

## **Joint Committee on Accountable Co-Governance Membership Report**

**APPROVED WEDS APR 14**

On December 20, 2020, the United Working Families membership commissioned a joint committee of elected officials, party committee, and election committee members to engage in a process by which we would take up accountable co-governance. We engaged in this process after a 2020 budget vote resulted in 4 UWF Alders voting 'yes' when party lines were drawn and these electeds were asked by UWF to vote 'no'. We held 6 meetings from February to April and a majority of participants were present at every meeting. We named why we were there using some of the following phrases: "we share the same north star," "we cannot let rich and powerful special interests win," "build power for grassroots folks," "we need to learn how to co-govern," "what we are doing here is a model for the country," and "we learn and grow from accountability."

Our task was to engage in honest discussions that would identify lessons learned from the 2020 budget vote, acknowledge the harm that was caused by this vote, make commitments to change behavior, and create internal accountability processes with clear expectations moving forward that can help us maneuver situations such as this, as they are likely to happen again. We acknowledge that this process did not result in all of the answers we originally sought. We are committed to this undertaking and see this as a moment of growth and improvement. This report includes a summary of our six meetings intended for our members to review, discuss, and to vote on the recommended next steps. This report will have four parts: reflections/contradictions that came up in a space with movement actors that play important and different roles, lessons learned from this process, statements from the three electeds that voted for the budget and agreed to participate in this process, and next steps we believe are important to help us ensure that we move forward together and with clearer expectations and methods.

We express our deepest gratitude, respect, and appreciation for Tanya Watkins from SOUL, who came into this process as a facilitator after the second meeting and did a

tremendous amount of work to help us listen to and learn from each other. This report would not have been possible without Tanya's deep commitment to justice, abolition, and transformation. Thank you, Tanya!

## **1. Reflections and Contradictions**

We recognize that members of the joint committee come from unique experiences and play different roles in moving our work forward: including electeds, staff, and volunteers. We acknowledge and respect that all of our roles are critical to the success of our party. This also means that there are different perspectives and disagreements present in our space so we wanted to name some of the ones that came up throughout this process. We are holding space for the following contradictions by naming them:

### **A. Inside/outside strategy:**

- a. There are people in our space whose role it is to play an inside strategy.
- b. There are people in our space whose role it is to amplify the voices and public pressure of movement.
- c. There are people in our space who have been betrayed by elected officials' inside strategy and therefore have a deep distrust of this tactic.

### **B. Being “attacked” vs. being “held accountable”**

- a. There are some UWF members, including electeds themselves, who feel they got thrown away and/or attacked in the fallout from the budget vote, especially in context of other neoliberal and conservative council members.
- b. There are also some UWF members who feel that UWF did not go far enough in censuring and/or holding accountable the members who broke with the party's position.

### **C. Different definitions of co-governance**

- a. There are electeds here who want to be decision-makers on movement strategy and demands because they are the ones negotiating directly with other legislators, caucuses, etc.

- b. There are others that feel like electeds shouldn't get to make decisions about movement demands and strategy because they are not on the outside frontlines.
- c. There are others that believe elected officials should be consulted and brought into the conversation to determine movement demands, but that while elected officials should be consulted, electeds should not be able to veto demands democratically decided by grassroots organizations and leaders.

**D. Definition of movement**

- a. Different groups have different claims to the mantle of "movement" and therefore it's not a clear process for deciding which demands should be prioritized. (ie. one coalition is saying vote yes and another is saying vote no and both may be seen by some as "movement" actors)

**E. Extracting legislative wins now vs. setting up electoral wins in the future**

- a. There are some who believe we need to be getting concessions now from the current arrangement to mitigate harm (because our people need things now--especially due to COVID).
- b. There are some who believe we should be taking a principled stance against the current arrangement (so that we can win elections against those actors in future years).
- c. Some believe both a. and b. are possible if we engage in a concerted inside/outside strategy.

