



Ward 1 Participatory Budgeting

Strategic Review
Executive Summary

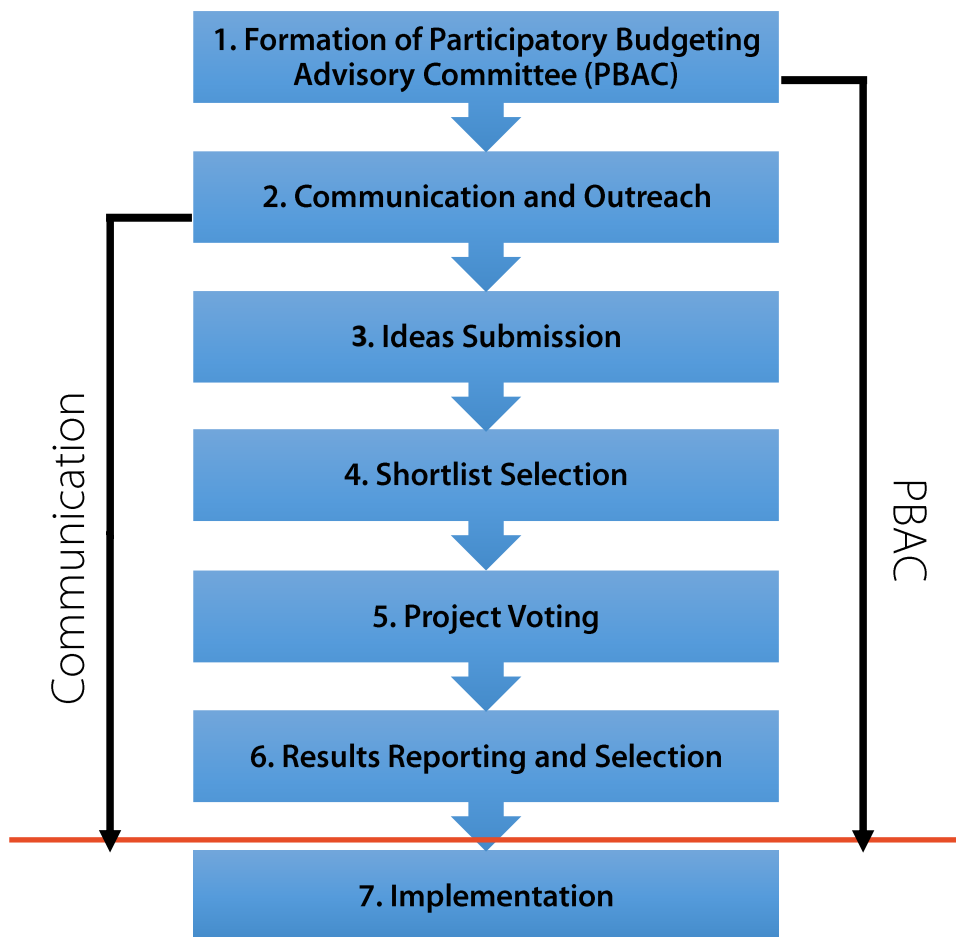
August 2015



Executive Summary

ForWard One is the name of a participatory budgeting (pb) process used in Ward 1 in the City of Hamilton to engage residents in identifying and prioritizing capital projects for funding. The process was initiated in 2012 as a means to seek input from the community to inform the Ward Councillor's decisions about capital investment. It was influenced by other examples of participatory budgeting, but it was tailored for the specific conditions in Hamilton's Ward 1. Additionally, the existing model took into account the fact that the majority of the time and resource requirements for its operation would be volunteer driven. The process involved seven steps as displayed below.

ForWard One Process



In 2015, the newly elected Ward 1 Councillor decided to review and renew the current pb process to learn from previous successes while improving certain parts of the process. In aid of this, the Councillor retained Civicplan to conduct a strategic review of the existing process.

The review involved three stages. It began with an analysis of the existing process, the various stages and trends observed over the three years it has been employed. Second, a community dialogue was initiated with members of the Ward 1 community through interviews, focus groups and an online survey. Finally, a set of recommendations and next steps were developed to help improve the process moving forward. Additionally, a best practices review of how participatory budgeting is implemented in other select communities was conducted to support the recommendations.

Overall, results from the community dialogue indicated strong support for participatory budgeting as means of influencing the spending of area rating funds on capital projects. Those surveyed noted their support for the current system, with some suggestions for improvement. Additionally, the review of historical data, as well as interviews with past PBAC members and the focus group with current PBAC members identified certain key areas within the existing process for improvement.

Some key successes over the years of ForWard One included,

- Consistently attracting skilled volunteers willing to commit time and energy to making the process work
- The improvement of communication material, dissemination, and branding over the three years
- Support from survey respondents for the current ideas submission (61%) and project voting processes (73%)

Some key challenges emerged during the strategic review as well. In general, these challenges related to the following themes,

- Improving transparency and openness of PBAC and the operation of the process
- Expanding and diversifying the volunteer base for ForWard One, as well as for participating residents
- Providing better and more information about area rating and the process for participants
- Improving communication between the Committee and residents about projects approved for funding, how they were selected and the path through implementation

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Ward 1 designed model of pb be retained in general, with targeted enhancements moving forward. This will reflect the successes of the work of staff and past volunteers, it supports the realities of the funding model, and aims to incorporate a reasonable approach to the resource requirements to make the process successful in the future. The following 15 recommendations propose actions for the Councillor and PBAC to improve participatory budgeting in Ward 1.

1. Align Scope of ForWard One Process with Resource Availability
 - a. Develop a process budget

PBAC

2. Improve Operation of PBAC
 - a. Create a more robust orientation process
 - b. Create a rulebook
 - c. Strengthen sub-committees
 - d. Standardize record keeping
3. Improve Transparency around PBAC Operations
 - a. Publicize committee activities
 - b. Open PBAC meetings to the public
4. Expand Community Representation in ForWard One
 - a. Diversify committee membership
 - b. Create additional volunteer opportunities

Communication & Outreach

5. Improve Communication throughout ForWard One Process
 - a. Update Communication Plan
 - b. Use Communication Plan and actions to enhance transparency
6. Strengthen Outreach and Engagement Approaches.
 - a. Update and expand Engagement Plan
 - b. Extend time for outreach and engagement

Idea Submission

7. Improve Ideas Submission Process
 - a. Create a more detailed ideas submission form
 - b. Allow for real-time review and feedback on the ideas submitted
 - c. Host an Ideas Charrette
8. Improve Public Education around Ideas Submission

Project Shortlist

9. Create a more effective shortlist
 - a. Lengthen shortlist development period
 - b. Engage City staff
 - c. Shorten the shortlist
10. Improve Transparency and Accountability of process
 - a. Standardize project filtering process and track decisions
 - b. Provide concrete feedback about ideas submitted

Project Voting

11. Improve Voting Opportunities
 - a. Develop paper ballot dissemination strategy
 - b. Improve ballot information
12. Solicit Feedback about ForWard One Process
 - a. Results Selection & Reporting
13. Improve Transparency of Selection Process

Project Implementation

14. Improve Reporting on Funded Projects
15. Promote Successfully Implemented ForWard One Projects

The recommendations were developed from the research conducted throughout the strategic review. In some instances, recommendations may reflect suggestions presented during the community dialogue. In other instances, examples of how other pb processes address similar challenges were integrated into the recommendations. These actions may be incorporated into a renewed ForWard One process in 2016.