



## Minutes for the February 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 Meeting of the Participatory Budgeting (PB) Committee of Freehold Borough

---

In attendance: Mark Bravaco, Carrie Conger (co-chair), Joanna Connelly, Ronald De Marco, Kathy Eckhardt (co-chair), Ted Eckhardt, Mike Faccione, Cary Freyre, Annette Jordan (council liaison), and Dan Xavier.

The meeting was scheduled for 7:00pm. In approximate chronological order:

All Committee members present at last month's meeting were present at this month's meeting, along with two others: Mike F., who is a prospective member to the Committee, and Cary F., who is an official member but was unable to be present last month.

It was agreed that Mark B. would be responsible for the February meeting's minutes, and that he would send last month's and this month's minutes to all the Committee members for review before being ultimately sent to Sasha for publication.

There was discussion about the Freehold Borough Educational Foundation's plans to fund a small-scale participatory budgeting program this year for local students.

The Committee looked at the PB PowerPoint that Kathy E. had recently revised. Dan X. suggested updating the photograph of the Freehold Borough municipal sign (on slide two) to a more current one.

The Committee once again took up the question of what the participating population would be for this year's cycle. There was some discussion and debate, but consensus was ultimately reached that anyone who lives in the Borough, who owns a business located in the Borough, or who works in the Borough can vote, as long as they are fourteen years old or older, and that anyone at all can submit project proposals to be considered for the ballot.

Dan X., going off discussion from last month's meeting, asked if there was still any interest for making this year's PB cycle themed, so that only certain types of capital projects would be eligible for funding. Dan X. argued that setting cycle-themes would help diversify the winners and reduce the number of projects going to Lake Topanemus. Others on the Committee argued against this position, saying that, although many projects at Lake Topanemus had been funded by the PB process, they ultimately represent a relatively small portion of all the projects that have ever won funding through the PB process over the years. Furthermore, they pointed to the value of the free competition of ideas, implying that even if Lake Topanemus had been dominating and dynastizing PB, the appropriate response wouldn't be to exclude projects intended for the park, but rather to further encourage the other

submitters to campaign harder for their proposals. Annette J. also noted that the current Mayor prefers keeping submissions open this year, as they have been in years prior.

It seems that, in some capacity, the Committee will implement a ‘rolling-project-vetting’ policy.

There was discussion of using our PB business cards from last year to promote the program again this year, I think.

Carrie C. and Mark B. talked about possibly re-using the flyers from last year. Carrie C. suggested that the information on the flyers was general enough that they could be used again, though Mark B. wasn’t quite sure that the information would still be up-to-date, and he indicated that he didn’t think he had gone back out to re-collect the PB flyers that he had put up around town last cycle, so that most of the flyers he’d printed are probably either still on display in the community or lost. Still, he indicated that he would check (I think), and he also agreed to potentially printing new flyers for this year. It was further suggested that the Committee would reimburse him for the associated printing costs.

Carrie C. said that she would try to get the QR code from last year to be redirected to the appropriate page on Freehold Borough’s new municipal website; that way, a new QR code wouldn’t need to be generated (which would be especially helpful under the circumstance that we end up re-using last year’s flyers and business cards).

There was mention of creating a digital list of local organizations from which to solicit project proposals in order to facilitate the process of assigning presentation responsibilities to Committee members.

The Committee discussed local events where the program might be advertised to attendees. Some of the events mentioned were the Memorial Day Parade, Olde Freehold Day, and the Battle of Monmouth Re-enactment. In order to help advertise the program at these events, Committee members suggested possibly having PB T-shirts printed (maybe even with QR codes on them!) and using a sandwich presentation board.

Mark B. agreed to reach out to Kathy Mulholland, the director of the Freehold Public Library, in order to propose updating the “Little Book of Participatory Budgeting in Freehold Borough” for this year and having the QR code printed on the back.

One idea that came up for further increasing awareness of PB was to have an advertisement posted on residents’ water bills.

Discussion returned to the topic of whether the PB status quo was tenable. Dan X. suggested it was not: drawing from his own personal experience interacting with other community members, he indicated that some people see Lake Topanemus projects as a dominating force and, as a result, regard competition as vain. Dan X. also warned that such public perception could even turn into something uglier, such as accusations of nepotism, given that one of the members of the Lake Topanemus Commission is related to the current Mayor of the Borough. In response to these arguments, the Committee indicated that such public perception was untrue; and so the appropriate response would be to try to change public perception to better reflect the truth. To that end, there seemed to be discussion of publishing a list of all previous projects that have won in Freehold Borough’s PB process and to emphasize non-Lake Topanemus winning projects in the PowerPoint slides.

The next PB Committee meeting is scheduled for March 1<sup>st</sup>.