

Improving Public Engagement

with the Boston City Budget



City of Boston
Budget



City of Boston
Innovation & Technology



HARVARD
Kennedy
School

Our Team



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2019*



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2020*



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Master in Public Administration
2020*

How might we offer Bostonians an **easy & equal** opportunity to have their voices reflected in the City's budget decisions?

Intro

User Research

Existing Resources

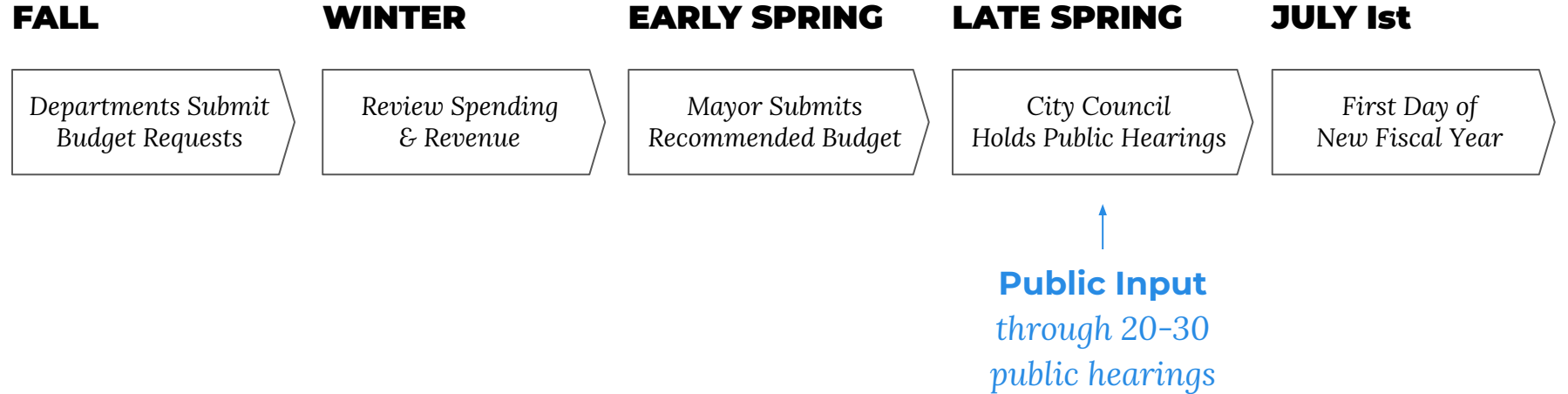
Prototype

Building Public Awareness

Conclusion

An aerial photograph of a dense urban neighborhood, likely in New York City, showing a mix of brick and stone buildings, many with fire escapes. The buildings are packed closely together, with some taller structures interspersed among the lower-rise buildings. The scene is captured from a high angle, looking down on the city blocks. A prominent blue rectangular banner is overlaid across the center of the image, containing the text "The budget is everywhere!".

The budget is everywhere!



How do Bostonians currently engage with the City budget?

