

## Toronto's Participatory Budgeting Pilot Evaluation

**Date:** January 31, 2019

**To:** Budget Committee

**From:** City Manager

**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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This report summarizes the findings from Toronto's 2015 to 2017 participatory budgeting (PB) pilot. The City of Toronto piloted PB in the former Ward 33 and the Neighbourhood Improvement Areas of Oakridge in the former Ward 35, and Rustic in the former Ward 12. The findings from the pilot suggest that PB may be an appropriate method of public participation under certain conditions, but has limitations and should be understood within the City's broader objectives and civic engagement strategy.

Many people use the term "participatory budgeting" to describe a wide range of civic engagement methods related to budgets, such as consultations, online budget guides and calculators, or public deputations or hearings.

However, PB is distinct from other budget consultations and specifically refers to a method that invites the public to propose ideas, vote and have the final say on how a portion of a government's budget will be allocated.

The Pilot evaluation, along with research on PB in other jurisdictions, found that:

- Residents seek and value clear information and ongoing opportunities to be more involved in decisions which affect their neighbourhoods, including local improvements and infrastructure planning;
- The public would like more opportunities to speak directly with City staff on a wide range of issues that are important to them, and appreciate engagement processes which include ways for them meet their neighbours, local groups and their Councillor; and
- PB supports specific types of decisions and can benefit communities, but has limited reach, is resource-intensive and can result in frustration, divisions within communities and a mismatch of investments against broader community needs.

Staff will share the feedback, templates, materials, and evaluation reports developed during the Pilot with City Councillors, City Divisions and community partners who may choose to host a PB process or use PB in their work.

The City Manager's Office will continue to review the City's civic engagement strategies to support decision making using a mix of appropriate engagement methodologies to involve and engage more residents on more issues than might be possible through PB alone, including in capital infrastructure or local improvement decisions.

This report includes information on potential operating and capital costs, should City Council wish to consider implementing PB more broadly in the future.

The full PB Pilot evaluation report is available at <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/get-involved/participatory-budgeting/> and data from participant surveys and community improvement ideas suggested by residents can be found in the City's Open Data Catalogue <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/open-data/open-data-catalogue/>.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The City Manager recommends that:

1. City Council request the City Manager to post online a toolkit of participatory budgeting (PB) resources and information developed during the Pilot to support City divisions and Members of Council in their use of PB for their ward and divisional decision-making.
2. City Council request the City Manager to include participatory budgeting information in the City's civic engagement training courses to enhance public participation in municipal decision-making, including input on capital infrastructure investments.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial implications resulting from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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City Council, at its meeting of February 12, 2018, adopted the 2018 Capital and Operating Budgets (EX31.2), and confirmed capital funding sources of \$705,000 for 14 community projects selected by residents in the 2017 Participatory Budgeting Pilot. Council also requested the Chief Financial Officer consider extending the Pilot for another three years in new wards, during the 2019 budget process.  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.EX31.2>

At its meeting of February 15, 2017, City Council adopted the 2017 Capital and Operating Budgets (EX22.2), which identified funding sources of \$730,000 for 16

community projects selected by residents in 2016 Participatory Budgeting voting (EX22.2r) <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX22.2>

On February 17, 2016, City Council adopted the 2016 Capital and Operating Budgets (EX12.2), which included consideration of the City Manager's report on the 2015 Participatory Budgeting Pilot, during which residents voted for seven community improvement projects at a total cost of \$435,000. City Council also authorized the City Manager to extend the Participatory Budgeting Pilot for two additional years, provide each pilot area up to \$250,000 each year and add a temporary staff position in the City Manager's Office to implement the Pilot at an annual cost of \$138,000, for a total annual cost of up to \$888,000.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EX12.2>

At its March 10, 2015 meeting, City Council adopted the 2015 Capital and Operating Budgets (EX3.4) and Council authorized the City Manager to undertake a Participatory Budgeting Pilot in Ward 33 and the neighbourhoods of Rustic (in Ward 12) and Oakridge (in Ward 35), with each receiving up to \$150,000 in capital funding. Council also directed that, should further PB pilots be approved, that consideration be given to including areas of the city that have an Emerging Neighbourhoods designation.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX3.4>

City Council on January 29 and 30, 2014 adopted the 2014 Capital and Operating Budgets (EX37.1), which directed the City Manager to report to the Budget Committee on a potential pilot project for implementing a community participatory budgeting program as part of the 2015 Toronto Budget process, and such a pilot would allocate a specific amount of the 2015 budget process to participating wards.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.EX37.1>

