

Participatory Budgeting Delegate Guide

September 30, 2025

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions about the PB Delegate process, please contact the Budget Office:

City of Cambridge Budget Office

795 Massachusetts Avenue, Third Floor Cambridge, MA 02139

Phone: (617) 349-4270

Email: pb@cambridgema.gov

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PB Delegates at Delegate Orientation in Fall 2024 for PB11 Proposal Development.

Roles & Responsibilities: Who does what?

PB Delegates

- Work as part of a committee to research submitted ideas. Participate in weekly inperson meetings from October to January/ February.
- Discuss and prioritize project ideas.
- Conduct site visits in Cambridge; visit proposed locations of projects.
- Consult with City staff on project feasibility, need, and impact.
- Learn about the City's annual budget process.
- Evaluate project proposals on need, impact, and feasibility.
- Each committee must develop a proposal for at least six projects.
- Review project feedback from City staff and the City Manager to make final decisions about projects on the ballot. Modify project language for accessibility.
- Provide explanations to the Budget Office for each project that did not make it to the ballot as to why it did not move forward.
- Communicate PB Delegate concerns to facilitators and the Budget Office.
- Provide feedback to evaluate the PB process.

Committee Facilitators

- Serve as a neutral party to facilitate committee meetings and ensure that all PB Delegates can participate.
- Serve as the main point of contact for the Budget Office and help coordinate communication within the Delegate committee and between the committee and Budget Office.
- Set meeting agendas, with help from the Budget Office and partners.
- Connect PB Delegates with information and resources. Facilitators are not expected to do research themselves or make decisions on projects.
- Ensure that notes are taken at each meeting and distributed to the committee. Keep committee members who miss meetings updated on the committee's progress and what needs to be done.
- Ensure the committee meets its deadlines! Remind Delegates of meetings and deadlines by email or telephone.
- Participate in facilitator conference calls or meetings, as determined by the Budget Office.
- Provide feedback to evaluate the PB process.

Budget Office

- Organize submitted ideas and reserve meeting spaces for committees.
- Pre-sort and categorize ideas by committee.
- Provide relevant information and general direction for idea research.
- Provide data on community demographics and amenities (city maps and studies).
- Provide information on the budget and other materials to guide facilitators and PB Delegates.
- Serve as a liaison between PB Delegates and City departments. Work with departments to obtain feedback on projects, including feasibility and cost estimates.
- Support and advise facilitators and PB Delegates.
- Help resolve conflicts.

Other City Departments

- Meet with PB Delegates to discuss eligibility rules for projects, clarify what projects are already in the pipeline, and answer questions about the need, impact, and feasibility of projects.
- Communicate with PB Delegates via email or phone to clarify issues or answer additional questions.
- Provide written feedback, edits, and cost estimates to delegates for the PB projects on the ballot shortlist.
- Evaluate and approve the final shortlist of proposals for the PB ballot.



PB Delegates and staff speaking at Speed Consulting 1 for PB11 in fall 2024.

PB12 Delegate Timeline

Meeting/Event	Date	Benchmarks & Goals		
Orientation Cambridge City Hall Sullivan Chamber	Tuesday 9/30 6-8 pm	 Learn about the PB Delegate timeline and proposal development process Choose your committee, meet your teammates, and review weekly meeting times and locations 		
Meeting 1 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 10/8 6-8 pm	 Icebreakers / establish committee norms Review PB Delegate Guidebook, discuss PB project eligibility criteria, explore resources Familiarize with the preliminary Idea List 		
Meeting 2 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 10/15 6-8 pm	 Organize ideas into subcategories, split into sub-committees Begin to identify need, impact, and feasibility for problem areas described in ideas 		
Meeting 3 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 10/22 6-8 pm	 Report back from site visits/research; identify any additional site visits needed Using the template, develop discussion points/ questions for Speed Consulting with City staff 		
Optional Budget Presentation Zoom/Cambridge City Hall	Thurs 10/23 6-8 pm	 Join the Budget Office for an optional session on an introduction to the City's budget This presentation will cover what's included in the City's budget beyond PB 		
Speed Consulting #1 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 10/29 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm	 Consult with City staff to discuss potential project ideas, and assess the need, impact, and feasibility of proposals 		
Meeting 4 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 11/5 6-8 pm	 Review staff feedback from Speed Consulting Select priority projects for additional research 		

