

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board

Wednesday, December 18th, 2024

EOB members present:

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

OPB Staff present: Ashley Groffenberger, Chief Financial Officer, Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting, Cynthia Lin, Chief of Staff

Board co-chair Jim Kennedy called to order the External Oversight Board meeting and conducted a roll call. Co-Chair Kennedy then called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes. Director Castelo provided an overview of the agenda.

Director Castelo provided a brief overview of the Participatory Budgeting process and a summary of the upcoming Boarding meetings and an overview of the Idea Submission dashboard. Board member Betsy Neptune had a question about the Budget proposal planning and deadline for the FY26 budget. Director Castelo shared that the deadline for the FY26 budget is January 13th and that the team will share more information in the January 9th meeting.

Director Castelo presented the Idea Submission dashboard that was developed with the City's Analytics team. This dashboard displays the nine community priorities and will be used as a resource for people to explore the different ideas and topics discussed in neighborhoods. The goal is to have a dashboard for each PB Cycle to capture resident ideas and priorities year by year.

Director Castelo provided context on the public feedback received online for the ballot proposals. All comments are available to review on the PB website. Board member Neptune mentioned that she received a high number of emails from the public regarding PB and asked how Board members can help ensure people are commenting and putting this information in the spaces where people are engaging more. Director Castelo responded that the office made accommodations for the public to provide comments and that we were hoping to have more comments. The team will keep thinking about ways to enhance outreach and PB awareness as the office continues with the PB process.

Director Castelo and Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin proceeded to review each of the 15 proposals, listing out the original proposals, public comment considerations, the proposal costs, and departmental considerations. Board member Wright asked if the first ballot proposal regarding youth programming was proposed to be year round or only during the summer, and Director Castelo responded that the office will work with the appropriate department, if the proposal is selected, to determine the timing of the grants. Board member Hy suggested adding "low income" back into the proposal since it was a part of the original language. Board member Weathers had a question about what kind of programming lowers gun violence and if youth engaging in these activities would solve the problem.

Director Castelo shared that once proposals are voted on by residents, the team will provide guidelines of what is needed to apply for the grants, but for now it's too much information to share on the ballot. Board member Neptune had a question about benchmarks that departments used to scale these proposals. Director Castelo shared that departments considered capacity and feasibility for each proposal to ensure a successful implementation.

Board member Stovell asked clarifying questions about proposal costs, and Director Castelo clarified that residents would be able to vote once for their top five proposals. The proposals voted the most will be implemented up to \$2 million dollars for projects.

Regarding proposal ballot 7, Board member Neptune asked Chief of Staff, Cynthia Lin to explain why the language "people of color" was removed from the final ballot. Ms. Lin shared that the language needed to be inclusive of all populations, as advised by the City's Legal department. Board member Stovell provided a comment about two spaces that could grant out spaces to low-income entrepreneurs. Director Castelo shared feedback received from City departments that only non-profits are able to apply for City grants.

Board member Neptune provided more context regarding Proposal 8, as she helped to facilitate the group during the visioning forum. She shared that the proposal was a combination of creating access to space that is not just customer facing, but co-working space that is accessible and affordable for residents who do not have computers or desk space available. She agreed that the proposal presented would help to merge these ideas by offering grants for co-working spaces, pop-up spaces, and incubator kitchens.

While presenting the proposal for youth jobs, Board member Neptune asked to explain why the \$18 an hour was the amount that was selected and not a higher rate. Director Castelo shared that the Director of Youth Employment office explained that youth in the age range of 14-18 years old current pay rate is \$15 an hour, and with this proposal it will be increased to \$18 an hour. For 19-24 year olds the rate will remain at \$20 an hour. He shared that one of the challenges is that in some of the non-profit organizations that youth are being placed, staff that have been with the organization for many years do not get paid this high pay rate. The department that oversees youth employment is very excited about this pilot program because of the opportunity to research the impact for youth jobs during the school year.

Co-Chair Kennedy shared that he was happy to hear that the departments offered their advice, recommendations, and that the departments are excited to help implement the proposals. Director Castelo pointed out that the proposals will be published on the office's website on December 19th.

Ms. Lin communicated voting logistics for the online voting platform and in-person voting. Director Castelo shared that libraries are excited to assist with online voting if residents need assistance, but that they do not have the capacity to help out with in-person paper voting this Cycle.

Mr. Castelo talked through the outreach and marketing for the PB voting phase. He continued to present the evaluation surveys that will be available to residents once they vote online or in person. These surveys are similar to the ones filled out during the Idea Collection phases.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy opened the meeting for public comments. A member of the public had a question about the language being changed for the age range for the housing proposal, and wanted to know why. He also asked about the wages for 20 to 24 year olds to reflect what was in the original proposal. Director Castelo let the members of the public know that the office would need to consult with the departments because they are the subject matter experts and will follow up with a response for the next Board meeting.

Co Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:57 PM

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