



Cambridge Human Services Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2016
5:30 – 7:30pm
Citywide Senior Center
806 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Commissioners present: Christine Elow, Christopher R. Hall, Anna Leslie, Linda Naval, Sumbul Siddiqui, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill

Regrets: Lori Likis, Khari Milner, Nan Stone

DHSP staff: Janice Alger, Mike Payack (recorder), Ellen Semonoff

Presenter: Michelle Monsegur, Principal Budget Analyst, City of Cambridge

Guests: Fatimah Dirir, Volunteer Budget Delegate; Gabrielle Lake, Volunteer Budget Delegate; Paige Manning, Volunteer Budget Delegate; Jeneen Mucci, Director of Program, Quality and Training – DHSP Youth Center Programs; Jessica Rivera, Teen Program Director at the Russell Youth Center, DHSP; Rahina Shajahan, Volunteer Budget Delegate

After welcoming members and guests and a round of introductions, Ellen Semonoff introduced Michelle Monsegur, Principal Budget Analyst with the City of Cambridge's Budget Department.

Michelle defined Participatory Budgeting (PB) as a democratic process in which residents directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. Michelle showed a short [video](#) by the Participatory Budgeting Project, which included a brief history of PB. PB started in Brazil 30 years ago and has since spread all over the world. The City hired the Participatory Budgeting Project to consult with the City on implementing PB during the first two City PB cycles (PB1 and PB2, respectively). The City will organize its third PB cycle (PB3) without the support of consultants.

Michelle outlined the six stages to Participatory Budgeting:

1. Planning
2. Idea collection
3. Proposal Development
4. Voting
5. Evaluation
6. Implementation

During the planning stage, a steering committee, comprised of 24 volunteer residents, developed a timeline and outreach strategy. During the idea collection stage, Cambridge residents are able to submit ideas online or in-person at various community meetings. During PB1, the City collected 380 ideas. During PB2, the number of ideas submitted by residents grew to 540 ideas.

The proposal development stage is where the bulk of the work takes place. Groups of volunteer Budget Delegates meet weekly over 3 months. During this time, Budget Delegates research the ideas, perform eligibility checks, meet with City staff, and develop concrete proposals (with budgets) to be included on the ballot.

Eligibility Criteria to be Considered by Budget Delegates—proposals must be:

- capital expenditures, usually involving infrastructure improvements (operating expenses are not eligible);
- one-time expenditures that cost \$600,000 or less;
- beneficial to the public;
- implemented by the City of Cambridge on City property.

During PB2, 35 Budget Delegates worked for 3 months to develop 23 concrete proposals from the 540 submitted ideas. After these proposals are developed by Budget Delegates, City staff conducts a final eligibility and feasibility review of the proposals.

During the voting stage, the City holds in-person voting events (30 events were held during PB2) as well as online voting (utilizing text message authentication). All Cambridge residents ages twelve and older are eligible to vote; immigration status is irrelevant. Ballots are available in seven languages. During PB1, 2,727 residents voted. During PB2, that number rose to 4,184.

During the evaluation phase after PB1, City staff decided to adjust project timelines and provide more support to Budget Delegates. One area of focus during the next evaluation phase will be strategizing on how to fill gaps in PB outreach.

During the implementation phase, City staff work on planning & design, procurement of supplies and equipment, installation, and testing. Lastly, implemented winning projects are branded with Cambridge PB stickers or plaques. The status of winning projects can be tracked online at pb.cambridgema.gov/pbcycles.

Michelle asked several Budget Delegates in attendance to share their experiences. Fatimah Dirir, Gabrielle Lake, Paige Manning, Rahina Shajahan, and Linda Naval (also a Human Services Commissioner) shared some of their thoughts on the PB process. Jeneen Mucci and Jessica Rivera, both of whom worked with the Youth Budget Delegates in attendance (Fatimah, Gabrielle, and Rahina), also shared their insights on the process.

PB1 ran from October 2014 through April 2015 and awarded \$528,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 capital funds to six winning projects. PB2 ran from June through December 2015 and awarded \$600,000 in FY2017 capital funds to seven winning projects. PB3 will run from May through December 2016, with \$700,000 in FY2018 capital funds available for winning projects.

Ellen Semonoff thanked the Budget Delegates as well as Budget Department staff for the tremendous amount of work, time, and effort they put into Participatory Budgeting.

Mike Payack announced that the next Human Services Commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 10, 2016.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Payack
Planner/Contracts Manager
DHSP/Planning & Development