

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

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 02, 2024

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

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

Director Castelo opened the meeting by introducing himself, Ashley Groffenberger, and Blanca Teixeira.

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.

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.

Director Castelo went over the timeline for the creation of the Rulebook, mentioning that there will be a period of public comment for residents to provide feedback on the draft. The office will announce the date for public comment at least two weeks in advance, conducting outreach to ensure that residents are aware of the Rulebook proposal and can provide comments.

Director Castelo shared OPB's approach to prioritizing the ideas submitted by residents. First, OPB will analyze the hundreds of project ideas that will be received during the Idea Collection Phase, identifying issue areas that emerged from residents across the City. These issue areas will be under the predefined categories chosen by the Board for Idea Collection (*Arts & Culture, Community Resources, Transportation, Public Safety, etc.*) Director Castelo then mentioned that OPB will host 3-5 City-wide Idea Selection Forums for residents to prioritize these issue areas. During forums, the goal is to identify the top 15-20 issue areas that can go into the ballot for voting. He added that all the ideas submitted by residents will always be visible online via the PB Portal.

Idea Selection Forums will be "Open House" style, where residents will be given instructions at arrival and then roam freely to visit each of the 10 category stations to explore and prioritize issue areas. When participants arrive at a table, a City staff or volunteer can help answer questions and instruct them on how to select their top issue areas.

Board member Jarett Wright asked if “issue areas” are a lump of similar ideas from the public. Director Castelo confirmed, and added that the data will be analyzed to identify trends across the City based on the ideas collected from residents.

Board member Betsy Neptune asked if there will be 15-20 issue areas under each category. Director Castelo confirmed, adding that after these issue areas are classified, OPB will bring them back to residents in the form of Idea Selection Forums so the public can prioritize which issues they care most about.

Board member Jim Kennedy suggested creating a space where all the ideas that did not meet the eligibility criteria can be displayed. Director Castelo was open to listing the ideas on the PB website. Board member Betsy Neptune and Board member Jarett Wright agreed.

Board member Esther Weathers was curious if the PB process can offer a virtual platform for residents to prioritize the issue areas, making it open to those who cannot attend the Idea Selection Forums in person. Director Castelo shared that during this pilot year, we can test the in person meetings and in future cycles, create a virtual platform where residents can prioritize issue areas online. Board members mentioned that they needed some time to consider the pros and cons of offering an online option for Idea Selection. Director Castelo suggested continuing with this conversation in the next session. Director Castelo was reminded to connect with 311 about opening a phone line for residents to submit ideas to PB. He mentioned concerns about 311’s capacity to take on Idea Collection, but that the Office will come up with a proposal for a PB phone line to which 311 can direct callers to.

A member of the public shared some comments about how to analyze the “issue areas” and approaches. Also, to use this first cycle to learn a few things at a time, in order to capture all areas for improvement for the second cycle.

For the next session, the Board agreed to continue the conversation about the proposal for in-person only Idea Selection Forums and considerations for adding an online component. Also, Director Castelo will discuss the Proposal Development Phase and OPB’s approach for PB voting.

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

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