

Offered by City Councilor Julia Mejia



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-SIX

ORDER FOR A HEARING ON GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND ACCESSIBILITY OF DECISION MAKING PROTOCOLS IN CITY GOVERNMENT

- WHEREAS,** Sherry Arnstein, writing in 1969 about citizen involvement in planning processes in the United States, described a “ladder of citizen participation” that ranges from non-participation to full citizen control, where people handle the entire process of planning, policy-making, and program management. Arnstein’s framework underscores the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, particularly in matters that impact local communities; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The City of Boston develops and dedicates substantial resources and conducts in-depth decision-making related to housing, education, public safety, public health, and zoning, but these resources and decision-making processes are often inaccessible to the individuals and communities most directly impacted by the systemic issues these initiatives aim to address; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Protocols and procedures in the City of Boston, established through the city charter, legislative action, or the discretion of city officials, have created a civic culture where individuals with the most privileged access often hold disproportionate influence over decision-making, while many residents feel excluded from or unheard in shaping policies and programs that affect them; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The renovation of White Stadium in Franklin Park has raised concerns about how effectively large-scale city projects incorporate meaningful community input. The project’s significant cost increase—from \$50 million to \$91 million—has highlighted questions regarding transparency, the accessibility and inclusiveness of decision-making processes, and how

these decisions align with the needs and priorities of neighboring communities such as Roxbury and Mattapan; *and*

WHEREAS,

In January 2026, City administration announced its intent to abandon a previously designated life sciences and affordable housing development on the City-owned Parcel 3 site along Tremont Street in Roxbury in favor of studying the construction of a new Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, a significant shift communicated to residents after years of community engagement around the prior plan and without a clearly defined, community-driven decision-making process, prompting concerns from Roxbury residents and Black community leaders about top-down governance, inconsistent application of public-private partnership models, the displacement of Black-led development partners, and the erosion of trust in how major land-use and public investment decisions are made; *and*

WHEREAS,

The Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) continues to conduct “Squares and Streets” planning and rezoning initiatives in several neighborhoods now and with a total of 17 neighborhoods in the future. Concerns have been raised about the inclusiveness and effectiveness of community engagement in these efforts, as participation data shows underrepresentation of protected demographic groups relative to neighborhood populations, suggesting insufficient outreach and equitable access, alongside a lack of specific measures to prevent the potential displacement often linked to rezoning, highlighting the need for more inclusive and proactive planning processes.; *and*

WHEREAS,

The modernization of Article 80 development processes by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) has raised concerns about reductions in public participation, the transparency of decision-making protocols, and the inclusion of protections against displacement and inequity in housing and development outcomes; *and*

WHEREAS,

The redesign of Blue Hill Avenue, a vital corridor connecting multiple Boston neighborhoods, has raised similar concerns about a lack of community involvement in decision-making. Despite the significant impact of proposed changes to traffic flow, parking, and infrastructure, many residents and business owners along the corridor feel excluded from conversations that directly affect their lives and livelihoods. Greater transparency and engagement are necessary to align decisions with the needs of those most affected; *and*

WHEREAS,

The redesign and construction of Madison Park Vocational Technical High School has experienced prolonged delays that have disrupted students’

access to critical vocational and technical programming, and although the project has now received funding approval from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, community stakeholders continue to raise concerns regarding decision-making protocols related to swing space utilization during construction, the scope and inclusion of academic and vocational programs in the redesign, and the transparency of the project's timeline, budget, and community engagement processes; *and*

WHEREAS,

Since its creation, the Boston City Council Committee on Government Accountability, Transparency, and Accessibility has worked to review the efficiency, effectiveness, and accessibility of city operations and programs. This includes the importance of examining decision-making protocols for projects like the White Stadium renovation, Squares and Streets up-zoning, Article 80 modernization, and the Housing Accelerator Fund to ensure they align with legislative intent and community priorities; *and*

WHEREAS,

More work remains to ensure that the City of Boston's departments and agencies adopt accountable, transparent, and accessible decision-making processes that center the voices of all residents, particularly those in historically underserved neighborhoods; ***NOW THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED:

That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing on Community Engagement, Transparency, and Accountability in City Development Decision-Making to examine the policies, protocols, and practices used by City departments and agencies to engage residents, disclose information, and make decisions related to major development, rezoning, capital, and infrastructure projects, including but not limited to the White Stadium renovation, Parcel 3 siting decisions, Squares and Streets rezoning, Article 80 modernization and other public-private partnerships; and to assess how these decision-making processes align with legislative intent, equity goals, public oversight responsibilities, and the needs of communities most impacted by such projects.

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