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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director
Legislative Policy Division (LPD) Staff

DATE: March 23, 2016

RE: Participatory Budgeting (PB)

In a memorandum dated March 7, 2016, Council Member Sheffield directed LPD to report on the history of participatory budgeting, its benefits and the feasibility of implementing it in the City of Detroit. This is LPD's report.

The concept of participatory budgeting in a city is well summarized, with brief historical background, by Josh Lerner and Maria Hadden, in the attached December 2011 article entitled "How to Start Participatory Budgeting in Your City". Detroit-based freelance journalist Anna Clark, in the attached article from April 2014, entitled "Is Participatory Budgeting Real Democracy?", examined experiences with PB in Chicago, with some in-depth analysis both locally and globally.

Participatory budgeting was reportedly initiated in 1989 in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. Ms. Hadden and Mr. Lerner state that as of December 2011 it had been used by residents in over 1,000 cities around the world. They state that in essence: "This innovative model has become popular across Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, and the United Nations has named PB a best practice of democratic governance. Cities, counties, states, schools, and housing authorities have used it to give local people control over public spending." Ms. Clark also notes that the Obama administration has been supportive.

It seems important to stress at the outset that participatory budgeting, by definition, only involves a small percentage of a city's entire municipal budget, usually only 1-3% but in some cases as high

as 15%. It is not a plan or technique to make 100%, or even anywhere near a plurality of the entire City budget, subject to a participatory process.

Such a process involves extensive, long-term public consultation over the budget priorities, for the small portion of the overall budget that is designated subject to the participatory budgeting process. Therefore, this is probably a good time to initiate discussion of participatory budgeting, in the immediate aftermath of Council's FY 2016-17 budget deliberations. This leaves ample time to discuss the issue with other policymakers, including both Council Members and the Mayor, as well as other stakeholders. In the event that a significant number of them opt to begin such a process, there would presumably be sufficient time to design it for implementation in the next annual budget process for FY 2017-18.

However, that is not by any means guaranteed or simple. It will take a long time to organize the relevant stakeholders, identify goals and procedures, and implement such a process, assuming Detroiters choose to do so. LPD believes that the advice of Ms. Hadden and Mr. Lerner is correct: "First, check if the right conditions are in place. At the most basic level, you need political will from above and community support from below."[i] Assuming that such broad support exists, after identifying the grassroots and government players available to institute participatory budgeting, they appropriately suggest: "To start gathering support, organize a public event about PB to explain how it works, where it has worked, and what benefits it could bring to your community."

This is where a full year would be needed to flesh out the details of a PB process that suits, and can be supported and implemented for, Detroit. Broad support would need to be recruited, and effective messaging and policy reasons will have to be developed to support PB, in the event that a sufficient critical mass of policy makers and residents can be identified who are motivated to take part actively in the process. Ms. Hadden and Mr. Lerner identify several key issues, which will not be repeated in detail here, in the attached article that may appeal to various groups and individuals: democracy; transparency; education; efficiency; social justice; and community.

Effective implementation of any PB process will require buy-in not only from many necessary stakeholders, but prominently must include the administration. After the City's Chapter 9 bankruptcy and the plan of adjustment, and subject to the oversight of the Financial Review Commission (FRC), PB may face more legal and political/administrative obstacles in Detroit than in other places. This issue should, in LPD's opinion, be confronted at the very outset, as soon as possible, by seeking support from the administration and the Law Department's approval of such a process under the terms of the plan of adjustment, before substantial resources are devoted to an innovative policy option that would be wasted if official resistance to the very concept is too intense and unremitting.

In the event that a PB process is tentatively acceptable to the administration, Detroit's Anna Clark itemizes benefits that such a process produced for one part of Chicago: "Thanks to the process, Rogers Park can now boast of a new community garden, dozens of underpass murals, heating shelters at three transit stations, hundreds of tree plantings, an outdoor shower at Loyola Park, a

$110,000 dog park, and eye-catching "You Are Here" neighborhood information boards at transit station entrances."[i]

However, this piece also makes it clear that PB has not been an unqualified success in all four (4) Chicago wards that attempted it: "Two of the wards dropped it after one year, citing the immense amount of work it takes to get residents involved, while the other two have kept at it, slow and steady." (See attached article) That experience highlights the importance of seeking as much information as possible from a broad range of sources as soon as possible in a prospective PB process in Detroit.

