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Meeka D. Owens
Cincinnati City Councilmember

COMMUNICATION

Councilmember Meeka D. Owens Budget Priorities for FY2027

As the City Administration prepares the FY2027 Budget Update, 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 addressing 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 City of Cincinnati Resident Survey provided by ETC Institute.

PUBLIC SAFETY

60.7% of FY26 operating dollars were spent on CPD and CFD, reflecting the priority that this council has on public safety. **Over the course of 2025, which spanned part of FY25 and FY26 we saw a 3.1% reduction in part one crime and an 18.1% reduction in shooting incidents compared to the year prior.** I ask that the administration take the following recommendations into consideration as we continue to ensure the strength of the men and women of CPD and CFD:

- Investments should be made to ensure that recruiting classes are properly funded, and that there are attractive salary ranges both for incoming cadets and lateral recruits. These investments should reflect the goal of achieving a full complement of both officers and firefighters.
 - An additional consideration should be to continue to support the understudy program to support younger residents to have easier access to city service.
- To address the issue that has been labeled the “**revolving door of justice**”, I ask that there be funding provided for CPD and all other relevant departments to receive training on how to request no bond request for violent and repeat offenders.
- To further address the public health crisis of gun violence and public safety as a whole, additional funding should be supplied to prevention efforts, including but not limited to, the **Victims Liaison Unit, the Violence Reduction Team, members of the Hope and Shield Network, and other teams** that provided resources and education to those at risk of experiencing gun violence and those who are victims of gun violence.
 - Additionally, programs that ensure looking towards preventative efforts that aim to provide safer and stronger communication with the children in our city. This

means continuing and expanding programs with external partners of CPD, CFD and others, like DVERT, that primarily serve our young populations.

- There should be a priority placed on ensuring all turnout gear for the Fire Department are within their life cycle and are capable of being replaced in a timely manner. Under federal standards set in NFPA, there are requirements that must be met through this turnout gear. So, we must create a stronger strategy to ensure that members of CFD are in properly **fitted turnout gear**, and we are in compliance with NFPA.
- To address staffing issues within our public safety departments, I ask that through this budget process there be a document provided to the Council **outlining the costs of CFD and CPD staffing during training academies**. Additionally, that there be a concerted investment to address **outdated staffing tables** within both departments. It has been brought to my office's attention that we might have issues with staffing pockets of the city with proper resources due to needs at the training academies. We need to understand the plan for ensure proper service delivery while providing the top education to our police and fire cadets.
- Our local businesses have been affected by the ebbs and flows in public safety more than just about anyone. It affects their bottom lines, their staff's morale, and the health of their communities. Therefore, I ask that the city administration take steps to **assist local businesses with getting enrolled in the City's FUSUS program** to expand the local camera network. We should look to expand enrollment in the FUSUS program by 1,000 cameras during FY27. A possible source should be the \$1m earmark from Congressman Landsman.
- Additionally, there must be investments in technologies that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Cincinnati Police and Fire Departments. This includes expanding the Drone Program, improving technologies within public safety fleet, and other identified areas.

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

During 2025, the City of Cincinnati saw a **positive net change in total housing units coming to the total of 1,280 units**. The City of Cincinnati also continued their investments into the Affordable Housing Leveraged Fund which sees a **leverage capacity of 13:1**. These units are ensured to bring opportunities to those who are 60-80% AMI or lower. But there is more work to be done in building up and maintaining our housing stock and ensuring the strengthen of our 52 neighborhoods, so I ask the administration to consider the following recommendations:

- Investments to the **Affordable Housing Leverage Fund** should be continued to ensure the creation of units that are accessible to those **at and below 60-80% AMI** within the City of Cincinnati.
- **Continue and expand funding for the Access to Counsel ecosystem**. Since the passage of the FY26/27 budget the City of Cincinnati has been made aware through a report

completed by STOUT that there is a **\$2.50-\$4.30 for every dollar** that is invested into this ecosystem.

- To simply have enough rental assistance to accommodate the capacity that the ecosystem currently can hold would require a \$1.7m investment. **Additionally, there are program services and legal representation costs associated with the program, meaning an investment of nearly \$2.5m** would be needed for all partners to function at full capacity without inflicting rental assistance. I ask that this be a consideration when considering investment in Access to Counsel.
- While the creation of new housing units is needed, the existing housing stock within the City of Cincinnati should not be forgotten. Therefore, I ask that investments be made to continue and expand the capacity of the city's **HARBOR program**. And to work towards expanding and enshrining further resources to protect and improve the quality of our afford and market rate housing stock through the creation of a **rental improvement fund**.
- Ensure that through investments made into the community that **the priorities of the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan** are properly reflected. This includes investments to reduce the effects of the urban heat island, increase air quality, increase tree canopy, reduce impervious surfaces, and more. Investments now save jurisdictions on public health costs in the long run.
- Incentives packages should be prioritized for economic development projects that are **revenue producing for the city**. This included reducing barrier to development for both large and small firms that helped to increase the populations and other revenues within Cincinnati. **Examples would be projects that could increase the city's annual admissions (ticket) tax revenue or additional housing units to increase the earning tax revenues.**
- The power of grassroots organizations in our communities cannot be overstated, and the support that the city provides makes these organizations and their outcomes stronger. Therefore, I ask that we continue that the following grant programs receive continued support: **Safe and Clean, Boots on the Ground, Seeds of Change, and others.**

