

# Participatory Budgeting in Somerville

Presented to City Council by Eric Willisson and Katelin Firth  
January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023



# Today's Agenda



Overview of PB



Key Decisions



What's Next

# What is Participatory Budgeting?

**A democratic process in which community members will directly propose and vote on how to spend \$1,000,000 of public money in Somerville**



# Project Criteria

Projects that are ideal for Participatory Budgeting:

- Serve a public benefit
- Are limited to a one-time expense (ex: not salaries)
- Can be implemented on city-owned property (ex: not MBTA, state parks)
- And cost less than \$1 million



# How does PB work?

## 5 Stages

### PROCESS DESIGN & PLANNING

- Working Group creates policies and procedures, events and materials are developed

### IDEA SUBMISSION

- Members of the community are encouraged to submit ideas through various outreach channels

### PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

- Volunteer Budget Delegates review and consolidate ideas, research, and score final projects to determine which will go on the ballot

### VOTING

- Members of the community encouraged to vote on their top 5 out of the final 20

### IMPLEMENTATION

- Winning ideas materialize throughout the community

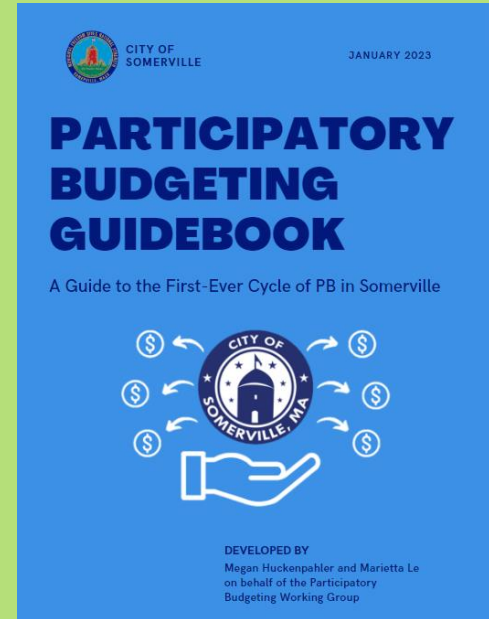
Community involvement at every stage:

- Participatory Budgeting Working Group helps create the process
- Budget Delegates made up of volunteers vet the ideas and turn them into proposals
- All residents of Somerville 12+ (or 6<sup>th</sup> grade) can submit and vote on ideas

# Purpose of the PB Working Group

Establish guidelines and develop a process to roll out participatory budgeting in Somerville in an inclusive, equitable manner. Members will write policies, build outreach and engagement strategies, and create and disseminate informational materials.

**All information will be summarized in a final work product, a PB Guidebook.**



# Goals & Values drove Decision Making

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## GOALS OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

- The community views this process as fair, open, and democratic.
- We maximize the budget for the people in the community. People have direct influence over how their government spends a portion of their funds for the things that matter to them.
- The community sees that change is possible and that they can bring about change. People feel engaged and that they have the ability to affect local government.
- At least 100 ideas are submitted.
- At least 2,000 votes are received. Participating in the budgeting process is viewed as important and a key element of civic life.
- No voices are missing from the process. The people submitting ideas, conducting community outreach, refining ideas and voting are representative of the diversity and demographics in Somerville.
- That outreach efforts focus particularly on underrepresented groups.
- Participation is a frictionless experience. Participation is easy, engaging and fun, with accommodations for language and access.



## VALUES OF THE WORKING GROUP

### TRANSPARENCY

We hold ourselves accountable to the community of Somerville. Our aim in developing this Guidebook is to share our decision-making process in a transparent and accessible way, and to highlight what values we used to guide our choices. Community members are asked to be involved throughout the process, and data on all ideas submitted and final vote tallies will be made publicly available.

### INCLUSIVITY

We must ensure all community members are able to access and engage with the process. This should be demonstrated through translation of materials into the five languages of Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese, as well as any accommodations requested through ADA for written content or for in-person events when requested.

### EQUITY

A desired outcome is that we can inspire people to be involved in the development of their community. Through our planning, we aim to engage populations who have not previously been involved in the city as well as those in historically disenfranchised groups. This approach will require more effort to solicit ideas and votes in non-traditional channels.

### TRUST

This will be a city-wide effort to bring ideas to life and we hope this process builds trust that the city will fulfill its promise to deliver these projects in the community. A clear timeline, with steps to get there, and defined roles for all involved will make the vision a reality.