If Council has any additional questions or concerns regarding this matter, LPD would be pleased to provide further research and analysis and report back regarding same.

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[i] The Peoples Platform organization in Detroit has advocated participatory budgeting, and might therefore be one place to start: http://www.detroitpeoplesplatform.org/resources/participatory-budgeting/ (web site visited on March 15, 2016)

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[1] LPD notes that in many ways the vision of community engagement and participation represented by participatory budgeting seems to be akin to that currently being developed by the Director of the Department of Planning and Development, involving grassroots participatory planning processes in specific areas of the City. Another pending City government reform that might be complimentary to participatory budgeting may be the Citizen Advisory Councils authorized by the 2012 City Charter. Whichever individual programs and activities that may ultimately be targeted for participatory budgeting, the key underlying point is that the process would have to have a specific, identified focus and "home" within City government and the community. As noted, participatory budgeting is not generally considered to be about the City's entire government budget process.

Wednesday, December 7, 2011 by **Shareable**

How to Start Participatory Budgeting in Your City

by **Maria Hadden** and **Josh Lerner**

Have you noticed all the cuts being made to your city budget? To schools and libraries, fire fighters and social services, and other public spending? Think you could do a better job managing the budget? Soon, you may have that chance.

Through a process called "participatory budgeting", residents of over 1,000 cities around the world are deciding how to spend taxpayer dollars. In October, four districts in New York City launched the second such process in the US. This article offers some initial tips for how you could start participatory budgeting in your city.

What is Participatory Budgeting?

In 1989, the Brazilian city of **Porto Alegre developed a new model of democratic participation**, which has become known internationally as "participatory budgeting" (PB). Through this process, community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. In other words, the people who pay taxes (all of us) decide how they get spent.

This sounds simple, but it is not. Budgets are complex creatures, and it takes a lot of time and support for ordinary people to make wise spending decisions. For this reason, PB generally involves a year-long cycle of public meetings. Community members discuss local needs and develop project proposals to meet these needs, then invite the public to vote on which projects get funded.

This innovative model has become popular across Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, and the United Nations has named PB a best practice of democratic governance. Cities, counties, states, schools, and housing authorities have used it to give local people control over public spending.

Despite its widespread popularity, PB is new to North America. In 2009, our organization, **The Participatory Budgeting Project**(The PB Project) helped launch the **first process in the US**, with $1.3 million in **Chicago's 49th Ward**. This Fall, we're piloting a **$6 million initiative in four New York City districts**. Discussions are also underway in Providence, New Orleans, Greensboro, **San Francisco**, and elsewhere.

If you want to bring PB to your community, here are some questions and suggestions to start you off:

Could PB work in my community?

First, check if the right conditions are in place. At the most basic level, you need political will from above and community support from below. You need someone with control over budget money (an elected official, agency head, department director, etc.) to agree to let the public decide how to spend part of the

budget. And you need community organizations, in particular those working with marginalized communities, to engage people and push the process forward.

At first, you may not know if you can count on the support of officials or community groups. So ask around. See if there are organizations or decision-makers who might be sympathetic. If so, start organizing.

How do I put PB on the agenda?

To start gathering support, organize a public event about PB to explain how it works, where it has worked, and what benefits it could bring to your community. The PB Project can help provide speakers and materials. Ask organizations and universities to co-sponsor the event, to build up more support and resources. Invite government officials and community leaders to respond to the presentations, to say whether and how they think PB could work locally.

You can also try proposing PB at other community meetings, writing editorials or blog posts, and asking elected officials or candidates to take a stance. Bit by bit, this public outreach can add up and spark local interest.

Who should be at the table for initial discussions?

When you begin to introduce the idea of PB to your community, talk with as many interested organizations and parties as possible. This includes government representatives and elected officials, local nonprofits, block clubs, religious institutions, political groups, foundations, universities, schools, and activists. The knowledge and relationships of these groups will determine how far your efforts will go.

How do I pitch PB, to attract interest?

We've found that different people get excited about PB for different reasons, but these six angles attract the most interest:

- **Democracy:** Ordinary people have a real say—and they get to make real political decisions. Politicians build closer relationships with their constituents, and community members develop greater trust in government.
- **Transparency:** Budgets are policy without the rhetoric—what a government actually does. When community members decide spending through a public vote, there are fewer opportunities for corruption, waste, or backlash.
- **Education:** Participants become more active and informed citizens. Community members, staff, and officials learn democracy by doing it. They gain a deeper understanding of complex political issues and community needs.

