

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

**Meeting Minutes**  
Thursday, February 15, 2024

**EOB members present:**

Carolline Pontoppidan, Jim Kennedy, Esther Weathers, Betsy Neptune, Carla Stovell, Khalid Mustafa, Lisa Hy, Jarret Wright.

**Staff present:** Ashley Groffenberger, Chief Financial Officer, 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 the Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo proceeded to share a proposal for public comment. During the EOB meetings, 15 minutes will be allocated for public comment after agenda items are covered. Relevant issues and topics brought up from the public will be addressed at the following meeting. If relevant clarifying questions come up during public comment, the co-chairs, Director, or Chief of Staff will provide brief clarification. Concerns about the ability to utilize Zoom's raise their hand feature were brought up. Director Castelo will look into making the messaging chat feature available for the public to indicate their interest to provide comment.

Director Castelo provided a quick update for the rulebook timeline, which will be extended slightly to accommodate a week of public comment and allow for the Board to discuss feedback from the public comment meeting. It's estimated that the rulebook may be finalized by the end of March. OPB and the Board will move into the planning phase and revisit the frequency of Board meetings.

Director Castelo shared an overview of the Proposal Development Phase. OPB and Board will review selected themes and transform them into short proposals for the ballot. During this time, OPB will connect with city departments to assess the feasibility of proposals and assign an estimated dollar amount. OPB will design a user friendly and accessible ballot for in person and online voting.

Director Castelo discussed the parameters for voting. Survey results from the Board indicate that in order to vote, residents will be required the following: name, last name, email, neighborhood, zip code, short affidavit for meeting Boston residency. Eligible voters will be Boston residents who are at least 11 years old or in the 6th grade. OPB is exploring various options for both in-person and online voting. Proposals with the most votes will be awarded up to the funding cap for the funding cycle.

Board member Jarrett Wright commented that a process needs to be set up to ensure projects reach the funding cap without going over. Similarly, Board member Betsy emphasized the need to provide clearer directive on how to proceed if projects go over the funding cap. Director Castelo noted that any remainder of funding may be put back into the account for the next cycle. OPB will clarify these points and incorporate it in the Rulebook.

Board member Carla Stovell, asked how the money would be distributed? Director Castelo clarified it would be through grants and contracts with community organizations or through city departments.

Board member Lisa Hy asked if residents have the ability to assign their estimated amount to their project ideas. Director Castelo noted that residents may not know the costs associated with projects, especially for infrastructure. Members of the board noted that they want people to be creative and numbers may hinder their ability to propose projects. Director Castelo discussed the ability to consider this further as OPB goes through the planning stage.

Director Castelo provided an overview of awarding PB projects discussing the ability to implement proposals through contracts and grants to community organizations or partnering with City departments. OPB and City Departments will review proposals from community organizations that can implement project proposals that address resident priorities.

Director Castelo walked through the entire PB process and timeline with accompanying phases, dates, and details from Rulebook Development, Planning for PB Implementation, Idea Collection, Data Analysis, Idea Selection, Proposal Development, Voting, and Funding Projects.

Board member Carla Stovell asked if the community organizations have been identified. Director Castelo clarified that community groups have not been identified yet. As soon as the rulebook is finalized OPB will work on identifying partners in the planning phase.

Board member Betsy Neptune commented that it was helpful to see the entire process timeline in the presentation. Board member Esther Weathers seconded Betsy's point, and asked the Director to clarify PB voting timelines and the alignment with the larger City budget process. Director Castelo stated that next week's meeting would focus on the cycle timeline.

Director Castelo opened up the meeting for public comments at 6:50pm for 15 minutes through 7:05pm. Co-chairs Jim and Carolline assisted in facilitating the public comment section. One attendee 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 representing the Better Budget Alliance provided comments regarding the idea collection phase, emphasizing the priority for creating a community driven needs assessment at the onset of PB. The commenter provided concerns about OPB and the Board having too much influence over the idea creation formulation on the ballot. In addition, public forums should be more like assemblies instead of open houses so residents can deliberate and

debate together as opposed to being divided at an open house event. Also, racial and social justice and embedding equity should be designed at each stage of the process.

Board member Betsy expressed interest in hearing more about the public commenter's recommendations regarding concerns that were raised in the comments. The public commenter mentioned that PB should be targeted in specific parts of Boston that have been disenfranchised. PB process needs to be designed with equity in mind and can be embedded by creating equity criteria. The commenter elaborated on the desire for Budget Delegates to be present in the process and represent neighborhoods.

Board member Caroline Pontoppidan asked a clarifying question about whether or not commenter's concerns about equity would be addressed by PB's creation of equity criteria for idea selection. The intent of the idea proposal process is to bring the ideas back to the community. Overall themes will be given to community organizations to propose projects that are more specific to the community, which allows room for community empowerment. Director Castelo elaborated that the reason for this approach was to avoid neighborhood rivalries for limited PB resources, and that OPB's approach would create a pot of funding for grants that allows for a broader distribution of funding throughout the city.

Board member Betsy Neptune asked how the equity criteria would be included in the PB project selection. Director Castelo shared that the ordinance outlines values of social and racial equity and therefore the PB process is tailored with this in mind. When residents submit an idea, there will be a project eligibility criteria that states OPB's prioritization of project ideas that advance racial and social justice. OPB will review this issue further and check with relevant City Departments to determine guidelines that can be used for evaluating and assessing project proposals.

For the next session, Director Castelo proposed to continue the conversation surrounding the public comment. The next meeting will focus on discussing the PB process timeline.

Director Castelo adjourned the meeting at 7:10pm.

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