35

*Interviews with
Boston Residents*

12

*Stakeholder
Interviews*

6

*Public Events
Attended*

Boston Resident

Attend a public hearing

Attend a neighborhood meeting

(E)mail, call

Tweet, Comment on Facebook

(E)mail, call

Attend city event or department hearing



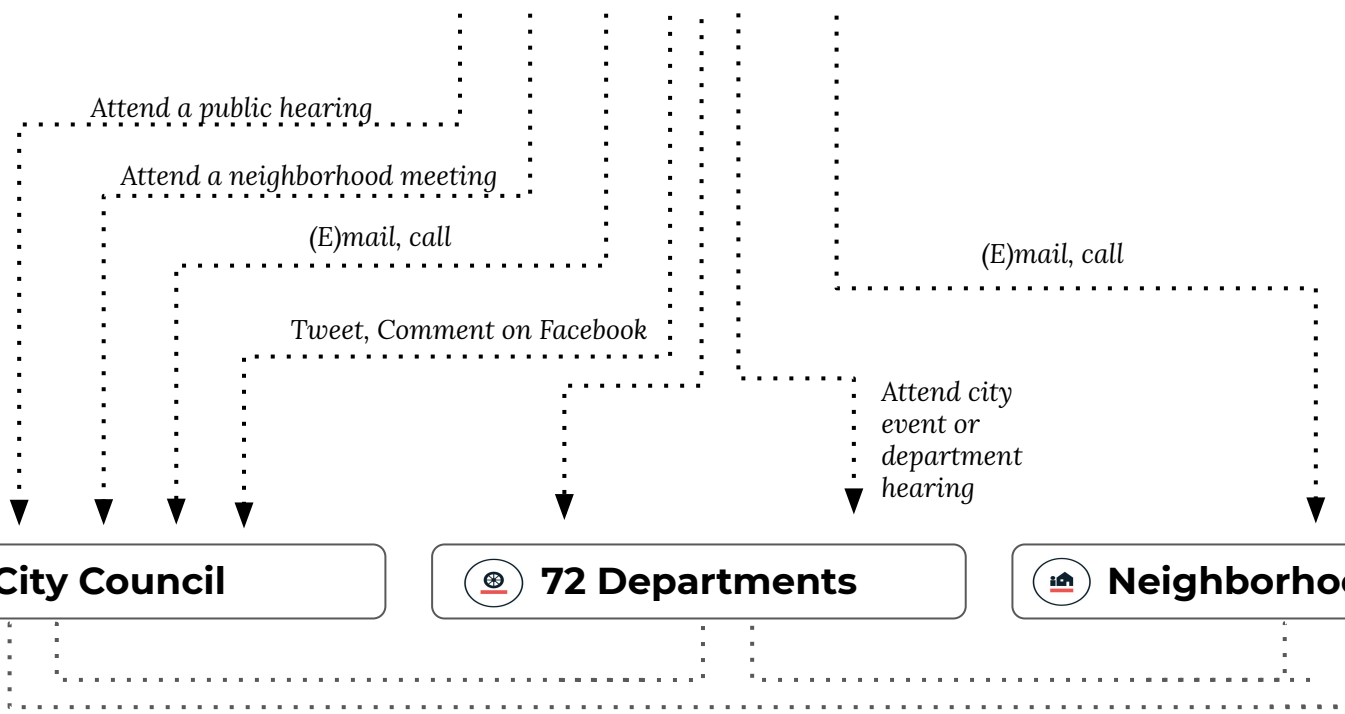
City Council



72 Departments



Neighborhood Services





Lumberjacks

Sophisticated activists
who know who to talk to and how to get things done. Typically speaks on behalf of others, has testified at public hearing, and believes long-term progress is possible.



Gardeners

Engaged residents
who care about their community and tend to local issues. They will weigh in if given the opportunity, think Boston is improving, and are usually older, long-time residents.



Failed Lumberjacks

Former activists
who care about social justice, equality, and other causes who used to be involved in civic life. They now suspect city outreach to be superficial, and feel frustrated and disappointed.



Greenhorns

Young/new residents
who never had a reason to interact with the city. They don't follow local news and assume things are mostly going well.



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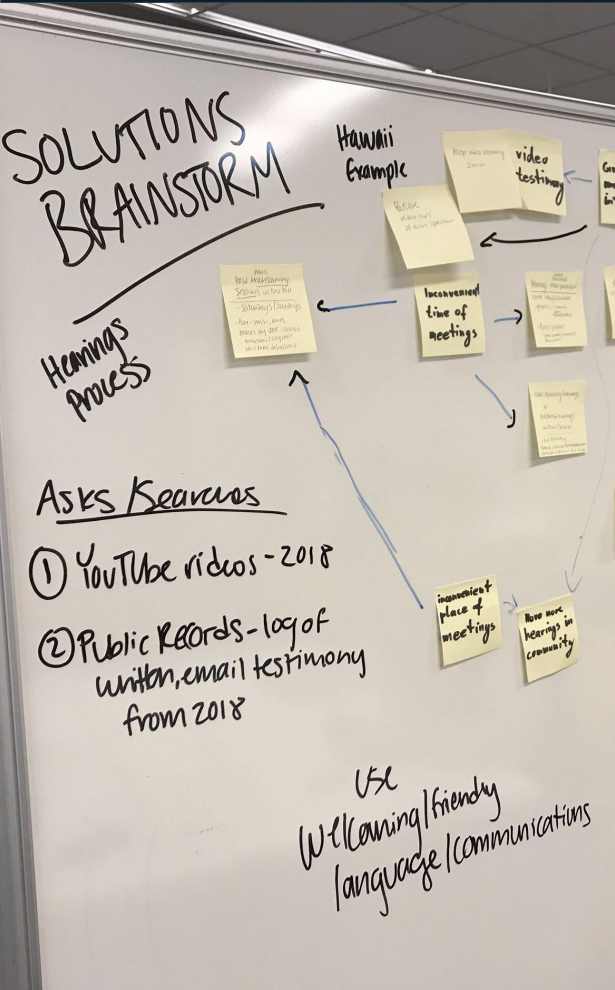


Greenhorns

Young/new residents

who didn't have a reason to interact with the city. They don't follow local news and assume things are mostly going well.

Main pain point:
 Currently, you have to both
know a lot & *do* a lot
 to engage with the budget.





MENU

CITY of **BOSTON**

Mayor Martin J. Walsh

[PAY AND APPLY](#)[PUBLIC NOTICES](#)[FEEDBACK](#)[TRANSLATE](#)[HOME](#) > [DEPARTMENTS](#) > [BUDGET](#)

BUDGET

We build and carry out the Mayor's operating budget and capital plan. Our work helps the City make smart investments, and aims to create a thriving, healthy, and innovative Boston.



CONTACT

[617-635-3870](tel:617-635-3870)BUDGET@BOSTON.GOV

1 CITY HALL SQUARE
ROOM 813
BOSTON, MA 02201-2037
UNITED STATES



Monday: 9:00 AM-5:00 PM

Tuesday: 9:00 AM-5:00 PM

[LATEST NEWS](#) [RELATED LINKS](#)[PROPOSED, CURRENT, AND PAST FISCAL YEAR BUDGETS](#) [MEET THE DIRECTOR](#)



May 9 – May 21

Libraries, Parks and Recreation, Parks and Environment, Police, Public Health Commission, Fire



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BUDGET



Capital Budget

The capital budget is used for long-term investments like infrastructure and facilities, that are paid off over time.



