



Minutes for January 10th 2023 Meeting of the Participatory Budgeting (PB) Committee of Freehold Borough

In attendance: Mark Bravaco, Carrie Conger (co-chair), Joanna Connelly, Ron DeMarco, Kathy Eckhardt (co-chair), Ted Eckhardt, Annette Jordan (liaison), and Dan Xavier.

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

All members in attendance introduced themselves, including the two newest members of the Committee, Dan X. and Ron D.

There was discussion of moving Committee meetings to the first Wednesday of each month, due (at least in part) to scheduling conflicts that Dan X. had with the present Committee meeting schedule. This proposal of meeting on Wednesdays was agreed to.

It was agreed that Mark B. would write this meeting's minutes.

There was discussion of the important dates (the "PB Timeline") for the upcoming 2023 cycle. The following dates were agreed to:

- Project proposals will be accepted starting on April 5th
- The last day to submit a project proposal will be July 31st
- Vetting of project proposals will occur from August 1st through August 31st
- The PB Town Hall will be held on September 14th
- The voting period will begin right after the PB Town Hall on September 14th
- The voting period will go through September 24th
- The winning projects will be announced at the Mayor and Council meeting on October 2nd, 2023.

Plans were mentioned to update the Participatory Budgeting Committee's PB PowerPoint, and Joanna C. offered to translate the newly updated version, once finished, into Spanish.

News was shared that Freehold Intermediary School (FIS) is going to have its own participatory budgeting program this year.

Committee members brainstormed some civic organizations to reach out to; and the purpose of this outreach work was discussed.

The Committee considered possible improvements to the Borough's PB Process. The idea came up of having a public drawing to determine each project's positioning (in order to eliminate favoritism and bias during the voting period), though the necessity of a *public* drawing was questioned, it was noted that the current procedure was already randomized, and the idea was ultimately not adopted. A demonstration given by one of the members, however, suggested that the current randomization procedure may not be perfectly random and may still need some tightening.

Furthermore, the Committee discussed who is allowed to submit project proposals and vote—although it did not seem that the Committee came to a clear, final decision on this question at the meeting. Dan X. offered an argument for why idea solicitation might be opened up to everyone, regardless of their connection to the Borough—because, according to Dan, the validity of someone's idea is independent of whether they have any personal ties to Freehold. Along these lines, Dan X. suggested soliciting ideas at outdoor concerts. The necessity of widening the participation net was questioned, however, especially given the substantial current levels of participation in the program. Notably, discussion touched on the specific idea of allowing people who simply work in the Borough to participate as well.

The Committee also considered the possibility of setting project themes for each PB cycle (an idea proposed by Dan X.), which remains an option for the future.

A point that came up during the meeting was the importance of participants campaigning and promoting their project proposals to the community—how such campaigning is a part of the process that is allowed, encouraged, and very important for success.

Carrie C. indicated that she would reach out to people who have submitted project proposals in years past.

The Committee was informed why a former Committee member had not been reappointed for the upcoming year. One reason was that they had made a post on social media directly to a PB participant that was deemed inappropriate in that it sharply criticized the participant's project proposals. Due to this development and at least one more instance of questionable behavior (towards a volunteer for another committee), it had been decided not to renew this Committee-member's one-year tenure with the PB Committee for this year's cycle. That is not to say that they are forever barred from PB—just that they will not be holding a seat on the Committee this year.

It was indicated that, except for 2022's winners, all winning PB projects from all previous years have been completed. Annette J. indicated that she didn't know if last year's portable surveillance camera had been purchased as of yet, and that the fishing pier at Lake Topanemus would be funded by this year's budget. I also recall Annette J. saying that she thought last year's flag-light project had been finished (or, at least, that it was being implemented currently).

The next Participatory Budgeting Committee Meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 1st.