• **Efficiency:** Budget decisions are better when they draw on residents' local knowledge and oversight. Once they are invested in the process, people make sure that money is spent wisely.
• **Social Justice:** Everyone gets equal access to decision making, which levels the playing field. Traditionally underrepresented groups often participate more than usual in PB, which helps direct resources to communities with the greatest needs.
• **Community:** Through regular meetings and assemblies, people get to know their neighbors and feel more connected to their city. Local organizations spend less time lobbying, and more time deciding policies. Budget assemblies connect community groups and help them recruit members.

How do I deal with resistance?

When government officials and other decision makers first hear about PB, they often raise the following doubts:

• **That's the Elected Official's Job:** Voters elect government officials to make the tough decisions, so shouldn't budgeting be their responsibility?
Sure, they should be responsible. But if they share this responsibility with community members, they can better represent local needs and desires. PB helps officials do their job better, by putting them in closer touch with their constituents, and by injecting local knowledge and volunteer energy into the budget process.

• **There's No Money:** Budgets are being cut across the board, so how could there be money to launch PB?
Fortunately, PB does not require a new pot of money, just a change to how existing budget funds are decided. You will need some resources to carry out the PB process, but this investment saves money down the road, as participants discover new ways to make limited budget dollars go farther.

• **The Process Will Be Co-Opted:** If budget decisions are opened up to the public, won't the "usual suspects" and powerful community groups dominate?
This is a valid concern for any kind of public participation, and PB is not immune. But if you involve all segments of the community in planning the process, and reduce the barriers to participation for marginalized people, you can prevent any one sector from taking control. Regardless, when people are given real responsibility to make budget decisions, they tend to rise to the occasion, and think about the broader community.

What pot of money will the community allocate?

PB usually starts with "discretionary funds"—money that is not set aside for fixed or essential expenses, and that is instead allocated at the discretion of decision makers. While this is typically a small part of the overall budget, it is a big part of the funds that are available and up for debate each year.

There are many sources of discretionary money. It could come from the capital budget (for physical infrastructure) or operating budget (for programs and services) of your city, county, or state. City councilors or other officials could set aside their individual discretionary funds, as in Chicago and New York. These officials may also have control over special allocations like Community Development Block Grants or Tax Increment Financing (TIF) money. Housing authorities, schools, universities, community centers, and other public institutions could open up their budgets.

The funds could even come from non-governmental sources like foundations, community organizations, or grassroots fundraising, if this money is oriented towards public or community projects. Some PB processes mix funds from different sources, to build up a bigger budget pot.

How much money is enough to do PB?

Almost no pot of money is too small to start. PB has worked with a few thousand dollars and with many millions of dollars. Most processes involve 1-15% of the overall budget. PB usually starts as a pilot project with a small budget. If the process is successful, it can build political will to increase the pot of money.

How much money you need depends on what it will be used for. If students are allocating the money to school activities, a couple thousand dollars will go a long way. If residents are deciding on significant physical improvements for public parks, streets, and buildings, you'll probably want at least a million dollars. These capital projects typically require more money than programs and services, since they are built to last multiple years.

Regardless, you'll want funds that are renewable from year to year, so that PB isn't just a one-year fling. And in the long run, the more money, the more you can do!

What other resources will I need?

Creating a new experiment in democracy is not easy. It requires months of planning, to design a sound process and build community buy-in. Successful PBs draw on the expertise and resources of dozens of organizations and agencies. Bringing all these people to the table is not easy—and getting them to agree on a plan is even harder!

Once your process gets going, you will need an extensive outreach and communications effort. Without the financial and human resources to conduct outreach, print materials, and run scores of public

meetings, community participation will be limited. Usually, the elected official, city, or agency pays most of these expenses. Foundations and other funders can also help cover costs—especially at first, when the work is greatest.

Starting PB in your city is a lot of hard work, but if you do it right, the payoff is tremendous. You can make government more transparent, budgeting more efficient, and public spending more fair. You can educate thousands of people on how government works, develop hundreds of grassroots leaders, and build stronger community networks. And in the end, you might even fend off those waves of budget cuts, and replace them with a people's budget.

For more information about starting PB in your community, please visit **www.participatorybudgeting.org** or email The PB Project at**info@participatorybudgeting.org**.

