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Cincinnati City Council

MEMORANDUM

Councilmember Meeka Owens Budget Priorities for FY2024-2025

As the City Administration prepares the FY2024 to 2025 Biennial Recommended General Fund Operating Budget and Capital Budgets, it should aim for an equitable allocation of resources that meets community needs and ensures that funds allocated are spent transparently and accountably. We present the following policy guidelines and priorities, which focus broadly on Council's top priorities and in particular the provision of core services (fire, police, sanitation, and code enforcement), infrastructure and deferred maintenance, housing, climate action, and human services.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. The General Fund and Capital Fund Budgets must be balanced. While continuing to strive to have a structurally balanced budget, the fiscal impacts of ongoing State of Ohio cuts to the Local Government Fund, and revenue losses stemming from the pandemic, the use of one-time sources must be used to balance the budget.
2. The City should also continue to building a reserve balance of 16.7 percent of prior year General Fund operating revenues.
3. To mitigate the anticipated ongoing loss of revenue and projected gap between revenues and expenditures, the Budget should continue to follow Council policy and allocate the second tranche of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to cover deficits in the City's operating budget for FY2024 and 2025 (Item #2022-00865, Attachment ____). Any remaining funds not used for operational deficit(s) should be allocated to address the critical deferred maintenance infrastructure priorities presented by the Administration's report (Item #2023-_____, Attachment ____).

CORE SERVICES – PUBLIC SAFETY, PUBLIC SERVICES, AND CODE ENFORCEMENT

4. Police and Fire should be funded consistent with bargaining agreements based on the departments' plans to reach their approved budgeted full-strength complements. Particular attention should be given to ensuring police and fire recruit classes are of a sufficient size to maintain the complements and reduce the burden of overtime on both the currently serving officers and the overtime budget.

5. As part of the City's ongoing efforts to address gun violence as a public health crisis, additional funding should be made available for CPD's victim support work, mental health crisis intervention, and gun lock distribution.
6. Public Services crews should be funded consistent with bargaining agreements, with every effort made to fill vacancies, including signing and retention pay, and retaining the dedicated crew members who are currently serving our City.
7. Across Cincinnati, many renters reside in housing that provides insufficient utilities, infestations, drug dealing and crime, and general neglect. Ensuring that existing housing units are stable and safe is a key tactic to tackle Cincinnati's housing crisis as is pursuing negligent and careless problem properties. Therefore, Code enforcement capacity should be maintained, and expanded when possible. This should include the expansion of the City's litigation capacity to enforce code compliance through legal means when necessary.
8. Basic and core services of City functions should be maintained with recommendations to incrementally restore staff and services to meet the needs of our residents as fully as possible. Finally, to meet the needs of all City employees, the budget should include an increase in the City's contribution to the pension fund by \$1 million per year.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

9. Funding should be continued for traffic calming infrastructure, Complete Streets projects, implementation of the Bike Plan, and pedestrian safety measures and maintenance. In particular, the budget should identify funding sources for placing additional speed cushions in neighborhoods with the highest incidences of crashes and injury, as well as in school zones and business districts in neighborhoods with the lowest rates of car access/ownership (as tracked by the 2021 Climate Equity Indicators Report).
10. City facilities and transportation infrastructure, including bike paths/lanes and sidewalks, are among the most utilized and essential capital assets owned and maintained by the City of Cincinnati. Due to diminishing capital resources, many of the routine capital projects have been removed and deferred over the years, adversely impacting the overall condition of the City's buildings, Parks and Recreation facilities, roads and bridges, and others. Now, Cincinnati faces millions of dollars of neglected infrastructure expenses.
11. Continue to monitor and assess the needs of the Office of Grant Administration to maximize the potential for City projects to be funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act.

HOUSING

12. As part of Council’s ongoing work on a Tenants’ Bill of Rights to enhance and enforce the rights of renters, a Housing Advocate position should be created within the Office of Human Services and funded comparatively to similar positions in other cities.
13. While the Mayor and Council have identified initial funding for the Access to Counsel program (Item #2022-02224), opportunities for additional funding sources should be considered and pursued. In particular, the Administration should continue to identify potential external partners which may be interested in providing funds for the program.
14. A minimum contribution of \$5 million should be made to the CDF Fund of Funds, allocated through the advice of the Housing Advisory Board.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

15. City Council is set to approve the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan on April 12. Efforts to implement the recommendations from the plan should take into consideration the 2021 Climate Equity Indicators Report, or more recent data. As part of our city’s climate action plan, the following initiatives should be funded:
 - a. Increasing the funding for the WarmUp Cincy program (23GCP p. 65)
 - b. Supporting youth green jobs (23GCP p. 73, 91)
 - c. Expanding capacity to apply for grants related to climate action (23GCP p. 73)
 - d. Begin transitioning the city’s lights to LED and gas streetlights to electric (23GCP p. 81)
 - e. Moving towards ensuring that at least 40 percent of funds spent on Green Cincinnati Plan initiatives are spent in underserved communities, similar to the federal Justice40 initiative (23GCP p. 87)
 - f. Increase the urban agriculture fund to at least \$100,000 (23GCP p. 99)
 - g. Prioritize road design and road infrastructure priorities that achieves Complete Streets recommendations and moves the City towards its Vision Zero goals (23GCP p. 117)
 - h. Prioritize Urban Forestry tree planting efforts in neighborhoods that have the greatest heat island effect, with the goal of at least 50% of funds spent on tree planting being in those communities (23GCP p. 125)
 - i. Expand City recycling collection to all Designated Outdoor Recreation Areas (DORAs) (23GCP p. 155)
 - j. Fund and expand the Climate Safe Neighborhoods Program to cultivate the social infrastructure for resilient communities and provide green workforce training (Community Planning and Social Cohesion Strategy 2, 23GCP page 142-143)

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

16. Based on the success of the inaugural pilot of the Boots on the Ground Fund, another round of at least \$100,000 should be allocated to continue support for smaller nonprofit organizations. Funding for the neighborhood councils and businesses districts should be at a minimum maintained, as should funding for the Safe and Clean Fund.
17. City capital projects should be funded consistent with principles of equity and with consideration of the history of projects conducted in each neighborhood and the effect the project will have on the health, well-being, and livelihoods of neighborhood residents.
18. It is pivotal that the community continue to be engaged, particularly the communities that have not been historically invested in. To ensure that these funds are allocated in an equitable way that is in keeping with the needs and desires of the community, the innovative community engagement work initially sponsored through the Bloomberg Foundation partnership should continue to receive City funding.

HUMAN SERVICES AND LEVERAGED SUPPORT

19. The Human Services Fund should be funded at the same levels as FY2022-23, or at a minimum be funded at 1.5% of the General Fund.
20. In keeping with Council's good government initiatives, no organization should receive leveraged support that did not apply through the leveraged support process. The majority of leveraged support should be provided to organizations in the "Economic Development and Neighborhood Support," "Homelessness and Eviction Prevention," and "Workforce Programming and Poverty Reduction" categories.