

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board

One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Thursday, September 12, 2024

EOB members present:

Jim Kennedy, Carla Stovell, Lisa Hy, Betsy Neptune, Jarret Wright, Marilyn Forman, Esther Weathers

OPB Staff present: Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting

Board co-chair Jim Kennedy called to order the External Oversight Board meeting and conducted a roll call. He shared an overview of the agenda and asked if there were any comments or corrections on last week's meeting minutes. He then called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo provided an overview of a schedule for future Board meetings. He noted that EOB meetings in September will focus on discussing community priorities and finalizing details of the visioning forums in the fall. Meetings in October will likely occur bi-weekly, and focus on debriefing the forum sessions. He shared a recap on the PB's Idea Collection phase and highlighted the number of ideas collected through the multiple engagement channels.

Director Castelo invited Jeff Lambert from the Data Analytics team to provide an overview and update of the preliminary findings from the ideas collected. Mr. Lambert shared a draft version of 22 topics generated by the analysis, with the caveat that OPB and Analytics teams would be refining these through manual review. Director Castelo clarified that ideas are not being modified in the process, but this process focuses on organizing the data in a manner that is user friendly for discussion during the visioning forums. Mr. Lambert shared a few of the top submissions, such as enhancing pedestrian and bike safety and infrastructure, housing support initiatives, and environment initiatives. Director Castelo added that ideas will also be shared with City departments for them to consider in future departmental budget discussions. Later this fall, OPB will share a summary of findings with Departments and this will be available to residents.

Director Castelo shared that a refined version of Community Priorities will be shared in the September 19 Board meeting. Board member Esther Weathers needed clarification on the threshold on how the broader themes were being created and showing the integrity of each idea. Board member Betsy Neptune added to the same question and asked how the office plans on sharing this information in detail to the public to ensure trust in the process. Mr. Lambert explained they are in the preliminary stages of the analysis, and will work with OPB to present these thresholds and findings during the next Board meeting.

Board member Lisa Hy asked for clarification about overlaps of topics. Mr. Lambert acknowledged her remark and said that the team still needs to make sense of the data. Director Castelo addressed that the manual review aspect will assist in reviewing overlaps and

emphasized that this process is just organizing the ideas and not finalizing the process or proposals.

Director Castelo clarified the PB process for upcoming phases with the Board. The next phase is the Visioning Forums and Online engagement, where residents will engage with the office, City departments and the Board to discuss the ideas collected and help define what ballot proposals should look like. Later, during Proposal Development, Board members will meet in person and engage with City Departments to, as needed, refine and finalize all proposals. Afterwards, the 15 proposals will need to be certified by the City's Chief Financial Officer. Voting will take place in January, and the ballot proposals with the most votes will be awarded for this first Cycle. Co-Chair Kennedy had a question about the funding target and maximizing the funding. Director Castelo shared that New York City had a model that had predefined caps, and OPB will start considering how that will look like for the City of Boston's process.

Director Castelo shared that OPB is meeting with City Departments and Cabinet Chiefs to give them a head start on the ideas collected and prepare the groundwork for upcoming collaboration. OPB has also been working with the evaluation team to prepare initial findings from the Idea Collection Phase. Board member Betsy Neptune said that she appreciated the office partnering with Community Partners and for the next Cycle the office should allocate more funds to support this partnership. Board member Lisa Hy had a question about how the office compensated each Community Partner. Director Castelo shared that Community Partners were compensated for each meeting they hosted.

Director Castelo continued sharing an update on the Voting platform and the Office's collaboration with the City's Information and Technology Department to identify and vet vendors. He later shared a snapshot of the media campaign, commenting that "earned media" (radio and newspaper interviews) were very successful in driving residents to submit ideas. Co-Chair Kennedy questioned if the media work was under one contract, and Director Castelo confirmed that it was one organization.

Director Castelo shared the Visioning Forum concepts and mentioned that the office will be collaborating with the Contract Partners just to help with the meeting logistics for each forum. OPB will run the meetings and be in charge of providing interpretation services. After finalizing Visioning Forums, Director Castelo stated there will be an online public meeting where residents will be invited to learn about the 15 draft proposals and have the opportunity to submit comments right there and in writing during the following week.

Co-Chair Kennedy provided the Board with an overview of his discussion with the City's Finance team regarding project funding. Co-Chair Kennedy shared that the Finance team explained that the funding is set for this fiscal year for PB. Co-Chair Kennedy shared that he will be putting his focus on funding for Cycle 2, and asked for Board members to be more involved in future funding discussions. A majority of the Board express agreement with the Co-Chair comments.

Co-Chair Kennedy opened up for public comment. A member of the public requested to have the number of ideas reported per capita rather than by neighborhood, as that would show a better representation of participation. Director Castelo stated that this could be something to consider for a future cycle. A member of the public asked how many participants attended each of the community workshops. They asked about the number of ineligible ideas and if there was a way to gauge how many stem from the workshops, to evaluate if instructions were clear and how to integrate better facilitation in the future. They asked what other cities currently do in their analysis with overlapping community priority ideas, and where the language for one of the topics regarding racial and social equity stemmed from. They echoed the need for using more funds for PB.

Another member of the public shared their thoughts on PB project funding and wanted more clarification on what was budgeted in each year. A member of the BBA stated their support for increased funding for PB projects. They asked for clarity on the application of equity framework to determine project ideas. They also asked if presentation materials could be available online for viewing. Director Castelo clarified that in the September 19 Board meeting the Office will present a final draft of Community Priorities.

Co-Chair Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 8PM.

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