Meeting 5 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 11/12 6-8 pm	 Identify 15-30 priority projects to further discuss with City staff Using the template, identify the key details you need from staff to prepare your shortlist projects 		
Speed Consulting #2 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 11/19 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm	 Consult City staff about specific projects Take detailed notes from consultations to discuss during the next committee meeting 		
Meeting 6 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 12/3 6-8 pm	 Review department feedback Select a shortlist of up to 8 projects to send to the Budget Office 		
Meeting 7 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 12/10 6-8 pm	Finalize 6-8 proposals and complete project forms to submit to the Budget Office		
Proposal Shortlists due via email	Thur 12/11 by 12 pm	Each committee submits up to 8 proposals to the Budget Office for final approval and cost estimates by City staff and the City Manager		
City staff feedback due	Mon 2/2/26	 Feedback and cost estimates from City staff provided to PB Delegates 		
Meeting 8 Cambridge City Hall	Wed 2/4/26 6-8 pm	 Review the City staff feedback and cost estimates Identify any necessary proposal adjustments Choose proposals and finalize text for the ballot 		
Final ballot text due via email	Thur 2/5/26 by 5 pm	 Delegates submit final proposal text for the PB ballot and website to the Budget Office by 5 pm 		
Vote!	March 5-15, 2026	Help spread the word about the PB voteOptional: volunteer at voting sites!		
PB Vote Results Party Cambridge City Hall	Thur 3/19/26 6-7 pm	Winning projects are announced!		

PB Delegate Committees and Sample Projects

Community Resources

- Public Arts
- Economic development
- Education
- Homelessness and housing
- Library resources
- Public Wi-Fi/internet access
- Device charging stations
- Public restrooms
- Water fountains/bottle fill stations

Transportation, **Streets & Sidewalks**

- Bicycle infrastructure
- Bus stop/shelters and transit screens
- Parking improvements
- Pedestrian walkways
- Snow and ice
- Street and sidewalk improvements
- Traffic calming
- Transportation infrastructure

Environment

- Community gardens
- · Composting, recycling, and trash
- · Electric vehicles/charging
- Rodent Control
- Solar panels and sustainable energy
- Trees/plantings

Facilities, **Parks & Recreation**

- Athletic facilities/fields and equipment
- Benches
- Dog parks
- Park and playground improvements
- Sports and recreation
- Universal design play equipment
- · Water play features
- Shade/outdoor weather coverage

Project Eligibility: What can be funded?

The City of Cambridge develops an operating and capital budget for each fiscal year. The City's fiscal year runs from July 1 - June 30. The operating budget funds programs and services, while the capital budget is used for infrastructure projects. For implementation in Fiscal Year 2027, beginning July 1, 2026, the City will allocate \$1,000,000 for Participatory Budgeting projects.

Projects are Eligible for PB12 Funding If They Meet the Following Criteria:

- Benefit the public.
- Cost \$1 million or less.
- Be either a capital project implemented on City-owned property (streets, sidewalks, parks, libraries, schools, youth centers, senior centers, municipal buildings, etc.) OR an **operating project with a fixed project duration** (up to 3 vears)
 - NOTE: Capital projects on Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA), Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) property are not eligible.
- Consistent with existing City policies
- Implemented by the City of Cambridge
- Can be implemented after July 1, 2026 (the start of the next fiscal year)

What is an Operating project? What is a Capital project?

Operating Projects fund programs and services, including salaries. Cambridge's 10th PB cycle was the first-year operating projects were eligible for PB funding consideration. Multiyear operating projects can win PB funding for a maximum duration of three years. Once PB project funds are spent, the project will end. Many City services like trash, recycling and compost collection, animal control, the Fire Department, and Cambridge Public Schools, involve operating funds.