Maria Hadden became involved in Participatory Budgeting as a volunteer community representative during the first cycle in Chicago's 49th Ward. She continues to work with PB in the 49th Ward and joined the Participatory Budgeting Project to bring the process to even more locations in the United States and beyond.

http://www.commondreams.org/view/2011/12/07-2

Is Participatory Budgeting Real Democracy?

Politics, People's Choice Style in Chicago

STORY BY Anna Clark
Apr 28, 2014

On a Tuesday evening in April, one of the first pleasant evenings in spring, more than sixty people crowded into a shabby second-floor room of a church on Chicago's North Side. They threaded through rows of pink chairs and past long tables circling the room, some with poster board triptychs sitting stately upon them. Neighbors had pasted onto these boards visions for how to make the area, Rogers Park, a better place to live. Optimism and a hearty civic spirit brought the community together for this meeting.

But nothing seemed to be going right.

Alderman Joe Moore was running late. The bulb on the projector burned out; staff from the 49th Ward office were scampering to find a replacement. They had no luck. "We'll just make do and get going," said Sheree Moratto, chair of the PB49 Leadership Committee. A cheery woman with a mind for efficiency, she was looking a little flustered this evening. When the presentations finally began (25 minutes late) residents standing before a yawning blank screen made their pitches for the projects they spent all winter developing . Attendees paged through black-and-white printouts of the slideshow that never was, while presenters made passionate pleas for their pet projects.

Chris Kopp and his energetic young son Henry spoke for a bikes-and-transit committee, pitching new bus stop benches and a 27-block bike route running through Rogers Park. A parks committee proposed a new beachfront path and numerous other improvements for aging recreational areas. Speaking for the

committee, Rebecca Weinberg introduced herself as a "mom to a two year old, so I'm obsessive about places to play."

After a tough winter that produced awful potholes, and with menu money as the only source of funds for resurfacing residential streets, 35-year-old Glenn Grossklags begged his neighbors to spend on street repair.

"We'd love to have 100 percent, but we know we're not going to get it," he said, sounding a little world-weary.

There was some urgency to this: this week, on May 3, residents will vote for their favorite projects. The top vote-getters will become reality.

Rogers Park is a neighborhood known for its freshwater beaches, leafy residential streets and the Art Deco campus of Loyola University. It's also home to the 49th Ward, the first U.S. city to put participatory budgeting into practice making the district a focal point for a radical experiment in direct democracy.

Drawing from a practice pioneered 25 years ago in Porto Alegre, Brazil and imported to North America via progressive leaders in Toronto and Quebec, participatory budgeting cracks open the closed-door process of fiscal decision-making in cities, letting citizens vote on exactly how government money is spent in their community. It's an auspicious departure from traditional ways of allocating tax dollars, let alone in Chicago, which has long been known for deeply entrenched machine politics. As Alderman Joe Moore puts it, in Chicago, "so many decisions are made from the top down."

Participatory budgeting works pretty simply in the 49th Ward. Instead of Moore deciding how to spend $1.3 million in "menu money" that is allotted annually to each of Chicago's 50 council members for capital improvements, the councilman opens up a public process to determine how to spend $1 million of

the allotment. The remaining $300,000 is socked away in the bank for emergencies and cost overruns.

And the unusual vote on $1 million in menu money is open to a wider swath of the community than your standard Election Day: you don't have to be a citizen to cast a ballot, and the voting age is sixteen.

Thanks to the process, Rogers Park can now boast of a new community garden, dozens of underpass murals, heating shelters at three transit stations, hundreds of tree plantings, an outdoor shower at Loyola Park, a $110,000 dog park, and eye-catching "You Are Here" neighborhood information boards at transit station entrances.

In the years since Moore brought participatory budgeting to Rogers Park, four other Chicago districts have followed suit. Two of the wards dropped it after one year, citing the immense amount of work it takes to get residents involved, while the other two have kept at it, slow and steady. In the fall, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel signaled his commitment to keep the nascent movement alive, with the creation of a new position in City Hall's Office of Management and Budget downtown. The new manager—not yet hired—will provide technical support to participatory budgeting efforts in the wards.

Communities elsewhere are adopting the process as well—about 1,200 of them globally, including nine city council districts in New York, the city of Vallejo, Calif., and three council districts in San Francisco, host to the third annual International Conference on Participatory Budgeting in September. (Chicago, naturally, hosted the conference in 2013.) New York Mayor Bill de Blasio campaigned on expanding participatory budgeting in the city, and when the process begins again next fall, it will have more than twice as many city council districts taking part in it— almost half of the city. Boston recently launched the first youth-driven participatory budgeting program in the country; based out of

the mayor's office and facilitated during after-school meetings (with pizza), young people will decide how to spend $1 million in capital funds.

