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AGENDA REPORT

TO: HENRY L.GARDNER
INTERIM CITY ADMINISTRATOR

FROM: Sarah T. Schlenk
Interim Budget Director

SUBJECT: Budget Advisory Committee Report
On Public Engagement

DATE: May 30, 2014

City Administrator
Approval

Date

6/4/14

COUNCIL DISTRICT: City-Wide

RECOMMENDATION

Receive and accept an informational report from the City's Budget Advisory Committee ("BAC") on recommendations to improve public engagement in the budget process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BAC recommends that the City undertake the following actions to improve public engagement in the budget process:

1. Develop and Implement a Professional Citywide Poll and Public Survey
2. Conduct Year-Round Public Engagement
3. Launch a Public Budget Literacy Campaign
4. Expand Methods of Engagement

These recommendations are derived from the BAC Informational Report Evaluating the FY 2013-15 Budget Process which was presented to the Finance and Management Committee on February 11, 2014. Specifically they are derived from: recommendation 4 (conduct public engagement year-round), 5 (launch a public budget-literacy campaign), and 6 (add additional methods of engagement).

OUTCOME

Staff requests that the Finance and Management Committee receive and accept this informational report. The acceptance of this report does not create any policy or compel any action.

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Finance & Management Committee
June 24, 2014

BACKGROUND/LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

On May 21, 2013, the Oakland City Council passed a Resolution establishing the City of Oakland's Budget Process Transparency and Public Participation Policy ("Resolution"), which requires the Oakland BAC to submit an annual budget process evaluation to the Finance and Management Committee. The purpose of the evaluation is to rate the budget process on transparency, engagement, and clarity. The BAC submitted this report and it was presented to the Finance and Management Committee on February 11, 2014. The Resolution also requests that the Oakland Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) assess opportunities for improving public participation in the budget process.

ANALYSIS

Please see the accompanying report for the BAC's full analysis.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST

The Budget Advisory Committee's recommendations are based on conversations with community stakeholders and were developed in collaboration with students from the Goldman School of Public Policy who presented recommendations for Budget Process Reform at the May 27th Finance and Management Committee.

COORDINATION

This report was prepared by citizen members of the Budget Advisory Committee in coordination with staff in the City Administrator's Office.

COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATIONS

There are no costs or fiscal impacts associated with the acceptance of this report, however directing staff to implement certain recommendations would require additional funding and/or result in indirect costs (e.g. staff time, etc.).

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SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

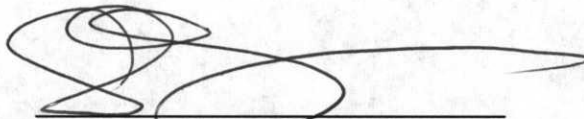
Economic: No direct economic opportunities have been identified.

Environmental: No direct environmental opportunities have been identified.

Social Equity: No direct social equity opportunities have been identified.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Bradley Johnson, Assistant to the City Administrator, at (510) 238-6119.

Respectfully submitted,



SARAH T. SCHLENK
Interim Budget Director,
City Administrator's Office

Attachments:

A: BAC Report: Recommendations for Improving Public Engagement in the Budget Process



Recommendations for Improving Public Engagement in the Budget Process

For the FY 2015-17 Budget Process

June 3, 2014

On May 21, 2013, the Oakland City Council passed A Resolution Establishing the City of Oakland's Budget Process Transparency and Public Participation Policy (Resolution), which, among other things, requests that the Oakland Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) assess opportunities for improving public participation in the budget process.

As the Resolution recognizes, "public participation and collaboration may enhance local government's effectiveness, expand its range of options, improve the quality of its decisions, and enlist the problem-solving capacities of the general public and organizations outside local government." The City adopted the Resolution "in order to ensure that the public has access to and an ability to participate in the creation of the City of Oakland's biannual budget and that Oakland decision makers have the public feedback to allow them to prudently manage the City's fiscal resources and adopt a budget responsive to public needs and priorities."

The BAC thus presents the following recommendations, which utilize the guiding principles set forth in the Resolution.

Please note that these recommendations are expanded from recommendations 4 (conduct public engagement year-round), 5 (launch a public budget-literacy campaign), and 6 (add additional methods of engagement) of the BAC Informational Report which was presented to the Finance and Management Committee on February 11, 2014.

➤ **Expand Methods of Engagement**

The BAC recommends that the City collect community input through a variety of means, including but not limited to: online surveys, paper and/or mailed surveys, focus groups, polling and drop-in hours.

We also encourage the City to conduct town halls in more locations, at differing hours, and in multiple languages.

- **Polling**

- Recommendation: The City should hire a consultant to conduct formal, statistically-valid polling of residents and stakeholders to determine Oakland's budgeting priorities. This polling should be conducted in advance of the late Fall bi-annual budget workshops in each budget planning cycle.