City Council at its meeting of July 12, 13 and 14, 2011 received a report from the City Manager describing a Corporate Civic Engagement Strategy that supports divisional activities, undertakes research, and develops participatory models of engagement and corporate best practices on city-wide issues.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2011.CC10.2>

## **COMMENTS**

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The City currently engages people in a variety of ways to build relationships that make government more accountable, support service delivery, build equity and invite participation in decision-making. Engagement methods are selected to meet each program's objectives, can be formal or informal, and include time-limited consultation meetings, online surveys and focus groups, as well as longer-term interactions through advisory groups, mentorship programs and public appointments.

The City's commitment to civic engagement is reflected in its Civic Engagement Strategy, adopted by Council in 2011, and in city-wide plans such as the City's TOcore, TransformTO, Long-Term Financial Plan and Public Benefits Framework.

Toronto's civic engagement practices continue to grow through its experience with a range of methods, lessons from other jurisdictions and in response to public requests. City engagements consistently indicate that people appreciate opportunities to meet City staff and their neighbours, value early and regular access to information, and would like to know more about how decisions are made and when there are opportunities to contribute to decision-making.

## **Executive Summary of Findings from PB Pilot**

PB is a process in which governments invite local residents to propose ideas on community improvements or funding priorities and vote on how a portion of a government's budget will be allocated to fund those ideas. Winning projects are then built by the City or funding government. There is a range of PB approaches used around the world. Differences in local models include the source and amount of funds, whether the program is implemented locally or city-wide, role of elected officials, and the types of eligible projects.

Typically, when City staff develop an engagement plan they first consider the program's objectives (informing, consulting, partnering, assessing etc.) and then select a methodology to achieve those goals. In the case of the PB pilot, staff were provided with a methodology - participatory budgeting - and asked to evaluate it against objectives which emerged from research on other jurisdictions, participants and partners.

Evaluation in most PB jurisdictions has focused on quantitative measures of participation (number of projects, ideas, voters and budgets spent). In Toronto, over three years, across all pilot areas:

- There were approximately 2,500 interactions with residents who suggested almost 700 ideas for local improvements, and voted for 37 capital projects worth a total of \$1.87M;
- All projects selected in 2015 and many from 2016 have been built, and planning is underway for the remaining projects; and
- Overall, approximately 0.8 percent of residents eligible to vote in the pilot cast a vote, which is consistent with participation rates in many PB jurisdictions.

Increasingly, cities are also undertaking qualitative research to assess the broader impact of PB and better understand the underlying conditions which support effective implementation and PB's ability to achieve objectives such as:

- community improvements;
- greater transparency in government;
- increased civic engagement of residents, particularly under-represented community members;
- strengthened and empowered communities; and
- impact on local budget decisions.

Evaluated against these common objectives, Toronto staff found that PB can be an appropriate engagement tool when it aligns closely with an existing program or budget process, or Council's directions. It appears particularly well-suited to supporting decision-making on some types of capital projects or informing certain types of

infrastructure planning. Table 1 summarizes the strength and weaknesses of PB as a method of engagement.

Table 1: Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses of Participatory Budgeting as a Method of Civic Engagement

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates opportunities for residents to meet City staff to ask questions and learn about local improvement plans, the costs of capital projects, the City's decision-making processes, City programs and services, and how to request non-PB resources such as off-leash parks and community gardens.</li> <li>• Invites City staff to meet residents to receive ideas for local infrastructure and input on programs and services.</li> <li>• May be appropriate for Section 37 funding that is ready to be distributed within a reasonable time.</li> <li>• Introduces neighbours to each other and can build connections and alliances to promote individual projects and encourage the community to support local investments.</li> <li>• Builds interest of some residents to be involved in future City decision-making opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Idea sharing and voting is competitive, which reinforces some existing demographic divisions in neighbourhoods and feelings of inequity, with investments being seen to benefit only part of a neighbourhood over other areas.</li> <li>• In small geographic areas, PB processes over several years may lead to "over" investment in some public spaces. In areas that are too large, a resident may be too distant to feel a connection to the process.</li> <li>• Very low participation rates, high operating cost per participant, and requires dedicated investment from elected members' offices.</li> <li>• Very few residents make decisions for whole neighbourhoods or wards.</li> <li>• May duplicate or conflict with other public engagement processes and plans for large capital investments (e.g. parks design).</li> <li>• Short PB timelines and specific funding eligibility can miss opportunities to align with other community investment plans or opportunities (e.g. Strong Neighbourhoods funding programs).</li> </ul>

