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**Seth Walsh**  
Councilmember

## **Budget Priorities for FY27 Recommended Budget** *Councilmember Seth Walsh*

This is the fourth budget I have considered as a member of Cincinnati City Council, and, no doubt the most challenging so far. In the face of an ever-changing federal and state landscape and the uncertain economic waters ahead, this Council and Mayor must make hard, thoughtful decisions to secure our city's future.

This does not mean that we can or should cut our way to prosperity. We can and should ensure that today's obligations are met while still protecting tomorrow's stability. It is critical to balance continued investment in what already makes our city great while also laying a strong foundation for the years to come.

We must be honest about our financial situation and stretch the dollars we have as far as we can. We cannot continue to start the year talking about deficits and cuts and end it with large surpluses that go mostly into filling reserves due to our conservative revenue projections. The needs are too great, and the moment is too important. This is not the way to a brighter future.

This is a defining moment for Cincinnati. The decisions we make pave the way for the growth and vibrancy we all want to see in the decades to come. We cannot shrink inward; we must lead with vision and invest with purpose. That is why in FY27, my budget priorities are as follows:

### **Safety and Basic Services**

Public safety and basic services are the foundation of a great city. Excellence in basic city functions has an outsized positive impact on building a city where people choose to live, work, raise families, and grow their businesses. In FY27, we must continue to invest to ensure our neighborhoods are safe and clean:

#### ***Public Safety:***

1. Increase the authorized strength of the Cincinnati Fire Department and invest appropriately to reach the necessary table of organization to reflect current staffing needs and significantly lower the mandatory overtime required of our firefighters.
2. Prioritize recruitment and retention of police officers, including lateral classes, to get the Cincinnati Police Department to full staffing.
3. Prioritize the deferred maintenance requests of our police and fire departments and utilize our bonding capacity to make necessary equipment and fleet replacements and facility upgrades.
4. Fund a hood and ANSUL system appropriate for a gas oven in Fire Station 50.
5. Fund the CPD Wellness Unit and CFD cancer screenings.
6. Allocate funds towards improving the design and equipment of UC Hospital's INO procedure room doubling the number of people that can receive this lung cancer treatment.
7. Restore funding to the violence prevention work of Whitney/Strong and Women Helping Women.

8. Invest in the Cincinnati Children's Hospital's vision voucher program.

***Basic Services:***

1. Prioritize the funding necessary to continue improving our snow and pothole response.
2. Repair all city-owned sidewalks.
3. Fund a second round of the residential sidewalk repair program.
4. Prioritize repair of city streets using Cincinnati Southern Railroad funding.

***Internal City Investments:***

1. No budget cuts to personnel, outside of vacancy savings
2. Ensure any budget cuts have no negative impact on public safety, basic services, and development.
3. Continue to ensure that all leveraged support fund awards are made in the budget, and that all funding awards are completed in time to meet pre-determined deadlines for outside matching funds.
4. Continue to increase our funding contribution to the pension.
5. Support capacity to ensure a successful launch of the Office of Strategic Growth.

**A Growing Cincinnati**

We cannot simply cut our way to a brighter future; we must grow into it. Cities that are not growing are dying. In FY27 we should make strategic, bold investments to catalyze growth and development in all our neighborhoods and build the Cincinnati of tomorrow:

***Neighborhood Economic Development:***

1. Combine and dramatically increase funding for the Quick Strike Acquisition Fund and the Catalytic Housing and Project Gap Filling into the Housing and Economic Development Reserve Fund as established in the FY25 Closeout Budget process. Funding should then be used as part of the Cincinnati Future Fund administered by Cincinnati Development Fund.
2. Provide funding to the Northside Gateway and Town Hall Flats projects to complete the financing structure and allow these critical neighborhood development projects to proceed.
3. 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.
4. Provide capital support to Uptown Consortium.
5. Maintain CDC operating support, with priority to invest in and grow smaller or emerging CDCs.
6. Continue to collaborate with Metro on development of BRT and create an economic development strategy with Metro and other development partners for the future BRT corridors.

***Neighborhood Vitality:***

1. Consolidate the current neighborhood activation and development fund catalog and coordinate funding with CDF to amplify the efforts of the Cincinnati's Future Fund and catalyze vibrancy and growth in our neighborhoods.
2. Maintain and grow NSP and NBDIP funding.
3. Reserve money to upgrade City Hall into a destination for the city once again.
4. Invest in preservation of pre-existing affordable housing in neighborhoods through CDCs.

**Vibrant Neighborhoods**

Cincinnati is an incredible city due in large part to the work of our small businesses, arts and culture organizations, and major events. They are economic engines, reputation builders, and together create the

soul of our city. FY27 is the year to reinforce the human impact these organizations have, as well as the potential job creation and revenue generation that will seed our next decade of success:

***Small Business Support:***

1. Uncap any funding application for small business support.
2. Restore CincyTech, Cintrifuse, and REDI to FY25 levels and fund the African American Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Represent Cincy, and MORTAR to support small and startup business growth and expansion in Cincinnati.
3. Eliminate or offset fees for small businesses operating streeteries in the urban core.

***Youth Employment and Engagement:***

1. Invest in Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati to support their GameChangers school-based mentoring program.
2. Invest in ArtWorks career pathways work.
3. Invest in the work of the Boys and Girls Club, particularly the building remodel and creation of the new Teen Center in Avondale.
4. Re-establish the Citizens' Committee on Youth.

***Arts, Culture and Major Events:***

1. Maintain capital and operating support of the arts and arts organizations.
2. Adjust the Playhouse in the Park lease to eliminate rent charges.
3. Invest in the necessary capital upgrades of city-owned facilities leased to not-for-profit organizations including the Cincinnati Museum Center, Music Hall, and Playhouse in the Park.
4. Maintain increased capital maintenance support for the Cincinnati Art Museum from FY26.
5. Invest in the Cincinnati Ballet's Mayerson Community Partnerships program.
6. Continue investing in Film Cincinnati at the previous level.
7. Continue investing in Visit Cincy at previous level.
8. Provide necessary support to BLINK.
9. Continue to support Asianati at previous levels.

***Major Events and Civic Icons:***

1. Continue investing in the Cincinnati Sports Commission at previous level.
2. Fund a Cincinnati Sports Commission study to examine our current sports facilities and what new facilities or upgrades are needed to attract major sporting events.
3. Provide ongoing capital support for the Cincinnati Sports Commission to leverage to make necessary upgrades for the city to land major sporting events.
4. Invest in an engineering study for the Purple People Bridge with Tri-State Trails to help ensure a sustainable future for a critical, iconic piece of pedestrian infrastructure in our urban core.
5. Provide \$1,350,000 in capital funding to Findlay Market for their Findlay Forward projects.
6. Provide \$8,000,000 to the Farmer Music Center as stated in the resolution passed by Council.
7. Invest \$1,000,000 in the acquisition of the parking lot adjacent to the Shakespeare Company to help facilitate their theater expansion project.
8. Invest to commission a permanent mural on the Brighton Approach Bridge celebrating Over-The-Rhine and the West End to transform this new infrastructure into a civic icon.
9. Invest to transform the west-facing retaining walls of the subway on I-75 into a rotating street art corridor to prevent graffiti and showcase local artists on a rolling basis.