



New Florida Majority  
Participatory Budgeting Committee  
1010 N. Davis St., Suite 104  
Jacksonville, FL 32209

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Charter Revision Commission Members  
Office of the City Council  
117 W. Duval St., Suite 430  
Jacksonville, FL 32202

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CIB*

Dear Commission Members,

We write to you in your capacity as state and local government officials and overseers of Duval County state laws. Over the past few months, our community has expressed concerns about civil society, transparency, and accountability within our local government. Distrust in authorities, low levels of civic activism, social problems and inefficient governance undermine the legitimacy of governments and create a demand for new institutional solutions for enhanced democracy, and better public services.

To address the concerns, the New Florida Majority (NewFM) proposes a solution of participatory budgeting (also known as PB).

The New Florida Majority (NewFM) is an independent political organization working to increase the voting and political power of historically marginalized and excluded constituencies toward an inclusive, equitable, and just Florida. Our PB Committee was founded in July 2019 with the well-being and inclusion of our community in mind.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. PB gives ordinary people real decision-making power over real money. The process was first developed in Brazil in 1989, and there are now over 1,000 participatory budgets around the world, most at the municipal level.

Participatory Budgeting can offer the following outcomes:

1. Give community members a say in how public funds are allocated
2. Cultivate better and fairer decisions
3. Inspire more active and democratic citizens
4. Foster a more accountable and efficient government
5. Create opportunities for local elected officials to connect with constituents

In Brazil, Participatory Budgeting contributed to a more equitable distribution of city services. In 1997, sewer and water connections increased from 75% to 98%; health and education budgets increased from

13% to nearly 40%; the number of schools quadrupled, and road building in poor neighborhoods increased five-fold.

Other processes give citizens decision-making power over a smaller portion of an individual Councilor's "discretionary funds." For example, in New York City, Participatory Budgeting is used to allocate \$35 million of City council discretionary funds. Local councilmembers may unilaterally decide to use Participatory Budgeting to spend their discretionary budgets as officials have done in Chicago, New York City, Missouri, and California. Because officials are allocating individual discretionary funds, no new legislation is required.

The process gives a voice to the poor whose interests are usually ignored, and this is exactly what we seek in Jacksonville. Participatory Budgeting empowers citizens to allocate portions of public budgets in a way that best fits the needs of the people. In turn, proponents expect PB to improve citizens' lives in important ways, by expanding their participation in politics, providing better public services including healthcare, sanitation, or education, while also giving citizens a sense of efficacy.

We call for:

1. A proposal for a PB model to be pushed for the inside of our City Charter
2. A meeting with City Council members to further discuss the benefits and plans of our committee.
3. Through our PB program, Jacksonville residents and stakeholders submit ideas, develop project proposals in collaboration with staff, and residents then vote on projects. A list of the projects, prioritized by the total number of votes, is submitted to City Council for funding consideration as part of the annual City budget.

Contemporary public policy is no longer able to rely on representative democracy. To stay legitimate and fulfill popular needs, it must transform and become more participatory and inclusive. Participatory Budgeting will improve conditions for marginalized communities, strengthen our community, and improve local governance.

In Power,

The New Florida Majority Participatory Budgeting Committee