



Meeka D. Owens

Cincinnati City Councilmember

COMMUNICATION

Councilmember Meeka D. Owens Budget Priorities for FY2026-FY2027

As the City Administration prepares the FY2026 to FY2027 Biennial Recommended General Fund Operating Budget, General Fund Capital Budget, and allocations from the Cincinnati Railroad Sale through Cincy on Track, it should aim for an equitable allocation of resources that meets community needs, ensuring that funds allocated are spent transparently with accountability, and move the City of Cincinnati further toward address the climate crisis through green investments. I submit the following policy guidelines and priorities, which focus broadly on the Council's top priorities and the responses that were presented in the Quality of Life and Budget Priorities Survey.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety should always be this Council's top priority, and we as a Council need to be proactive in ensuring the expansion and maintenance of our public safety infrastructure. While the administration, directed by this Council, continues to do this work, I ask that they specially prioritize:

- Police and Fire should be funded in a manner that is consistent with bargaining agreements based on the department's plan to reach their approved full-strengthen complements.
- To further address the public health crisis of gun violence across Cincinnati, additional funding should be made available to CPD's victim liaison unit, mental health crisis intervention, gun lock distribution, and proper education and awareness. This can all be supported using the ACT for Cincy blueprint recently formulated by the administration.
- There should be priority placed upon the maintenance of our Public Safety fleet, a majority of CFD vehicles are currently overdue for maintenance that could have been seen as preventive but is now deferred. I ask that our public safety employees be able to get into vehicles that are properly maintained on a timely basis.
- The administration by the direction of Council should support a formative RFP regarding public engagement around the possible installation of a Gun Violence Victims Memorial. This is in reference to the report provided by the administration (#202500448).
- Further the collaboration with FLOCK software to enhance meaningful and effective public safety strategies in our neighborhoods. Actively, the city is functioning under an MOU with FLOCK for access to the software, but we should be looking for greater ways to institute their products.

THRIVING NEIGHBORHOODS

Cincinnati's 52 neighborhoods make our city so special. While I and the rest of Council are aware that each neighborhood has specific needs, I ask that the administration focus on these needs to help our communities grow and thrive:

- Funding for infrastructure should support the formation of a multimodal transportation network. This will help in providing greater resources for residents for more affordable forms of transportation in our city. By supporting greater forms of transportation and reinforcing those investments we will create greater growth for Cincinnati neighborhoods.
- Home repair assistance programs such as HARBOR should continue to be funded at the previously biennium level to support our city's housing growth and sustainability. Programs similar to the one previously identified should also be considered to reinforce the housing conditions in our city. Including the ongoing conversations around a Cincinnati Rental Improvement Fund.
- Ensure that both capital and operating budgets reflect climate-informed investments. This includes vigorously applying for remaining federal funds and incentives, which will ensure that the city can have dollars from the federal government that are directly allocated for mitigating the climate crisis.
- Accelerate our efforts to remove lead piping through the Lead Service Line Replacement Program and continue to identify sources to ensure that this program can thrive, regardless of shifting federal priorities and timelines.
- In alignment with the Cincy on Track plan, the administration should identify green solutions for addressing deferred maintenance. Prioritizing green solutions while we allocate dollars from the CSR sale will help us build a city for the future that will also help reduce our effect on the climate crisis.
 - Reported by the Ohio Environmental Council's (OEC) *The Bill is Coming Due: Calculating the Financial Cost of Climate Change to Ohio's Local Governments* shows that Ohio municipal spending will need to increase annually by \$1.8b to \$5.9b by 2050 to keep up with current spending levels to properly address the impact of climate change. Further, if the reductions of the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law continue this would impact Hamilton County \$1.7b in critical climate investments
- While we continue addressing our aging infrastructure and constructing possible new infrastructure, we should identify proactive maintenance plans to ensure that we can maintain the assets we currently have and are considering constructing.
- Cincinnati is a city made up of renters, 60% to be exact. We are continuing to see the crisis that is homelessness, housing insecurity, and eviction take place far too often. Over the past three fiscal years this Council has been incredibly proactive in address the needs of our most downtrodden residents. Through our investments we have helped hundreds of families stay in their homes over those three years, avoiding the adverse effects of having an eviction on their record. Therefore, this Council should prioritize continued investments in the Access to Counsel ecosystem while additionally being supported by Rental Assistance funding.
- Many of the properties that tenants reside in have insufficient utilities, risk infestation, crime, and general neglect. Ensuring safe and healthy housing stock is critical to tackling

our region's housing crisis. That is why code enforcement capacity should be maintained and expanded when possible. Expanding the Building Inspectors recruiting program to ensure there is a full compliment of inspectors.

- Supporting smaller grant programs that produce thriving communities should also be paramount in the face of lacking federal resources. We should continue the funding for Safe and Clean, Boots on the Ground, Seeds of Change, and other critical programs that support neighborhood-based improvements.