Operating Budget

The operating budget covers the day-to-day expenses required to deliver services to residents.



Featured Analyses

Learn about specific funding and initiatives supported by the FY20 budget.



HOW TO TESTIFY AT A CITY COUNCIL HEARING

We welcome public input at City Council committee hearings. You have three options:

[IN PERSON](#)[BY MAIL](#)[BY EMAIL](#)STEP
1

CHECK THE CITY COUNCIL SCHEDULE

Before you visit Boston City Hall, view the upcoming City Council schedule to find the date and time of the hearing you want to attend. Any member of the public can testify at a hearing.

STEP
2

GO TO BOSTON CITY HALL

We hold hearings in the Iannella Chamber on the fifth floor of Boston

CONTACT:

CITY COUNCIL



617-635-3040



CITY.COUNCIL@BOSTON.GOV

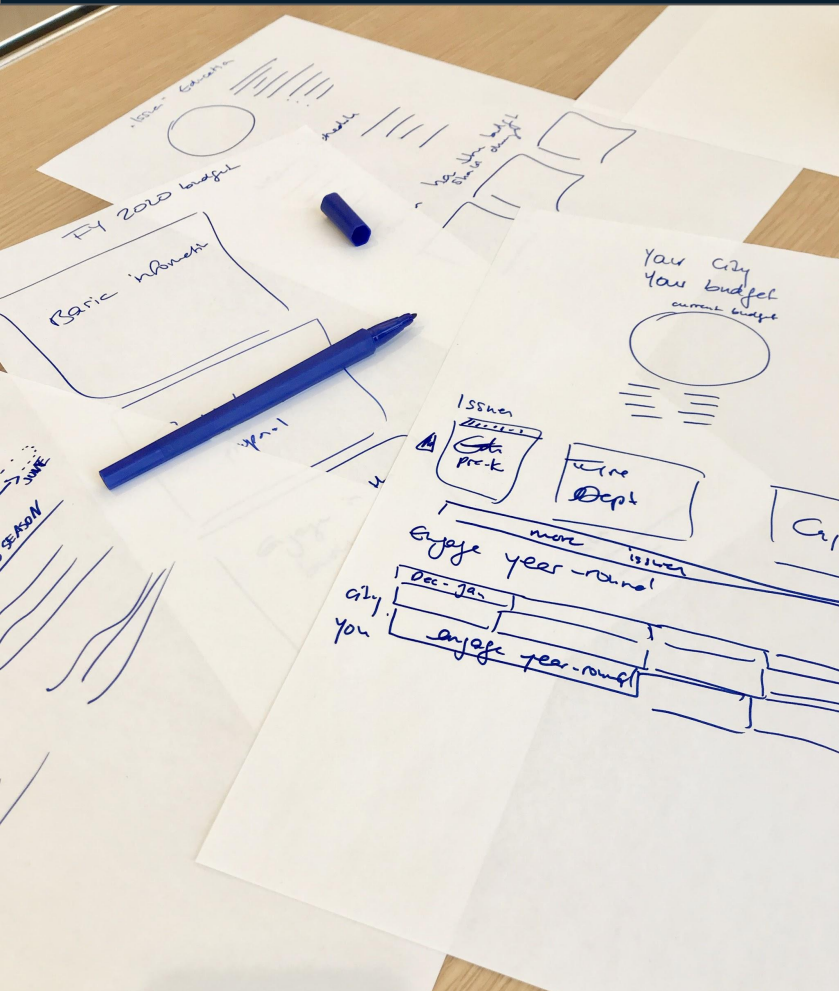


1 CITY HALL SQUARE
ROOM 550
BOSTON, MA 02201-2043
UNITED STATES

PLEASE STAY IN TOUCH

- ▶ You can view the upcoming City Council schedule online.

How may we blend *educational*
information about the budget with
proactive solicitations for *participation*?



Come to a City Council Hearing on the Education Budget

April

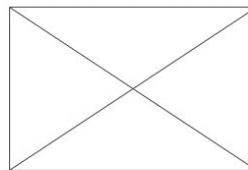
- 24 Tue 10:00 am Overview Presentation
- 26 Thu 11:00 am Student funding and enrollment
- 26 Thu 2:00 pm Vocational Learning

May

- 3 Thu 11:00 am Administrative Budget
- 3 Thu 2:00 pm Academics & Student Support
- 8 Tue 2:00 pm School Operations (1)
- 8 Tue 6:00 pm School Operations (2)
- 10 Thu 11:00 am Human Capital & Equity

Make your voice heard

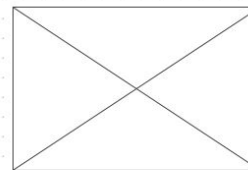
Speak at a hearing



Attend one of the hearings in City Hall and speak in front of your City Councilors.

[Learn more](#)

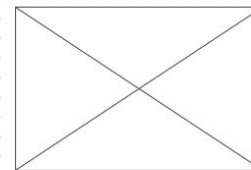
Testify in writing



Submit your comments in writing. We will forward your concerns to the relevant committee meeting.