**F. Identity of UWF**

- a. There are people who feel that the identity of UWF has evolved and because of this they are being held accountable to individuals and organizations they aren't in relationship with.
- b. There are others who think that there are individual members of UWF that are also a part of other spaces and organizations and that is inherent in the organizing ecosystem and a natural consequence of our growth as a party.

**G. Ward Political Landscape**

- a. There are some people that think UWF electeds should be willing to take on all political risks and stand on the side of those who have been intentionally left out of the political process regardless of constituency or allies in your ward.
- b. There are electeds in conservative wards who are working to change the political landscape but are vulnerable from the right and believe that there has to be an organized, UWF-affiliated IPO in that ward in order for electeds to feel supported in taking a political risk. In the absence of the support on the ground, we as a movement risk losing a seat to a centrist or neoliberal, when we need to grow our numbers and power.
- c. There are also dynamics in each ward that encourage the UWF general membership to recognize the local IPO and/or organized base as a leading voice in their respective wards.
- d. There are also different levels of ward representation in UWF, and that should also be considered when it comes to general membership votes.

#### **H. Process vs. Outcome**

- a. Some believe if the process is imperfect then it's not fair to demand a specific outcome.
- b. Others believe the process isn't ever going to be perfect but as long as we are making a good faith effort we can still demand an outcome.

#### **I. Individual Leadership vs. Voting Bloc**

- a. There are some elected officials who prioritize their individual ability to analyze, lead, negotiate, and navigate multiple spaces.
- b. There are some elected officials who are part of and have different accountability to other caucuses and organizations.
- c. There are others who prioritize the power of the collective and of an ideologically-aligned voting bloc.

## **2. Lessons Learned and Areas for Improvement**

The Joint Committee debriefed the budget fight over two sessions, on February 3 and February 17. Below are some of our key findings and recommendations.

Collective decision-making, leadership, and communication structures matter. Some of the structures set up for the 2020 budget fight were not clear. There were real questions about who was in and who was out and why; what decisions were going to be made at which meeting; what was the threshold for a binding group decision; and how we would check back in with each other when negotiations were underway and things were changing quickly. There was a lot of communication and effort, and people did their best, but this was a new moment for the movement, and we were building the process as we progressed urgently. While we recognize that the demand that UWF electeds vote no on the mayor's 2021 budget proposal occurred during a historic uprising for Black Lives, and the demand was clearly articulated, there was no clearly set process to identify UWF hardlines in the 2021 budget. Moving forward, we recommend that the budget coalition:

- A. **Vote on our outcomes and bottom-line purpose together, and be clear about what success looks like.** Sometimes it might be getting a concession into the budget. Sometimes it may mean making our political opponents bear the political cost of a bad vote. There are valid reasons to do both; we need to be as clear as possible with each other about which we are doing and why.
- B. **Explicitly set up decision-making processes and bodies** (e.g. steering committee, vote threshold, etc.), including a structure for rapid response. The decision-making bodies for the budget process must include elected members in advisory capacities, but prioritize UWF steering and general membership in order to ensure we are centering grassroots leadership as a party.
- C. **Explicitly do roll call and gain agreement** to what commitments are so there can be clear accountability and process.
- D. **Recognize that when the party (through a democratic process) chooses a political line** for which there is not full consensus amongst electeds there may be continued lobbying and agitation from the grassroots towards those electeds not yet in alignment.
- E. **Communicate party process and development of platform with general membership** so there is a political education and acknowledgement of inside and outside strategies as they pertain to budgets, That education will benefit us

all and allow us to continue growing as a movement and party. It also increases the transparency and accountability of our party.

