



Mark Jeffreys
Councilmember

Motion: The Future of Cincinnati's Western Downtown Riverfront

September 11, 2025

WE MOVE that the administration work in partnership with the Hamilton County administration to report back on efforts to:

- Identify 1,371 surface parking lot spots within walking distance from Paycor stadium that can be dedicated for tailgating during Cincinnati Bengals games. These would be an alternative to using the surface parking spaces to the former Hilltop Lot South (970 units) and Lot E (391 spaces)
- Collaborate to identify 927 spots that can be used temporarily while the Crossett lot is closed for 3-5 years during the Brent Spence Bridge construction.
- Determine 'what needs to be true' to make the Hilltop Lot South and Lot E spaces into permanent park space managed by Great Parks or Cincinnati Parks rather than surface parking.

STATEMENT

Cincinnati has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine our riverfront west of Smale Park and extend that world-class experience even further. Great cities around the globe are defined by inspiring riverfronts. Not long ago, before Smale Park, ours was anything but inspiring—it was dominated by a stretch of deteriorating surface parking lots.

Smale Park changed that story. Through vision, persistence, and collaboration, what was once asphalt became a breathtaking gateway to our city—recognized nationally and internationally as one of the finest riverfront parks in America. It proved what Cincinnati can achieve when we choose parks and public space over surface parking lots on our 'city's front yard'. Building upon that legacy by transforming additional riverfront lots into green space would be a bold step toward shaping the future of our city for generations to come.

We are grateful for Hamilton County's leadership in acquiring the Hilltop property and relocating concrete operations away from the downtown riverfront. We also recognize the complexity of balancing contractual obligations to the Cincinnati Bengals, which include providing up to 9,043 parking spaces—3,460 of them surface spaces. But with diligence and creativity, this does not have to be a zero-sum choice.

The challenge before us is clear: can we partner with the county to help it meet the requirement it has for these surface spaces while converting the 1,371 surface spaces in Lot E and the Hilltop South Lot into new park space? Early analysis suggests we can. A simple review of nearby parking shows that over 2,000 surface spaces already exist within a short walk—at Longworth Hall, the Public Landing, and Sawyer Point—without even counting other lots within easy reach. With thoughtful planning, these existing resources could fulfill the 8+ days a year where there are game-day needs for tailgating while freeing up precious riverfront land for parks, recreation, and community life for the other 350+ days a year.

This is a historic opportunity to expand the vibrancy of our riverfront. The question before us is whether we will seize this moment to elevate our riverfront experience—or lock away prime land for a use that falls short of its highest and best potential. We believe that the city and county can collaborate in a spirit of 'what has to be true' to make this vision possible, because the choices we make now will define Cincinnati's riverfront for the next century.



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Appendix

Existing lots and a rendering of what it could look like as a park space.



ZB

EGH