[Start writing](#)

Testify via video



Record a video of yourself talking about your concern that will be shown at the relevant hearing in City Hall.

[Start recording](#)

Intro

User Research

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Prototype

Building Public Awareness

Conclusion

Demo



YOUR CITY, YOUR BUDGET

*The budget is what keeps our City running.
It is the reflection of our shared priorities.*

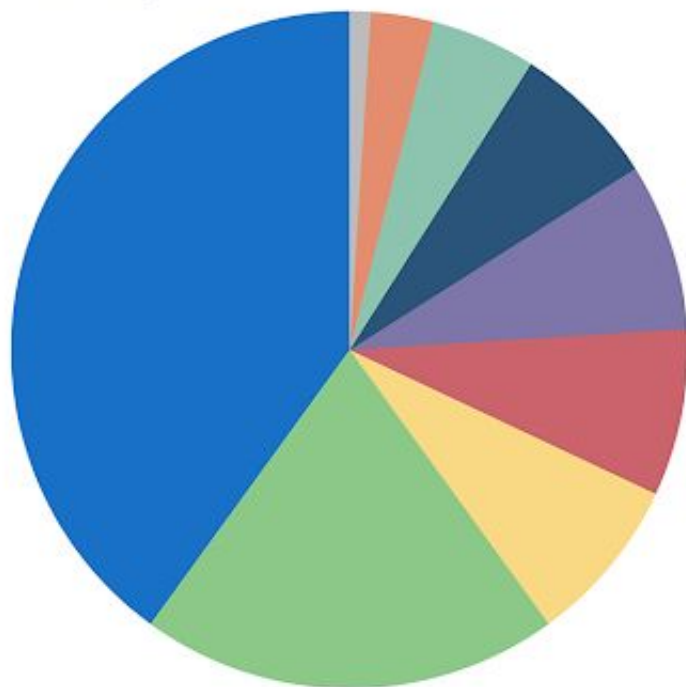
PROPOSED SPENDING

\$3.48B in total for June 2019 - July 2020




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\$3.48B in total for June 2019 - July 2020



- Education
- Public Safety
- Other fixed costs
- Other City departments
- Health Care related
- Pension
- Streets
- Public Health Commission
- Other centrally budgeted funds

Click on one of the budget items to learn more!

- 
- Education
 - Public Safety
 - Other fixed costs
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Click on one of the budget items to learn more!

EXPLORE THE BUDGET PROPOSAL



Pre-Kindergarten

We will be investing \$15 million in universal pre-k to guarantee equitable access to free, high-quality pre-k for all four-year-olds in Boston.



Fire Department

The health and safety of firefighters continues to be paramount for the City and the FY20 continues invest heavily in the Fire Department.



Recovery Services

The Mayor's Office of Recovery Services is increasing efficiency by consolidating and uplifting recovery related programs.

pre-k for all four-year-olds in Boston.

heavily in the Fire Department.

ery related programs.

GET INVOLVED WITH THE BUDGET PROCESS

December - April

Planning Phase

What we do: Each department plans its spending for the upcoming financial year. The Budget Office combines their plans and evaluates overall costs of new proposals and other opportunities. The mayor then publicly submits it to the City Council for review.

What you can do: During this time, you can [contact individual City Departments](#), the [Budget Office](#), or your elected [City Council representative](#) to speak about your ideas and concerns for the upcoming budget.

May

Public Hearing Season

What we do: The City Council holds a series of public hearings to review the Mayor's proposals, and offers their own recommended changes. The new budget is formalized and signed by the mayor by the end of June.

What you can do: Now you can learn about how the newly proposed budget impacts the issues you care about. If you think something in the budget needs to change, check the [schedule for public hearings](#) and [prepare to speak at a hearing](#). If you can't make it to a hearing, you can also [comment in writing](#) or record a [video with your concerns](#).

June - November

Implementation Phase

What we do: The new budget has just been approved, and the City implements new programs and services.

What you can do: You can weigh in year-round. [City Departments](#) and [City Council](#) are curious to learn about your ideas and concerns. You can also attend one of the many [community meetings](#) that take place in your neighborhood and get to know City representatives.

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[schedule for public hearings and prepare to speak at a hearing](#). If you can't make it to a hearing, you can also [comment in writing](#) or record a [video with your concerns](#).

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD AT A PUBLIC HEARING

Speak at a Hearing



Attend one of the hearings listed below at City Hall and speak in front of City Council members.

Comment in Writing



Submit your comments in writing. We will forward your concerns to the relevant City Council committee.

Send Us a Video



Record a video of yourself talking about your concern that will be shown at the relevant hearing in City Hall.