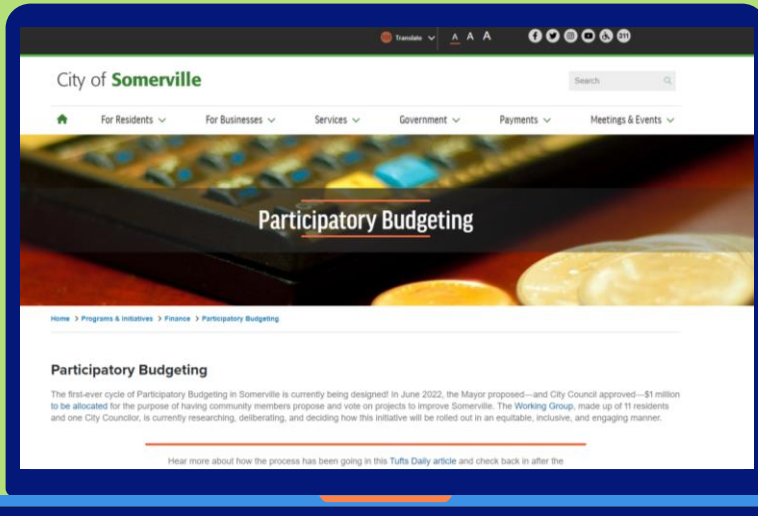
### COMMUNITY

Through careful planning and attention to these values and more, we want all residents in Somerville to be proud that Somerville is launching Participatory Budgeting and will join us to celebrate winning ideas once they materialize. We want to demonstrate that Somerville is a community we are lucky to be a part of now, and for generations to come.



# Idea Submission Phase Goals

- Submit ideas online at [www.somervillema.gov/pb](http://www.somervillema.gov/pb) or by visiting a library branch or City Hall



1. Answer ‘What is Participatory Budgeting?’
2. Drive Idea Submission
3. Recruit Budget Delegates

A screenshot of the 'Somerville Participatory Budgeting - Share your idea' form. The form is titled 'Somerville Participatory Budgeting - Share your idea' and includes a 'Ward #' field. The main section is 'Your idea' with the instruction 'Describe your idea, and what needs to be done to make it happen?'. Below this are three columns: 'Category' with checkboxes for 'Community-wide resources', 'Parks & Green Spaces', 'Streets & Sidewalks', 'Arts & Culture', and 'Education'; 'Location'; and 'One word that best describes your idea'. There is a section for 'How will your idea improve Somerville?'. At the bottom, there is an 'Email (optional)' field and a 'Thank you for sharing your idea!' section with the instruction 'Give this form to the volunteer or city worker you met. Or you can also drop it off at the Somerville Public Library or at the Somerville City Hall.' The footer contains accessibility information: 'Persons with disabilities who need auxiliary aids and services for effective communication (i.e., CART, ASL), written materials in alternative formats, or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures in order to access the programs, activities, and meetings of the City of Somerville should please contact Adrienne Pomeroy at 617-625-6600 x 2059 or ADA@somervillema.gov'.



# How do we spread the word?

- Mailers sent to all residential addresses
- In-person events partnering with nonprofits and community organizations
- Canvassing
- Coordination with Schools
- Flyers in local businesses
- Ads – large banners, yard signs, trash cans, MBTA, local media
- City socials and newsletters
- Present at Community Meetings

# Example Materials

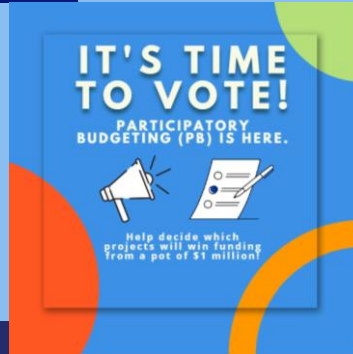


**Participatory Budgeting (PB) comes to Somerville!**

Help your neighbors decide how to spend \$1 million!

Persons with disabilities who need auxiliary aids and services for effective communication (i.e., CART, ASL), written materials in alternative formats, or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures in order to access the programs, activities, and meetings of the City of Somerville should please contact Adrienne Pomeroy at 617-625-6600 x 2059 or ADA@somervillema.gov

Postcard-sized handout



**IT'S TIME TO VOTE!**

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING (PB) IS HERE.

Help decide which projects will win funding from a pot of \$1 million!


Social media post

**Ways to get involved in PB:**

- Submit a project idea
- Become a PB volunteer
- Vote for which projects to fund

Find out more by scanning the QR code or by:

Website: [somervillema.gov/pb](http://somervillema.gov/pb)  
Email: [pb@somervillema.gov](mailto:pb@somervillema.gov)  
Call: (617) 625-6600 ext. 2107



**Participatory Budgeting (PB) comes to Somerville!**

Help your neighbors decide how to spend \$1 million!