Be intentional about our timeline and how we put our coalition together. The city budget is a \$12.8 billion document that requires a year long focus. The Mayor's team works on budgets all year long, and typically, the City Council begins moving forward budget ideas in the July/August timeframe. This puts movement at a disadvantage intentionally. To flesh out our negotiation strategy, policy, communications, pop ed, and other efforts, we need to begin earlier and develop our budget acumen year over year. Moving forward, we recommend that next year's budget coalition:

- A. **Develop specific asks as early as possible**, including a range of acceptable concessions (e.g. we are going to publicly ask for \$50 million for XYZ, \$49-30 million is an acceptable compromise, we need you to say no to an offer below \$29 million), so that those debates can be held early on. We are hopeful about the work of the current budget working groups to build this out for 2021.
- B. **Be firm in our unity and purpose**. Our opponents will always tell us what's not possible. They will always treat the value of Black, immigrant, and indigenous lives as up for negotiation. They will always insert wedge issues to try to take advantage of segregation, racism, anti-Blackness, and a long history of turfiness and self-interest in Chicago politics. We are working together to do something different from this and it will be challenging. We lift up the work that the Immigration Working Group and UWF-affiliated members of the City Council Latino Caucus did in 2020 to ensure that the Welcoming City Ordinance was not used to peel off votes as a model of this kind of solidarity.
- C. **Build a united front**. Explicitly invite as many organizations and formations--not just UWF member organizations--to participate in a united front budget coalition, provided that they agree to the goals and structure of the space. We should also intentionally encourage building relationships based on trust, respect, and compassion; one of our assignments in Joint Committee was to do one-on-one's, which underscored the importance of this relational work. UWF members and

staff who are in other groups could also do a better job of being clear about the difference between UWF strategy and that of the other groups.

**D. Be clear about our power within wards and within City Council.** In City Council, 26 votes are needed and at our strongest, we have 9 alders. The power of that bloc needs to be considered in negotiations and in the context of what other caucuses and interests are also in negotiation. At the ward level, we should be mindful of the level of political risk we are asking folks to take, what support they will need, what UWF and/or movement activity in that ward looks like, and what political landscape they are navigating in order to better coordinate as a team.

We must define what it means to be a UWF Elected. We have an endorsement process that we use to identify candidates for office who we support. We have a membership process for sign up and participation. We don't have clear guidelines or agreements on what it means to be UWF Elected. Elections happen every 2 - 4 years and there are a lot of decisions that elected officials make throughout their term. With co-governance as the goal for how we want to be in relationship with our elected officials, we need mutual agreements to ensure that we can work together to achieve wins, fully utilize inside and outside strategies, and create the accountability necessary (for UWF as well as the Electeds) to achieve this.

**A. Set membership guidelines for elected officials.** Develop these guidelines with members, staff and current electeds. Guidelines will clarify commitments and expectations as well as the processes for renewing commitments, endorsements and other support from UWF. Guidelines will also give a measure by which member electeds can be evaluated, and include a process around how guidelines are changed/updated and with what frequency. Clear expectations should be set for member electeds to engage in collective decision-making processes to determine UWF hardlines, and to abide by those hardlines once they are democratically and collectively determined by UWF.

**B. Clarify status of endorsed candidates vs. member electeds.** The endorsement process is clear and established. But if an endorsed candidate wins election or re-election, does that automatically make them a UWF Member

Elected? There should be a process and orientation for endorsed candidates to be introduced to guidelines, expectations and other processes that they are being asked to commit to in order to be a UWF Member Elected BEFORE an endorsement is given and before the election is held. This also creates more leeway for the endorsement committee to strategically support candidates who align with goals in certain races without fully claiming them as part of the organization.

### **3. Next Steps and Recommendations to Membership**

After the six meetings of the Joint Committee process, it is clear that our party has room to grow in the following areas:

- A. Grow our legislative muscle.
- B. Develop party discipline for our elected members to vote in unison on issues (the Joint Committee read [this article from \*In These Times\*](#) which was helpful in thinking about this question).
- C. Create a process where membership defines a legislative agenda that outlines parameters for our electeds.

United Working Families is a party-building project. That means that the rules that we write for ourselves will always be in process, and in need of revision as we try new things, make mistakes, learn from them, and grow. There are some unanswered questions that surfaced through the Joint Committee process. We are including some of them at the bottom of this section as a starting point, and recommend the following process to membership to seek further clarity and definition.

