

Seoul City to reflect citizens' priorities through citywide budgeting process

The Seoul Shinmun

May 3, 2012

Ordinance bill for the participatory budgeting system passed
Budgeting Committee members to be chosen by next month
Citizens' opinions on financial policy and investment to be reflected

The over 10 million citizens of Seoul now have access to an institutional device through which they can make their voices heard on issues related to the prioritization of public spending by participating in Seoul City's budget process.

Seoul Metropolitan Council held a general meeting on May 2 and passed an ordinance on participatory budgeting in Seoul, with 64 votes in favor, two votes against, and three abstentions. Seoul City is the last city among Korea's local governments to enact such an ordinance, but its ordinance is considered the most practical of all. Especially, the ordinance is the result of over three months of discussions among Seoul City, Seoul Metropolitan Council, and grassroots organizations.

The ordinance stipulates that a written opinion on the following year's budget should be submitted to Seoul City after being reviewed by the Participatory Budgeting Committee by the end of June, which, however, will not be done this year because of the tight schedule. Seoul City plans to draw up an operational plan and select the Participatory Budgeting Committee members by the end of next month. The members will then receive budgeting training and submit their opinions in writing, which, according to Seoul, will not be possible until August. Kim Sang-han, a chief in the Budget Department of Seoul City, admits that this year's participatory budgeting will serve as a pilot program at best.

In the process of enacting the ordinance, Seoul held talks with Seoul Metropolitan Council regarding the scope of participatory budgeting and the roles of the Participatory Budgeting Committee. Kim Seon-gab, a Seoul Metropolitan Council member who participated in drafting the proposal for the ordinance, explained, "Seoul Metropolitan Council wanted to include the citywide budget in order to fulfill the purpose of the ordinance, while the executive committee aimed to establish an upper limit." He went on to add that the two parties finally agreed to make it clear that the ordinance should allow citizens to express their opinions and engage in discussions on budgeting. Seoul City expressed discontent at first, but finally approved the inclusion of supervision of the mid- to long-term budget allocation and financial policy as well as large-scale investment projects as duties of the Participatory Budgeting Committee.

As this is the first year of implementation, the road ahead will be bumpy. However, citizens' active participation is at stake. Kim expects that "the participatory budgeting system will increase the transparency, fairness, and efficiency of the local governments' financial management" and stressed that "as it will take quite a long time for the system to take root, Seoul City should make special efforts to provide citizens with civic education in diverse areas, including budgeting training." Son Jong-pil, the chief of the Participatory Budgeting Network Taskforce, said that the civic organization would do its best to promote active citizen engagement, operate the system independently, and create models of public-private cooperation.

Reported by Kang Guk-jin

Seoulites to Decide How to Spend KRW 50 Billion of Citywide Budget

Participatory Budgeting in Full Swing

The Kyunghyang Shinmun

May 25, 2012

Seoul City announced on May 24 that it has launched a participatory budgeting system that gives citizens the authority to make decisions on how to spend KRW 50 billion of the city's budget.

On the same day, Seoul City began recruiting the members of the Participatory Budgeting Committee and organizing the Support Council. The Participatory Budgeting Committee consists of 250 citizens, who will monitor Seoul's 2013 budget and decide its allocation. Seoul City will accept applications until June 8 and select a total of 150 citizens from each of the 25 local districts through a random draw. The remaining 100 members will be chosen based on the recommendations of the city government, civic organizations, and regional participatory budgeting committees. Seoul City said that socially underprivileged citizens, such as people with physical disabilities and senior citizens, will be given priority.

According to the city, the KRW 50 billion in funds, which will be set aside for projects that were given priority by citizens, accounts for roughly 11.4 percent of this year's KRW 432.3 billion citywide budget for new projects. Participatory budgeting is open to all Seoul citizens, and anyone can send related suggestions or ideas to Seoul City or local districts via the Internet or by regular mail.

Seoul plans to run the Budget School in order to provide education for the members of the Participatory Budgeting Committee and the general public on Seoul City finance and the participatory budgeting system, among other subjects. The Participatory Budgeting Committee is divided into eight subcommittees, including those for the environment, women, and architecture, and is responsible for reviewing the public spending projects proposed by citizens and making final decisions regarding project priority at the general meeting of the Participatory Budgeting Committee.

