**What is Participatory Budgeting?**

Participatory Budgeting, or PB, is a whole new way of managing public money. It’s a democratic process that gives everyday residents the right to vote directly on how a portion of their local tax-dollars are spent every year. It allows residents to develop public projects in collaboration with City Staff and then vote as a community on which projects receive funding. The whole idea is to give real people, real power over the decisions that impact their local quality of life.

**How does it work?**

There are many of examples of Participatory Budgeting in cities around the world, but they each have unique aspects tailored to the local community. Most follow a basic process that includes:

1. Residents Brainstorm Spending Ideas in Public Budget Hearings
2. Volunteers (Budget Delegates) work with city officials to turn ideas into concrete proposals
3. Residents hold a public vote to determine which projects are most important to the community
4. Top projects receive public funding and are implemented with the oversight of residents and city officials

**How would it happen in St. Pete?**

We want to put the concept on a citywide ballot in November of 2015. Since it is currently illegal for residents to vote directly on how their tax dollars are spent, we must amend the City Charter to allow residents to vote on up to 3% of the General Budget, or approximately $7 million.

We need roughly 16,000 signatures to get the idea on the ballot, and then it must pass by a simple majority vote of local residents.

If that’s successful, it would then be up to a steering committee appointed by the mayor and city council to establish the process and criteria for voting, before turning it over to the people to create their own proposals and vote on which projects should be funded.

**How you can get involved:**

The best thing people can do to help is to get signatures from your friends, family, and neighbors. We are asking our core volunteers to complete the modest task of getting 4 signatures a week. If we all play our small part, we can accomplish so much. Just think, if we have 100 people getting 4 signatures a week from now until the end of the year… That’s almost 5,000 signatures!

We are also looking for people to volunteer as petition collection sites around the city. This could be your home or a local business that supports the idea of more democracy. Our goal is to have locations that people can go to get petitions and drop them off. Once every couple of weeks, one of our volunteers will come by to pick up signatures and drop of more petitions. We’ll throw in a free yard sign to let your neighbors know you support local democracy.

**Don’t we elect people to decide the budget for us? That’s their job.**

Democracy can be much more than just picking your representative every few years. This is really about having a say on the issues that determine our local quality of life. Participatory Budgeting lets everyday people make those decisions for themselves, based on their own understanding of what the community needs.

*Do you think more democracy is a good thing?*

**Won’t this raise our taxes if money is set-aside for Participatory Budgeting?**

We aren’t asking for additional revenues to be raised. We are only proposing that the people should have a direct say over how 3% of the General Budget is spent. Participatory Budgeting actually increases transparency and accountability because residents are much more engaged in how public funds are spent.

*Do you think giving taxpayers more say over the budget would lead to better use of our tax dollars?*

**The budget is too complicated for everyday people to understand.**

Who knows better what the community needs than the people who live there? By allowing residents to decide how to spend a small portion of the local budget, people get to work alongside City staff and learn about the process while getting engaged in decisions they used to rely on others to decide for them.

*Do you believe the city should try to make the budget more accessible to residents?*

**What if people don’t participate? This will never work!**

A key goal of Participatory Budgeting is to increase civic engagement by giving people real power to make decisions over real money. By giving residents a seat at the table, PB can create the incentive for people to get involved in local budget decisions like never before.

*Don’t you think that giving people the right to make decisions makes it more likely they will participate?*