- **Public Survey**

- Recommendation: In addition, the BAC recommends that the City Administrator's Budget Office personnel work with the BAC to develop and conduct an informal survey to be distributed through community listservs and other communication channels. The BAC

recommends that the City should distribute the informal survey through the following channels:

- Resident Budget Workshops
- Community Budget Forums
- OUSD schools
- Recreation Centers
- Libraries
- Senior Centers
- Online
- Neighborhood, organizational and other listservs

- **Email contacts**

- Recommendation: All budget proposals, and all announcements concerning Community Budget Forums, Resident Budget Workshops, and surveys should be timely emailed to all known email addresses of Oakland residents. The announcements should be in multiple languages, and shall be screen reader accessible (i.e., searchable text rather than an image or .pdf).

➤ **Develop And Implement a Professional Citywide Poll and Survey**

The Resolution requires the City Administrator to "develop or secure a statistically-valid survey for assessing the public's concerns, needs and priorities," unless the City cannot afford a professional survey. This professional survey is required to be completed by March 30th in the budget development year (for this budget cycle, 2015).

- **Poll and Survey:** BAC believes that there should be both a randomized, professional telephone survey and a voluntary, but also professionally designed public survey. The randomized & scientific poll will ensure participation by members of the public who do not normally provide their input to the budget process. The public survey, properly publicized, will allow as many members of the public as possible to provide input.
- **Timing:** Gathering budget priorities directly from the public is the *first step* to obtaining "meaningful participation" in the budget process. Thus, the BAC encourages the City to gather resident input before the Mayor and staff begin to draft the budget so that the community can inform the budget process from the outset. In this budget-planning cycle, public engagement should begin immediately, well in advance of the bi-annual budget workshop, which the Resolution requires to be held in late Fall 2014.
 - Recommendation: The citywide poll/survey process should be conducted much earlier than the March 30, 2015 deadline. Development of the poll and survey should commence forthwith, and the poll and survey should be conducted in Fall 2014.
- **Development:** The Resolution requires the questions be submitted to the BAC to review.
 - Recommendation: The City should require the public opinion professional to collaborate with the BAC in the development of the poll and survey questions and the methods of dissemination. The poll and survey should include questions about what services residents use, to develop a better understanding of the perceived value of the City's services in the minds of the public. The poll and survey should be as objective as possible, and be a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. They should be designed to provide ranked or weighted feedback on existing services, and should have a large enough sample to capture Oakland's primary ethnic groups at a reasonable margin of error. The feedback generated by the poll and survey should be used by the Mayor, the City Council, and Department heads in the development of budget priorities. The poll, survey, and their

results should be made available in those languages which municipal election materials must be provided pursuant to federal law and local ordinance, as determined by the Alameda County Registrar of Voters. Currently, English, Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese (hereafter referred to as "multiple languages" or "languages").

- **Distribution of the Public Survey**

- Recommendation: To the extent possible, the survey should be distributed to Oakland residents in a way that is designed to obtain a sample representative of the racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of Oakland. Distribution of the survey should not be limited to "regular voters," but should be inclusive of all Oakland residents. In the event that this is cost-prohibitive during the 2015-2017 budget cycle, the BAC recommends that the City build such an expense into future budgets.

- **Encouraging Participation In The Public Survey:** The Resolution requires the City Administrator to "take steps to promote participation" in the budget process.

- Recommendation: The City should require the City Administrator to develop a communication campaign to promote participation in the survey and advising of the methods of participation forthwith, and no later than one month prior to the late Fall 2014 bi-annual budget workshop. The campaign should encompass a variety of promotional mechanisms (fliers, advertisements in local newspapers, emails, etc.). At a minimum, notices announcing the survey should be posted near publicly-available computers in all City Libraries, Recreation Centers, and Senior Centers on the same timeline. The campaign should be in multiple languages. The City's website, Mayor's newsletter, and City Council member newsletters, should announce the survey and direct resident's to an online portal for completing the survey.

➤ **Conduct Public Engagement Year-Round**

The BAC has recommended that the City engage the public in the budget process throughout the year. Year-round engagement would enable the City to build long-term relationships with the diverse constituencies that make Oakland such a vibrant community. We encourage the City to devote more resources to planning and implementing a robust and effective year-round public engagement process.

The Resolution requires the City Administrator to create an email address, a phone number with voicemail and a web-based engagement platform to collect resident input prior to budget development. These actions will encourage resident input year-round.

- **Collecting Resident Input Year Round**

- Recommendation: The City should immediately set up and communicate an email address, phone number (with voicemail) and web-based engagement platform to accept resident input on budget-related matters. At the latest, these actions should be completed no later than one month prior to the late Fall 2014 bi-annual budget workshop. City personnel should return all phone calls and respond to all emails, informing residents that their input will be shared with the Mayor, the City Council, and Department heads. The information gathered through these channels should be aggregated by City personnel and distributed to the Mayor, the City Council, and Department heads prior to the Fall 2014 bi-annual budget workshop. The aggregated information should also be made available to the general public online, in an obvious location.
- Recommendation: For these purposes, the City should consider using an existing website, such as <http://www.engageoakland.com>, until it has the time and resources to develop a "City Budget 101" website (discussed below).

