

# Documenters

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## Budget & Finance Committee

Documenter name: Erin Couch

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## Summary

- Funding has been cut across all city departments due to federal stimulus money running out post-pandemic. It is the first time in five years the city will operate without it.
- Leverage support for organizations outside of the city has also been cut significantly.
- First round of disbursements from the Cincinnati Southern Railway sale fund will be utilized this year. The \$56 million will go toward streets and bridges, recreation, public services and parks.

## Follow-Up Questions

- What factors are taken into consideration with leverage funding to external organizations?
- What services will local nonprofits cut as a result of their own budget shortfalls?
- Because the mayor plays a large role in the budget process, why was Mayor Aftab Pureval not in attendance?

## Notes

### Scene

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

Elected officials/council members in attendance:

- ~~Aftab Pureval, mayor~~
- Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney, vice mayor
- Victoria Parks, president pro tem
- Anna Albi, council member
- Jeff Cramerding, council member
- Mark Jeffreys, council member

- Scotty Johnson, council member
- Meeka Owens, council member
- Seth Walsh, council member.

Other city officials in attendance:

- Bryce Rhoades, senior assistant city solicitor
- Steve Webb, finance director
- Andrew Dudas, budget director
- Cheryl Long, city manager
- Jill Bocian, deputy clerk of council.

### **Recommended budget breakdown**

Council is currently reviewing the budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-2027. By law, the city must pass the biannual budget by June 30.

The timeline for the biannual budget passage, according to Council Member Jeff Cramerding:

- Tuesday, June 4: Mayor/city manager presents council with a draft budget.
- Friday, June 6: Council must have recommended adjustments to the clerk.
- Week of Monday, June 9: Council will discuss the budget adjustments
- Monday, June 16: Budget discussed as a group again.
- Wednesday, June 18: Council will pass the biannual budget.

Budget director Andrew Dudas laid out the budget recommended by the city manager's office.

- Across all funds, the city is at \$1.3 billion for FY 2026.
- In January, the city had an approximate \$10 million deficit to close. It did so by saving on position vacancies, nonpersonnel reductions, reducing fire overtime, reduction of funding to external organizations (leverage support grants), and reducing the budgets for the offices of mayor, clerk and council.
- The general fund budget in terms of revenue totals is \$569.5 million. The vast majority of tax revenue – about 65% – comes from earning tax. Property taxes are the next highest at 8.4%, followed by other revenues, investments, state shared revenues, casino tax and parking meters.

- Expenditures for the \$569.5 million fund: Largest portion goes to police, at 33.1% of the general fund. Fire gets 28.1%. The city manager's office gets 8.5%. The rest are dispersed to other city departments, and all are under 4%.
- Cincinnati Police Department is expected to have three 50-member recruit classes.
- Cincinnati Fire Department will have two 50-member recruit classes.
- Leverage funding for external organizations was cut by \$300,000 from the last budget cycle.
- The city will get \$56 million from the Cincinnati Southern Railroad sale's first payout. Breakdown: 62.% to bridges/streets, 13.6% for recreation, 11.5% for public services, 12.8% for parks.

## **Public hearing**

Public hearing began at 5:52 p.m.

### **Activities Beyond the Classroom**

Sally Grimes, executive director of [Activities Beyond the Classroom](#) (ABC), advocated for her organization. She said public dollars would be put back into the community in the form of after-school programming for the tens of thousands of students ABC serves.

### **Center for Addiction Treatment**

Several speakers advocated for the [Center for Addiction Treatment](#) (CAT House) throughout the hearing. Many told stories of how CAT House's services have helped them overcome homelessness and addiction.

Jethro Jones spoke on his experience with 25 years of homelessness. CAT House case managers helped him overcome drug abuse, alcoholism and housing instability.

Alicia Arnold, outreach manager for CAT House, said she is a recovering addict and alcoholic herself as well as a survivor of human trafficking. She said CAT House is unique because case managers go to places like jails and recovery centers to help people. "CAT House does what a lot of people won't – meet people where they are."