April

22

Mon 10:30 a.m. [Administration and Finance](#)

May

6

Mon 10:30 a.m. [Libraries](#)

A Quick Win *(added in April 2019)*



CITY of **BOSTON**

Mayor Martin J. Walsh



[PAY AND APPLY](#) [PUBLIC NOTICES](#) [FEEDBACK](#) [TRANSLATE](#)



[HOW THE BUDGET WORKS](#) [OPERATING BUDGET](#) [FY20-24 CAPITAL PLAN](#) [PUBLIC HEARINGS](#) [LEARN MORE](#)

PUBLIC HEARINGS

April 22 – April 29

Administration and Finance Overview, Revolving Funds, Public Facilities, Assessing, Boston Public Schools



April 30 – May 9

Boston Public Schools, Veterans Services, Age Strong, Public Works, Inspectional Services, Transportation, Neighborhood Development, Innovation and Technology, Boston Centers for Youth and Families, Youth Engagement and Employment



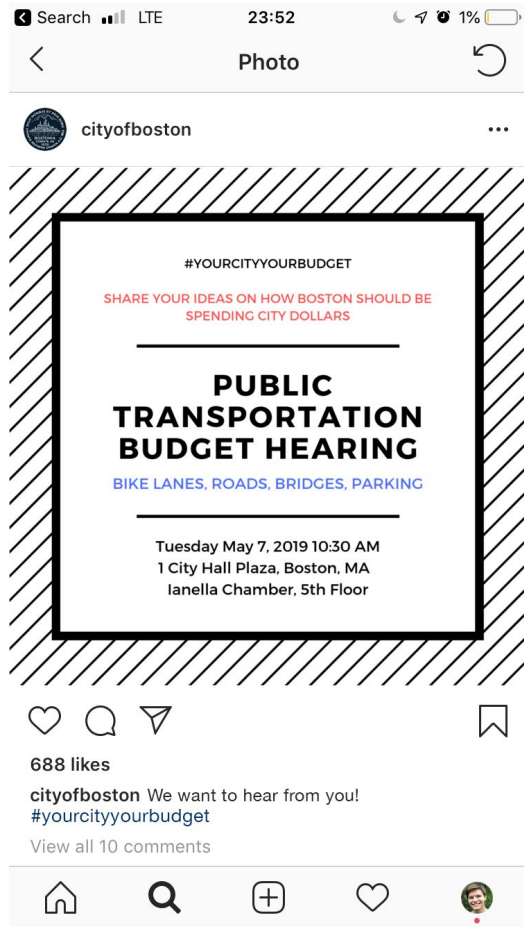
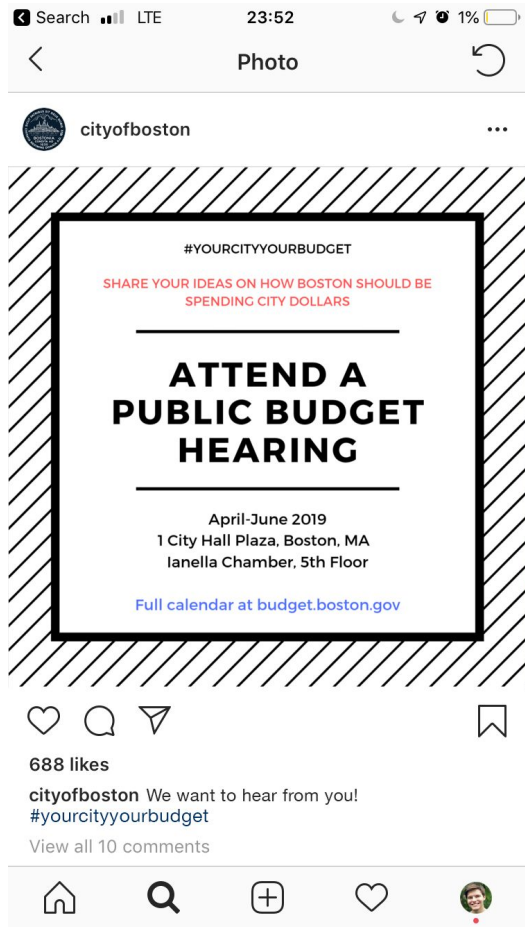
May 9 – May 21

Libraries, Parks and Recreation, Parks and Environment, Police, Public Health Commission, Fire



A man with short, dark hair, wearing a light-colored shirt, is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He is standing in a field of tall corn plants. The background is a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

**If you build it they
will come ... right?**





welcome to

BOSTON.GOV

THURSDAY, MAY 2



TOW LOT

The tow lot is open from 7 a.m. - 11 p.m. Automated kiosks are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for vehicle releases.



PARKING METERS

Parking meters are running on their normal schedules today.



CITY BUILDING HOURS

All municipal buildings are open based on their normal hours.



TRASH AND RECYCLING

Pickup is on a normal schedule.



STREET CLEANING

Today is the first Thursday of the month and street cleaning is running on a normal schedule.