Serves public benefit | A one-time expense | On city-owned property | Costs less than \$1 million

**Do you have a great idea for making Somerville better? Do you want to help find eligible projects? Do you want to vote for which projects are the best? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, Participatory Budgeting is for you!**

To find out more, scan the QR code or:

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Newsletter graphic



**Somerville Participatory Budgeting**

\$1,000,000 for your ideas

Sign up to newsletter for updates  
[SOMERVILLEMA.GOV/PB](http://SOMERVILLEMA.GOV/PB)

Subscribe

Flyer

# Proposal Development Phase

- Committees broken down based on idea submission categories below
- # of ideas per category onto final ballot proportional to the number of ideas submitted, with a minimum of 1 per category

Community-  
Wide  
Resources

Parks &  
Green  
Spaces

Streets &  
Sidewalks

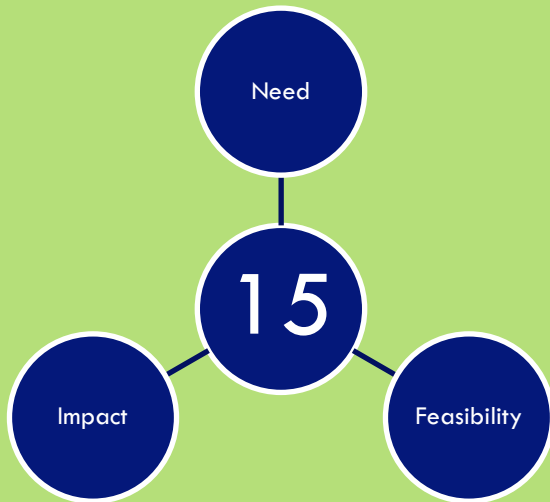
Education

Arts &  
Culture

Meeting	Goal
Orientation (in-person)	Understand timeline, project criteria, select subcommittee
Meetings #1	Get to know team members, review initial list of ideas, familiarize with relevant materials
Meetings #2	Begin filling out Project Scope Template, scanning ideas for eligibility, similarities
Meetings #3	Continue filling out Project Scope Template, scanning ideas for eligibility, similarities, assign members to get site photos if possible, assign if not completed
Meetings #4	Document ineligible ideas, prepare questions for City Staff
Meetings #5	Consulting with City Staff
Meetings #6	Debrief City Staff meeting, select projects for further review, research homework
Meetings #7	Discuss research, information needed on final proposals
Meetings #8	Begin scoring final proposals
Meetings #9	Consulting with City Staff
Meetings #10	Finalize scoring, select proposals for the ballot, subject to Mayor's approval

# Proposal Scoring

## 5 points possible for Need, Impact, Feasibility



### Determining Need

- Does the project already have community support? (# of ideas, feedback in other meetings)
- Committee research
- Does the resource exist already or not?

### Determining Impact

- # of people who could benefit
- Will an underserved community benefit?
- Is it in a high-use location?
- What is the durability?

### Determining Feasibility

- Has the city implemented a similar project?
- Does it meet criteria?

# How to Vote

- Voting online using Stanford's platform
- In-person ballots available in at least City Hall & Public Libraries
- Support from SomerViva, canvassing across the city
- Build on Outreach Methods used in Idea Submission Phase

## Top 5 Rank top 5 projects out of 20, projects chosen until funding runs out

The screenshot shows the PB Dieppe voting interface. At the top, it says "PB Dieppe" and "France". Below that, it indicates "You only have 0 / 5 projects." A list of 20 projects is shown on the left, including "A heritage to discover: the story of Dieppe told", "Multifunctional beach facility", "Boards and special surface for ball hockey: Maison des jeunes de Dieppe", "Lakeburn Rocks - an indoor climbing wall: Boys and Girls Club of Dieppe", "Acoustics and sound of the Atrium of the Center for Arts and Culture", "A nature park like in the good old days", "Breeze from the past at Place 1604", "Counter the isolation of seniors with weekly hikes", "Outdoor fitness circuit", "Sculpture and poetry garden along the waterfront path", "Swing adapted for wheelchairs", "Dieppe Creative LAB at the Dieppe Public Library", "Off-leash dog park: Rotary St-Anselme Park", "Personal finance courses", "Tidal Bore Observation Deck", and "Ski in town".