The Resolution requires the Administration and Council to hold at least three Community Budget Forums in different neighborhoods for presentation of "budget facts" and for questions and answers. These Community Budget Forums must take place between May 1 and June 10 of a budget development year

(in this cycle, 2015). The Resolution provides that “[e]very member of the City Council shall make their best efforts to attend at least one Community Budget Forum.”

The BAC has recommended that the City expand its use of these Community Budget Forums to engage the public throughout the year. The BAC provides more detailed recommendations below:

- **Public Budget Meetings:** The BAC recognizes that public budget meetings serve dual purposes: 1) to educate the public; and 2) to gather input from the residents and stakeholders about priorities and specific proposals. Often, a single public budget meeting is unable to adequately serve both purposes.
 - **Recommendation:** Instead, the City should conduct budget literacy meetings (“**Resident Budget Workshops**”), discussed in more detail below, in addition to the **Community Budget Forums** required by the Resolution. Educating the public about Oakland’s budget in general is an important task, and one that should happen early and often and through different modalities, as discussed below. Seeking input from the public on Oakland’s budget priorities, and on specific budget proposals should also occur more frequently than in years past, but it is important to understand that these two goals are distinct and the tools to implement these goals should be distinct as well. The Resident Budget Workshops should be held prior to May 1 (in this budget cycle, in 2015), so that they can focus on budget literacy, with the May-June Community Budget Forums focusing on the Mayor’s actual budget proposal and any competing Councilmember priorities/proposals.

➤ **Launch a Public Budget Literacy Campaign**

Oakland residents vary considerably in their understanding of local governance and budgeting, which impacts their level of civic participation.

To ensure that the public engagement process the City undergoes is inclusive and equitable, the BAC has recommended that the City conduct education campaigns to increase budget literacy.

The Resolution’s guiding principles promote the idea of “informed participation” by the electorate. Thus, in addition to the Community Budget Forums required by the Resolution, the BAC recommends that the City take the following steps to increase budget literacy among its residents:

- **Resident Budget Workshops**
 - **Recommendation:** Budget Personnel in the City Administrator’s Office should be directed to prepare budget literacy materials to be presented by City personnel during the Resident Budget Workshops. Budget literacy materials should be provided in multiple languages, with easy-to-understand graphics. The Workshops should include ample time for questions and City personnel should be identified for follow up questions.
 - **Recommendation:** The Mayor, City Council members and Department Heads should make their best efforts to attend at least one Resident Budget Workshop.
 - **Recommendation:** The City should make Resident Budget Workshops as accessible as possible, by providing childcare at meetings, scheduling meetings at varying times of the day and on weekends to encourage the participation of individuals with familial obligations and those who work traditional and non-traditional hours, holding meetings in ADA-accessible facilities served by public transit, and providing video and audio recording for later viewing. Resident Budget Workshops should be announced far in advance, ideally one month. Language translation services, including American Sign Language, should be available upon request (48 hours prior to the meeting).
- **“City Budget 101” Website**
 - **Recommendation:** Develop a “City Budget 101” website, perhaps as part of www.engageoakland.com. Leverage existing materials and available technology to create an accessible and interactive website that demystifies the budget process for residents

and stakeholders, while also providing a vehicle for input. The website should include easy-to-understand written materials, short videos to explain components of the budget process (e.g., City's restricted funds), and a budget literacy tool. The website should provide information in multiple languages and be accessible to people with disabilities using screen reading software. The videos should utilize closed captioning in multiple languages to ensure accessibility. See Open Budget Oakland for a good starting point: www.openbudgetoakland.org.

- Recommendation: The City should update and re-launch the interactive budget challenge, www.oaklandbudgetchallenge.com. Residents' aggregated choices should be made available for viewing.

- **Updated Budget Materials**

- Recommendation: The City's existing budget-related materials should be updated to include easy-to-understand information (in multiple languages) that is and accessible to "regular" people. Such materials should be included in the City Budget 101 website and also be made available in print at libraries, senior centers, community centers, and City Hall.

➤ **Final Thoughts on Improving Public Engagement in the Budget Process**

The Resolution's guiding principles state that "the design of a public participation process includes input from appropriate local officials as well as from members of intended participant communities."

Pursuant to this guiding principle, the BAC recommends that in all of the City's budget planning processes *all* stakeholders should be engaged, including, but not limited to:

- Residents
- Small business owners
- Non-profit organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Unions representing City of Oakland Employees
- Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils
- City grant recipients
- Civic groups, including but not limited to:
 - Oakland Rising
 - Make Oakland Better Now
 - League of Women Voters
 - Oakland Community Organizations
 - Asian Pacific Environmental Network
 - Unity Council
 - Community Democracy Project
 - Oakland Chambers of Commerce (including the Oakland Metro, African-American, Asian American, Latino, and other minority chambers)