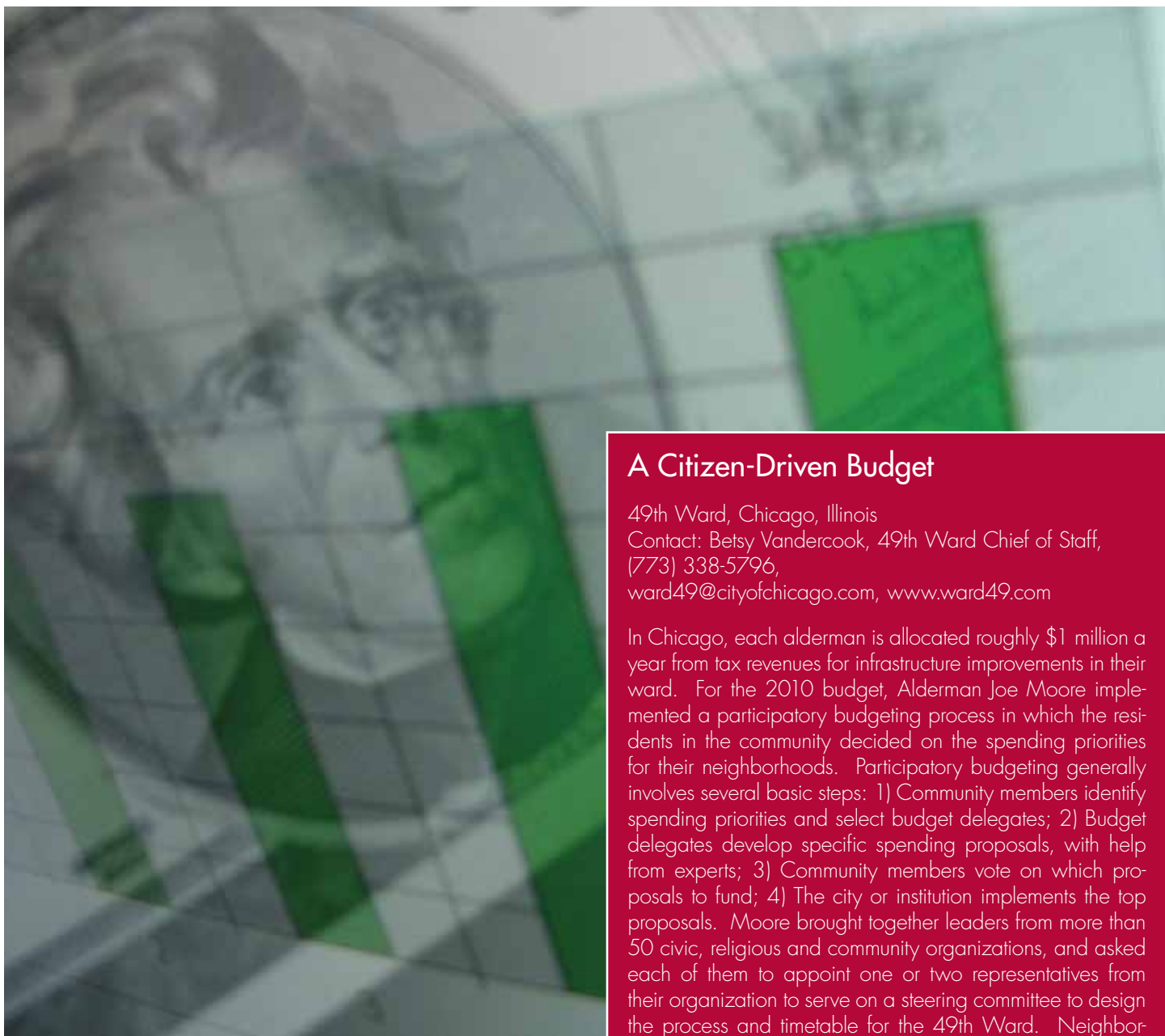


Recurring Deliberative Processes on Key Issues and Decisions

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

BUILDING BLOCK 10 OF 12 - IMPROVING PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING



A Citizen-Driven Budget

49th Ward, Chicago, Illinois
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In Chicago, each alderman is allocated roughly \$1 million a year from tax revenues for infrastructure improvements in their ward. For the 2010 budget, Alderman Joe Moore implemented a participatory budgeting process in which the residents in the community decided on the spending priorities for their neighborhoods. Participatory budgeting generally involves several basic steps: 1) Community members identify spending priorities and select budget delegates; 2) Budget delegates develop specific spending proposals, with help from experts; 3) Community members vote on which proposals to fund; 4) The city or institution implements the top proposals. Moore brought together leaders from more than 50 civic, religious and community organizations, and asked each of them to appoint one or two representatives from their organization to serve on a steering committee to design the process and timetable for the 49th Ward. Neighborhood assemblies were held where information and ideas were exchanged. Meetings were conducted in Spanish as well as English. Thirty-six individual proposals appeared on the ballot. Each voter was entitled to vote for up to eight projects. More than 1,600 residents voted in the election for infrastructure spending priorities in April 2010. The project proposals that garnered the most votes were submitted to the City of Chicago and its sister agencies for implementation. The participatory budget process has since been used to develop the 2011 infrastructure priorities in the 49th Ward, and a number of other Chicago aldermen have pledged to launch similar processes in their wards.

In many cities, local officials and other leaders have been able to address key issues and policy decisions by engaging large numbers of people in small deliberative groups. These efforts typically involve hundreds of people, each of whom devotes several hours of their time (sometimes over several weeks, sometimes in one day). Participants consider a range of policy options and have the chance to make up their own minds about what should be done. These processes can be embedded into the way the community engages citizens and makes decisions in different issue areas.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Reduce tension around controversial issues.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Institute an annual Participatory Budgeting process.
- Mount large-scale community visioning processes at regular intervals.
- Establish an annual large-scale deliberative process, using face-to-face and online tools, on the top issue of the year.
- Incorporate deliberative processes in how high-profile land use decisions are made at the local and neighborhood levels.
- Establish regular deliberations on issues of race, diversity and difference in neighborhoods, workplaces and other settings.
- Develop a procedure for using citizen juries, citizen panels or other representative sample approaches on more specific or technical issues.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that have historically been marginalized or under-represented.
- They use online tools to allow citizens to post questions, comments and ideas before and between meetings.
- They are repeated as part of the regular policymaking routine on a particular issue.
- They are connected to citizen spaces in neighborhoods, schools and online settings.
- Officials report back clearly — both online and in face-to-face settings — on what they have heard from residents and how that input was incorporated into policy.