Any investment in civic engagement, including PB or PB-type processes under the right conditions, creates opportunities for public participation. However, research suggests that PB complements rather than replaces other engagement methods that might go further to involve and empower more residents on more issues than PB alone. PB may not significantly increase public involvement when measured against other engagement activities and processes that attract higher rates of participation, or achieve engagement objectives more effectively. For example, recent design proposals for the Rees Street Park and York Street Parks received almost 2,800 responses to online surveys and public exhibitions over four weeks.

Each year of the pilot, staff increased outreach, modified communications and resources to respond to feedback from participants, and improved the idea review process to ensure selected projects would be successfully implemented. However, even after changes, participation levels and the return rates of participants' year over year remained relatively low (approximately 0.8% of eligible residents voted in the pilot areas each year).

After three years, the City found that, consistent with many other jurisdictions, committed leadership from local Councillors and significant staff operating resources to support communications, outreach and education, are required to maintain participation against annual attrition rates.

City Council initially authorized the City Manager to undertake the PB Pilot for a single year. A report from the City Manager at the end of the first year, recommended extending the pilot for two more years to leverage momentum gained in the first year, and to continue to evaluate the process. Council authorized up to \$150,000 in capital funds for each of three pilot areas in 2015, and \$250,000 for each area and a total of \$138,000 in operating costs for each of 2016 and 2017.

Significant capital and operating investments would be required to extend PB to additional, or all, City wards or neighbourhoods. Several scenarios are described in this report. Implementing a new pilot, or extending the current pilot is not recommended based on the findings from the three-year pilot, and extensive feedback from staff, experts and residents.

## **Toronto's PB Pilot Design**

The pilot ran for three years in the former Ward 33 and the Neighbourhood Improvement Areas of Oakridge and Rustic (in the former Wards 35 and 12, respectively). Council selected these pilot areas to build on previous PB activity in Ward 33 and to support investments and build connections in the two NIAs.

The City Manager's Office coordinated resources from Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Transportation Services-Public Realm, Toronto Public Health, Social Development, Finance and Administration, Strategic Communications, Financial Planning and participating Councillors' offices.

Each year the pilot cycled through the following six phases:

- **Promotion and Outreach** (year-long) - Staff from City Divisions and participating councillor's offices disseminated information about PB and opportunities for participation through flyers, posters, household mailings, inserts in local publications, articles, media releases, social media alerts, subscription lists and at local events and meetings.
- **Idea collection** (2-3 months) - Residents were invited to brainstorm community improvement ideas at meetings, drop-ins, pop-up locations and booths at local events, and online. Divisional staff were on hand to share information about the PB

pilot, existing infrastructure plans, the City's budget and decision-making process and to answer questions about resident's ideas.

- **Idea Review (1 month)** - Staff in the City Manager's Office, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Transportation Services-Public Realm reviewed the ideas against the approved eligibility criteria. Staff followed up with residents if they needed more information, if an idea might be better suited to another location, or if several similar ideas could be bundled. For a project to move onto the next phase it had to be:
  - A capital project rather than funded through the City's operating budget;
  - On City property in a PB pilot area;
  - Valued at \$250,000 or less (\$150,000 or less in the first year);
  - Able to be constructed within 18 months of the vote;
  - Aligned with existing capital plans; and
  - Free of requirements for additional review (e.g. traffic studies) or pre-existing partnerships (e.g. community gardens).
- **Ballot selection** (1 week) - Residents were invited to meetings to review the status of all the ideas generated in their area. Ideas were sorted by those that were eligible, needed additional information to be considered, or were not eligible. Residents had the opportunity to discuss all the ideas with City staff and each other, consider changes that might make an ineligible idea more suitable for PB funding, and select 8-10 eligible projects to appear on the local voting ballot.
- **Voting** (2-3 weeks) - Voting stations were set up in schools, libraries and community centres on multiple days in each area. Residents could vote for up to three projects on their local ballot. Residents could vote in PB even if they were ineligible to vote in municipal, provincial or federal elections, by signing a declaration that they were 14 or older, lived in the pilot area and would vote only once. Staff tallied the votes on the final day to determine the winning projects. The project with the most votes received funding and its cost was subtracted from the \$250,000 budget. The project with the next most votes that could be funded with the remaining budget was declared the next winning project, and so on until as much of the budget as possible was allocated. In some cases this meant that ideas with the second or third most votes were not ultimately selected because their costs were greater than the amount remaining after earlier projects were funded.
- **Budget Allocation** (2 months) - The City Manager submitted a report during the Capital budget process with voting results and the source of funds for the projects. City Council had pre-approved sufficient funds at the beginning of the PB Pilot, but the location and nature of the winning projects informed the most appropriate source of funds for Council approval. In all cases, funds for the PB projects came from capital reserve accounts for parkland acquisition/improvement or public realm.
- **Project Implementation** (12-18 months) - Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Transportation Services-Public Realm coordinated the planning, design and installation of the winning PB projects. Additional resident consultation occurred as required, depending on the nature of the projects, to finalize the details.