An Yeong-sin, a 38-year-old member of the Participatory Budgeting Committee in Seongbuk-gu, pointed out, "The Participatory Budgeting Committee succeeded in allocating KRW 100 million that was supposed to be spent for apartment-related projects to local community projects instead. However, it is true that the local community budget available under the participatory budgeting scheme accounts for only a small portion of the central government's budget."

Yun Jong-pil, the chief of the Seoul City Participatory Budgeting Network Steering Committee, worries that the budget will be allocated among the districts equally without taking the financial circumstances of each district into consideration, as some districts with solid infrastructure and strong welfare programs may not require as much public funding as some others that do not. He hopes that the Participatory Budgeting Committee members will take Seoul City as a whole into account when making funding decisions.

Seo Yun-gi, a member of Seoul Metropolitan Council who proposed the participatory budgeting ordinance, said: "Budgeting is not a task reserved exclusively for experts." He defines participatory budgeting as "a program designed to establish an institutional framework for ordinary citizens, including socially underprivileged people who are in need of funding but cannot express such need due to a lack of information and knowledge, to learn and make their voices heard."

Reported by Kim Yeo-ran

“Proud to Be a Full-Fledged Seoulite”

Muroya Madoka, a Japanese Resident of Seoul Who Became a Member of the Seoul City Participatory Budgeting Committee

The Seoul Shinmun

July 20, 2012

Muroya Madoka is a Japanese man who loves Seoul so much that he has come to know the city better than even native Seoulites. He often visits the Seoul City website to learn more about Seoul by reading news and information on the city. One day, he saw an advertisement for the recruitment of members of the Seoul City Participatory Budgeting Committee.

- **Falling in love with Korean calligraphy**

After finding out that the job is open to all Seoul residents, Muroya Madoka rushed to fill out an application form, hoping that he could learn even more about Seoul through direct involvement and meet Seoul residents from all walks of life.

He was not selected in the random draw, but Seoul City was so impressed by his interest and passion for Seoul that Mayor Park Won-soon included him in the group of 25 people that he personally recommended as Participatory Budgeting Committee members. Muroya Madoka said, “I feel that I have been accepted as a Seoul citizen. It makes me feel great, and I’ll do my best. My parents and friends have been very supportive.”

Born and raised in Tokyo, Muroya began his special relationship with Korea through calligraphy. Attracted to the charm and beauty of Korean calligraphy, he learned Korean and came to Korea to receive language training in 2002.

He joined the 2008 Busan International Film Festival as a staff member because he wanted to become involved in Korea-Japan joint programs. Since then, he has been living in Korea and working for the Korea Tourism Organization since 2010.

Muroya’s position as a member of the Participatory Budgeting Committee does not reflect any interest on his part in budget-related matters. At first, he wanted to be assigned to the Culture and Tourism Committee, as it is related to his work, but he is now on the Committee on Economy and Industry. “I don’t know much about budgeting, but it’s great that I can learn something new, and the Budget School run by Seoul City has taught me a lot of things I was unaware of before,” he said with a big smile.

- **“Would like to promote bike riding”**

As he believes that “what counts is not professionalism but love, interest, and passion for learning,” Muroya is actively suggesting numerous public spending projects to vitalize bike riding in the city.

Reported by Kang Guk-jin

• Heartwarming Behind-the-Scenes Story about a “Fairy Tale Village with Wall Paintings”
“An Owl and an Old Lady,” a Fairy Tale based on Cheonho 3-dong, Gangdong-gu, Seoul

The Kyunghyang Shinmun

July 10, 2015

The term “Cheonho” in “Cheonho-dong,” the name of a neighborhood in Seoul, means “1,000 houses,” as the area was believed to be an ideal place to live. There is also a fairy tale based on this neighborhood. It begins with an owl hovering around downtown Seoul, looking for a place to pass the winter. However, it bumps into a wall in an alley of Cheonho 3-dong and hurts its wing. An old lady finds the owl and takes good care of it, and her neighbors build a nest for the bird. The owl then settles down in the village, raises a family, and takes on the responsibility of patrolling the neighborhood to protect people as they walked through the dark alleys. The residents, who had shut themselves up inside their houses for safety, came out of their houses and lived happily and safely together.

This fairy tale is called “An Owl and an Old Lady,” and is told against the backdrop of Cheonho 3-dong. A neighborhood lined with tightly spaced multiplex houses amid narrow alleys that run along steep slopes, Cheonho 3-dong is vulnerable to fire and has a dark and dreary atmosphere at night, and the ground is slippery, causing residents to slip and fall frequently. The rundown neighborhood waited to be gentrified for over 10 years, during which time it lost its vitality and became rather desolate. However, it has recently transformed itself into a “fairy tale village decorated with wall paintings.” The fairy tale introduced above was created based on the recent changes that the neighborhood has undergone.

