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Seth Walsh
Councilmember

Budget Priorities for FY26 Recommended Budget *Councilmember Seth Walsh*

This is the third budget I've considered as a Member of Cincinnati City Council. Each year, this process is more than balancing revenues and expenses—it's our opportunity to write the next chapter in Cincinnati's future. Together, we have proven that thoughtful, community-centered investments can uplift neighborhoods, strengthen families, and inspire growth.

As uncertainty clouds the national landscape, Cincinnati must be the city that steps forward with clarity, creativity, and compassion. Our time is now to continue to reinvest in our neighborhoods and basic services to pave the way for growth and vibrancy throughout the city.

Now more than ever, we are called to lead boldly. We must protect what makes us strong—public safety, basic services, and access to opportunity—while building the kind of future where every neighborhood and every resident has the tools to thrive. In FY26, my budget priorities are as follows:

Safety and Basic Services

Safety and reliability are the cornerstones of a city where people choose to live, raise families, and grow businesses. In FY26, we should double down on these foundational investments:

Public Safety:

1. Invest in the CPD Wellness Unit, ensuring our officers are mentally healthy and mission ready.
2. Increase full-time fire staff to reduce costly overtime and support long-term staffing sustainability.
3. Replace all Violent Crime Squad (VCS) unmarked vehicles and create a program to ensure we rotated in new cars every 6-12 months moving forward.
4. Support and increase funding to Big Brother Big Sisters from the FY25 investment of \$50,000.

Basic Services:

1. Ensure the Department of Public Services receives the funding necessary to improve our snow response including increasing staff, replacing and/or retrofitting our fleet where necessary.
2. Utilize our bonding capacity to maximize necessary fleet upgrades, with priority to fire vehicles.
3. Revolutionize our pothole repair through technology upgrades and AI to be proactive, not just reactive, in pothole repair.
4. Provide funding to install sprinklers under major bridges and outdoor infrastructure to prevent the type of damage we saw in November 2024 with the Daniel Carter Beard Bridge.

5. Provide funding to replace the failing retaining wall in Mt. Adams visible from Columbia Pkwy.
6. Provide funding to have utilities along Bus Rapid Transit routes buried underground during the building of BRT.

Internal City Investments:

1. Continue to increase our funding contribution to the pension.
2. Continue to fund and support OPDA.
3. Create an Office of Strategic Growth.
4. Continue to invest in the Buildings and Inspections Building Inspector Training Academy.
5. Leverage City investments into outside partners and projects with private and non-profit funding to make sure the City's investment is as impactful as possible.

A Growing Cincinnati

We know that every one of our 52 neighborhoods has untapped potential and that cities that are not growing are dying. FY26 continues our push to deliver catalytic investments that unlock growth, fuel creativity, and help people put down roots:

Neighborhood Economic Development:

1. Create a Right of First Refusal program to secure long term control over important properties within communities for long term investment.
2. Dramatically increase funding to Quick Strike Acquisition Fund. There were over \$1.3 million in asks for the FY25 funding cycle, with three projects still anticipated to come through the process.
3. Continue the Catalytic Housing and Project Gap Filling Funding created in the FY24 closeout budget with an initial \$5.5 million investment.
4. Fund the Northside Gateway project to complete the financing structure.
5. Invest in South Fairmount stabilization and redevelopment efforts in collaboration with The Port, to leverage potential additional state funding.
6. Invest in an "Iconic Cincinnati" marketing strategy to improve and increase positive brand recognition of Cincinnati and to adjust national perception of our great city.
7. Support programs from the Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio including expanding and growing Building Futures to continue to grow and manage a strong, diverse workforce.
8. Increase operating support to The Port to continue to be a major development arm in Cincinnati.
9. Support HOME operating funding needs.
10. Uncap Affordable Housing Trust Fund awards and maintain the AHTF at the current funding level.
11. Maintain CDC operating support through HomeBase Cincy, with priority given to invest in and grow smaller or emerging CDCs.

Neighborhood Vitality:

1. Invest in branding and activation of neighborhoods and their unique business districts.
2. Maintain NSP at \$10,000 per neighborhood and continue to support Invest in Neighborhoods.
3. Put aside money to upgrade City Hall into a destination in the city once again.
4. Maintain and expand the City's HARBOR program.

5. Continue to invest in the Safe and Clean fund and Keep Cincinnati Beautiful to keep our neighborhoods welcoming and clean.

Vibrant Neighborhoods

Small businesses, arts and culture organizations, and special events are more than economic engines—they're the soul of our neighborhoods. In FY26, we continue to stand with local entrepreneurs and creatives who are creating opportunities and building community from the ground up.

Small Business Support:

1. Continue to fund the tenant improvement program and increase funding as possible.
2. Uncap any funding application for small business support.
3. Create a loan or grant program for small businesses impacted by construction. Small businesses should not struggle or fail because of city related work or development.
4. Continue to provide support to the Avondale Town Center. It is difficult to create a new market, which is what we seek to do at the Avondale Town Center. Continued support is key.
5. Fund a pop-up shop program similar to the "Our Shop" program in College Hill through DCED.
6. Support CincyTech and Cintrifuse in growing a startup culture in Cincinnati.
7. Continue to support REDI in their business recruitment to Cincinnati.

Arts, Culture, and Special Events:

1. Continue to support the Cincinnati Sports Commission after our initial \$250,000 investment in the FY25 budget.
2. Complete our commitment to America's River Roots by matching our initial \$250,000 investment in the FY25 budget.
3. Provide operating support to BLINK to make it more than an event more than every two years.
4. Create and fund a Special Events Startup Incubator to find the next big event in Cincinnati.
5. Provide funding to lead the study of the capital stack funding needs for the new arena.
6. Provide \$750,000 support to Clifton Cultural Arts Center to finish the project.
7. Provide \$1.6 million to the Cincinnati Art Museum to create an ADA accessible ramp that goes with their steps up to the Museum.
8. Provide \$125,000 to the ArtWorks Creative Campus ArtPark project.
9. Continue to fund Film Cincinnati at the total FY25 level of \$150,000.
10. Support Asianati in their work to continue building a more diverse Cincinnati.

This budget isn't just a list of priorities. It's a blueprint for progress. A call to action. And a promise to every resident of Cincinnati: you matter. Your neighborhood matters. And your future is worth investing in.

Let's build this future, together.

