Cincinnati Oversight Project

April 4, 2026

Via Email

Mayor Aftab Pureval
Members of Cincinnati City Council
City Manager Sheryl Long
City of Cincinnati
801 Plum Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Re: Proposed $8 Million Allocation for Farmer Music Center – Budget Classification, Public Purpose, and Transparency Concerns

Dear Mayor Pureval, Members of Council, and City Manager Long:

I write regarding the recent resolution expressing Council's intent to allocate $8 million in "capital resources" to support the Farmer Music Center project and to include this allocation in the FY27 Budget.

This represents a material financial commitment, particularly in the context of the City's projected General Fund deficit. However, the resolution does not establish the legal or financial basis necessary to support the proposed expenditure. Indeed, many people are asking how the city can afford this type of expenditure in light of a projected $29.5 million General Fund deficit.

The resolution passed by the council simply declares the proposed $8 million as coming from capital resources. However, the resolution's reference to "capital resources" is not all that is necessary to establish that this expenditure qualifies as a capital investment. That determination depends on whether the City will receive a capital asset or enforceable financial interest, which, so far, has not been identified by the resolution's supporters.

If the City does not receive a capital asset or enforceable financial interest sufficient to justify classification as a capital expenditure, then this allocation should be treated as a General Fund expenditure. In that event, it would increase the City's projected $29.5 million FY27 General Fund deficit and should be evaluated accordingly as part of the budget process.

First, the resolution does not identify any ownership interest, leasehold interest, or other capital asset that the City will acquire. Absent a defined asset or enforceable financial interest, it is not clear how this allocation qualifies as a capital expenditure rather than a subsidy.

Second, the resolution does not include any formal determination that the expenditure serves a public purpose. While it references anticipated economic impact and tourism benefits, such statements are not a substitute for a clear and legally sufficient public purpose finding—particularly where public funds are directed toward a project involving a private or quasi-private entity.

Third, on March 20, 2026, I submitted a public records request seeking information regarding what the Administration and Council knew about this project prior to the adoption of the resolution, including any analysis supporting the classification of this expenditure as a capital investment and any determination of public purpose. No response nor records have been produced to date.

Given that Council has already expressed its intent to allocate $8 million to the project and that this matter is expected to be incorporated into the FY27 Budget, it would be inappropriate to defer these issues pending the production of public records in response to my request. The absence of publicly available information at the time of the vote—and continuing today—also raises serious concerns regarding transparency, due diligence, and fiscal oversight.

Before this allocation is incorporated into the FY27 budget, I respectfully request that the Administration and Council provide the public with clear answers to the following:

1. What specific asset or legally enforceable interest will the City receive in exchange for the $8 million allocation?
2. On what basis is this expenditure being classified as a capital investment?
3. Where is the formal determination that this expenditure serves a public purpose?
4. What is the identified funding source for this allocation, and what is its projected impact on the FY27 General Fund deficit?

These are fundamental questions that go directly to the integrity of the City's budgeting process and the proper stewardship of public funds.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Zinser
Founder
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