## Participation in Toronto's PB Pilot

Participation in the pilot was generally low. Across all three areas, and over the three years of the pilot, there were just under 2,500 total interactions with residents (See Table 2). Each time a resident participated in any phase of the pilot, over all three years, (sometimes multiple times) this was counted as separate interaction. Participation was highest during the voting phase (See Figure 1).

Approximately 0.8% of eligible voters (residents 14 years of age and older) voted in the pilot areas each year, which is consistent with PB voting rates in some PB cities but lower than the 2.2% average PB voting rates in some North American cities. High participation rates in cities like New York City may reflect higher budgets as well as eligibility for funding investments in public schools.

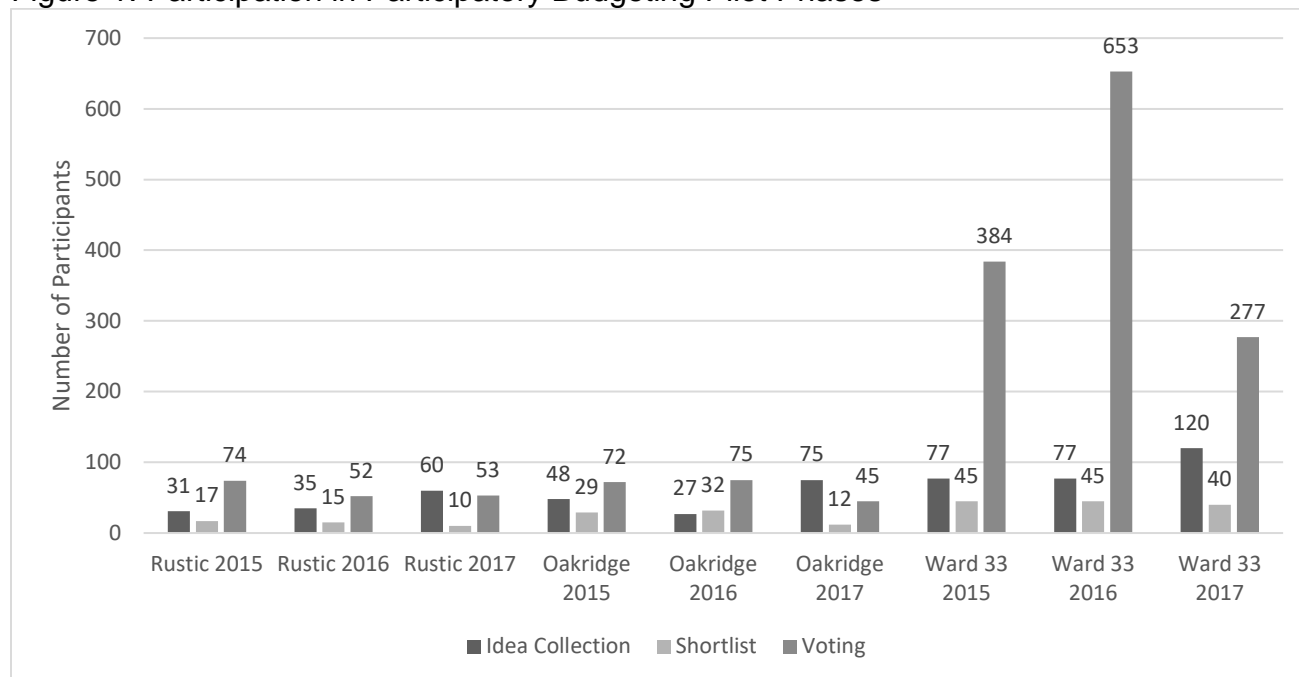
Low participation and voting rates can be a concern particularly if a limited number of residents make final decisions on behalf of an entire neighbourhood. In both Oakridge and Rustic, where more than 7,700 and 10,600 residents respectively were eligible to vote in PB, fewer than 100 residents determined which projects were proposed and funded each year.