GROWING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

A city that has stagnant growth ceases to exist. Cincinnati is growing for the first time in a long time, and we need to capitalize on this moment. The administration should focus on the following to help our economic standing:

- In maintaining this Council's good government initiatives, organizations who are seeking funding from either Leveraged Support or Human Services Funding who did not go through the application process should not be allocated funds or recommended by the organization using those sources.
- The administration, through Leverage Support and Human Services Funding, should look for strategic impact and innovation for the focus of their recommendations. We also ask that there be a strong understanding of if we are supporting existing programs or new programs.
- In greater support of the City's environmental work, we ask that there be a prioritization of projects that might be able to access existing federal incentives in green investment (i.e. IRA tax credits).
- That the administration looks to identify possible sources of funding to aid local non-profit organizations who are in need of capital funding to complete transformative projects. Additionally, these projects should be supported by a competitive application process similar to Leveraged Support.
- As we continue to incentivize development and business in Cincinnati, we need to ensure that we have a strategic impact when it comes to city investment in development projects. Specifically, around funds that are allocated via TIF and Quick Strike.
- Since the passage of Connected Communities in June of 2024, this Council and administration should reenforce the funding for Neighborhood Business Districts. Specifically, maintain funding in the Neighborhood Business District Improvement Program (NBDIP).
- Furthering the city's efforts to encourage and enhance historic preservation needs to be a priority as we look toward what growth looks like in Cincinnati. Therefore, we should improve the service delivery and process improvements to enhance the historic nature of our 52 neighborhoods.
- Growing economic opportunities means growing for everyone in our city and in our collective region. Based on goal identified in the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan we need to incentivize and increase the availability of green jobs going forward.
- Retaining and attracting small businesses needs to be paramount as we are in a resurgence of local innovation and entrepreneurship. I ask that we continue to support

the Commercial Tenant Improvement Program (CTIP), the Pop-Up Shop Program (OurShop) and the MicroCity Loan Program to support our local businesses further.

FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

With the federal landscape changing every day, we as a city must be proactive in our approach to filling gaps and identifying new sources of revenue. That is why the administration should consider the following:

- The General Fund and Capital Fund budget must be balanced over the next two fiscal years (FY26 & FY27).
- The administration should ensure that a competitive process is established for all non-profits approaching the City through allocation processes, including the carryover process overseen by the Council.
- Regarding the aforementioned federal landscape, the city administration should identify ways to incentivize revenue-producing development, programming, and additional projects to grow the City's overall revenues. This includes reducing barriers to development for both large and small firms to help increase the population of Cincinnati to increase the tax base overall.
- Ensuring proper capacity within the City administration, specifically the Office of Grant Administration, to apply for all available federal funding opportunities. Right now we are in a moment of not knowing what federal incentives will be accessible, but having the ability to quickly and effectively allocate resources to applications will make our city more competitive for these critical funds.
- The administration should be committed to establishing and maintaining a transparent system for allocating funds related to the sale of the Cincinnati Southern Railroad.

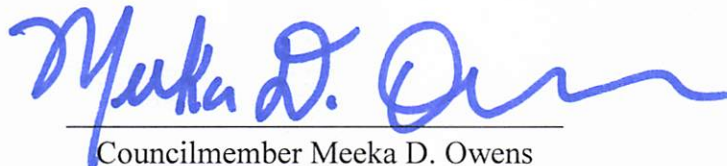
EXCELLENT AND EQUITABLE SERVICE DELIVERY

Our city's primary mission should always be to supply national recognized services to the people of Cincinnati. Over 6,000 people come to work every day to supply these critical services to the residents of our city. Therefore, we should have the back of those who deliver those resources and services. I ask the administration to consider the following to address those service concerns that are in alignment with the requests of city departments and the citizens' survey:

- Investments in greater FTEs should reflect the services that citizens want to see improved, based on the citizens' survey.
- Our city cannot function without legal services. Therefore, I ask that the administration work reach a full complement of attorneys in the city Law Department as soon as possible.
- As stated in a previous priority, we want historic designation to become a more fluid and efficient process for community members to use. This will require greater support for the Department of Planning and Engagement, specifically the Urban Conservator. This position directly oversees the historic designation process from start to finish and is a position of one. If greater resources are allocated to assist the Conservator, then we can prioritize historic designation and preservation even more.
- A city prioritizing fighting the climate crisis should reflect that in the services that they deliver. Therefore, I ask that the administration continue the efforts around electrifying

our fleet and installing charging infrastructure at city facilities. Additionally, Cincinnati facilities should continue to find climate conscious measures that bring down energy costs. This could include energy-efficient appliances, solar installations, excreta.

- City employees should be granted greater professional development and training opportunities during their time of employment. We should prioritize getting city employees into regional/statewide/national programs that enhance leadership and communication skills that will improve the services that our departments provide.
- Improving and enhancing the Department of Human Services is a must have in this biennium. Not only is this department of one individual (Dir. White), but this department maintains critical contracts and relationships with critical service providers in our city. Therefore, the administration should look at adding an additional FTE to the Department of Human Services during FY26.



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