YOUR CITY, YOUR BUDGET

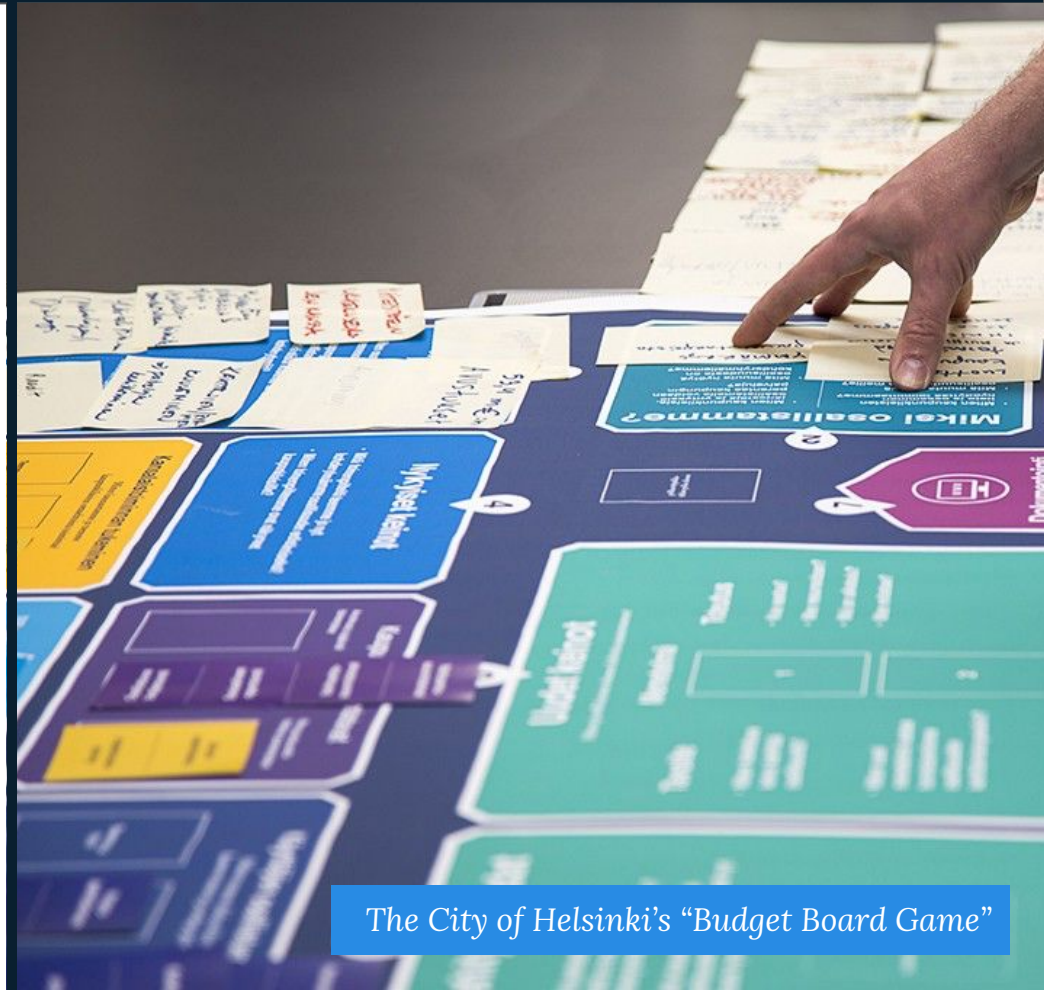
The budget is what keeps our City running. It is the reflection of our shared priorities.



Come to one of this year's public hearings at City Hall to weigh in!
Find out more on budget.boston.gov

CITY of BOSTON

Year-round in-person engagement through neighborhood events



The City of Helsinki's "Budget Board Game"

Additional Insights and Recommendations

- *More accommodating hearing times*
- *Year-round budget events in the community*
- *Improve feedback loops from city to citizen*

Thank You!

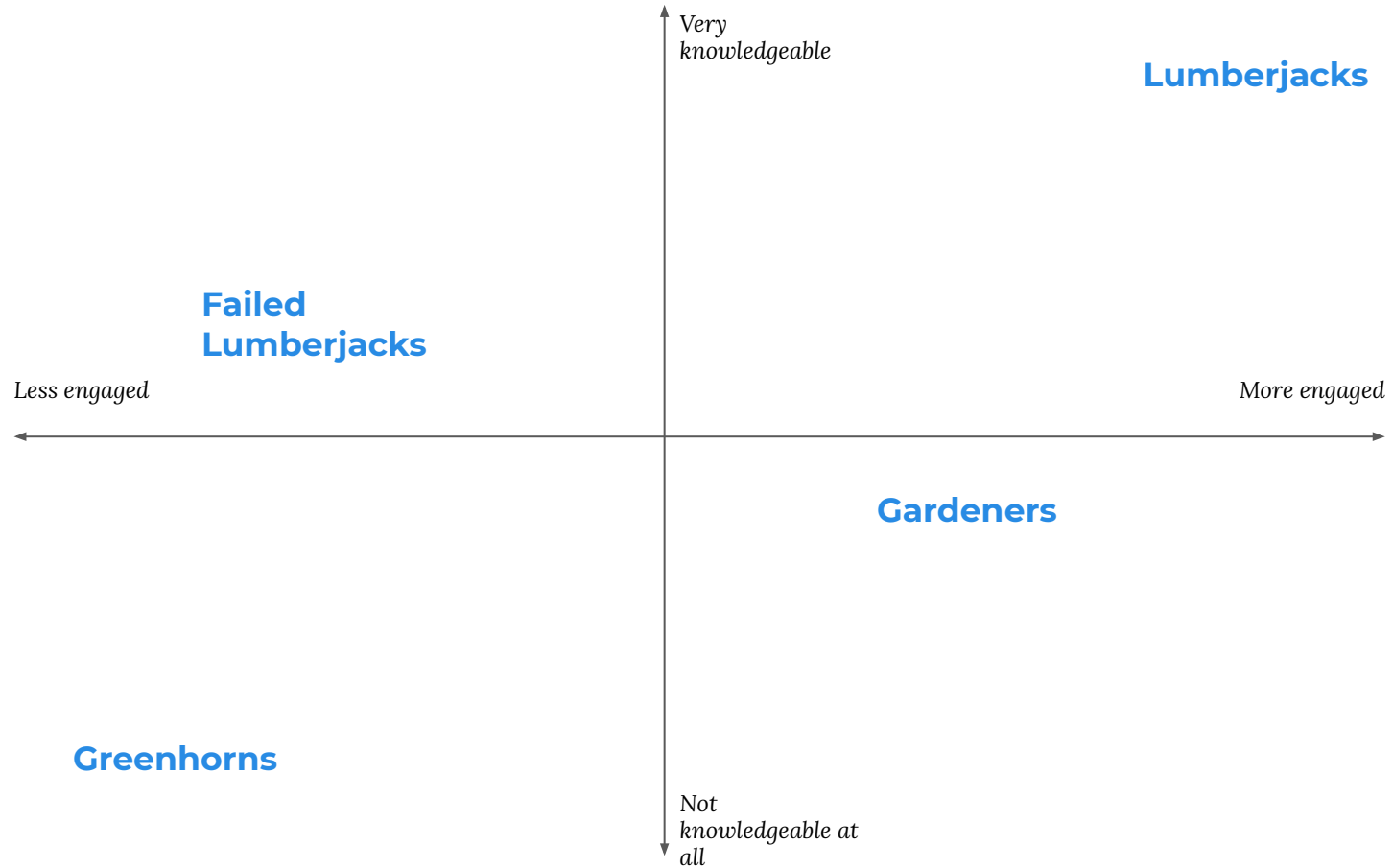
*Special thanks to the City Hall team from the Budget Office
and the Department of Innovation and Technology:*