	Oakridge			Rustic			Ward 33			Total		
	Ideas	Ballot	Vote	Ideas	Ballot	Vote	Ideas	Ballot	Vote	Ideas	Ballot	Vote
<b>2015</b>	48	29	72	31	17	74	47	43	384	<b>126</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>530</b>
<b>2016</b>	27	32	75	35	15	52	77	45	653	<b>139</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>780</b>
<b>2017</b>	75	12	45	60	10	53	120	40	277	<b>255</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>1314</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>1685</b>
<b>Annual Average</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>Total Resident Interactions</b>										<b>2448</b>		

Although overall participation and voting rates were low, the PB pilot did build some local interest in future involvement. Most participants came with little or no previous experience engaging with the City either through consultations, attending Council or Committee meetings, contacting their councillor or even 311 for example. Seventy-three per cent of 195 people who responded to survey questions about future involvement indicated that they would be more likely to participate in future City decision-making activities because of their involvement in the pilot. It is not known if this is greater, less than or consistent with the impact other types of engagement have on an interest in future participation.



Figure 1: Participation in Participatory Budgeting Pilot Phases



### Participant Ideas and Local Investments

Residents contributed almost 700 project ideas across all pilot areas over the three-year pilot. Staff reviewed all ideas against eligibility criteria. The majority of ideas would have required initial or ongoing operating budgets (such as new recreation programs) or were valued at a level greater than the pilot budget (such as a new library or swimming pool), therefore were ineligible for PB funding. A third category of ideas were those that could be better addressed through routine maintenance (such as replacing burnt-out lightbulbs or gravel on a path), which indicated a need for more information on how residents could make these requests to the City. After staff review, and bundling similar ideas, approximately 10 per cent of ideas each year were eligible for PB funding and brought forward to the ballot selection meetings. Residents in each area then chose 8 to 10 of the eligible projects for their local ballots each year.

In total, 37 capital projects were selected through residents' votes. The estimated cost of the projects totalled \$1.87M of a possible \$1.95M available for over the three year pilot:

- Oakridge selected 11 projects worth \$625,000;
- Rustic selected 12 projects worth \$630,000; and
- Ward 33 selected 14 projects worth \$615,000.

Most projects were park amenities, such as outdoor fitness equipment, lighting, shade structures and water bottle-filling stations. Public realm improvements included landscaping, sidewalk accessibility and an underpass mural. Most PB jurisdictions similarly find that eligibility criteria result in the majority of successful projects being in parks or schools, and that resident priorities for pressing community investments in safety, economic and social development often require operating funds that are not fundable through PB.

## **PB Pilot Evaluation - Key Outcomes and Findings**

The City Manager's Office and an external vendor evaluated the first year of the pilot. This evaluation led to the recommendation to extend the project for two years and continue the evaluation. For the next two years of the pilot, the City conducted surveys and interviews with residents, divisional and community partners, Councillors and their offices, and other stakeholders. Staff also conducted interjurisdictional research and sought input from organizations and cities with expertise in PB and engagement.

Toronto's PB project was an opportunity to pilot a new process, allowing staff to test and adapt PB to the Toronto context and learn from residents and participating Councillors about how successful the process was in achieving its objectives. Piloting PB in three neighbourhoods over three years allowed the City to explore and test different approaches to outreach, promotion, and resident meetings to collect ideas, shortlist projects for the ballot and conduct the vote. The size and demographic differences between the pilot communities allowed staff to compare the model in different settings and scales. Additionally, all three Members of Council were involved in the Pilot to differing degrees, which allowed staff to evaluate the impact of the role of the local councillor on the process.

### *Toronto's Pilot compared to PB in other jurisdictions*

In designing the Toronto PB Pilot, staff consulted with the City's engagement practitioners and reviewed PB processes in other jurisdictions to consider options. Appendix 1 describes several PB processes in other jurisdictions.

There is no particular design for a successful PB process, but jurisdictions with the highest participation rates often have the largest capital budgets and sufficient operating funds to support city-wide implementation and outreach to specific communities.