On the right, there are instructions and a "Submit my vote..." button. The instructions are:

1. Choose the projects you want to support by clicking on the "Select" button.
2. Choose **five projects** (you must choose 5 in order for your vote to be retained).
3. Indicate **the priority** of each of your choices, ie. from 1 to 5 with 1 being your first choice and 5 your last.
4. There is no limit to the total cost amount of your choices. The amounts shown are included to give you an idea of the size of each of the proposed projects.
5. Click the **"Submit my vote"** button when you're done.

Below the instructions, it says "Check out the [playlist](#) for all the videos in the project." and "Submit my vote..." button.

Two projects are shown with "To select" buttons:

- A heritage to discover: the story of Dieppe told**  
A series of panels along the paths, with video capsules, retracing the history of the places, the inhabitants and the monuments. [YouTube video](#)  
[project details](#)  
Estimated cost : \$62,500
- Multifunctional beach facility**  
Multifunctional beach available for various recreational activities including but not limited to volleyball, beach soccer, football and frisbee.  
[project details](#)  
Estimated cost : \$120,000

At the bottom, the selected projects are listed: "Boards and special surface for ball hockey: Maison des jeunes de Dieppe" and "Lakeburn Rocks - an indoor climbing wall: Boys and Girls Club of Dieppe".

# What does success look like?

## Qualitative

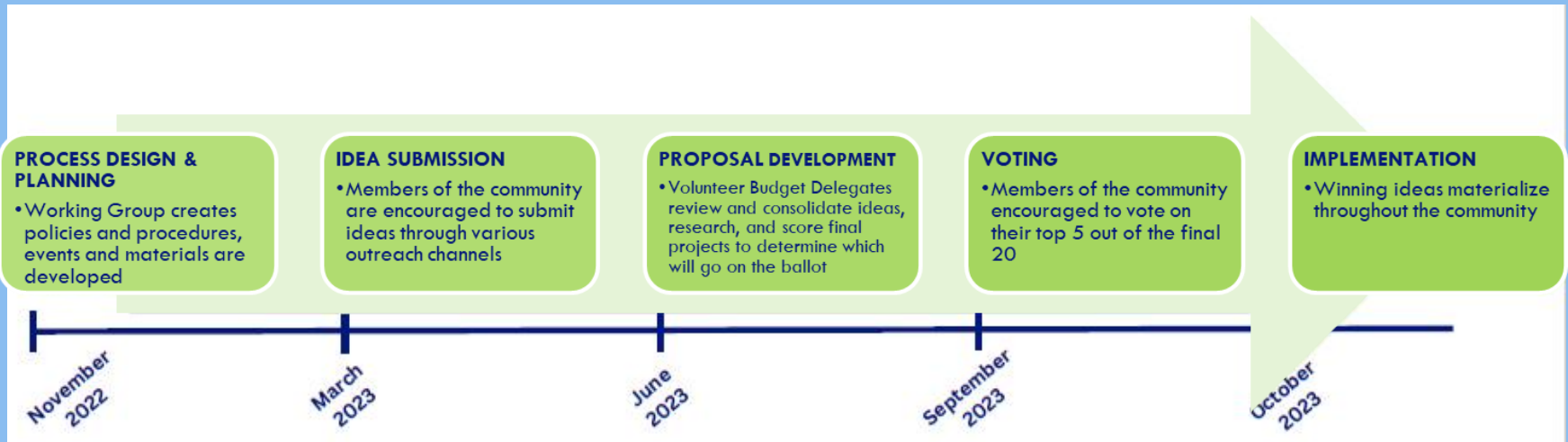
- I am satisfied with the Participatory Budgeting initiative.
- Participatory Budgeting in Somerville was able to reach all demographics of the city.
- The effort allocated to each Outreach Method was appropriate.
- PB was well-organized.
- I received adequate instruction for my role in PB.
- I would volunteer with next year's cycle of PB.
- I have a greater understanding of local government and decision-making through PB.
- I am more likely to engage in local government as a result of my time with PB.

## Quantitative

- Level of participation
- Demographics (optional)
- Number of ideas submitted (100+)
- Number of votes (2,000+)
- Number of volunteer hours, available and filled by Outreach channel
- Number of contacts
- Feedback forms at events
- "How did you hear about PB?"
- 311 calls and emails
- Languages
- Newsletter subscription, newsletter engagement, website visits

# Where do we go from here?

- Continue material development
- Reach out to community organizations for partnerships
- Coordination with SPS, libraries
- Recruit PB volunteers



# Council Involvement

- Help spread the word; physical and digital copies of materials will be shared when available
- Email [pb@somervillema.gov](mailto:pb@somervillema.gov) with community groups
- Door-knocking in your ward in fall





**Thank You**