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Cincinnati City Council

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COMMUNICATION

Councilmember Meeka D. Owens Budget Priorities for FY25

As the City Administration prepares the FY25 Biennial Recommended General Fund Operating 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 are in accordance with the structure of budget asks of other departments and boards of the City of Cincinnati, community needs, and the interests of my office.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Public Safety is this Council's first, second, and third priority, and we as a Council need to be proactive in ensuring that our public safety is the best it can be. While this administration, informed by the Council, continues to do this work, we ask that they specifically prioritize:

- Police and Fire should be funded in a manner consistent with bargaining agreements based on the departments' plan to reach their approved budgeted full-strength complements. Particular attention should be given to ensuring police and fire recruit classes are sufficient to maintain the complements and reduce the burden of overtime on both the currently serving officers and firefighters and the overtime budget.
- As part of the City's ongoing fight 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, gun lock distribution, and proper education and awareness. These items should all be adequately funded so the administration can form a Rapid Response Program to help communities immediately after these traumatic events.

THRIVING NEIGHBORHOODS

Cincinnati's 52 neighborhoods are what make us so unique. While I and the rest of the Council are aware that each neighborhood has unique 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. While costs continue to go up across the board in our city, from property taxes to daily expenses, adequate growth in transportation options needs to help mitigate costs. By supporting greater transit options, our city will become more attractive to prospective residents.
- Home repair assistance programs such as HARBOUR should continue to be fully funded to support our city's housing growth and sustainability. This should include the tentative formation of a Cincinnati Rental Improvement Fund to support local landlords in improving their properties while keeping costs affordable for tenants.

- Ensure that the budget reflects climate-informed investments. This includes vigorously applying for the Inflation Reduction Act Revolving Fund, which will ensure that the city can have dollars from the federal government that are directly allocated for mitigating the climate crisis. Additionally, we should accelerate our efforts to remove lead piping through the Lead Service Line Replacement Program and continue to identify funding sources to ensure that this program can thrive.
- In alignment with the Cincy on Track plan, the administration should identify green solutions for refurbishing those projects identified. Prioritizing this while we allocate dollars from the railroad sale will help us build a city for the future that will also help reduce our effect on the climate crisis. While we continue refurbishing 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 building.
- Throughout Cincinnati, many tenants reside in properties that provide insufficient utilities, infestation, crime, and general neglect. Ensuring that existing housing units are stable and safe is crucial to tackling Cincinnati's housing crisis, as is pursuing negligently problematic properties. Therefore, Code enforcement capacity should be maintained and expanded when possible. This should also mean prioritizing that there are adequate resources to continue and expand the Building Inspectors recruit program. This should include expanding the City's litigation capacity to enforce code compliance through legal means when necessary.

GROWING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

A city that does not grow 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, no organization should receive leveraged support that did not apply through the leveraged support process.
- As we continue to try to incentivize business in Cincinnati, we need to ensure that we have an appropriate and responsible allocation of TIFF dollars.
- As the Council and the administration await the introduction of Connect Communities, we should identify ways to grow our Neighborhood Business Districts.
- Green Jobs should be a priority for this administration to help identify and grow, as outlined in the Green Cincinnati Plan. By engaging in this work, we should determine how to activate the city's youth workforce to achieve this and the larger goal of growing employment.

FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

With federal funding sources beginning to dissolve, we as a city need to be proactive in our approach to closing the impending deficit. That is why the administration should consider the following:

- The General Fund and Capital Fund Budgets must be balanced by FY26 when ARPA funding is no longer available.
- The City should ensure that a competitive process is established for all non-profits approaching the City through our allocation processes, including the carryover process overseen by the Council.
- With impending financial shortfalls approaching with the loss of ARPA funding, the city should identify ways to incentivize revenue-producing development, programming, and additional projects to grow the city's overall revenues.

- Ensuring proper capacity within the City Administration, specifically the Office of Grant Administration, to apply for federal funding opportunities. Growing capacity to apply for federal dollars will ensure that we are not selecting the sources we will apply for based on capacity but rather can apply for funds based on what we need.
- 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

The City of Cincinnati's primary mission should be to supply best in class services to the people of this amazing city. Therefore, 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:

- Staffing investments should reflect the services that citizens want to see improved, based on the citizen's survey.
- Continued support should be given to the Law Department's Quality of Life team, which is at the front line of combating issues threatening our city's citizens' health, safety, and welfare. This aligns with the Council's continued work on the Tenant's Bill of Rights.
- Proper training opportunities should be accessible to all city employees so that they may engage with subject matter experts and personally advance their knowledge of their industry. This, in turn, will grow the expertise of city employees.
- Meeting the needs of our Human Resources Department should be of the utmost importance so that they can properly help fill staffing shortages and achieve full complement across all departments and offices. This requires allocating resources to have competitive salaries and benefits regardless of industry. This is an overarching goal for the city to attract and retain talent.
- Redevelopment of the city's communications needs to be at the forefront of the administration going forward. We must understand how people interface with the city and realize this is primarily done online. Further, we should examine all possibilities for improving citizens' communication with the city, primarily through our website. Through this improvement we should identify what citizens are accessing frequently and how we can specifically improve those systems. This is pivotal as we consider enhancing our customer service with all community members.


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