North American examples of PB include a range of approaches such as:

- Short-term online processes like the Government of Ontario's "Budget Talks" in 2017, which encouraged residents to submit ideas for project grants, pilots, studies, events or digital services in one of five topics areas;
- Processes for specific audiences, such as Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)'s program that has funded capital improvements through PB for more than 15 years;
- PB that funds school capital investments, as is done in many U.S. cities, while other jurisdictions have more limited capital eligibility or fund both capital and operating investments;
- City-wide PB in cities like Boston, Seattle and Victoria, while Chicago, Halifax and Hamilton are among municipalities that run PB in local wards; and
- PB that secures pre-budget approval from City Council -- as in Toronto and Victoria - - which allowed the public voting results to be the final decision, compared to cities like Chicago and New York City that run their public processes to the voting phase but final decisions go back to their councils to confirm or reject projects.

### *Feedback on Effectiveness of PB to support capital investment decisions*

Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Transportation Services-Public Realm capital staff were able to accommodate new PB projects during the pilot period, but raised concerns about the potential impacts of PB on capital planning; specifically, about the possible long-term impact on divisions' ability to deliver state-of-good-repair and other capital projects, and the draw on capital reserve funds.

City Councillors, most residents and City staff felt that the PB process was a good way to hear about local priorities and make decisions about certain types of projects, and that the winning projects would benefit the community. Residents valued the opportunity to discuss ideas with their neighbours and City staff, and learn how much amenities such as park benches and playgrounds cost and how they might fit with other capital plans.

Many residents expressed frustration that the project eligibility criteria limited the ability to address real community needs. This perspective is evident in cities like New York City and Boston, where PB is seen as a way of funding capital projects but a poor method of addressing pressing community needs related to youth, public safety, recreation and equity. Some residents also indicated that the process required too much involvement for what they felt were small projects, and that some of the completed projects were different than was depicted on the PB ballot.

The City's experience echoes that of TCHC, which recently changed its 15-year PB process. TCHC residents and staff indicated that they found the process of interacting with each other and discussing capital plans to be extremely beneficial, but they had some concerns about the process and the actual projects were causing frustration because they often didn't match what was voted on. TCHC resumed a modified PB process in 2018 that allowed voting on non-capital projects (i.e. small improvements such as window blinds and furniture) for their buildings, along with a separate process that invited residents to provide input on capital projects and planning.

PB could be an effective way to engage the public in infrastructure decisions, provided that the City can ensure:

- Pre-authorized funding from Council to ensure that voting results are not re-opened or reversed by Council;
- Staff capacity to deliver projects within a reasonable time of the vote;
- Sufficient operating funding to support extensive, accessible resident engagement, consideration of ideas, and a transparent, accountable voting process; and
- Clear and detailed information to guide residents through the PB process, as well as broader information about City services and programs and opportunities to get involved in decision-making.

### *Feedback on PB Process as an Engagement Approach*

In addition to the infrastructure improvements built or underway as a result of the PB pilot, staff reviewed the outcomes against a number of initial objectives. PB supported some public involvement, provided opportunities for City staff and local residents to meet and exchange information and ideas, and encouraged the public to learn about

and consider other ways to get involved in the City's programs, services and decision-making processes.

Much of the resident and staff feedback on Toronto's PB process was positive. Participants and staff liked having a variety of meeting opportunities and a range of promotion and voting options, which supported awareness and encouraged participation from as many residents as possible. Although some participants suggested the use of online ideation and voting tools, there was also strong support for in-person interactions as a way to build community connections among participants and make the process accessible to all residents. City staff provided ways for participants to submit ideas online in years two and three, while continuing to support public sessions for discussion about the ideas.

Toronto's pilot was designed to be inclusive and accessible to all residents. However, it was evident that the ballot selection and voting processes created competition between residents, which detracted from the experience and amplified differences within communities. For example, the competition led to disagreements and some divisive language at meetings about the relative benefits of certain ideas and perspectives, and some voting outcomes reflected real or perceived power imbalances between youth and older residents, those living in apartment buildings and homeowners, and those in different neighbourhoods within the pilot areas.

### **Key Factors that Influence PB Success**

A number of key factors impact the successful implementation of a PB initiative. These include appropriate scale, outreach and communications, accessible information, momentum, resources and support from divisions and Council Members' offices, the type of community improvements eligible for PB, and status updates on the improvements each community selected.

