

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board Meeting
Tuesday, January 6th, 2026

EOB members present:

Jim Kennedy, Lisa Hy, Carla Pantaleon-Stovell, and Claire Teylouni

OPB staff present: Renato Castelo, Director; Blanca Teixeira, Finance and Contracts Manager; Alexandra Mackay, Community Engagement & Outreach Fellow

Board Co-Chair Jim Kennedy called to order the External Oversight Board meeting and conducted a roll call. With three Board members present at the time, there was no quorum for adopting the meeting minutes. Director Renato Castelo announced that Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin transitioned to a new role at the MBTA, and her former position may shift to focus more on community outreach and partnerships. Co-Chair Jim Kennedy announced he is stepping down as Chairman due to term limits, and the board will identify nominees for new co-chairs in the coming months. Director Castelo outlined the upcoming Board meeting schedule, noting that the official voting period for the current PB cycle will run from January 15 to February 15, 2026. Winning projects will be shared at the February 19th in-person board meeting, followed by rulebook updates in March 2026 and the final evaluation report in April 2026.

Evan Kuras from Data + Soul Research presented survey data for the October and November forums. High percentages of participants felt the process allowed their voices to be heard and improved their understanding of the city's budgeting process. Residents from at least 17 neighborhoods participated, with East Boston and Allston showing high turnout relative to their populations. Lower participation in Mattapan was attributed to recruiting challenges and neighborhood concerns regarding immigration enforcement. Jim Kennedy inquired about the full composition of the evaluation questionnaire. Mr. Kuras explained the survey was two pages long, containing approximately ten questions, including a five-part "agree or disagree" section regarding trust and city improvement. Board member Teylouni asked if the survey included short-form questions and where that feedback would be located; Mr. Kuras confirmed that open-ended feedback was collected and would be included in the complete evaluation report on the Office of Participatory Budgeting (OPB) website.

Director Castelo and team presented the 13 final proposals for the 2026 PB ballot. Mr. Kennedy asked for a description of the factors used to determine budget amounts, to which Director

Castelo responded that budgets are set by city departments based on project impact and the department's capacity to implement alongside existing projects.

The PB Voting phase will open on January 15th through February 15th. Boston residents aged 11 and older, will vote once and may select up to five projects. Residents will be able to vote online, which will require cell phone verification, though residents without phones can request a unique PIN. In-person voting will be available at City Hall and select BCYF community centers. This year's outreach efforts will include earned media, multilingual paid advertisements, and digital promotion through Boston Public Schools and community partners. Board member Hy raised several questions regarding voting security and logistics. Director Castelo confirmed the online platform stops individuals from voting twice with the same phone number and that the office tracks manual PIN requests to prevent duplicates. Ms. Hy also questioned the use of Simplified versus Traditional Chinese for outreach, noting that many seniors use Traditional Chinese; Director Castelo committed to consulting with the Language Communication Access (LCA) department on this matter.

During public comment, a member of the public suggested creating a permanent resident position for policy drafting and pushing for a larger total budget for PB projects. Another member of the public encouraged using quantitative longitudinal data for future evaluations to track if participants increase their long-term civic involvement. Board Chair Jim Kennedy motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:32pm.

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