PB, the context of PB in Boston, including the Youth Lead the Change process, the formation of the Office of Participatory Budgeting and its mission

and goals, and the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, including that of the External Oversight Board. Board member Jim Kennedy noted that there should be more context and background information put into the rulebook about PB as a process and background on the Youth Lead the Change PB process. Board member Lisa Hy noted adding a hyperlink to the PB Ordinance in the criteria section would be helpful for context.

The next section focused on project eligibility, which is consistent with the criteria outlined by the PB Ordinance. She noted the example of projects that would or would not be eligible. The third section focused on the PB timeline, where she recapped the PB phases and month timelines associated with each phase.

The fourth section provided more detail into the various phases of the PB process. She began with discussing Rulebook Development and Planning for PB Implementation Idea Collection, Data Analysis, Idea Selection, Proposal Development, PB Voting, Awarding PB Projections and Implementation Monitoring, and Evaluating the PB Cycle One.

Board member Carla Stovell suggested the option of being flexible with the word count limit for idea collection and Board member Lisa Hy agreed. Board member Betsy Neptune noted that if this is translated into other languages, the word count is limited. Director Castelo agreed that the 50 word limit can be shown as a recommendation, but allow residents to expand on their idea to a reasonable limit.

Director Castelo reminded the Board to provide written comments by Monday close of day to provide additional thoughts or feedback. He also noted a short one-two page summary will be created to provide a more accessible document that can be translated into other languages.

Board member Lisa Hy asked for clarification regarding the PB phone line and how data would be collected. The Director and Board engaged in a discussion regarding the operational details of how recordings would be collected, contact information, and follow up. Director Castelo proposed coming back to the Board with more detail and clarification in the next meeting.

Board member Khalid Mustafa asked a clarifying question regarding the overlap and connection between the website and rulebook. The Director and Chief of Staff noted that the rulebook will be a standalone reference document that provides the framework for PB in Boston, while the website will be a more dynamic location for updated information regarding PB and next steps. Board member Carla suggested that the one-two page summary document should also have links to the website. Board member Betsy Neptune also suggested a shorter executive summary be included at the beginning of the Rulebook. She also noted extending the process evaluation to the “off season” internal process timeline activities such as project awarding and implementation.

Director Castelo opened up the meeting for public comments at 7:15 for 15 minutes. Two (2) attendees from the public provided comments. Director Castelo suggested that the Board and OPB take time to process the comments and provide sufficient feedback at the next meeting as part of the protocol.

A member of the public provided comments regarding process timeline comparisons and suggested researching the steps in other city processes. A representative of the Better Budget Alliance (BBA) asked for clarification on the private property eligibility criteria. It is not specifically noted in the ordinance and there are a number of projects that could take place on private property such as community gardens, community fridges, etc. She suggested adding infrastructure projects that would be eligible to the criteria list as examples of non-programmatic examples. The commenter suggested including a comment about equity and inclusion during idea collection to ensure residents know there's an equity frame to their submissions. In addition, demographics should be incorporated into the PB process to understand who is engaging. The commenter suggested there should be more external resident and stakeholder engagement in the proposal and RFP phases of the PB process.

Director Castelo adjourned the meeting at 7:23PM

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