



Rebecca Maurer COUNCIL MEMBER, WARD 12

COMMITTEES: Health, Human Services & the Arts - *Vice Chair* • Municipal Services & Properties • Operations • Rules • Transportation & Mobility

Statement from Councilwoman Maurer re: People's Budget Cleveland Ballot Initiative

After hours of conversations within City Hall and hours of conversation with members of PB Cle's coalition, I have decided to oppose the charter amendment that proposes to dedicate 2% of the City's general fund to a participatory budget process.

This decision has been difficult for me. I fundamentally believe in the need to reinvigorate small-d democratic engagement in the city and I believe the PB coalition has been acting in good faith to do just that. But as an elected member of City Council, I must balance these beliefs with my fiduciary obligations to keep the City in good financial standing. Because of the amount of money being asked and the lack of safeguards in the amendment, I must oppose it.

Challenges in the PB ballot language: Last year we successfully balanced the city's \$710 million general fund for the first time in years with a remaining balance of only \$196,518. Even if this amendment allows for a mix of capital repair dollars and general fund dollars to reach \$14 million, any draw on the general fund is a risk for a poor city like ours. Moreover, the amendment does not have any safeguards. PB would not be paused if we have to dip into the rainy day fund or if the PB Steering Committee ends up struggling to successfully spend the money. It would not even be paused in the worst-case scenario of a fiscal emergency. I think these are among the key reasons that many of the city's labor unions have come out against this ballot initiative. I join them in doing so.

Challenges at Council: While I feel it is important to take a clear stand on the black-and-white issue of the ballot issue in November, let's not miss the context of how we got here. My colleagues on City Council had the opportunity to support a one-time \$5 million pilot that was supported by the Mayor's administration and paid for by federal ARPA dollars. Myself and three other members co-sponsored the bill. But the rest of council's disdain for putting real dollars behind community participation was palpable. The pilot didn't pass. It was a shame to see community engagement seen as a threat rather than as an opportunity.

Recent Negotiations: I continue to want to see the ideas behind participatory budgeting work in a meaningful way without risking 2% of the general fund. Because of this, I have stayed in touch with both Council leadership and the PB Coalition. In recent days as the September 8 deadline approached for adding charter language to the ballot, I approached both the Coalition and Council leadership about whether there was any room for a deal to be struck. I shuttled between

both sides discussing if a lower dollar amount was possible. I truly believe there was a good-faith effort on both sides, but there just was not enough room for compromise and it was clear we were running out of time given the need to pass any change through a meeting of Council. Those last-minute negotiations did not result in a deal and the PB charter amendment will be on the ballot in November.

Keeping our eyes on the prize: I am ultimately frustrated that this conversation has gotten so entrenched on both sides. As we fight over the specifics of this charter amendment, we lose the bigger conversation about the endless money the City seems to find for new stadiums or tax breaks for big-time developers downtown. Fundamentally, I want to challenge both my colleagues on Council and the Mayor's administration to find real ways to increase public participation in our city's budget, even and especially as they oppose the proposed PB charter amendment. Let's get real public input on the budget -- even as simple as using a model like [Cincinnati's](#).

We must stay focused on doing the hard work of rebuilding trust between our government and our residents. PB's proposed charter amendment is not the right way to do it, but there are many other options we should pursue.

#####