Another prominent supporter of participatory budgeting? The White House. In December—about eight months after Joe Moore met with President Barack Obama about bringing participatory budgeting to the federal level—PB became an option for determining how to spend community development block-grant money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Obama administration also declared that, in a yet-to-be-detailed partnership, it will help create tools that can be used for participatory budgeting on a local level.

All this activity has so far added up to $45 million in tax dollars allocated to 203 voter-approved projects across the country. Some 46,000 people and 500 organizations nationwide have been part of the decision-making, according to the nonprofit Participatory Budgeting Project.

No doubt, it's still a rather small sliver of the hundreds of billions spent each year by governments, but there are strong indications the number could multiply within just a few short years. And to many observers troubled by sinking voter turnout rates and endemic distrust of government, this is a very good thing.

"In the usual forms of democratic engagement—public hearings, town meetings—people who go to those things don't expect anything to happen because of their participation," said Archon Fung, a Harvard University professor who researches participatory governance. "Participatory budgeting is fundamentally different because people expect something to happen with their participation."

But to fulfill this vision, the process needs resources behind it—enough funds for projects to demonstrate a visible community benefit, and ample capacity

from the facilitators of the process (whether it's district officials or city hall) to truly reach out to the community. Without intention and capacity, PB risks duplicating the process of elections for ordinary representative democracy, where white middle- and upper-class voters are far more likely to vote and therefore enjoy an outsized influence on their neighborhood.

Participatory budgeting has long seemed to be too utopian to work in cities—if it could work anywhere in America. But is the first wave of PB communities mainstreaming this radical process? And if the process catches on, will it live up to its promise of creating a fairer, more equitable and more direct democracy—or will it alienate the very people it means to engage?

REVOLUTION, ONE LIBRARY CARPET AT A TIME

In the tiny women's bathroom of a bar in Rogers Park, the graffiti gets political. "Free Leonard Peltier!" is scrawled in magenta marker. "Ald. Joe Moore Sat Here," suggests another line. And, put more plainly in purple marker, "Fuck Joe Moore."

The afternoon bartender is a young woman in jeans and a long ponytail named Sydney. She said that Joe Moore "has definitely proven to be one of the more controversial" of the city's alderman—enough so that she didn't want her last name or the name of the bar to appear in print, for fear of her clientele's reaction. Many love the longtime community leader who earned a reputation for his spirited progressivism, often going up against Mayor Richard M. Daley. He was the champion behind the 2006 Chicago Big Box Ordinance that compelled companies like Wal-Mart to pay a living wage, raising the minimum pay to $10 an hour. But those in the community who oppose him, Sydney said, feel he's gotten too cozy with Mayor Emanuel. Indeed, while Moore voted with Daley 51 percent of the time, he's voted with Emanuel 97 percent of the time.

"It's really split down the middle," Sydney said in a knowing tone. In 2007, Moore was forced into a run-off election, in which he scraped through by less than 300 votes. Shortly after this, Moore launched participatory budgeting in the ward. He reached out to Josh Lerner, who he'd seen present about it at a conference, to develop a workable process for the 49th Ward. Back then, when Lerner championed PB, he'd often hear that it was "fine for Brazil, Asia, Africa, but it couldn't work here, it couldn't work in a place like Chicago."

Moore held his first participatory budget hearing in 2009. By the time he ran for office again in 2011, he was elected with 72 percent of the vote—barroom graffiti notwithstanding.

The alderman apologized when he rushed late into the harried April meeting at St. Paul's Church-by-the-Lake in Rogers Park. He'd been with his son on a college visit downstate. "I left early from Urbana-Champaign because I wanted to be sure to be here for this," he told the crowd. Before the project presentations continued, Moore stood before the blank projector screen and rallied the group by putting the nitty-gritty of one suggested budget line item—library carpeting—in the context of a larger democratic revolution. "When this is adopted in governments across the nation, we'll know it started here in the 49th ward," Moore said. "We're a part of history."