### **Boys and Girls Club of Greater Cincinnati**

Bill Bresser, CEO of the [Boys and Girls Club of Greater Cincinnati](#), asked council to reconsider leverage funding for the organization. It recently opened a youth workforce development center in Villages at Roll Hill and will do the same in Avondale and Price Hill

this year. The nonprofit is 85% privately funded and serves 2,500 children across the region. He said the Monday-through-Friday after-school program has helped 75% of its students increase their abilities in reading and math.

“It’s way more than just a rec center. It’s a redevelopment center. That’s what we do,” Bresser said.

### **African American Chamber of Commerce**

The [African American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Cincinnati](#) (AACC) had the largest showing of speakers of all organizations in attendance, with more than 10 people speaking on its behalf.

Funds for the chamber were recommended to be cut from \$350,000 to \$300,000 this year, speakers said.

The chamber offers more than 120 programs and events for small business owners that cover business basics, marketing know-how, sales strategies, networking and digital engagement. AACC president Eric Kearney asked council to restore its funding.

“We bring certified companies to the City of Cincinnati. We bring people to the City of Cincinnati. We bring businesses to the City of Cincinnati,” Kearney said. “There are a lot of great economic development organizations. They all do fabulous work, and they deserve our city’s support.”

### **Camp Joy**

Two officials with Camp Joy said the camp has brought programming to nearly 1,000 Cincinnati youth, many of whom have challenging life circumstances. It was first founded in the West End in 1937 to serve local children in crisis. Now the camp is located right outside city limits.

“These are not just numbers. These are students in our community who are often left out of life-shaping experiences, kids who carry stress, trauma and self doubt, but who light up when someone invests in them,” philanthropy director Stephanie Voorhees said.

### **Art Academy of Cincinnati**

Officials with the Art Academy of Cincinnati said the college has brought new life to

Over-the-Rhine since it relocated there in 2005. A city investment would come out of the public safety fund.

“Through many public projects, community projects and student-led initiatives, we have not only added to the beauty of the urban landscape but also contributed a sense of safety and belonging for residents and visitors alike,” Art Academy President Joe Girandola said.

### **Clifton Cultural Arts Center**

Advocates called the Clifton Cultural Arts Center (CCAC) a community hub for the neighborhood. It offers free and low-cost arts programming. Board member Monica Mehta said what makes CCAC so special is its power to bring people together of all ages, backgrounds, from every corner of the city, through shared creative experiences.

“In today’s climate, where division often dominates the conversation, we need spaces that uplift, celebrate and unify,” Mehta said.

### **ArtWorks**

Walnut Hills-based [ArtWorks](#) recently lost funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. CEO and artistic director Colleen Houston noted murals have been a big economic driver for the city since the nonprofit was founded in 1996. The nonprofit employs 250 to 300 youth and artists each year.

In 2024, ArtWorks requested \$150,000 in capital funds to complete the ArtWorks Creative Campus, rehabilitating a historic property that had fallen into disrepair.

“We’re so close to the finish line to complete our first-ever capital campaign project, and city support would be instrumental,” she said.

### **CincyTech**

Venture capital firm [CincyTech](#) invests in entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas in technology but need seed funding. It partners with universities and hospitals to find talent prospects.

The budget proposed by the mayor and city manager reduces funding to Cincy Tech by 70%, from \$250,000 to \$75,000, CEO Emma Off said. The proposed reduction is effectively a \$350,000 reduction because city money is used for a matching grant from the State of

Ohio.

“We are the center of gravity to help build, create high-paying jobs and increase the tax Base,” she said.

### **Bethany House**

Peg Derkers, CEO of [Bethany House Services](#), started by thanking the city for its support. Bethany House serves 158 mothers and children who rely on the emergency shelter and other programs that support families experiencing homelessness. Derkers said the shelter still needs more support as it is a “critical city asset.”