Capital Projects fund infrastructure improvements, typically things that are bought or built. Most capital projects have some sort of associated operating cost, like the ongoing cost to maintain and clean a public bathroom. Capital projects could include open space amenities, transportation infrastructure, vehicle purchases, technological materials, and much more. Examples of previous PB capital projects include youth center upgrades, electric vehicle charging stations, basketball court upgrades, water bottle filling stations, and tree plantings.

Proposal Review

By December 11, 2025, your committee will submit a shortlist of up to 8 project proposals to the Budget Office, to be shared with City Department staff and the City Manager. Department staff will provide cost estimates and final feedback for these proposals. All shortlist proposals must be reviewed and approved by City staff and the City Manager to be eligible for the PB **ballot.** Projects are reviewed to ensure that they meet the requisite need, impact, and feasibility assessments, align with existing city policies, and that they meet all legal requirements for funding. PB is not a substitute for any community process that might also or otherwise be required for project implementation.

We ask that each committee submit at least 6-8 projects on their shortlist for final review by City Staff because some projects may hit roadblocks and not receive final approval from City Staff. Each of the four delegate committees can ultimately recommend 4-6 projects for the PB ballot.

Examples of Eligible and Ineligible Projects

Eligible

- Repaying a part of a street, sidewalk, or basketball court
- Installing new playground equipment, trash cans, or water fountains
- Building a new community garden
- Purchasing equipment or furniture for a school, library, youth center, or senior center
- Public art, events, celebrations, and festivals
- Three-year tree maintenance program
- Two-year city-wide rodent control service

Not Eligible

- Renovating a privately owned building, a church, or T station (not City property)
- Installing a boat dock on the Charles River (not City property)
- Direct checks to residents (direct payments/not legal)*
- Building a school (too expensive)*
- Creating a permanent after school program (over three years)*
- Banning the sale of plastic bottles in Cambridge (legislative/ regulatory function)
- Removing bike lanes (Inconsistent with City policy)

*Though a proposal may be ineligible for PB, it does not mean the project cannot be implemented through alternative funding sources. For example, in the past, the City of Cambridge has used American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to provide direct cash assistance to eligible families under 200% of the federal poverty level in the City. The City has also built three new elementary and upper schools in the past 15 years, and is expanding afterschool opportunities, all things that are done outside of the PB process.

What should you do to make sure that your projects work?

- Remain goal-oriented and be flexible about how you will meet the public needs you identify. Ideas often propose a method of addressing an area of need. If that method is ineligible, consider if you can come up with a method that is eligible, and achieves the same outcome. Ask yourself: What is this idea trying to achieve? Why did someone submit this idea? Is there a better way to accomplish the goal than what is proposed?
- Look for similar projects. Consult the City's FY25 and FY26 Budget (provided by the Budget Office in the PB Delegate Resources folder online) to see what projects are already included in the City's plan.
- Consult with City staff through the Budget Office. City staff are very helpful to brainstorm with when thinking about stronger methods to achieve the goals of projects. They are often times thinking of solutions to similar problems on the daily and always thinking about new ideas!

What other barriers might there be to make a project work?

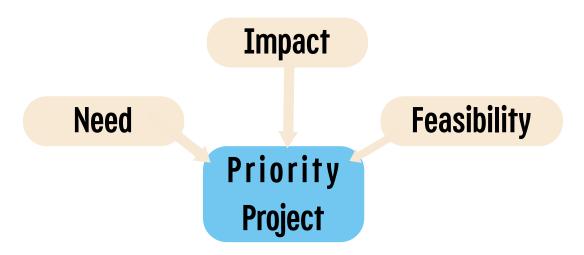
The following issues are worth keeping in mind as you review project proposals:

- The City has engineering, procurement, or quality standards that the project might not meet or might significantly raise costs when applied.
- The City might not have jurisdiction over all the property involved in a particular project.
- The funding source for PB is property taxes. As such, there are legal restrictions to how these funds can be used.
- At first, some projects might not seem like ones that have policy implications or require additional community processes. For example, adding lights to parks and ensuring they stay lit past sundown may seem like an eligible idea; however, many park hours are marked "open from dawn until dusk". Providing lighting past dusk suggests the park is open past dusk. Not only would this require a change in park rules, but a community process may be necessary for abutters, for which PB is not a substitute. A project like this may not be eligible.