*Jeanethe Falvey, Sarah Figalora, Justin Sterritt,
Natasha White, Jim Williamson, & Reilly Zlab*

Questions?

Appendix

User Research & Personas





Lumberjack

- Power user who **knows who to talk to**, how to get things done
- Speaks **on behalf of others**
- Has **testified** at a public hearing
- Doesn't think the city is perfect, but believes **long-term progress** is possible and worth working toward

Engagement 🙋🙋🙋🙋🙋

Knowledge 🧐🧐🧐🧐🧐

Faith 🙌🙌🙌🙌

“We decided that rather than going to City Hall and saying “we want body cameras,” we would go in and produce everything related to that. We were going to say here’s what the policy should look like and here’s where the money should come from. As opposed to working in the reverse, which was saying “we want this” and then letting elected officials tell us what was going to happen.”

Segun, Hyde Park



Gardener

- **Cares** about their community and tends to local issues
- Weighs in **if given the opportunity**
- Thinks Boston is **improving**
- Usually **older** and has lived in Boston for a while

Engagement



Knowledge



Faith



“I’ve emailed Michelle Wu a few times about street parking. I got another \$250 ticket the other day for parking a rental car on my street. Residents who don’t own cars should be able to get temporary parking permits when they rent cars.”

Tom, South End (pictured)

“The city’s a lot better than it was in 1975. It’s more diverse and it’s more inclusive.”

Sharlene, Jamaica Plain



Failed Lumberjack

Engagement



Knowledge



Faith



- **Used to be** very **involved** in civic life and aspired to make a difference
- Thinks city outreach attempts are **superficial**
- Feels **betrayed** by the city
- Cares about **social justice** and **equality**

“My brother used to work for the city. It’s all corrupt. If you have money you can get whatever you want...”

Joe, East Boston

“City meetings? Two words. Lip. Service.”

Valerie, Mattapan



Greenhorn*

- **Never had a reason to interact** with the city
- Young or **new** to the city
- Doesn't follow local news
- Thinks things are mostly **going well**

Engagement



Knowledge



Faith



"I don't know."

Evan, Fenway (pictured)

* Green · horn
1 a newcomer (as to a country) unacquainted with local manners and customs

Key Insights from User Research

- Residents initially care about **issues** that affect them, not about the budget per se
- Even the most engaged, politically aware citizens **hardly ever directly engage with the budget** process
- **City Council** is the main point of contact
- **Modes of interaction** with the city are numerous
- Attending **in-person meetings** is challenging for many Bostonians
- **Digital** communication **does not play a substantial role**
- A **lack of trust** exists among some communities
- A noticeable **lack of feedback** from the city

Additional recommendations

Item 1: *Improving feedback loops*

Item 2: *Hearing attendance tracking*

Item 3: *Variations in hearing timing*

Item 4: *Reorganizing public hearings*

Item 5: *Accessibility*

Item 6: *Year-round budget engagement*

Item 1: Improving Feedback Loops

Digital Feedback Box:

Automated thank you email directing people to more contacts and resources after they submit a generic comment.

CITY of BOSTON

Thank you for giving us feedback about Boston's budget!

Feedback from residents about what matters most to them and their vision for Boston's future is an essential part of making sure the city works for everyone, and our annual spending decisions reflect local values and priorities.

