

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE : April 11, 2017

TO : Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., County Board Chairman
Peggy West, Chairwoman, Committee on Finance & Audit

FROM : Steven Kreklow, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget,
Department of Administrative Services

SUBJECT : Balancing Act – Public engagement regarding 2018 Milwaukee County Budget

OVERVIEW

Public input is an integral part of the political process and in an effort to increase participation surrounding important fiscal policy decisions, Milwaukee County is implementing an interactive budgeting tool to better capture the priorities of the public regarding expenditures and revenues.

BACKGROUND

The format for the Milwaukee County Executive Community Input Sessions on the 2017 budget was changed to incorporate facilitators from the Zeidler Center for Public Discussion. The intent was to solicit more meaningful community feedback and discussion around citizen priorities for the limited financial resources. Over one hundred participants submitted surveys outlining policy preferences that were closely considered for inclusion in the 2017 budget. To build on the success of the Zeidler Center discussions and expand the reach of public participation to those citizens unable to attend in-person sessions, Milwaukee County has purchased an inexpensive software package in order to present an online interactive budgeting tool called Balancing Act for input on the 2018 budget.

Balancing Act is a mobile optimized website loaded with the financial information of Milwaukee County that provides citizens with an easy, interactive way to learn about the choices the County faces during the budgeting process. Each user can adjust expenditures and revenues based on their priorities to balance the Milwaukee County budget and submit their preferences for consideration to policy makers. Balancing Act will be open for public submissions until early-August via the Milwaukee County website. An accompanying presentation providing background on the financial status of the county will be available for viewing by Balancing Act users.

A simplified version of Balancing Act was created using only budget data for the Milwaukee County Transit System familiarize staff with the tool and develop the required skills for countywide implementation. Eight small groups were provided with a link to the tool and given a presentation with instruction on its use during the month of March. The test groups submitted responses and provided feedback for improvements. The Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget will present the pilot PowerPoint and demonstration in the April Finance Committee meeting and anticipates a full 2018 Balancing Act budget presentation in the May Finance Committee meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for information purposes only. No action is required.



Steven R. Kreklow, Director
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Department of Administrative Services

Cc: Chris Abele, Milwaukee County Executive
Sheldon Wasserman, Co-chair, Finance Committee
Supreme Moore-Omokunde, County Supervisor
Michael Mayo Sr., County Supervisor
Willie Johnson, County Supervisor
Jason Haas, County Supervisor
Sequanna Taylor, County Supervisor
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