

Citizen Engagement Plan Supplement for the Annual Budget Process

The Citizen Engagement Plan (CEP) addresses citizen participation across a wide spectrum of City matters. It identifies how to systematically solicit citizen ideas and issues, organize and prioritize ideas and issues, obtain input and feedback with respect to City decision-making, and directly involve citizens in the implementation of City priorities and projects.

The Citizen Work Group concept identified and proposed in the CEP lends itself well to addressing the development of financial policy and dealing with other specific fiscal matters, but does not necessarily work well for addressing the City's annual budget development and budget administration. The annual budget development processes require extensive staff preparation at various levels of the organization, broad public vetting through dissemination of draft budget documents and community meetings, extensive City Council work sessions, and general public hearings. As a result, the Citizen's Budget Work Group concept was developed to deal specifically with how to integrate more in-depth citizen involvement into this unique function and into the various steps involved.

Citizen's Budget Work Group

The City Manager is recommending the creation of a City Manager appointed Citizen's Budget Work Group to provide oversight and input into the preparation of the Fiscal Year 2015 budget. This group would be made up of five members of the public - two from the business community, two from the non-profit community and one at-large citizen, to solicit a cross-section of community perspectives. Members would be welcome from all backgrounds, including but not limited to those with finance and budget experience.

While it is true that it takes time to familiarize citizens with the intricacies and complexities of the City's budget structure, it is recommended that the membership of the Work Group rotate from year to year to provide a deeper level of exposure to the City's budget to as many participants as possible. The City Manager would work with the Citizen Engagement Coordinator to identify participants based on their backgrounds and interest in serving. At least a few of the first year participants would likely be solicited from the existing pool of Budget Oversight Commissioners. This process would be piloted in FY15 and further refined in subsequent years as a result of the experience gained in year one.

City's Budget Process is Shadowed

The Citizen's Budget Work Group members would be involved in each step of the budget process, shadowing staff and the City Council in their work. The Work Group members would attend the annual City Council Budget Retreat/Kick-off alongside City staff and the City Council; would participate in the City Manager's budget review meetings for both the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and each of the departmental operating budgets; and would be

invited to attend the various public meetings for the CIP and the annual three day City Council budget work sessions in April. Throughout these steps the citizen representatives would be able to ask questions of staff and offer comments and input to both staff and the City Council, bringing their unique perspectives as citizens, business owners, and representatives of non-profit groups.

Specifically, the Citizen's Budget Work Group would participate in the budget process in the following ways:

Step 1. The budget retreat would be consistent with previous years and serves as staff's opportunity to discuss the budget calendar, financial projections, preliminary budget assumptions, and upcoming issues and challenges with the City Council. The intent is that the Citizen's Budget Work Group members would participate alongside Council and have an opportunity to offer input to the City Council on budget priorities. The City Council then provides direction to staff in preparing the new budget.

Because the City Council will not consider the Budget Work Group recommendation until six days before the FY15 budget retreat, it is unlikely a Work Group would be established in enough time to participate in that kickoff meeting. The FY16 Budget Work Group would be established in enough time to participate in the FY16 retreat.

Step 2. Once staff have taken that input and developed preliminary requests for both the departmental operating budgets and the City's Capital Improvement Program, the City Manager, Assistant City Manager, and Finance Director, alongside the department directors and managers, conduct detailed line item budget and program reviews. The Citizen's Budget Work Group would also participate in those reviews providing an opportunity for staff and the Work Group to have an interactive discussion on the different elements of each Department's budget.

Step 3. Once the proposed budgets have been refined based on City Manager review and direction, the City Manager's recommended budget is presented to the City Council and the Citizens Budget Work Group during the City Council three-day budget work sessions. The Work Group would have the opportunity to provide input to City Council and City Council will provide direction to staff on the draft budget.

Step 4. Based on comments and direction received during these sessions, the budget would be further refined and the tentative budget would be brought back for adoption in May.

Step 5. As always, the final budget would be presented for adoption in June. After the Citizen's Budget Committee has completed its work, and the budget is adopted by the City Council, their work is done until the next year's budget process.

Transparency is Enhanced

The Citizen's Budget Work Group is intended to create an even greater level of transparency in the City's budget process. The new structure will give citizens access to aspects of the process that previously included only staff (City Manager CIP and department line item reviews). The City Council will also now have direct interaction with citizen representatives when deliberating over budget matters.

Administrative Burden is Reduced

Because the various steps identified above are already part of the City's established annual budget preparation process, adding five new participants to the same milestones does not present the same type of administrative burden that was required to integrate the Budget Oversight Commission review into the budget process.

Because the Budget Oversight Commission conducted operating budget and CIP reviews prior to the public meetings and prior to the City Council review, City staff were required to have the draft CIP and operating budgets prepared, the City Manager's programmatic and line item reviews completed, changes processed from those reviews, and new budget packets produced enough in advance to provide those review documents to the Budget Oversight Commission more than a month in advance of providing them to City Council. This additional review step made the preparation timeline unusually short, backing up staff's timeframes for budget preparation by over a month, and requiring production of draft budget documents as early as mid-March.

Simply integrating the Budget Work Group members into existing staff and Council milestones will streamline the budget process and calendar.