Narrowing Down Your Idea List & **Developing Proposals**

What are the criteria for evaluating ideas?

As representatives of the community, you and your fellow delegates should keep the community's best interests in mind as you decide which projects to work on and include in the final ballot. The criteria below will help you evaluate and prioritize the project ideas:



How do we know there is a high NEED for this project?

- High level of community need based on neighborhood household income levels or other demographic data.
- High level of community support for the project, demonstrated by feedback from community members, the number of times the idea was proposed, etc.
- High level of need identified through the committee's research and experience.
- The community lacks access to the type of project in question.

How do we know if a project will have a large IMPACT on the community?

- A relatively large number of people would benefit from the project.
- An underserved or underrepresented community will benefit from the project (low-income households, youth, immigrants, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, etc.).
- The project is in a location where community members regularly congregate.
- The project would have a long-term benefit for people in the community.

How do we know if this project is FEASIBLE?

- Similar projects have been implemented by the City before. Consult with City staff and look at the City's budget documents for previous fiscal years. Determine if similar work is being done by the City.
- Project appears to meet the eligibility criteria outlined on page 8.
- Project could likely be implemented for less than \$1 million. Look at the City's budget to see what similar projects have cost.
- Confirm that the project location is owned by the City and not by other entities, such as the MBTA, DCR, a university, the Cambridge Housing Authority, or a private owner.

Can the committee consider other factors, like equity?

Yes. NEED, IMPACT, and FEASIBILITY are minimum requirements for any project to be eligible for the ballot, but your committee is welcome to consider other factors, like equity, when evaluating projects.



PB Delegates working on proposal development during Cycle 4.

How to Research Needs and Develop Project Proposals

1. Discuss Community Needs as a Committee

Needs are things and conditions that make it possible for every person to live a dignified, healthy, and peaceful life. Committee members will work together to determine the areas of highest need in the community. The maps and demographic information may come in handy for these discussions.

What can you do in PB to address needs?

- Prioritize those projects that address the deepest and most urgent needs.
- Give underserved and underrepresented people a voice and increase their participation.
- Prioritize projects that benefit the most underserved communities and neighborhoods around Cambridge.

2. Do Field Research

Field research is one of the best ways that PB Delegates can gather information to research project ideas and evaluate a project's relative need and impact. PB Delegates can visit different neighborhoods to assess needs, meet with local service providers and community groups, conduct site visits of proposed project locations, conduct simple neighborhood polls by talking to residents on the street or emailing out a survey to neighborhood groups, etc.

Tips for site visits:

- Brainstorm questions beforehand. Many questions will be project-specific. Know what you are looking for!
- Capture what you see using notes, photos, and videos. Photos will come in handy when developing final project proposals. You can upload them to your committee folder in Google Drive.
- **Speak to locals.** How do they understand community needs? What ideas proposed during idea collection might address their needs? Seek out a variety of opinions to see where there may be conflicts between groups. For example, students and parents may have different views on issues in local schools.

3. Consult with City staff

The Budget Office will serve as a liaison to other City departments that are relevant to your project development. Budget staff will help you figure out which other departments you need to speak with and will connect you via email or phone.

You will also have two opportunities to meet in person with representatives from multiple departments during two department "speed consulting" events. Your committee facilitator and the Budget Office will help organize those consultations as well as any follow-up communication with departments.

4. Use the Project Evaluation Matrix

The Project Evaluation Matrix is a tool your committee can use to help evaluate project ideas based on the need, impact, and feasibility criteria outlined on pages 12-13. The Matrix uses a numeric scale of 1-4 where 1 indicates the lowest level of need, impact, or feasibility and 4 indicates the highest level of need, impact, or feasibility. The projects with the highest total score continue to be researched and developed.