- **May 22: General Membership Meeting** to review and discuss report, weigh in on outstanding questions, and commission task force made up of a smaller group of elected and non-elected members on endorsements, incumbent support, and caucus formation.
- **June-July:** Political task force meets to develop recommendations.
- **August (date TBD):** Party Committee Meeting to review and discuss initial recommendations of political task force.



- **September (date TBD):** General Membership Meeting to adopt task force recommendations and revise bylaws as needed.

Here are some questions for the task force to consider:

- What are the important votes that are non-negotiable (if at all) for elected members of our party? Are there behaviors besides votes that are equally important and/or non-negotiable (e.g. supporting other UWF-endorsed candidates, signing on to public statements)?
- Is there a threshold around these demands and behaviors that would indicate “good standing”? What happens when an elected is no longer in good standing?
- What kind of additional support do elected officials get from UWF staff, affiliates, and individual members if they are in good standing?
- How might our endorsement process do a better job of laying out commitments and expectations as a party? (See *Lessons Learned*, above).
- Would it be plausible for us to develop a caucus in each level of government we endorse? If so, what do we need for it to be successful? How would members become involved in such processes?

#### **4. Meeting Dates and Composition**

The Joint Committee on Accountable Co-Governance met six times over the course of January-April 2021: January 13, February 3, February 17, March 3, March 17, April 7, and April 14.

The following members of the UWF Joint Committee attended a majority of the meetings:

Alejandra Avila

Kennedy Bartley

Erica Bland-Durosinmi

Marcos Cenicerros

Stacy Davis Gates

Anthony Driver

Alderwoman Maria Hadden  
Ibie Hart  
Abbie Illenberger  
Ryan Kelleher  
Alderman Daniel La Spata  
Mayra Lopez-Zuniga  
Alderman Matt Martin  
Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa  
Alderman Michael Rodriguez  
Ald. Rossana Rodriguez Sanchez\*  
Dixon Romeo  
Alderman Byron Sigcho-Lopez  
Debbie Southorn  
Emma Tai  
Alderwoman Jeanette Taylor  
Alderman Andre Vasquez  
Rey Wences

*\*Ald. Rodriguez Sanchez was unable to attend a majority of the sessions due to a scheduling conflict, but submitted amendments and voted by proxy.*

Ald. Susan Sadlowski Garza declined the invitation to participate in the Joint Committee.

## **Appendix A**

The three alderpeople who voted for the 2021 budget were asked to submit statements acknowledging impact and making renewed commitments. Their statements are provided in this appendix because we believe that it is important for membership to have access to this process; however, each alderperson is the sole author of their statements and the content was not approved or edited by the other members of the Joint Committee.

ALD. MARIA HADDEN:

As a UWF Elected Official, I am accountable to our mission, vision, values and of course, our members. With my vote on the 2021 Chicago City Budget, I did not vote in line with the wishes of our members and many felt that my decision was also out of line with our shared values. The decision-making process was complex, but I have heard and understand the disappointment, anger and frustration that members felt because of my vote and also recognize and understand the harm that my decision added to and created even though it was unintended. I am truly sorry for the negative impacts of my decision. Please know that my commitments to our shared goals and values have not changed. I absolutely remain committed to divesting funding from policing and to reinvest in the types of services and programs that will serve our most marginalized Chicagoans.

I remain committed to UWF members and values and that's why I was happy to be a part of the joint accountability committee over these last several months. Working together with members, staff, and other elected officials to name the harm we caused, reflect on our experiences, review our processes and come back to you with both process recommendations and personal commitments has brought me more understanding and has made me a better representative. Here are my commitments to you going forward:

- When making decisions during key votes where the situation is volatile and circumstances are rapidly changing, I commit to double and triple checking with our team. I learned through this last budget vote that I need to be more diligent about that. When things are moving quickly, it's even more important to come back to our base to check in and make sure that we stay aligned in service to our goals.
- I also commit to working to inform and transform the role of Member Electeds in UWF. Co-governance requires more relational development

and fewer transactional interactions. When we need to be on the same page and back each other up while making sure that our processes are well planned and organized. I'm going to do more to make sure that we work better together because that's how we win change for Chicagoans.

