

Christopher Smitherman
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?** Cincinnati is in trouble. Cincinnati needs strong leadership with common sense. I am a small business owner as a license financial planner for 30 years.
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?** I have not read the Commission report but it is clear that Cincinnati needs an economic plan that includes fully funding the Cincinnati Retirement System and passing a balanced budget. The top priority is putting a comprehensive plan together that addresses crime in our city and supports cutting red tape so development can continue in our city.
 - b. **Do you support the creation of the Office of Strategic Growth?** I believe Cincinnati has the tools to do economic development through our great Planning Department Staff. It is not that I will not consider expanding support for our team when needed but I believe development starts with our city workers.
 - c. **Are there recommendations you believe the City should not pursue?** No.
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?** My key priorities are fighting crime across all 52 neighborhoods, supporting basic services like snow removal, fixing pot holes, and sanitation services. We must do these basic services within the confinement of existing revenue. This means I do not want to raise income or property taxes. The financial position I have is if it is not a priority around basic services than it is not a priority. City hall must return to the basics.
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?** No. We cut a deal regarding Metro and lowering our income taxes and we must keep our word.

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.**
- Do you support continuing to provide funding to these organizations?** Yes, they are all very important organizations. I have always voted to support their work and have had great relationships with all of the CEO's.
 - Do you support continuing to fund the Affordable Housing Leverage Fund with the City's waterfall?** Yes.
 - What actions would you take to support job growth and site development?** I served four years on the Planning Commission and have always been supportive of the great development deals that came before the Commission. I made myself available to the development teams to get my questions answered so that none of the professionals were surprised with the direction of my vote. It is very important that city leaders understand that capital can be invested anywhere in the Country. So part of being competitive is removing red tape so long term investors will select the City of Cincinnati.
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?** Any city that desires to be competitive must grow its tax base. The only way to achieve this is through economic partnerships with organizations like Model Group, the Port, 3CDC, REDI Cincinnati, etc...
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?** No, I do not support Connected communities and this idea was not communicated well to the 52 neighborhoods. As I spoke with members of Bond Hill, one of our 52 neighborhoods, they expressed displeasure about the affordable housing project coming to their community. They believe this will negatively impact their home values and it is very unfair. Then there are our neighborhoods like Price Hill that are at capacity for affordable housing and deserve market rate housing. The Port has been doing a good job doing Land banking in the community of Price Hill but we must give them the resources to get more projects moving.
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.**
- What specific actions should Council take to expand housing of all kinds across the City?** The only way City Council can expand housing in our city is

through partnerships. There is no way the city has a budget to bring on line the housing needed without partnering with great organizations like Model group for example. This means that City Hall has to increase their financial literacy to understand that investors have to get reasonable returns or they will invest in other cities across the country. This is a very competitive space for capital.

- b. **Would you restore the residential tax abatement program if presented with evidence that housing production has slowed?** Yes
 - 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 voted to support all TIF districts when I served on council. I continue to support them.
 - d. **How would you improve the city's permitting and development process? The permitting process is more of a cultural shift.** It is not that the permitting process is a problem. This is a culture shift for staff who are not business owners to understand that time is money. The key is communicating what the rules are, not changing them midstream in a project, and responding in a timely fashion.
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?** When I served as the Vice Mayor under Mayor John Cranley they key was over communicating with the neighborhood leadership. We were able to get lots of projects done by including the neighborhood at the beginning so they were stakeholders and ultimately endorsed the projects. We have robust zoning laws that should be followed.
 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?** I agree with incentives particularly surrounding affordable housing expectations.
 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?** Having a safe downtown is critical to this question. Also making sure we have conversations about improving our public school system for young families is critical to retaining talent. Young people want to have fun which in part includes having a safe nightlife downtown.

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?** Our professional Police Department today does not feel supported. This was not true four years ago. So the first step is going to roll calls, doing ride alongs, attending recruit class graduations which often City Council does not attend. City Council should shows our officers and their families that they are supported. City Council must also build a good relationships with Local 69 so the Cincinnati Police Department understands they are supported when it counts. Sending the message that we support proactive policing is not in conflict with the Collaborative Agreement. I cannot stress strongly enough that when Sheriff Larry Henderson was rundown during a UC graduation traffic control how that effected every Peace Officer in our region.
13. **What is one concrete way you would engage business leaders to improve public safety outcomes, and how would you ensure accountability?** When I served as Law and Public Safety Chair Mayor Cranley, the City Manager and the Vice Mayor held a coordinated Law Enforcement meeting. We brought necessary law enforcement, city, and community partners together to have a plan to help the city manage spikes in crime. The accountability is the measurement of where crime is on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. This coordination was stopped four years ago. It was critical in fighting crime.
14. **Cincinnati's small businesses are the lifeblood of neighborhood business districts. How would you support long time and new small business entrepreneurs?** I do not like picking winners and losers by advancing capital to a small business. However, having a building inspection team and a permit team that is responsive to business owners is very important. Finding anyway we can lower fees like dance hall fees would help them tremendously. Having the building inspection team be reasonable if they find a problem is helpful. An example would be adding a fire escape. The fire escape might cost \$10k. You do not pile on and expect the business owner to fix in 30 days. You do not make the small business owner feel like they are the enemy. You work with the small business owner.
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? Making sure the small business is paid on time.** A great example was the casino project downtown that was directly negotiated with Chip Gerhardt. We had zero problems on the project of people getting paid and the expectations of the project.
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? I graduated from the School of Creative and Performing Arts. Cincinnati has some of the best art institutions in the world. When big capital projects came before council I always supported them because that attracts and retains young and older people to stay in our city and region.

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 am running as an Independent for many of those reasons. I have good friends on all side of the political aisle. I sat on the TID Commission and I currently sit on the Casino Commission. I also served on One Ohio and the Ohio Attorney General's Advisory Group on Law Enforcement Committee. We always have to work across the aisle to get things done. Compromise is very important in politics. When we disagree on public policy it is not personal.