But history is painstaking. In a series of neighborhood assemblies in the fall, the community broke into small groups with volunteer facilitators and brainstormed ideas for how it might spend the money this year. Green alleys came up again and again. Somebody wanted to see community composting in the neighborhood. But after a winter where voluntary community representatives researched and honed the most promising project ideas, the final proposals to the community look quite different. There will be no green alleys or community compositing sites on the ballot. Nonetheless, after whittling the wish-list down to what is affordable and doable, residents (and

Moore's office) feel they are presenting projects that will excite the community: geometric designs on the street surface of key intersections, brighter street lighting, a new mosaic on the field house of a park, and more everyday street repairs.

The fact that the money is limited to "touch-and-feel" capital projects—infrastructure, and not programming or operations, especially those that overlap with City Hall services—consistently confuses residents. "We can't do big things, like renovating the wing of a school, the kinds of things that really ring people's bells," said Betsy Vandercook, Moore's chief of staff who has been with the 49th Ward's PB process since it began. She pointed out that this is an "accident of planning" with menu money in Chicago; PB money that comes from HUD block grants would likely be available for a more expansive array of projects. And indeed, the White House's plan emphasizes that the federal dollars are intended to support affordable housing and services to vulnerable citizens.

Even as the countdown begins for this week's PB vote, the limitations on spending still need to be explained to residents eager to propose things like after-school programs and help for the homeless.. And for some residents, like Sydney, the focus on capital projects makes the process, which she had never heard of before I mentioned it, feel moot. She, along with several other residents I talked to, feels that gang activity is the community's greatest challenge. "Just in the last month, there were, like, four shootings," she said. Free programming for young people that would keep them away from the violence, she says, is what would most benefit the community she's lived in all her life. "Yeah, the murals are nice and give the neighborhood a good feel," Sydney said, but, "as someone who lives up here, it's just not what we need right now."

It's a weakness that advocates don't deny.

"If I had $1 million to put towards jobs or programming, I'd have 5,000 people showing up for the vote, not to mention the community meetings," Vandercook said. The story doesn't end on voting day. To see the projects actualized, community members and Moore's office must steer them through a tricky process that requires follow-through from understaffed city departments and utilities—which often must develop new guidelines for this unusual procedure. Few participatory budgeting projects in the 49th Ward emerge without delays and some are still caught in the bureaucratic process. But none have been outright canceled. "We try very hard to avoid putting anything on ballot that cannot be implemented," Moore said.

Another point of contention? It's not possible to invest, save, or build interest on this year's menu money so that it can be funneled into a costlier high-impact project later on - a suggestion made at virtually every PB community meeting. The menu money comes through the city as bond-issue money, and the city keeps the investment income for itself. While menu money could roll over in previous years, Emanuel ended the practice; unspent money each year goes back into City Hall's coffers.

AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATION

Participatory budgeting works differently for every city. In Porto Alegre, Brazil, where the process was created a generation ago by The Worker's Party to give disadvantaged people a stronger voice in government, as many as 50,000 people vote on how to spend public money each year. More than $700 million has been funneled through the process since its inception. Vallejo, Calif., embraced participatory budgeting in 2012 after emerging from bankruptcy as part of its citywide reinvention. In its first PB vote in May 2013, 3,917 residents voted over the course of a week at 13 polling locations. That translated into four percent of the city's eligible voters—a tiny number, but a much higher percentage than previous PB processes in Chicago and New York.

But the 5th Ward in Hyde Park, a South Side neighborhood that's home to the University of Chicago, dropped PB in December, citing low turnout in neighborhood assemblies and residents who felt the process was too much work to be worthwhile. "They said it was very time consuming, a lot of meetings, and that they thought the neighborhood groups that they had were active enough to do it without having all of the expenses that were associated with it," Alderman Leslie Hairston told the Hyde Park Herald. In 2013, its first year with participatory budgeting, the 5th Ward held a PB vote that saw only 100 ballots cast.

Josh Lerner of the Participatory Budgeting Project says low turnout is a problem that can be solved through outreach and promotion. "It is challenging to do this without capacity," he said. Internationally, according to Lerner, PB is part of a city administration, with a whole office coordinating the process. Without the backing from City Hall in Porto Alegre, participatory budgeting would have a hard time attracting the tens of thousands who now count themselves as part of the process. And even with the support from City Hall, the 50,000 participants represent less than one percent of the city's population of 1.4 million.

Moore's office is putting great effort toward ensuring that the participatory budgeting process in Rogers Park is indeed participatory. It hosts neighborhood assemblies and project expos throughout the community, including for students at the local high schools. It has a Spanish-language arm which, among other contributions, designed a project on this year's ballot that would turn an abandoned basketball court into a mini AstroTurf soccer field for children.