Shelter operating funds were cut by 18%, and city and state government funding only covers about 31% of shelter expenses. She asked the city to find \$45,000 that was cut from Bethany House’s request and add it to the grant award.

### **Midwest Apparel Creative Foundation**

Myra Wallace Walker, executive director of Midwest Apparel Creative (MAC) Foundation and MAC Fashion Week, said her organization over the past three years has been doing great work for many young and underserved creatives in the region who look to make an economic impact in the fashion and arts/culture industries, notably through a creative center and pop-up shop in Queensgate.

The MAC Foundation’s work has brought prospects to bring Fashion Week to Cincinnati, a “strategic move that will assist in stimulating the local economy,” Walker said.

### **Produce Perks Midwest**

Tevis Foreman, executive director of [Produce Perks Midwest](#), asked council to restore funding for the nonprofit, which helps low-income families access healthy foods. Many fruits and vegetables also come from local farmers.

The nonprofit was not included in the leverage support recommendations – as it was in the previous budget cycle – and the loss of its \$100,000 from the city would essentially double its loss because it gets a matching grant from the USDA.

The loss of funding comes as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) [faces](#)

[cuts](#). SNAP recipients who utilize Produce Perks' services are able to effectively double their monthly SNAP allotment, as Produce Perks provides a dollar-for-dollar match for those recipients.

"These dollars are going directly back into our communities, strengthening local food systems, stimulating local food economies, and improving health outcomes for our most vulnerable," he said.

### **Cincinnati Health Department, Cincinnati Public Schools nurses**

Tyler Parsons, vice president of AFSCME Local 3119 public health nurses union, spoke on behalf of the dozens of nurses working at the Cincinnati Health Department and Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). Nurse jobs are on the chopping block in this year's budget, Parsons explained.

CPS told the union it cannot afford to fund the district's nursing program, which leaves the city as the last line of support for the nurse services at public schools, Parsons said. Thirty school nurses could be laid off if the program is not funded.

"Allowing this program to collapse directly contradicts any repeated claim that this budget will not result in layoffs. If the city fails to step in and provide bridge funding, that is exactly what will happen," Parsons said. "Eliminating [nurse jobs] will shift the burden of care to educators and staff who are not medically trained and who are not nurses, putting everyone at risk."

### **Women Helping Women**

Cuts to [Women Helping Women](#), a local nonprofit that provides services to domestic violence survivors, would jeopardize the organization's abilities to provide its Prevent and Empower programming to CPS students. It serves 1,000 students annually with educational courses on teen dating, violence and sexual assault prevention.

Amber Malott, vice president of programming with Women Helping Women, cited statistics provided from CPS that show they learned tools to prevent physical and sexual dating violence.

"It's not just the data and research that tells us there is an impact, it's the students themselves," she said.

## **Questions about transparency**

West Price Hill resident Todd Zinzer pointed out what he considers a lack of transparency in the leverage support selection process. Sheryl Long, the city manager, has an application process, and organizations submit their applications. Long then “shakes and bakes it,” he said, and comes up with her recommendations, and it’s merit-based “as far as I can tell.”

Then, the recommendations go to the mayor and council and they can adjust those figures, but citizens don’t know what the basis is for those adjustments, Zinzer said. There’s one adjustment from City Council, but there are nine members on council.

“How do the nine members of the City Council decide on that one adjustment? It totally lacks transparency,” Zinzer said, noting the mayor doesn’t provide any justifications for his adjustments. “I don’t know that the winners tonight or through the process are that interested, but I’m sure the losers, whose funding has been cut or rejected, would like to know those kinds of things.”

## **Other organizations and projects advocating for funding:**

- Asianati
- Hispanic Chamber of Cincinnati
- Invest in Neighborhoods
- Clifton Avenue traffic calming
- LADD
- Price Hill Will
- Habitat for Humanity
- Mortar Cincinnati
- Keep Cincinnati Beautiful
- Bond Hill community

After public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

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