Rundown neighborhood excluded from gentrification projects

Wall paintings in alleys suggested by a local senior

A fairy tale with a local resident as its heroine

“Transformed into a clean and safe place”



On July 9, a local senior Park Gap-yong is standing with a big smile on her face in front of a wall decorated with paintings depicting scenes from the fairy tale that was created based on the neighborhood. The fairy tale, titled “An Owl and an Old Lady,” was created based on the story of how the village began to change after Park asked Gangdong-gu Office to revitalize the alleys in her neighborhood. Park appears in the fairy tale as the heroine. Reported by Kang Yun-jung

In the afternoon of July 8, some elderly residents were chatting in the rest area near the entrance of the neighborhood. It is a small space, but they said it was something new and treasured by local residents. The alley with wall paintings is only a few steps from there. A 78-year-old lady named Park Gap-yong looked proud, touting the wall paintings for their artistry. Having lived in the neighborhood for the last 30 years, Park is the very heroine in the fairy tale. Early last year, she asked Gangdong-gu Office to “transform” her neighborhood, like the neighborhood beautifully decorated with wall paintings that she had seen on TV. Her idea became a reality after it was chosen as a participatory budgeting project called the “Project for the Creation of a Safe Village” in Gangdong-gu, Seoul. The project aimed to achieve crime prevention by taking an environmental design approach to the 1.3-kilometer-long alley that stretches from Cheonho 3-dong Community Center to Cheonho-dong Cathedral. Local residents, civil servants with Gangdong-gu Office, and experts met six times for meetings, lectures, and training sessions, and the residents, including Park Gap-yong and 70-year-old Kang In-ja, examined every corner of the village to identify problematic spots that required repairs. As a result of their work, the village is now equipped with new streetlights, security mirrors, and multi-camera surveillance systems, and the stories told by the locals were reproduced as a fairy tale and wall paintings, in which the residents are portrayed as the heroes and heroines. Park said, “There are many alleys that are still unsafe, but the whole neighborhood is now as safe, clean, and lovely as mine.”

Reported by Kim Hyang-mi

Decisions to Be Made on Participatory Budgeting Projects for Next Year!

• Seoul City to hold general meeting at Seoul Square on August 19 and 20, and citizens to vote on KRW 44.7 billion in community-driven projects via mobile technology

The Kyunghyang Shinmun

August 16, 2016

Seoul City announced on August 15, 2016, that it would hold the “Participatory Budgeting General Assembly” on August 19 and 20, 2016, at Seoul Square to make its final decision on how the KRW 50 billion budget for the participatory budgeting projects would be spent next year.

The city government received proposals for a total of 3,815 locally driven projects (requiring a budget of KRW 537.4 billion) under 20 themes from April 1 to May 20 and, after a review by the relevant departments and screening by the Participatory Budgeting Committee, selected 502 projects (requiring a budget of KRW 44.7 billion) for next year.

During the meeting, Seoul City introduced the 502 projects that have passed the screening and classified them by theme, while 25 local districts displayed and promoted 238 projects proposed by local residents under various themes, such as support for the social activities of retirees, creation of walkable neighborhoods, and expansion of youth programs.

The general meeting will be attended by an average of roughly 3,000 people a day, including members of the Participatory Budgeting Committee, citizens who developed the projects, budget experts, public officers with local district offices, and regular citizens.

The participatory budgeting system, which gives citizens the authority to allocate public funding, was first introduced to Seoul in 2012. Recognizing that the system could become nothing more than another way for each district to secure funding, Seoul City has categorized the projects into citywide projects and small, localized projects. It has also introduced an electronic voting system.

Electronic voting is open to all Seoul citizens and accessible through the mobile application “mVoting.” Seoul City expects that over 100,000 citizens will cast votes by 2 p.m. on August 20, when the poll closes. The participatory budgeting projects will be chosen based on the results of the vote (40 percent), recommendations of Participatory Budgeting Committee members (40 percent), and a telephone survey (20 percent). The final winners will be announced at 4 p.m. on August 20 at the Multi-purpose Hall on the eighth floor of Seoul City Hall.

Reported by Kim Hyang-mi