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND HUMAN SERVICES

There are over **400 enterprises registered as certified vendors with the City of Cincinnati, ranging from minority owned to woman owned and more.** These businesses assist the city with ensuring stronger economic opportunities for those in our community who haven't seen economic support in the past. Additionally, there are dozens of human services organizations who support and uplift residents in some of their darkest time, most of the funded through our Human Service Fund and Leveraged Support. Therefore, I ask that the administration consider the following:

- In maintaining this Council's **good government initiatives**, organizations who are seeking operating funding from Leveraged Support who did not go through the

application process should not be recommended for funding or allocated funds. Unless, actively under contract with the city for other purposes.

- Through Leveraged Support, there should be a concerted effort to understand the **leveraging capacity of city dollars over previous awards during the application process**. City dollars should not be a stop gap for organizations but rather a measure for organizations to grow beyond that funding. There should be a priority placed onto organizations that have a **proven track record** of leveraging city funds to acquire funding from other sources.
- Additionally, there should be a focus on investments from Leveraged Support that go upstream and focus on prevention. This would include programs that are built from city programs like those supported through Women Helping Women.
- Maintain and expand funding for the Neighborhood Business District Improvement Program (NBDIP) and place an importance on **placemaking and safety measures**.
- Enshrine investments in programs and organizations who can aid in achieving the goals of the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan, **specifically, the goal of creating 4,000 green jobs by the end of the decade**.
- In an effort to better support our small business across the city, I ask that we continue, and if possible, increase, the **Commercial Tenant Improvement Program (CTIP)**, the Pop-Up Shop Program (OurShop) and the MicroCity Loan Program to support our local businesses. Additionally, support investments for FlyWheel as they search for innovative solutions to many of the city's problems.


SERVICE DELIVERY AND FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

In 2025, the City of Cincinnati had **over 146,000 requests for service, with 65% of those being closed by their due date**. This mark has regressed from previous years and needs to be improved as part of the FY27 budget. The projected 5.1% cut to the operating budget is not easy to navigate and I believe that there are additional revenue sources that could be considered as we work to address that gap. Additionally, in January of 2024, an Internal Audit was complete on the city's ability to **purchase and replace vehicles**. It was discovered that of the **1,495 vehicles** owned by the city, **685 of these were out-of-lifecycle (45.8%)**. It was projected that there would need to be an investment of **over \$82m to address those 685 vehicles**, fleet will remain a capital issue and reduce our service delivery capacity if we cannot address the issue. Therefore, I ask the administration to consider the following recommendations related to service delivery and fiscal sustainability:

- I ask that the administration look at all fees, permits, and registries to understand sites of additional revenues to reduce the effect of present and future operating deficits.
- **As discussed during the FY25 carryover process, I would ask that the percentages of our reserves be returned to 16.7% and to be calculated off of expenditures rather**

than revenues. These changes would result in more dollars to be kept out of reserves and to be spent on service delivery.

- There should be focus placed reducing the issues of out-of-lifecycle fleet, as referenced in the 2024 Internal Audit. There should be a larger investment made during FY27 and the creation of a plan, with funding, that works to reduce the out-of-life cycle fleet below 10%. Additionally, looking at possible present and future state and federal incentives that could work to address the issue of public safety fleet.
- I ask that the FY27 operating and capital budget be balanced and not project any deficit spending.
- I ask that there be proper resources provided to the Office of Grant Administration to properly apply for state and federal grants to assist the City of Cincinnati in accomplishing outcomes for residents.
- I ask that there be a concerted effort **on improving processes to execute the Cincy on Track plan** and that those dollars are not only encumbered but are spent in a timely and effective way.
- Investments or **realignments in FTEs should reflect the services that residents want to see**, as mentioned in the resident's survey completed in 2025.
- City Administration should consider investments in software's that improve productivity and efficiency in government. There should also be an effort placed into ensuring that the City of Cincinnati **by the end of FY27 has a responsible Artificial Intelligence policy**. Therefore, I request that the administration provide funding to ensure that City employees have the option to use the premium version of Microsoft CoPilot and other assistive AI programs.
- To provide stronger access to summertime childcare and options for young people, I ask that the administration look to **provide free or subsidize summer camp programing through CRC to 125 families during the summer of 2027**.
 - *The focus of these free or subsidized spots should for families who don't have access to vouchers, who are **at or below 60-80% AMI**, and are in communities with higher levels of gun violence.*



Councilmember Meeka D. Owens

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AD

Budget and Finance