Again, thanks to members and staff for providing the space for this process and I look forward to the work we can accomplish together.

Maria Hadden  
Alderman, 49th Ward Chicago, IL

ALD. ANDRE VASQUEZ:

To our Movement Siblings in the Struggle,

I would first like to thank the members of the UWF Joint Committee for this process and opportunity to debrief/reflect on last year's Budget Vote process. Anything worth doing is worth evaluating, and I am appreciative of the Party leadership, my colleagues, and UWF membership for engaging in it. So as to appropriately address my vote, I thought it best to follow the lead of Tanya Watkins, and frame it in terms of Intent, Harm/Impact, and Lessons Learned, so that it leads to commitments that I believe will result in better outcomes.

Intent

The budget vote was not an easy decision in part because it did not deliver the things we need in this moment. However, the reality was that the COVID crisis had and has decimated Chicago's traditional revenue streams. Our tourism and hospitality industries were devastated, leaving us with fewer tax dollars to fund essential city services. The lack of additional aid at the state and federal levels further compounded these challenges. With no relief from Washington, and with state revenues impacted by the failure to pass a Fair Tax in Illinois, it was imperative to identify other sources of revenue to support what would likely be

another difficult year for our City's economy. Added to that dynamic is the current iteration of Chicago's City Council, as well as the few number of movement electeds in it.

As a member of the City Council it is my responsibility to work with my colleagues to identify solutions and make the tough decisions now to get us on solid footing for the future. Together, a coalition of the Progressive, Black, and Latino Caucuses came together for the first time in our city's history to bargain across the table from the administration.

In the 2021 budget we were able to secure:

- No layoffs for anywhere from 350-2000 mostly black and brown working class union workers.
- No furloughs for non-union employees making less than \$100,000 per year.
- \$36 million in Violence Prevention which supports anti-violence programs like the Communities Partnering for Peace, who successfully intervened to suppress gang activity in the 40th Ward. This is a proactive public safety measure that we can fund as we work to Defund CPD.
- Commitment to prevent borrowing from the Cannabis Tax when federal funding becomes available, so as to allow for the growth of what could be a substantial revenue stream that can be used towards Reparations, Equity Programs and more that can be implemented to account for the intentional attacks on people of color through Drug War narrative and oppression.
- Commitment to pass the Welcoming City ordinance independent of the budget, as conflating that with the budget vote was unnecessary
- A Commitment from the Administration to work on a Year Long Alder Budget Working Group

In contrast to the prior year, when many of us voted no and extracted no wins, my intent was to see what we could win for the people who need it now as well as to mitigate harm from what could have been a more austere budget, in light of the pandemic moment we found ourselves in.

My vote was grounded in seeking to mitigate harm - in looking at the final 21 no votes, to illustrate the point, 14 of them were from conservatives who would have voted yes had the Mayor eased the property tax by removing violence prevention investments or by keeping the layoffs. I know that what we secured wasn't enough for the moment, but also that we needed to secure something before the budget became more austere.

#### Harm Acknowledged and Lessons Learned

As someone who grew up in poverty, in an immigrant family, racially oppressed, profiled by police, a victim of child abuse, someone who lost a brother to gun violence, almost lost another to the carceral system due to police intimidation, and was displaced out of 5 neighborhoods growing up, I know exactly what I am looking to defeat - Chicago Style Racial Patriarchal Capitalism. I am not removed from my experience and work through that trauma every day of my life. The struggle isn't theoretical for me. I am not here in this position because I am special - I am here because I am fortunate - and there are too many like me that weren't able to make it out of our environments.

