
Vallejo citizens launch petition to save Participatory Budgeting (PB) process -- 5/12/14

Participatory Budgeting Vallejo Press Release

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PB supporters respond to the City Manager's proposal to "skip a year" of PB and reduce its allocation

VALLEJO, CA (May 12, 2014) — Vallejo citizens, including many Participatory Budgeting Steering Committee Members and Budget Delegates, respond to the City Manager's April 22, 2014 proposal to "skip a year" of PB and reduce its allocation to a meager \$1 million by launching a petition and Facebook Page in opposition to the proposal.

"PB is helping to create a collective vision, voice and future for Vallejo that every citizen can get behind. Why wouldn't we want to do anything but encourage and promote more of that," said Lynda Daniels, Chair, PB Steering Committee?

On April 22, 2014, the City Manager recommended to the City Council to "skip a year" of PB and not allocate any monies to PB in Fiscal Year 2014/2015. In addition, he recommended continuing PB in Fiscal Year 2015/2016 BUT reducing the total allocation for PB projects to \$1 million.

"PB is the most important investment the city has made in our community. While the funds are only 3% of the City's general fund this year, the added benefits of community and trust building between the public and City hall, citizens' sense of pride in our city, and the community's hope for the future are immeasurable. Vallejoans have made their voices heard loud and clear: they want PB to continue, and City Hall needs to hear that message," exclaimed Councilwoman Katy Miessner!

Isaiah Bennett (age 15 years old), second year PB Youth Budget Delegate, further underscores Councilwoman Miessner's message by adding: "A person can have a strong voice in city government, but with PB his or her voice is even stronger, louder, more powerful and should be heard every year by the city council and city government."]

In contrast to the City Manager's current proposal, on June 25, 2013, the Vallejo City Council unanimously recommended to future city councils to allocate a portion of Measure B monies (1% sales tax) to Participatory Budgeting every year until Measure B expires in 2022. Specifically, the 2013 City Council recommended the following allocations for PB per Fiscal Year starting with 2014/2015 until 2022: \$1,516,600; \$1,584,864; \$1,657,899; \$1,732,815; \$1,810,727; \$1,891,756; \$1,976,027; and \$1,547,751.

Pelton Stewart, second year PB Steering Committee Member, had this to say when asked about the City Manager's proposal: "Participatory Budgeting (PB) is about engaging ALL of our citizens in the Democratic process and ensuring that everyone has a place at the decision-making table. Vallejo has become a nation-wide leader known for this level of civic engagement. Let's not throw it all away and return to business as usual. We have a tremendous opportunity AND responsibility to continue to be a national PB leader - giving a voice to those who might not otherwise have one."

In April 2012, the Vallejo City Council authorized the first city-wide Participatory Budgeting process in North America. Since then, the City has been a PB trailblazer recognized nationally for its pioneering efforts including in President Obama's second Action Plan in Open Government released in November 2013. "PB has not only changed how we do business in the city, it's changed how we collaborate together. People from all sorts of backgrounds are talking to each other and working together in a way that I've never seen before," said John de la Torre, Vice-Chair, PB Steering Committee. PB has moved the city from being known for its former bankruptcy to a city known for cutting edge civic engagement and transforming the Democratic process.

Frustrated by the City Manager's proposal, Gary Bennett, first-year PB Steering Committee Member had this to say about it: "When will we the people have a government of the people and for the people, rather than a government against the people. This issue to delay PB Vallejo and its funding will only confirm the negative feelings that are already choking our city. The city's elected officials need to be consistent and committed in their campaign promises, and ensure that we have a government that is of the people and for the people."

"Skipping a year of PB" and further reducing its allocation will only lower community morale; exacerbate the already questionable trust between city staff, elected officials and the public; and ensure that the entire PB process loses momentum and is ultimately terminated.