

# Public Engagement in the Budget Process

Recommendations for Involving the Public in the 2021 Budget  
Finance & Personnel Committee  
July 22, 2020

# Public Engagement in Budgeting- Background and Goals

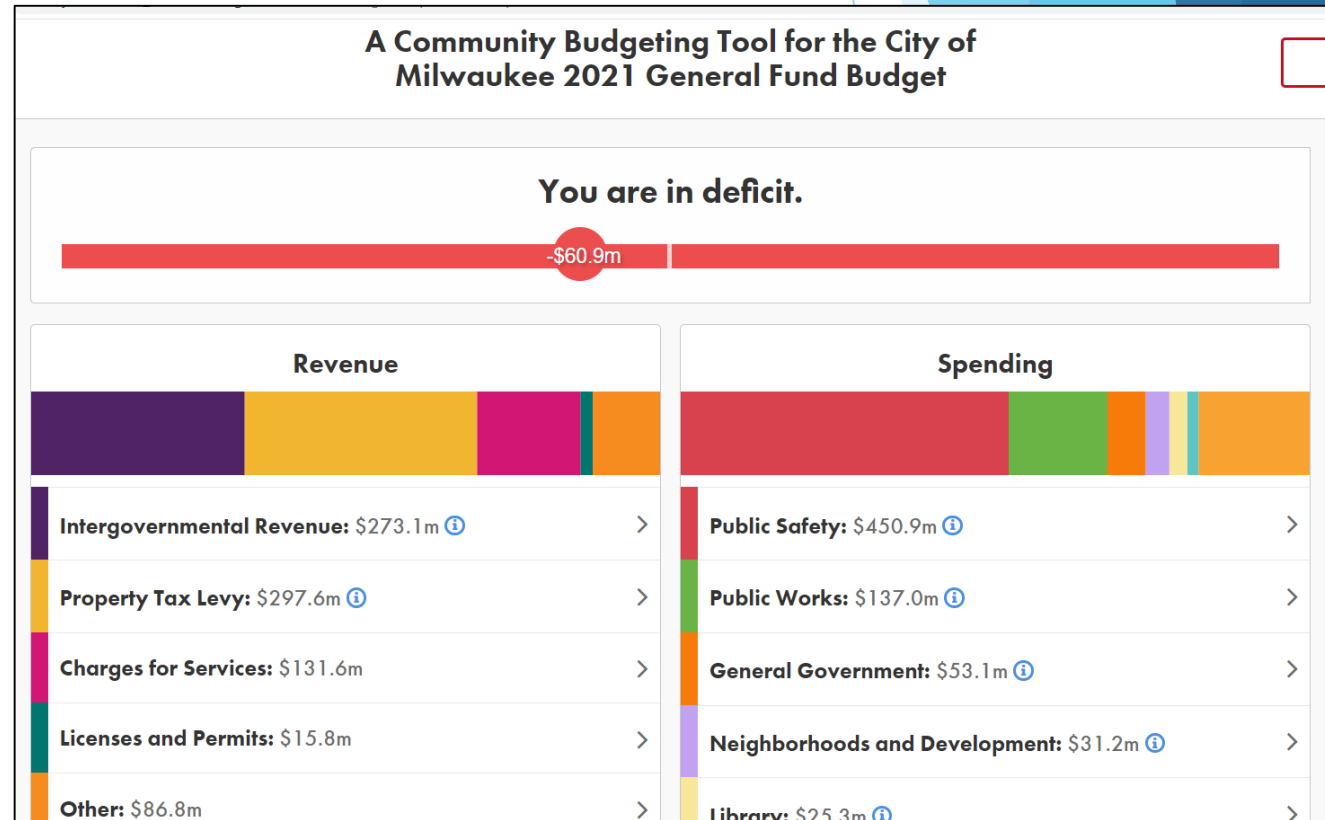
- ▶ Adopted in January 2020, Resolution #191462 directs the Administration Director to develop and present a plan to the Common Council for a City budget public education and participation initiative
- ▶ The Public Engagement in Budgeting Work Group was tasked with accomplishing three goals:
  - ▶ Develop and present recommendations for engaging and involving residents in the City of Milwaukee's 2021 Budget process
  - ▶ Prepare a plan for implementing recommendations
  - ▶ Identify opportunities to expand outreach with community partners

# Key Considerations for Developing Recommendations

- ▶ The Public Engagement in Budgeting Program must be **inclusive**
  - ▶ ADA, age, race/ethnicity, language, tech savvy
- ▶ The **community** must be involved in developing the program
  - ▶ Involve community members and community organizations at each step in the process
- ▶ **Public health** guidelines and best practices must be followed for budget engagement activities
  - ▶ Large in-person meetings not viable for public engagement on the 2021 Budget