This engagement takes effort and resources by Moore's office, but it appears effective — the same year that the 5th Ward had 100 people turn up to vote, the 49th Ward had about 1,500 voters. "Slightly better than in the past,"

Vandercook told me, as a result of a "major outreach push." Chicago's 46th Ward had more than 500 voters.

But there's a lot of work to be done. Each Chicago ward has about 53,000 residents, meaning that less than three percent of the population turned out for the the PB vote in the 49th Ward (though that percentage doesn't account for residents who are not eligible to vote because they are not yet 16.) For those that do show up, participation follows old patterns. Outreach or no, PB in Chicago still skews toward white residents who are middle- and upper-class, even though, in the 49th Ward, residents are about 30 percent Latino, 30 percent African American, 30 percent white and 10 percent Asian American. More than 80 languages are spoken in Moore's district. You could argue that the Spanish-language assembly was a drop in the bucket.

Archon Fung observed that the U.S. versions of PB are very small compared to international versions, in terms of the money spent, so "it's difficult for citizens to see positive outcomes, to be able to point to something and say, 'Yeah, I'm proud of that, yeah, I had a role in that.'" That lack of visibility diminishes participation. "Wins are really important to sustaining the process and making it bigger," Fung added.

There is no question that a large gap in participation remains and that the outreach that could alleviate the problem costs money that simply isn't available. Notably, when New York City introduced a PB process that modeled Chicago's, it added a new element that empowered council members to provide grants for outreach efforts to nonprofits in low-income communities.

There are also other models for participatory budgeting that stretch and expand the pool of voters. Vandercook told me about a model where children—anyone old enough to talk—are allowed to vote alongside everyone else. The project expo would post drawings of the projects with buckets in front of them,

so children can choose their favorites by dropping gold coins in them ("without chocolate, so they don't eat the ballots.")

"PB keeps on expanding the edges of what's possible for voting," Vandercook said. She pointed out that secret ballots and ID cards are relatively new developments in American voting. "The process has changed throughout history," she said. "We used to have town meetings, where you had to stand by what you believed in." This mirrors the template of the final PB voting day, which is a "very open and retro" process where people speak publicly about their choices.

Vandercook, for her part, says that they are trying to bring more people and more diversity into the process. The team circulates "thousands and thousands" of fliers about the neighborhood assemblies, she said, because it understands that not every resident relies on email. All information is bilingual, and if someone who is hearing impaired needs an interpreter at a meeting, they have one available. But at the same time, Vandercook said, "I refuse to beat myself up" about the diversity of participants. "You do what you can, but at a certain point you have to accept that this interests people, or it doesn't."

A recent report by the National League of Cities and Knight Foundation suggests that Moore's office make better use of online tools in order to improve diverse participation in the process, something San Francisco is experimenting with. Foremost among the suggestions is to allow people to vote online, and to comment on how to improve proposed projects. The 49th Ward is venturing forward with online voting this year, with the support of Stanford University. At the April project expo in Rogers Park, a table was set up in back with a laptop where attendees could test the program out; researchers asked for feedback, and were tweaking it for actual use in this week's early voting. Tanja Aitamurto, who hosted the pilot online vote, is a visiting researcher in the Program on Liberation Technology at Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development, and

the Rule of Law. "The point is for residents to access it online a few weeks before (the vote) so people can play around, seeing how it works, without actually voting," she said.

The report by National League of Cities and Knight also suggests using GIS mapping tools to help residents identify and visualize projects, as well as budget simulators so they can play with the dollars for their favorite projects. But of course, all these tools cost money, and they can't replace face-to-face engagement—especially for a process that is so foreign to most residents.

Meanwhile, the 49th Ward is catching the attention of academics that want to watch this experiment in democracy unfold—and, in some cases, actively support its success. The University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute joined the Participatory Budgeting Project to raise $175,000 in funds and services for PB in Chicago, including the printing of ballots and flyers. They also provide a central person, not in the ward, to "do the grunt work: the phone calls, the emails, setting up the meetings," said Vandercook. (Academic interest is also leading to documentation of the process: José Meléndez of UI Chicago and a PB49 leadership committee member, filmed the April project expo for his dissertation.)