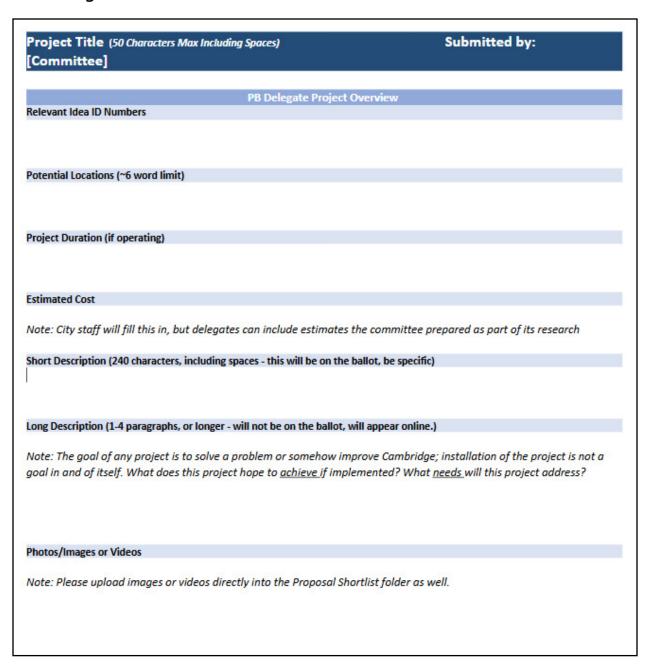
This process can be used at different points in the proposal development process to help determine which projects will move forward. Please note that this is provided as an optional tool; your delegate committee can develop other tools with additional considerations (such as equity) if members prefer. Printed versions will be provided, and a digital version is available in your committee's Google Drive.

Project	How much need is there for this project?	How much impact would this project have on the community?	How feasible is the project?	Total Project Score
Project 1:				
Project 2:				
Project 3:				
Project 4:				
Project 5:				
Project 6:				

What Will Your Committee Produce?

1. Project Proposal Forms Shortlist: Thursday, December 11, 2025, by 12 pm

You will submit the following information as a Word document to the Budget Office for City departments to review and designate approval for proposals. Each committee will submit up to 8 proposals for vetting. Please submit each shortlisted proposal as its own document, all in a folder in the Google Drive.



2. Final Proposal Text: Thursday, February 5, 2025, by 5 pm

Once your committee has reviewed cost estimates, feedback, and project approval status from the City Manager and City departments, choose the four projects that will feature on the ballot for your committee, finalize the text and information on the proposal forms, and re-submit the projects to the Budget Office. This is where space and character limits become very important, as all 20 projects must fit on the PB ballot! Please also ensure that every single project you submit has an image.

Final text for PB projects should incorporate "plain language." Plain Language is clear, effective communication that is easy to understand. Using plain language is one of the simplest ways to advance equity and communicate more effectively with our community. All final project text will be reviewed and potentially edited by the City's Language Access Manager to ensure plain language and accurate translation. The hemingwayapp.com is a resource you can use to review plain language.

The project title, cost, location, duration, and short description will all appear on the ballot. All the proposal information, including the images, will appear on the City's PB website (pb. cambridgema.gov) and at voting sites. See examples from the PB11 cycle below:

Welcome Baby Boxes for New Parents (\$60,000)

Location: Citywide via the Center for Families for up to three years.

Let's support new parents! Baby supplies are expensive and caring for a newborn is hard. This proposal will provide baby supplies for new parents and promote information on community resources to help ease the transition into parenting.



Build a Pollinator Garden in a City Park (\$75.000)

Location: To be determined based on need and impact assessments

Pollinator gardens are gardens specifically for native plant species that provide pollinator resrouces for local wildlife. This project will design and plant a pollinator garden within a city park to attract and nourish native pollinators!



