



Seth Walsh
Councilmember

Seth Walsh Budget Priorities

The City of Cincinnati is at an inflection point. In the coming years, our ARPA funding will run out and budget deficits will return. For too long our solution has been to cut our way to prosperity. This strategy can no longer be the path forward.

Now is the time to invest in ourselves and to create pathways for future, new revenue to our city. Failure to do so can be a catastrophe.

Simultaneously, we must recognize that our resources are limited. We must find a balance between investing in ourselves to stave off future crises and investing in programs that will provide a return to our city and help us dig out of impending deficits. Now, not later, is the time to invest.

My budget priorities will be twofold: internal investment of city departments and external infrastructure building for future investment.

Economic Development Infrastructure

Economic Development Strategy: This past decade has shown us that those neighborhoods with a strategy for their future end up seeing the majority of our investment. Unfortunately, that is not the case for many of our 52 neighborhoods.

More importantly, economic growth is the silver bullet for growing our way out of impending budget deficits. It is time for our city to invest in a comprehensive study that gives a roadmap for critical investment opportunities, the needed capital, and a strategy to ensure all neighborhoods benefit and grow from catalytic economic investment into the city. This study should be bold and audacious in pushing our city to grow in every community without displacing the current residents. Neighborhoods that have experienced decades of disinvestment should especially be the focus of this strategy.

CDC Incubator: Building a CDC Incubator. Funding should be provided for an agent, such as Homebase, to create a CDC incubator that helps every neighborhood organize a CDC if there is a desire and which helps the CDC leadership develop a business plan that focuses on community organizing, community vision setting, how to do development, and a pathway to creating fiscal sustainability. As a part of this program, a neighborhood-focused/friendly class called Development 101 should be offered at least monthly to help communities understand how development happens and what role they can have in it.

Bonding: Bonding is one of the top reasons that small contractors cannot grow. As we seek to build and strengthen our MBE's and SBE's bonding must be addresses. My office is working with the Law Department on a program to help break this glass ceiling and it is anticipated funding will be required to pilot this program.

Rapid Acquisition Funds: The best plans mean nothing if the property or land is not under friendly owner control. Especially in the neighborhoods outside our urban core. A fund should be created that can be rapidly deployed (i.e., 45 days) to purchase property and land as it becomes available for future development opportunities, specifically in line with neighborhood plans and the city's economic development strategy. When possible, local CDCs should take control of the land with covenants on it from the city to prevent the sale or transfer of the land prior to an appropriate development coming to life.

CDC Operating Support: I would like to see CDC Operating Support increased to \$1.5 million dollars across all pots of money. CDCs provide the micro-level economic development in our city that we are not built out to do. This funding administered by Homebase should only become available when the city provides a strategy for self-sustainability in the coming 5-10 years.

Investing now in economic development is critical to ensure that the city is able to meet its bills in the years to come and that we are able to provide the highest quality of services to our residents.

Investing now, not later. Approaching our budget from a data-driven, investment-focused perspective with ensure Cincinnati continues to grow in a way that puts our citizens first while preparing for our future needs and successes.

Internal Investment

Public Services: Provide the funding necessary to bring us to the 21st century regarding the technology needed to operate our fleet around the city. We should strive to not cut DPS and upgrade our technology.

Technology Investments: Technology investments are critical for cost efficiency and gathering much needed data.

Fire Department: We face an impending crisis with almost 25% of our force eligible to retire today. Though unlikely to all happen all at once, this risk is unacceptable. We have approved a new recruit class for this year, but to make an impact on this risk we should look to that recent class and prepare for a future that has us less at risk. There needs to be an intentional effort whether through hiring a grant writer or supporting our current staff to go after grant opportunities aggressively for the Fire Department specifically the safer hiring grants. The city should also be investing in the purchase of Lucas Devices for all engines and companies. These lifesaving tools are needed especially in our outlying communities. We must also work with our firefighters to track deferred maintenance requests as well.

OPDA: The City's push to innovate and become more results-oriented will pay off in droves in the years to come. The more results-oriented our budget and city, the better. I would like to see this department fully funded and, if necessary, overfunded to ensure we are attracting the best talent to this field. We have to start to invest in new technology city wide and to do so are departments must be supported with up-to-date analytics and data to make the best decisions in where to use this technology.

Red Tape Cutter: As we become a more sophisticated and professional city, it becomes more and more clear that we need a point of contact, that is not an elected official, to help developers and nonprofits navigate our bureaucracy. This role should report to the City Manager and have the freedom to navigate across departmental issues.

Hiring Evaluation: The Department presentations to City Council made one thing abundantly clear: we have a major hiring crisis. An evaluation of our hiring process, benefits, employment experience, reputation, etc. should be conducted by a third-party vendor. Failure to hire new talent now and to be building our next wave of leaders now will only continue to grow as an issue exponentially into the future. Let's invest in this analysis now to ensure we avoid a future crisis.

Merge Pension and Finance Departments: The need for us to be the most efficient and effective means that evaluating crossover with common and parallel workstreams has to become paramount and in this case taking a look specifically at the Pension and Finance departments ability to become one department in an opportunity to merge potentially save funding with overlap of work.

With these investments, I believe that we will see a significant, positive impact on the city, not only in the year ahead but in the years and decades to come. Not providing the highest quality service is not an option for us.