"I think it's going to be tough," Vandercook said about expanding and improving participatory budgeting in the city, adding that the timing seems off for the citywide position. With an alderman election in 2015, the time that city leaders and staff can dedicate to launching the effort in their own communities—let alone doing so with an effective outreach plan—will be swiftly eaten up. In the long term, she said, participatory budgeting will work. But the short term will be a struggle.

"How can we work smarter?" Vandercook said. "Can we combine (neighborhood information) meetings to reduce the level of staff needed? Can we get the

community to take more responsibility? ... It's huge work people have to do." But once residents take the responsibility, how does government ensure that their votes reflect true public needs? Park projects are unfailingly popular in PB communities. Last year in New York, for instance, more than half of the projects that won funding from voters were park and open-space projects, from the renovation of East Harlem basketball courts to the construction of ADA-compliant access ramps to Rockaway Beach. When the choice is between street repairs and a fun but not totally necessary park, do the repairs ever win? How does the dull-but-essential work win the heart of the masses?

The 49th Ward learned this the hard way: residents aren't likely to vote for street resurfacing projects, unless they happened to live on the street in question. And as Glenn Grossklags emphasized, if resurfacing isn't done through menu money, it isn't done. So last year, the 49th Ward refashioned its ballot. Voters don't just choose their favorite projects among the 20 proposals, they also vote for what percentage of the menu money should be allotted to street resurfacing and street lighting across the community. If most voters choose 50%, then $500,000 of the menu will be spent on maintenance. The remaining $500,000 will be given over to the top vote-getting projects. It's a compromise that returns some discretionary power to the elected official but keeps public will at the forefront of the decision-making.

OPEN INVITATION

So what's next for participatory budgeting in Rogers Park and beyond?

Well, first off, Rahm Emanuel's new Manager of Participatory Budgeting will be responsible for supporting council districts if and when they opt to go participatory. There won't be a requirement to do so, but if a district wishes to follow the 49th, they will have high-level backup from City Hall.

But this new manager—as well as Chicago's aldermen and engaged citizens—must understand that there is no one-size-fits-all formula for participatory budgeting. The process must be adapted to the unique needs and culture of each district if it is to resonate with locals. And timing is key for rolling out the process.

While still in the hazy early days, federal support through the new White House initiative may also prove crucial in streamlining the participatory budgeting process, easing the burden on local leaders and citizens, and ultimately generating better participation—and, therefore, better on-the-ground results in communities around the country.

One of the key lessons of participatory budgeting—as with democracy more broadly—is that efficiency is not the highest value in the public sphere. It would be much easier and more cost-effective for aldermen to return to the old days and simply check off the boxes for where he or she thinks menu money should be spent. "We could sign off on menu money in a couple hours, a couple days," Vandercook said. By choosing the participatory path, aldermen effectively create more work for themselves. They risk low rates of participation and the possibility that winning projects may not be the most worthy. Scalability, too, is a problem — the larger the community served by the process, the more difficult it is to ensure that both the process and the resulting projects reflect the needs of the entire community.

Nonetheless, participatory budgeting serves a harder-to-measure purpose that may well be, in the final accounting, more important. It is a profound civic education for citizens, who dig into both the limits and possibilities of public money. They experience what their elected leaders must navigate every day. But it's also a civic education for council members and city staff who may find that they are engaging with those they represent more than they ever had before, learning about what they value most. Owen Brugh, chief of staff for Alderman

Joe Arena in Chicago's 45th Ward, told the Participatory Budgeting Project, "I was really surprised by the amazing knowledge base we have among our volunteers. So many of our volunteers came to the process with a background where they understood some principles of traffic management, community development and urban planning. It was very refreshing. Usually, in an alderman's office, people contact us to fix an isolated problem. Through this process, we discussed not just what needed to be fixed but what we wanted our community to be."

The participatory budgeting process expands the scope and depth of civic spaces in the community, where elected leaders work with—not for—residents. Even for those who do not show up to vote, there is an empowerment that comes simply in knowing that they could; the sincere invitation to participate matters, whether or not it is accepted.

Voting has already begun in Rogers Park: early ballots began being cast on April 26. But it is Saturday when residents will head over to the Chicago Math and Science Academy on Clark Street between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.. to choose what matters most to them. At an evening party, they will announce and celebrate the results. Residents who put time and energy into developing projects over the winter will be watching the results come in with special nervousness. Robin McPherson, a 29-year-resident on the parks committee, has her heart set on a water spray feature at Pottawattomi Park. "I've seen our parks in the past, our parks now and our parks in the future," she said, with real enthusiasm. "This is our future."