Piloting PB in a large ward and two small NIAs allowed staff to measure the effects of scale on the process. Rustic and Oakridge were small neighbourhoods and many of the projects were concentrated in two or three small parks. This led to the parks being "overdesigned" after only two years of PB, which left a lack of options for projects in the third year. The pilot boundaries of the small NIAs also confused or frustrated residents who saw the borders as arbitrary or inconsistent with their view of their community. Conversely, in a large ward (the former Ward 33) areas often competed with each other, for example with traffic projects in one area of the ward challenging park-focussed projects of another area. Many residents indicated that they wouldn't vote for a project that wasn't in their immediate community, even if the project would benefit others in the ward. In some cases residents attended the vote only to leave without voting if the ballot didn't include something close to where they lived, worked or walked.

Momentum was key to building outreach and sustaining participation in the PB pilot. Experience in and beyond Toronto suggests that building ongoing involvement requires several years or cycles and considerable outreach to raise awareness and help residents learn how to participate. As the community improvements are built, residents see the cumulative impact over the three years, which in turn can build momentum from prior years. A 12-18 month turnaround from PB voting to project completion was an

important commitment that Toronto made to maintaining momentum. In cities like New York and Chicago, projects approved by councils after the resident voting can take many more years to implement.

City staff and residents felt that greater communication about the pilot could have attracted more participants, including underrepresented populations such as youth and newcomers. Staff implemented improvements by introducing clearer and more varied outreach and communications strategies each year of the pilot to extend their reach (See Appendix 2 for examples of PB communication materials).

Involvement of the local elected official has been shown to be key to outreach and promotion, encouraging residents to participate and vote, and communicating voting results and project installation. In Toronto, participating Councillors and their offices found that the pilot required considerable involvement, with one councillor indicating that a full-time position would need to be dedicated to the pilot. In New York City and Chicago, city staff depend on councillor's offices and resources to ensure success of their PB programs. Prior to a 2018 electoral decision that expanded PB across New York City, Council Members who choose to join the PB process gave a minimum of \$1 million from their discretionary budget for the year-long process of public meetings, community engagement and local voting. Some jurisdictions alter their PB processes during election years to reflect restrictions on the participation of elected officials and candidates.

### **Resource Considerations for Implementation of PB**

Toronto's pilot required considerable staff resources, consistent with other PB jurisdictions. Council's extension of the pilot past 2015 acknowledged this by allocating funding for a temporary staff position to coordinate the additional two years. Other City staff, and Councillors and their staff, contributed significant time to promote the pilot, attend meetings, review ideas, estimate project costs and liaise with residents, in addition to the follow-up meetings and work undertaken in the implementation phase of many projects.

The per-participant cost of PB is significant. Staff undertook a high-level assessment of the financial implications for implementing PB under a number of possible scenarios. Table 3 below summarizes estimates for annual, biennial or fewer cycles of PB across all wards or Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). Details are provided in Appendix 3. A ward-level process would provide more equal opportunity for resident participation and capital investment, while running PB in NIAs would prioritize investment and engagement in communities with the highest relative need.

Table 3: City-Wide Participatory Budgeting Resource Estimates (\$250,000 for capital improvements per ward or Neighbourhood Improvement Area per year)

<b>Option A - PB in all wards or Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) each year</b>	
<b>1a</b>	<b>PB in all 25 City wards every year</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated annual cost: \$6.25M capital, \$1.53M operating</li> <li>• Estimated cost per Council term: \$25M capital, \$6.13M operating</li> </ul>
<b>1b</b>	<b>PB in all 31 NIAs every year</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated annual cost: \$7.75M capital, \$1.4M operating</li> <li>• Estimated cost per Council term: \$31M capital; \$5.6M operating</li> </ul>
<b>Option 2 - PB in half of wards or NIAs each year</b>	
<b>2a</b>	<b>PB in 12 or 13 City wards each year:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated annual cost: \$3M or \$3.25M capital, \$892.5K or \$918K operating</li> <li>• Estimated cost per Council term: \$12M or \$13M capital; \$3.57M or \$3.67M operating</li> </ul>
<b>2b</b>	<b>PB in 15 or 16 NIAs each year</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated Annual Cost: \$3.75M or \$4M capital, \$710K or \$735.5K operating</li> <li>• Estimated cost per Council term: \$15M or \$16M capital; \$2.84M or \$2.94M operating</li> </ul>
<b>Option 3 - PB in a quarter of wards or NIAs each year</b>	
<b>3a</b>	<b>PB in 6 or 7 wards each year:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated Annual Cost: \$1.5M or \$1.75M capital, \$630K or \$655.5K operating</li> <li>• Estimated Cost per Council term: \$6M or \$7M capital, \$2.52M or \$2.62M operating</li> </ul>
<b>3b</b>	<b>PB in 7 or 8 NIAs each year:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated Annual Cost: \$1.75M or \$2M capital, \$504K or \$529.5K operating</li> <li>• Estimated Cost per Council term: \$7M or \$8M capital, \$2.02M or \$2.12M operating</li> </ul>

