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**Date: December 20, 2013**

**To: Budget Committee**

**From: Councillor James Pasternak**

**Re: Exploring Participatory Budgeting in Toronto**

**SUMMARY:**

Recently numerous other municipalities, including New York City, have introduced a participatory budgeting initiative where communities are provided the opportunity to decide which capital projects they would like to see taxpayer money directed toward. Participatory budgeting not only makes the budgeting process more accessible and clear, it can also ensure vital funds are directed where the community feels they are most needed.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Request that the City Manager report back on the feasibility of implementing participatory budgeting as part of the 2015 Toronto Budget process.

Sincerely,

James Pasternak  
Councillor, Ward 10



# Participatory Budgeting in New York City

REAL MONEY. REAL PROJECTS. REAL POWER.

RE: BU 57.1.37

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## YOU DECIDE HOW TO SPEND TAXPAYER DOLLARS

New York City is experiencing a new kind of democracy. Through Participatory Budgeting, residents of eight Council Districts have directly decided how to spend \$15 million of public money. From September 2013 to April 2014, community members will be exchanging ideas, working together to turn ideas into project proposals, and voting to decide what proposals got funded.

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## About the New York City Process

In 2011, four New York City Council Members - Brad Lander, Melissa Mark-Viverito, Eric Ulrich, and Jumaane D. Williams - launched a PB process to let residents allocate part of their capital discretionary funds. Since then, five more Council Members have joined the process, giving the community real decision-making power over at least \$12 million in taxpayer money across nine districts.

Between September 2013 and April 2014, residents of participating districts will directly decide how to spend at least \$1 million of their Council Member's funds - for a total of approximately \$12 million.

Participatory budgeting is grassroots democracy at its best. It helps make budget decisions clear and accessible. It gives real power to people who have never before been involved in the political process. And it results in better budget decisions - because who better knows the needs of our community than the people who live there?

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## What are capital discretionary funds?

Discretionary funds are money that the City Council Member can allocate as he or she sees fit. There are two types of discretionary funds. Expense funds are used to pay for salaries and services. Capital funds are used to pay for physical infrastructure - for "bricks and mortar" projects.

For the time being, PBNYC only deals with CAPITAL money. That means community members can propose projects like improvements to schools, parks, libraries, public housing, and other public or community spaces.

For more information about the City Budget and what types of projects are eligible for PB during the pilot year, see the PBNYC City Budget 101 Guide (PDF).

## Why Participatory Budgeting In New York?

There are lots of benefits to conducting participatory budgeting, but in New York we especially hope it will help us move towards three core goals in our community:

### 1. Inclusion

We aim to include everyone in the community - especially those who are often excluded from the political process, who face obstacles to participating, or who feel disillusioned with politics. By making every effort to actively engage these communities and reduce obstacles to participation, we hope to prevent the 'usual suspects' or groups with more resources from dominating, and to generate spending decisions that are fairer and better reflect the entire community's needs.

### 2. Equality

We aim for every person to have equal power over public spending - one person, one vote. Giving each community member the same power to propose and vote on spending ideas makes governance more democratic.

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### 3. Empowerment

We aim to empower and strengthen our communities and the individuals within them through education and skill building, and by giving people real decision-making power. By building community power to make budget decisions *and* to shape the budget process, we hope to develop new leaders and inspire people to work together to improve the community.

We also hope that PB will have other benefits for the community: inspiring greater civic participation, building community, educating and empowering residents, increasing transparency in government, and leading to better budget decisions - spending that is more responsible and efficient, and that results in more sustainable and livable neighborhoods.

#### Timeline: What happens when?

The PB process involves a series of meetings that feed into the city's annual budget cycle. For 2013-2014 the process starts in September 2013 and continues into 2014.

##### Neighborhood Assemblies: September - October 2013

At public meetings in each district, community members learn about PB and discuss their community's needs. They then brainstorm project ideas and select budget delegates.

##### Delegate Orientations: November 2013

Delegates selected at the assemblies learn about the budget process, project development, and key spending areas, then form committees.

##### Delegate Meetings: November 2013 - February 2014

Delegates meet in committees to transform the community's initial project ideas into full proposals, with support from Council Member staff and other experts.

##### Project Expos: February-March 2014

Delegates present draft project proposals to the community and get feedback, with which they revise the projects.

##### Community Vote: March-April 2014

Delegates present the final project proposals and residents vote on which projects to fund.

##### Implementation & Monitoring: April 2014 onwards

The Council Members submit their spending priorities to the City Council, including the winning PB projects. Community members evaluate the process, and oversee the implementation of projects.

Research and Evaluation happens throughout these stages, to improve the process for next year!

#### Partners

Hundreds of organizations and individuals across the city are working together to make PBNYC a success.

At the city level, the participating Council Members are working with The Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) as the technical assistance lead and Community Voices Heard (CVH) as the community engagement lead. A City-wide Steering Committee - consisting of forty organizations and institutions committed to improving city spaces and governance - is also helping to coordinate the initiative.

In each district, local organizations and community leaders have formed PB District Committees to drive the process forward.

The following partners make up the City-Wide Steering Committee for PBNYC 2013-14:

##### Council Members:

Council Member Sara M. González / Council Member Carlos Menchaca

Council Member David Greenfield

Council Member Brad Lander

Council Member Stephen Levin

Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito

Council Member Donovan Richards

Council Member Eric Ulrich

Council Member Mark Weprin