# Recommendation #1: Balancing Act Budgeting Software

- ▶ Web-based program which allows users to develop and submit a balanced City of Milwaukee budget using real budget numbers
- ▶ Use email list, social media, community groups to push out link
- ▶ Balancing Act generates a report from the results of all the users' submittals, which can help identify budget priorities
- ▶ User hopefully gains a better understanding of how the City brings in revenue and how it is spent, and gets a better sense of the trade-offs involved in budgeting



# Recommendation #2

## Single-Issue Online Town Hall Discussions

- ▶ Partner with community groups to hold online events for top issues of resident interest
  - ▶ Police, Public Health, others
- ▶ Include key figures from departments, moderator/facilitator
- ▶ Broadcast on City Channel 25, Zoom, Facebook Live
- ▶ Depending on community or Council interest, hold neighborhood or Aldermanic district-level meetings to reach more residents

# Recommendation #3

## Budget Priority Survey

- ▶ Online survey to gauge resident opinion on budget-related questions
  - ▶ Ranking, yes/no, demographic questions
- ▶ Link to survey will be pushed out using email lists, social media, community partners, E-Notify
- ▶ Will be made available in English, Spanish, and Hmong
- ▶ To bridge the digital divide, work with community organizing groups who are already doing in-person outreach to assist with budget priority surveys
- ▶ For 2022 Budget and beyond, explore using formal statistically-valid community priority surveys

# Recommendation #4

## Alternatives to Mayor's Public Budget Hearing

- ▶ Broadcast online (Webinar, Zoom, Facebook Live, etc.) and City Channel 25
- ▶ Allow for a robust Q&A, Resident Comments session
  - ▶ Solicit questions and comments from residents via Zoom, Facebook Live, social media
  - ▶ Call in option (or other non-web based alternative) for submitting questions and comments
- ▶ Consider holding multiple Public Budget Hearings throughout August
- ▶ Notify residents well in advance of the date/time of the meeting and how to access the meeting
- ▶ Make background materials, presentation available to the public before the meeting

# Recommendation #5

## Simplify Terminology in Budget Materials

- ▶ Budget Office currently undergoing internal review of terminology and concepts used in public budget materials
  - ▶ Prepare simple, relatable explanations or definitions
  - ▶ Share with residents, elected officials, City staff, and especially those engaged in public engagement activities
- ▶ Modify “Budget in Brief” to use more commonly understood terms and concepts
  - ▶ Budget in Brief will be the “user-friendly” version of the Budget Summary
- ▶ City staff can offer to deliver presentations on topics such as basics of the budget process, roles of City vs. County gov’t, revenue options, etc.



# Recommendation #6

## Two-Part Budget Engagement Sessions

- ▶ Part 1- Background on City budget process, summary of key budget data
- ▶ Part 2- Workshop on how attendees can share their ideas/opinions and have them heard as part of the City budget process
  - ▶ Refine their “elevator speech”
  - ▶ Connect attendees with other helpful resources
- ▶ Partner with community groups, higher education institutions to sponsor engagement sessions

# Public Engagement in Budgeting- Accomplishments So Far

- ▶ Work Group developed recommendations for engaging residents on the 2021 Budget
- ▶ Held two Roundtable Discussion with NSP community organizing group leaders to review and refine recommendations and help craft the Budget Priority Survey
- ▶ Consulted with community group leaders on preliminary recommendations
- ▶ Secured commitments from several community organizing groups to take an active role in specific aspects of the City's Public Engagement in Budgeting program
- ▶ Compiled an email list with over 2,100 contacts to share links and event notices

# Public Engagement in Budgeting- Ongoing Efforts & Next Steps

## ▶ Ongoing Efforts

- ▶ Final stages of developing City of Milwaukee Balancing Act budget simulation
- ▶ Very close to finalizing online Budget Priority Survey
- ▶ Evaluating online options for Mayor's Public Budget Hearing- viewing and questions/comments
- ▶ Continue to work with NSP, UEDA, other community groups to amplify outreach

## ▶ Next steps

- ▶ Involve Council members, other key stakeholders in outreach
- ▶ Work with Council, community groups to schedule online Town Hall discussions
- ▶ Push out links to the City of Milwaukee Balancing Act budget simulation and Budget Priority Survey

# Timeline for Public Engagement on Proposed Budget

Budget  
Priority  
Survey

Available to the  
public:  
**July 29th**

Survey Ends:  
**August 14th**

Results from Budget  
Priority Survey and  
Balancing Act will be  
available by August 19th

Balancing Act  
Budget  
Simulation

Available to the  
public:  
**July 29th**

Summarize  
responses received  
on or before:  
**August 14th**

Town Halls,  
Public Budget  
Hearing

**Will take place throughout August**

# Thank you!!

Please feel free to contact me to share any other ideas or comments

Bill Christianson

Budget & Management Division

▶ [wchris@milwaukee.gov](mailto:wchris@milwaukee.gov)

▶ 414-286-5588