

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

**Meeting Minutes**  
Thursday, February 08, 2024

**EOB members present:** Carolline Pontoppidan, Jim Kennedy, Esther Weathers, Betsy Neptune, Khalid Mustafa, Marilyn Forman, Jarret Wright, and Carla Stovell.

**Absent:** Lisa Hy

**Staff present:** Ashley Groffenberger, Chief Financial Officer, Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting, Cynthia Lin, Chief of Staff, and Blanca Teixeira, Finance Manager & Grants Manager/Contracts Manager.

Director Castelo opened the meeting by introducing himself, Ashley Groffenberger, Cynthia Lin and Blanca Texeira.

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 the minutes were approved. Cynthia Lin introduced herself and talked about her professional background.

Director Castelo reminded the Board that in past meetings, we have not been taking public comments to ensure there is enough time for the Board to discuss the topics. Director Castelo added that at any point members of the public can email questions or concerns at [pb@boston.gov](mailto:pb@boston.gov). A few Board members expressed that public comment would help the process, and requested to build in 15 minutes into future meetings to allow public comments. Ashley Groffenberger suggested that in the next meeting OPB will propose a meeting schedule that is responsive to this suggestion.

Director Castelo shared an update about expanding the channels of how the public can engage with the participatory budgeting process. Director Castelo proposed to include a phone line for the public to leave a voicemail to submit ideas. This PB Phone Line will be multilingual, and have instructions on how to submit ideas over the phone. If the public calls 311, the 311 team will be able to transfer callers to the PB Phone Line. The second expansion is to explore a partnership with the Boston Public Library (BPL) to have a PB ballot box at every branch location for residents to submit ideas. With this, Boston residents will have four avenues for residents to engage with the PB process: an online PB portal, at in-person events led by contracted community partners, PB Phone Line, and at BPL branches.

Director Castelo did a quick review of the timeline for the Rulebook, mentioning that on February 29th Board members will be able to adopt the first draft of the Rulebook and publish it for public comment. The Office estimates that in early to mid March a public meeting will be hosted for residents to provide feedback on the draft. The Office of Participatory Budgeting will make sure that there is good outreach, providing residents with details about the meeting.

Director Castelo restated OPB's approach for the Idea Selection Phase, sharing that there will be 3 to 5 Idea Selection Forums across the City. These forums will be "Open House" style, where residents will be given instructions at arrival and then be able to visit each of the category stations to explore and prioritize issue areas that they'd like to see on the PB ballot.

The Office of Participatory Budgeting wants to keep this process manageable by having 10-20 issue areas per category, so attendees can prioritize their top issues easily when visiting each station. In addition to in-person prioritization, there will be an online option for the public to prioritize issue areas.

Board member Jarett Wright mentioned using IP addresses to ensure residents are not flooding the system when prioritizing issue areas. To avoid that scenario, Director Castelo shared a suggestion that residents who want to prioritize issue areas online would need to sign in or use their email to do so.

Board member Carla Stovell expressed concern about not spending PB funding on proposals already being funded by the City's general budget, such as "fair share funds" or "preservation act funds". Director Castelo shared that we need to think about how the Office will engage with other city departments to ensure work is not being duplicated. Director Castelo shared that this is something that we can discuss as a group during the planning phase, and added that if there is a relevant proposal that is being funded by another department, OPB could contribute to expand that work with our funding.

Director Castelo shared that during the Proposal Development Phase, the Office and the Board will review each resident-selected issue area, and transform them into more specific proposals for the ballot (3-5 sentences). OPB and the Board will also assess the feasibility proposals and assign an estimated dollar amount.

Board members decided to have 15 proposals on the ballot, with residents being able to vote for up to 5. Also, the public will have a month to submit votes, and the age requirement for voting will be 11 years old or 6th grade. In the event there is a tie, City staff and the Oversight Board will resolve the tie.

For the next session, the Board will discuss OPB's proposed approach for awarding projects and discuss the timeline for the entire process.

A motion was passed to adjourn the meeting at 7:30pm.

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