I reflect on the feeling of elected officials failing us and the movement as well as the harm, pain, anger, and stinging disappointment of unmet expectations. Because of that feeling, with every organization, from UWF to CDSA, I have sought to address general memberships directly so as to answer any questions and my hope is that there are more opportunities like this to do so. I know full well how many of our people have lost their lives, livelihood, safety, shelter, and hope during the past year. As part of my budget vote process, I met with movement and with constituents once I had come to a decision, but in advance

of the vote, so that I could tell them myself and provide the opportunity for those who had been harmed to voice every feeling they had. We had a total of three public meetings - one with People's Lobby/One People's Campaign, One with 40th United, and one with the constituents of the 40th Ward. It was tense, it was painful for all of us, and we all shed tears. Many expressed their disappointment and hurt - they were absolutely justified in doing so.

My sense of urgency in wanting to secure commitments was a critical flaw that left those who had worked to get us here out of the conversation. There were moments where I could have taken a step back to discuss and strategize with the movement folks that live and organize in the 40th Ward. Although I was clear in articulating my perspective in every UWF meeting I was in, and we had ward community meetings focused on the budget, I didn't make time to co-conspire with my People's Lobby and One People's Campaign comrades. I had reached out to CDSA consistently since getting elected so that we could organize in the 40th Ward together, but their leadership did not see it as an organizing priority, and thus building relationships there has been its own challenge. Regardless, I regret that I didn't establish a process that gave me the time to step back and reflect with the comrades of the 40th prior to coming to a decision.

#### Commitments

- Change in Process - I commit to discussing the budget vote and which direction I am leaning in with my comrades at The People's Lobby and One People's Campaign as I have with UWF for further accountability, so that the movement that is on the ground in the 40th can be informed and weigh in prior to a decision being made.
- Outreach to General Membership - I commit to being intentional in reaching out to the general membership of all groups that live in the 40th Ward, so that we can organize and co-govern together. I want to build a coalition table in our ward, so that we can be clear on purpose and mutual

commitments as we move forward. That will take organizing and relationship building through 1:1s, which I commit to doing.

- Political Education - I commit to communicating negotiation updates, analysis, and perspective so that those that I co-conspire with can concur or debate the best step forward during situations, as we discuss what we consider a win and what we need to continue fighting for each cycle.

### Conclusion

Something that came out of the Joint Committee discussion was the discovery that we were all building processes as we went along, because this is a new moment for us in the movement. We have never had this many community organizer electeds and were still developing relationships with each other as UWF member electeds, Endorsed electeds, Party leadership, and membership.

I believe that through this Joint Committee process, we have gained a greater understanding and appreciation for what we all bring to the table, as well as for how powerful we can be if we improve our processes, communication, relationship building, and accountability/transparency measures. I will continue to be committed to building coalition and finding ways that we can win together. This moment and movement demands that of us, and I am confident that although we may at times disagree on the path forward, we are working towards the same goal. I believe that together, we can and will win.

In Solidarity and Service,  
Alderman Andre Vasquez  
Alderman – 40th Ward

ALD. MIKE RODRIGUEZ (draft Monday 7:11am)

My decision to vote for the 2021 budget was a difficult decision. I knew that either way that I voted, some segment of our movement would feel hurt. I committed years ago to my local IPO that I would engage our local membership and



leadership in major decisions including with my annual budget vote. I sought input from my membership and communicated regularly with my leadership as the budget process moved forward, eventually receiving the support from my executive board to make a decision to support the budget. I made this decision based on the collective work to achieve many of the shared demands of the Latino, Progressive and Black caucus'. In addition, organized labor played an important part in my decision, as my organization and I have a long history of siding with labor.

I acknowledge that there were individuals and groups who felt harmed by my budget vote, particularly members of UWF. I am committed to building unity in our movement and addressing that harm is vital to move forward. Our movement has multiple coalition partners and groups pushing on behalf of working class people. In UWF, we need clearer and increased communication to build a better process of working together. Having clarity in partnership is reciprocal and something I am committed to building. We can do so by communicating clear agreements and processes, and I can do so by communicating with UWF of movement in conversations regarding the budget and other important votes. .