Additional scenarios were considered but not costed as they introduced additional levels of complexity or limitations. For example:

- Phasing in PB over a term of Council: a quarter of wards or NIAs would be added each year over four years until wards or NIAs are permanently running PB every year. This option would initially reduce costs and allow the process to build experience and capacity, but was considered inequitable, as some wards or NIAs could have up to four PB cycles next term while others would have one;
- Theme-based PB: processes would focus investment on a particular group such as youth, or issue such as the environment or safety, as is done in some other PB jurisdictions. This option could help projects focus on pressing needs, but may

conflict with other funding and City initiatives being implemented in these areas as the benefits of resident voting to set these priorities are unclear. PB by theme in other jurisdictions have faced similar challenges of competing priority setting between geographic communities to priority setting between public policy issues; and

- Establish a general PB fund: would support up to a quarter of wards or NIAs each year, at the discretion of Council might increase inequity by limiting engagement opportunities and investment in areas that are not successful in securing PB funds.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

The City Manager's Officer will continue to communicate with Councillors and residents in the PB pilot areas regarding the completion of the PB projects. Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Transportation Services have completed all projects selected in 2015 and many from 2016, and planning is underway for the remaining projects.

In Toronto, staff were encouraged by the interest of residents in the pilot, but recognize that PB alone will not significantly increase local participation. It may serve as one tool or option in the City's engagement strategy, complementing the many ways divisions currently involve residents through public meetings, focus groups, open houses, surveys, polls and advisory committees, elections and at Community Councils and Standing Committees.

Over the course of the pilot, staff discussed Toronto's project with researchers and PB practitioners in other cities and reviewed emerging research. A recent comprehensive review of PB in Canada and the United States describes a growing understanding of PB as one way cities can encourage local public participation. It also describes a trajectory that PB takes in some jurisdictions, which introduce PB but later modify or end their PB processes over time in response to changing public or political interest and priorities and the availability of a sustainable budget. The City of Toronto will contribute to the worldwide body of knowledge on PB by posting this report on the City's PB website to complement the detailed evaluation report and participant data released in November 2018.

The PB pilot provided insights that could enhance the City's capital infrastructure planning and civic engagement on a range of policies and programs. The City Manager will incorporate PB concepts and lessons into the City's existing corporate and divisional civic engagement courses. Advice on the use of PB to support specific types of divisional planning and service delivery will also be provided to Divisions and Councillors. For example, PB may be a useful approach under certain conditions, such as inviting residents to vote on how to allocate new Section 37 capital funding, or to support new capital investments neighbourhoods identified through the City's Community Investment Funding Program and Partnership Opportunities Legacy program.

The pilot broadened staff perspectives on the other ways in which the City involves residents in decision-making. Residents appreciated the opportunity to learn more about what City divisions were planning for their neighbourhoods, including investments in local parks and roadways, getting to meet City staff, asking questions and discussing

their ideas. The City already communicates many infrastructure projects through its T.O INview web application and the media, but residents in the PB pilot are seeking earlier information and opportunities to contribute to decisions about closures, planned upgrades, or infrastructure challenges (e.g. flood remediation). Additional information could help build public confidence and resolve misinformation and potential for confusion. For example, in the first year of the pilot, many residents in one neighbourhood wanted PB to fund benches that had previously been in their park, only to find out that they were already slated to be returned after the bocce ball courts were repaired. Others in another neighbourhood were advocating for a playground to be replaced but were not aware that improvements were scheduled in the near future. A simple sign or other communications could alert residents about short-term changes or planned upgrades.

The City Manager will continue to support the City's Civic Engagement Strategy and engagement practitioners, providing advice, tools and engagement planning to support public participation in municipal decision-making including lessons from the Participatory Budgeting pilot.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Chris Murray  
City Manager

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Appendix 1: Examples of Participatory Budgeting Processes  
Appendix 2: Examples of Participatory Budgeting Pilot Communication Materials  
Appendix 3: Resource Considerations for Implementation of Participatory Budgeting