

Vallejo Initiates Participatory Budgeting Approach for Tax Measure Funds

The City of Vallejo, California, has emerged from bankruptcy and is seeking to establish a stable financial base. With the passage of a recent ballot measure (Measure B), the City Council will have additional tax revenues to appropriate in FY 2012-13 and is seeking public input on how these revenues should be spent. The city anticipates that approximately \$11,875,000 in Measure B revenues will be collected in the 15 month period from April 2012 to June 2013.



Participatory Budgeting Project - www.participatorybudgeting.org

At an April 2012 City Council study session, the Council directed staff to immediately begin collecting public input on the allocation of 70 percent of those funds, and to engage the public in a longer term “participatory budgeting” process about the use of the remaining 30 percent.

Through an Open City Hall platform, the city offered residents the opportunity to contribute comments online about city staff recommendations to allocate \$8,296,000 (70 percent) of Measure B revenues.

Vallejo has now begun a participatory budgeting effort to allocate the remaining 30 percent of the anticipated new revenues (about \$3.2 million collected over the 15 month period). These revenues can be used for capital infrastructure projects as well as for other programs and service projects that benefit the public. These must be one-time expenditures for projects that can be completed with funds presently available, unless any additional costs offset other expenditures in the city budget or if the program pays for itself or increases city revenues.

A consulting firm, specializing in participatory budgeting, has been hired by the city to help design develop, and facilitate the overall engagement effort relating to the allocation of the 30 percent of Measure B funds. A Steering Committee for Participatory Budgeting in Vallejo (PB Vallejo), created by the City of Vallejo, coordinates the “PB Vallejo” project. The steering committee is composed of representatives of all 20 local civic, business, cultural, educational and other community organizations who applied for membership.

A series of nine “participatory budgeting assemblies” will be held from October through December. These will include one afternoon assembly for youth, one daytime assembly

for seniors and one Spanish language assembly. Other assemblies may also have Spanish and other language translation services as needed.

The first assembly, held on the evening of October 30th, attracted more than 100 residents, many learning about the meeting through door to door canvassing and outreach through community organizations and congregations. Assembly participants learn about the city budget and the Measure B revenues and then meet in small groups to brainstorm project ideas.

Assembly participants can also volunteer to serve as “budget delegates.” These delegates attend orientation sessions and take on the important role of transforming the many brainstormed public ideas into full proposals, vetted with the city to ensure they meet Measure B project eligibility criteria and don’t duplicate projects already planned or underway. The completed full project proposals will then be brought back for further public review and discussion through at least three “project expos,” including one in Spanish. At these expos, budget delegates will present the project proposals to the community and get feedback through a “science fair” format.

Public voting on the final set of project proposals is expected to take place in May of 2013. To be eligible to vote, an individual must be at least 16 and a resident of Vallejo or adjoining unincorporated areas. Prospective voters will have to present proof that they satisfy eligibility requirements. Voting opportunities will take place on multiple days and in multiple locations.

The projects with the most votes will be submitted to the Vallejo City Council for action. The Council will, according to the *Participatory Budgeting in Vallejo 2012-13 Rulebook*, have the discretion to approve which projects are funded, the amount of funding, and the conditions (if any) placed upon the use of the approved funds. The *Rulebook* was developed by the Steering Committee with the support of the Participatory Budgeting Project.

After the vote, a monitoring committee of Steering Committee members and budget delegates will be established to monitor the implementation of funded projects. For more information, see www.pbvallejo.org.

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The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:

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