Each spring the Mayor announces a new yearly budget proposal, and City Council holds hearings in April, May, and June open to the public before they accept or reject those proposals. Learn more about how to participate in this process.

If you have an immediate concern, we encourage you to follow up with:

- [A department at City Hall that could help](#)
- [Your City Council representative](#)
- The City Council member who chairs the committee that oversees issues related to your concern.

Item 2: Hearing Attendance Tracking

Hearing sign-in sheets could be digitized and presented on a tablet or iPad.

End Goal: *A database of prior hearing attendees and their contact information.*

Attendees could be:

- *Sent a thank you email (prior slide),*
- *Added to existing email newsletters,*
- *Emailed in the future about community meetings or hearings similar to the one they attended.*



Item 3: Timing of Budget Hearings

In regular April -June hearing schedule, schedule as many hearings as possible in the evenings or on weekends. In 2018 two of the four most-commented on hearings were in the evening.

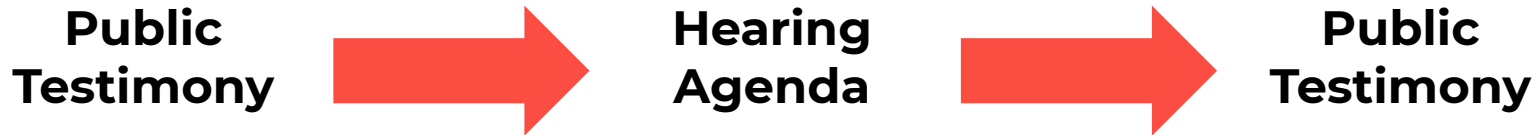
Time of Day	# of Hearings	Avg. # of Testimonies	Total # of Testimonies
10 AM - 5 PM	21	3	60
5 PM - 8 PM	2	10	21
Overall	23	4	81

Data from 2018

Item 4: Sequencing of Budget Hearings

Public officials are busy. When present at hearings they aren't running, they often show up to give opening remarks and then leave.

Spreading public testimony at any hearing throughout the meeting, and not leaving it all until the very end of an hours-long hearing ensures more people will actually be heard.



Item 5: Accessibility of Budget Hearings

Refreshments: *Will always be welcome, especially in the evening around dinner time when people may be coming straight from work.*

Kid-Friendly Environment: *Attending in-person in the evenings is challenging if not impossible for families with kids. Dedicated child care or play zone could break down those barriers.*

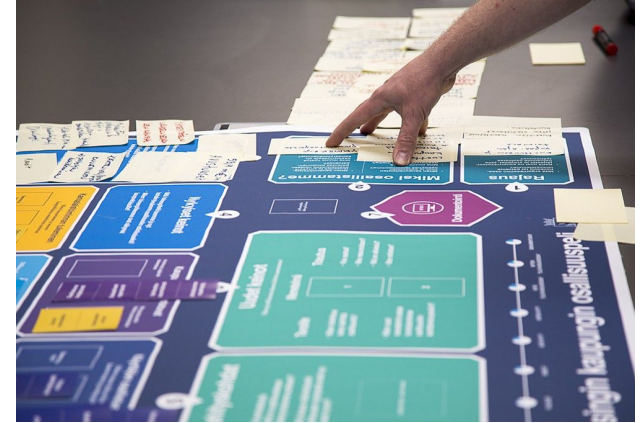
Charlie Card Pre-Loaded with \$4.50 Two-Way Subway Fare: *Available to those for whom attending in-person is a financial burden.*

Item 6: Year-Round In-Person Engagement

Fall has been ID'd as an ideal time to submit ideas before departments start December work of crafting new budgets.

Idea: Budget Office sponsors 1-4 weekend or evening events, attended by assortment of City Council members, Budget Office staff, departmental staff, or the Mayor!

- *Held in the community*
- *Feature group break-outs, educational brainstorming and workshopping, trainings on how to testify*
- *Gamification (budget board game), brainstorming games, live-action simulation.*
- *More time for people to learn ins-and-outs of budget*



The city of Helsinki, Finland created a board game to guide people through city budget trade-offs.

Example: Washington, D.C.

Broadcast on Facebook Live

PollEverywhere as live survey tool



D.C Mayor Muriel Bowser at a 2019 Budget Engagement Forum

JOIN MAYOR MURIEL BOWSER AT THE 2019 BUDGET ENGAGEMENT FORUMS

Join with fellow DC residents at forums to share your values, priorities, and ideas with the Bowser Administration as the FY20 budget is developed.

FEBRUARY 21

**BUDGET ENGAGEMENT
FORUM #1**

Time: 6:30 pm

Location: Arthur Capper
Community Center
1001 5th Street, SE

FEBRUARY 23

**BUDGET ENGAGEMENT
FORUM #2**

Time: 10:00 am

Location: Deanwood
Recreation Center
1350 49th Street, NE

FEBRUARY 25

**BUDGET ENGAGEMENT
FORUM #3**

Time: 6:30 pm

Location: Roosevelt
High School
4301 13th Street, NW

#FairShotFebruary

RSVP: 2019budgetforums.eventbrite.com

For reasonable accommodations or interpretation, please call 202-442-8150 or send an email to engagement.dc@dc.gov by February 9th.



GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR