

STEVE GOODIN

Candidate for City Council – Responses

- 1. What motivated you to run for council/re-election, what parts of your professional and personal experience qualifies you to serve, and what measurable outcomes should voters hold you accountable for if you are elected?**

I was motivated to run this year because the City I love is experiencing dual crises in public safety and housing. While many of the root causes stem from state and federal policies (and macroeconomic trends), we nonetheless lag behind our sister Ohio cities in addressing them at the local level. In my view, the current administration seems lost and adrift and is not nimble enough to adapt the alarming situations unfolding in our neighborhoods.

As a former felony prosecutor with deep ties in the Cincinnati Police Department, I can tell you the department is understaffed, demoralized and rightfully resentful of incessant political meddling in its operations. As a former community council president, I can tell you there is a serious disconnect between City Hall and our neighborhoods about how developments should be approved. Both situations have become needlessly adversarial and overly political.

As a former councilmember with law enforcement experience and private sector economic development experience, I feel uniquely suited to bring about measurable change in these areas. If the voters return me to council, you will see a new budget which delivers enough officers to actually provide the “community policing” contemplated by the Collaborative Agreement and much-needed new housing after we better integrate neighborhood input into the City’s development approval process.

- 2. Last year the Cincinnati Futures Commission released its report containing recommendations that chart a fiscally sustainable path forward for the City and develop a community-informed economic agenda for the future.**

- a. How would you accelerate the implementation of the Futures Commission, and which specific recommendations do you believe are the top priority for the City?**

In my view, the most pressing matters raised by the Futures Commission are top-line revenue and our backlog of deferred maintenance. Our streets, parks and common areas are showing signs of obvious disrepair, and this is a slow-moving crisis that affects quality of life and investment. We must commit to annual

funding in these areas outside the funds provided by the railroad sale. And that may at some point involve raising the earnings tax.

b. Do you support the creation of the Office of Strategic Growth?

Yes – with a particular focus on regionalism, shared services and potential annexation.

c. Are there recommendations you believe the City should not pursue?

I am unpersuaded we should sell or privatize Cincinnati WaterWorks. I think it is a well-run public utility which we should grow and leverage as we explore deeper inter-connection with neighboring communities. Unless I see numbers to the contrary, divesting from CWW feels like a short-sighted “fire sale” move.

3. The City’s budget is constrained, with major obligations to the pension, public safety, and infrastructure. Please describe your budget priorities, including where you believe the City can save money and where the City should grow its spending. What tradeoffs would you be willing to make to fund your key priorities?

There is no question (at least in my mind) that we must fully staff our CPD complement and consider expanding it due to the growth in our base population and the numerous new attractions which have emerged in the CBD and OTR since that complement was established. This would conservatively require an additional \$12-15 million per year in operating revenue going forward.

Consequently, we will need to make reductions in several areas. We may have to reconsider some non-profit support and examine non-uniformed City Hall staffing. I must also note that some of the current council’s pet programs – including the ineffective “ACT for Cincy” \$3.1 million boondoggle – should be cut outright.

4. Do you support an increase in the City’s earning tax in the next Council term? If yes, how much would you increase it and what would you utilize the revenue for?

I would be open to considering an increase, but not exclusively for use on housing initiatives as some have suggested. We need to revamp our public safety priorities, potentially address equipment issues within the CFD while at the same time addressing our infrastructure. We are in a unique period in which the business community and the neighborhoods have essentially the same priorities. It will be difficult to address them without identifying additional revenue streams. Given our state’s current tax regime, the earnings tax will likely be the only means of raising additional revenue.

5. The City has a number of external partners like REDI Cincinnati, The Port, CincyTech, Cintrifuse, 3CDC and others that help it achieve its growth goals.

a. Do you support continuing to provide funding to these organizations?

I do, but we must employ more detailed metrics to better understand the return on our investment from each.

b. Do you support continuing to fund the Affordable Housing Leverage Fund with the City's waterfall?

I do, but I have real concerns about how the City continues to concentrate income-restricted housing in only "certain" neighborhoods like the West End. I think we need to have a robust public conversation around the placement of the units going forward.

c. What actions would you take to support job growth and site development?

As former outside council to the City's economic development department, I got an up-close look at the City's efforts to recruit companies into the region. I have also worked on brownfield and TMUD applications for developers, so I understand the challenges we face in terms of preparing sites (especially on the industrial/manufacturing side). This is one area in which we should study the state's efforts and become much more inter-disciplinary in our packaging of sites for prospective new businesses. Columbus is also outpacing us in this area. It also may be time to re-evaluate and re-staff certain aspects of the City's economic development operation.

6. Do you believe Cincinnati needs to grow? If so, what do you believe is Cincinnati's greatest opportunity for growth and what tools should City Council provide to make it successful?

Cincinnati absolutely needs to grow.

The first thing we must do is to take decisive action to reverse the terrible national publicity which followed the Fourth Street brawl. This administration's bizarre choice to argue with the public about crime statistics was a horrible choice – the perception is that our City is less safe than it was a few years ago, and this perception is a reality policymakers must face. Consequently, we must address public safety by bringing back "community policing" and traffic interdiction – and both will require additional police staffing and resources.

I feel the same applies to our stealth infrastructure crisis. It's hard to sell Cincinnati when out-of-town developers are bouncing over potholes in their rental cars on their way to a potential site. And the same goes for our unchecked litter and graffiti and other quality of life issues. The City does not present well right now, and that is a barrier to growth and investment.

We must continue to find innovative ways to sell our city and to find ways to mine new collaboration among the various entities which have served the City so well in this space. But we must do better on the fundamentals of city life if we are to grow.

7. Connected Communities was passed to increase housing supply through zoning reform. Do you support this policy? What additional zoning or land use changes, if any, would you support to add new housing in Cincinnati?

As a member of the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission, I raised concerns about Connected Communities in its earliest stages. In my view, the neighborhoods would never buy in – and they didn't. This legislation – while well-meaning – is perceived by many as a slap in the face of single-family homeowners, especially those in working-class neighborhoods. We have been telling residents for decades that home ownership is the best path to generational wealth. Now many fear their property values will be adversely impacted by apartment buildings with no parking going in next door. I understand that, to many, Connected Communities was a modest proposal. But to overtaxed homeowners, it feels like an existential threat.

It is important for policymakers to understand that this reaction was organic and not reactionary NIMBYism. This was about property owners being concerned about the value of their property. And the opponents of Connected Communities do not, by and large, believe neighborhoods should have an absolute veto on new developments. That's a false, binary narrative that does not reflect the true breadth of opinion many have on this issue.

That said, we absolutely do need more housing in this City. I do favor something akin the form-based zoning proposed by the REALTOR Alliance of Greater Cincinnati. With real neighborhood buy-in, we could essentially pre-approve certain kinds of “middle housing” which would be appropriate for different parts of town. But the process must not be top-down and must involve real community engagement, rather than the confusing sessions held around Connected Communities.

8. In 2021 the Chamber released *Embracing Growth*, which laid out a number of policy recommendations. Since then, Council has considered a number of policies to increase housing supply.

a. What specific actions should Council take to expand housing of all kinds across the City?

As noted above, we must start with common sense zoning reform which has real community buy-in. That means a very public process to adopt a form-based code which neighborhoods understand and support. The next step would be to

work with our school board and the County Auditor to find a better way to deal with tax valuations of distressed properties. Unless the Port is directly involved, these two entities can stand as significant stumbling blocks to returning distressed properties to productive use. We must also make our Building and Inspections Department more collaborative and less adversarial and complaint-driven. I've had several experiences in the past two years in which B & I have significantly slowed the development of new housing units – and for no good reason. Lastly, we must streamline the enormous red tape around our permitting processes. As a practical matter, it's difficult to figure out what permits are needed and how to get them. That must change.

b. Would you restore the residential tax abatement program if presented with evidence that housing production has slowed?

Yes – but with the caveat that so-called “teardown abatements” should not return. Those were deeply divisive and defeated the policy purpose behind the original program.

c. What role do you believe that TIF districts should play in advancing the City's growth agenda? How do you think TIF funds should be utilized? What role should City Council play in prioritizing their use?

I'm a huge believer in TIF districts and think they should be used to underwrite both public and private development. I've worked on multiple projects which have involved TIF dollars and believe that's a process the City largely gets right. I especially like the targeted use of TIF dollars as forgivable loans on distressed real estate.

d. How would you improve the city's permitting and development process?

As noted above, I feel as though these two very important city functions have drifted into a bad place during the past several years. Having personally deal with everything from VBMLs to projects constructed outside zoning requirements, I can tell you firsthand that our permitting processes have become needlessly adversarial and bureaucratic. In some cases, you are only allotted one hour per day to speak to a zoning inspector. We need a roundtable with developers and a review of best practices – particularly in Columbus, where the city gets high marks with working through such issues. Sadly, Cincinnati is once again getting a reputation as a city where it is tough to do business.

9. A number of development projects and policies in the last Council term have sparked debate over density, affordability, and neighborhood character. What responsibility does City Council have to advance pro-growth housing policy when individuals, advocates, or neighborhood organizations oppose specific projects, and

how should Council weigh the importance of population growth and citywide housing needs against localized opposition?

Let me answer this directly: The folks in Hyde Park weren't NIMBYs and did not deserve to have their character assassinated for opposing the development. They were well within their rights to do so, just as council was well within its rights to pass the development over their objections.

The Hyde Park Square debacle was helpful in at least one respect: It presents a case study in all that is wrong with how council and the planning commission works with neighborhoods. There is noticeable eye-rolling whenever a community council weigh in on a project. And the community councils are increasingly frustrated by the notion that their input is not welcome. All of this must change.

My suggestion: In addition to adopting a more form-based code as discussed above, we should agree upon a set of criteria by which community councils may object to a certain project. Right now, the interplay between these councils and the city is chaotic and unproductive. In OTR, the community council's focus is on parking and the number of affordable units; in Clifton, it is on the historic character of a new proposed development; in the West End, the key issue is the concentration of poverty and crime that can come with income-restricted units; and so forth. We need to find a city-wide overlay of what is a proper objection to a new project in the first instance. And we should take reasonable steps to ensure that community councils are truly representative of their neighborhoods (e.g., that renters are included).

10. The Chamber believes economic incentives have been essential to Cincinnati's growth. What role do incentives play in Cincinnati's future growth, and which types of projects do you think most warrant increased incentives?

Our priorities for incentives should remain housing and manufacturing, with an emphasis on distressed properties. We should also find creative ways to incentivize the development of the thousands of foreclosed-upon single-family homes which still sit vacant within the city limits.

11. Cincinnati's economy depends on attracting and retaining talent. What role should City Council play in ensuring we grow a skilled workforce and remain attractive to young professionals and families?

We have made great strides in making the city a more welcoming place for young workers. I'm happy to see my oldest daughter – a very progressive recent college graduate return to Cincinnati. She feels welcome here and that warms my heart.

Our city is vibrant in many respects, and I truly believe our restaurant scene and FC Cincinnati do as much to retain young talent as any organized initiative the business community can undertake. That said, we must continue to invest in recruiting new businesses and making certain our Gen Y workers have opportunities. And I am a huge fan of vocational education, community colleges and trade apprenticeship programs to keep a steady flow of productive workers in town who do not want to pursue traditional four-year college degrees.

12. Violent crime, quality of life issues, and residents' perception of safety are all pressing concerns in Cincinnati. What short- and long-term strategies or policies would you champion to improve actual safety and strengthen the community's sense of security, especially in the urban core? How would you measure success in both areas?

I've spoken to this several times through my answers to this questionnaire, but I will reiterate here that we have an underappreciated crisis in police staffing. We cannot live up the beat patrol "community policing" contemplated by the Collaborative Agreement at current levels. Our policymakers must prioritize this and do so immediately.

If I were running the city, I would immediately allow the Ohio State Highway Patrol to take over all interstate highway interdiction and reassign the CPD officers currently patrolling the interstates to city streets. I would disband the disastrous community responder program and redirect those dollars to CPD staffing and overtime. And I would be open to bringing in the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department for targeted patrols, joint investigations and some overtime.

When criminals see police, they are less likely to offend. And when law-abiding citizens see police, they feel safer. It's that simple.

We also need an immediate return to more aggressive traffic patrols within the city. Such stops typically take guns off the street. I would also reinvigorate the Citizens on Patrol program, which provided valuable street-level intel to our narcotics officers.

13. What is one concrete way you would engage business leaders to improve public safety outcomes, and how would you ensure accountability?

My recent experience dealing with hookah bars and afterhours parties has highlighted the need for business owners to grant CPD access to their security cameras. While the whole experience can feel a bit Orwellian, the more eyes we have on the street, the

better the policing. The city should be actively encouraging businesses to purchase compatible cameras and showing them how to grant access.

14. Cincinnati's small businesses are the lifeblood of neighborhood business districts. How would you support long time and new small business entrepreneurs?

As a former small business owner – and as a lawyer who has advised many small businesses over the year – this is an issue close to my heart.

While I am all for providing creative incentives to small businesses, what I am hearing from my friends is this space is the need for a renewed focus on basic services. In the hospitality industry especially, margins are tight. A few slow days or nights can render an entire month unprofitable. Public safety issues can have a real and immediate impact. So can homelessness, bad roads, litter and slow snowplowing. Before we try to get creative with new programs, we need to get the basics right. And the city is failing at that right now.

15. What is one existing barrier to growing small, minority, or women-owned businesses in Cincinnati, and what is the City's role in removing that barrier?

We are still an extraordinarily segregated city and I applaud the great non-profits and government officials who have done their best to encourage entrepreneurship in our minority populations. What I see as the biggest current barrier to progress is the disconnect between union apprenticeship programs (many of which are very intentional about minority recruitment) and the MBEs which tend not to utilize union labor. We must find a way to de-silo these groups to increase minority participation in larger-scale construction projects.

16. The City funds arts, cultural institutions, and major events in different ways. Which types of cultural or tourism investments do you believe should be prioritized, and how would you pay for them?

Our largest and most immediate need in this regard is a new downtown arena. Identifying the correct stakeholders to fund such a project will prove a difficult task and one I will not speculate about here. But if we are to stay competitive with our sister Ohio cities, a new arena is a must.

17. Solving major policy challenges, delivering efficient public services, and funding critical infrastructure projects requires the City to work with county, regional, state and federal leaders, some of whom are from different political parties. How will you engage these leaders to support the City's needs?

I truly believe in across-the-aisle cooperation and have deep connections with lawmakers on both sides of our political divide in Columbus and Washington. As a

former Ohio General Assembly staffer, I know personal relationships are often the way to get things done in these cities.

On a related note: I am truly disappointed by our city leaders' ceaselessly partisan tone. I think we all agree that Donald Trump has been bad for cities on many levels. But smearing anyone who doesn't agree with you on a given issue as MAGA is cheap, unfair, typically false and ultimately unproductive. There are still moderate Republicans in Columbus who want the Queen City to succeed. We must adopt a different kind of rhetoric if we want engage them productively.