FAQs

1. Will we only be developing proposals for projects that are on the idea list?

Yes. The idea list given to each committee contain all the ideas submitted by community members that relate to the committee's focus. All projects must be inspired by a submitted idea. *PB Delegates must consider every project on the list and provide a brief explanation for why a project doesn't advance.*

2. How do we divide up the projects among us or decide who does what?

This is up to each committee to decide. You can each work on separate projects or you can work in subcommittees on groups of projects. Most committees find it helpful to divide projects into subcategories. For example, the Environment Committee may want to group projects into subcategories such as recycling & compost, solar, and trees, etc. To help expedite the delegate process, the Budget Office will categorize the project list; it's up to the delegate committee to decide what, if anything, it does with those categories.

3. How will we know how to determine project costs?

The Budget Office will work with other City departments to answer questions about costs and other concerns. *It is up to City staff, not PB Delegates, to determine the final cost estimate for a proposal.*

4. How specific should our proposals be?

Your proposals should specify the goals and outcomes of a project, its proposed location(s), if applicable, why it's needed, and who it will benefit. It does not have to be long, but it should outline these elements in clear, concise, plain language. Please see the Project Proposal Form on pages 12 and 13 for details.

5. Are there constraints on where projects can be located?

Yes. Many City projects cannot be implemented without a targeted community process to solicit feedback from the neighborhood to ensure that residents most impacted by a project have an opportunity to provide input. Additionally, the city can only implement capital projects on cityowned land. For that reason, it is better to allow for some flexibility in where certain projects will be implemented.

6. How can we be sure that the City isn't simultaneously planning one of the projects we're working on? Delegates can consult the City's FY25 and FY26 budgets, which have been uploaded to Google Drive, and can ask City staff about projects they are planning to undertake in the next few years. The Budget Office will also help you determine whether proposed projects are already being planned for future budgets.

7. What is the best way to communicate within our committee outside of meetings?

Each committee is free to decide what works best in terms of communication, as long as your communication method is as inclusive as possible. Most committees choose to communicate via email.



8. Can we work with other committees?

Committees are encouraged to work together to assess community needs and research projects that affect other committee's areas of interest. For example, a neighborhood's environmental and transportation needs may be connected. Committees may want to meet to identify needs, share ideas, or discuss lessons learned and challenges. You can work with your facilitator and the Budget Office to plan meetings or other exchanges between committees.

9. Can we campaign for our projects?

Yes, you can encourage voters to vote for your projects, but you must remain respectful of the other committees and the PB process when campaigning. You can campaign for your projects, but not against other projects on the ballot. However, if you volunteer at voting events, you must remain neutral during the events and refrain from campaigning at that time.

10. Is there flexibility to the meeting format (in person versus virtual)?

While all 8 Delegate Meetings and both Speed Consulting Sessions are planned to be conducted in person at Cambridge City Hall, if for any reason, a hybrid/virtual option is needed, accomodations can be made. Please notify Budget Office staff and you facilitator, and hybrid meeting arrangements can be discussed based on what set up best suits each committee!

Advice From Past PB Delegates

- Use your interactions with the City departments **strategically**. Work with the Budget Office to make sure you make the most of the limited interactions!
- Think about the **method of an idea versus its goal**. The goal of an idea might be possible, but the method of achieving that goal might be infeasible. Be creative in thinking of different methods to achieve an important community goal.
- Your job as a PB Delegate is to work with the rest of your committee to develop a consensus on which projects make the ballot. Community needs should be the focus, not individual needs or your specific project.
- **Get specific** early in the process about what exactly you hope to do and what questions you need to be answered.
- Frequent **communication** between Delegates is a must. You also may want to set internal committee deadlines or checkpoints to help move things along.
- **Stay in touch** with the other committees. You may want to partner on some projects. Other committees can help work through challenges or offer useful advice.
- One key factor in capital eligibility is who owns the land or property. Figure this out early, since it might not always be obvious!
- You may want to consider **bundling projects** for voting purposes.
- Meet with relevant organizations and stakeholders. You may get feedback to improve a proposal, learn about needs, get a better sense of the support for an idea, or identify barriers. Take notes and report back to the committee.
- In determining which projects should go on the ballot, think about who in the community is likely to support it. Consider how to maximize its appeal through plain language (descriptive project title and a compelling short description).

Thank You for Making Participatory Budgeting Possible in Cambridge!