

AARON WEINER

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?**

Housing and development have been at the forefront of conversation in Cincinnati. There is a need to address housing across all levels. I have been in residential real estate for 25 years. I plan on drawing on my experience and adding a seasoned voice to the discussion to move the initiative forward. I am in my second year as an Advisory Board Member on CHCURC (College Hill Urban Redevelopment Corporation) which has given me additional insight and skills in this subject matter. Personally, I have been involved in some type of public service, community and neighborhood engagement, board and philanthropy work my entire adult life. Some of my most proud and fulfilling moments have come from this work. I plan on using my non-profit experience and business acumen to serve the city. The voters of Cincinnati should hold me accountable to move the needle on housing and develop and implement creative ways to address housing needs. Additionally, they should count on me to improve quality of life issues in neighborhoods and public safety.

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

The report addresses the amplification of Core Services. I do feel this is a crucial foundation to build from. Public safety, infrastructure/roads, basic quality of life issues are important benchmarks of a successful city. Starting there provides the framework to build on. Housing and population growth are also very important recommendations from the report. In many ways, the two work together, but Core Services should be an initial priority.

- a. Do you support the creation of the Office of Strategic Growth?**

I would support the creation of the Office of Strategic Growth contingent upon it not adding unnecessary layers of bureaucratic red tape.

- b. Are there recommendations you believe the City should not pursue?**

The report addresses selling of public assets. That is something I would be opposed to or would want as a last resort.

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?

Public safety, basic services, infrastructure, and quality of life issues are my top priority. These are things that attract people and businesses to the city. I would closely evaluate and streamline the investment in some "pet projects" and "studies" in order to properly fund these basic initiatives.

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?

If necessary, I would support a small earnings tax increase if it would address the current condition of our infrastructure and public safety (including updating our fire stations and fully staffing our police complement).

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 definitely support the funding of these organizations. Each one plays a unique and integral role in development and business support and incubation and growth.

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

I would support the continuation of AHLF. Prioritizing affordable housing. AHLF has been a successful vehicle in this effort.

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

The expansion of development and projects naturally brings in job growth across many industries and providers. In terms of site development, I believe a missing component is downsizing opportunities for Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. Expanding housing for this market would open up the housing market and bring younger people into the neighborhoods who would buy the existing homes of the older generations. This is a large opportunity for growth.

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 the City Council provide to make it successful?

I believe Cincinnati needs to continue on the path of growth. We are catching up and competing with larger Mid -Western cities. I believe more and more we are becoming and can become a destination spot. I believe this involves focusing on our strengths and assets and amplifying them. Our riverfront is an example. Investing in improving and enhancing the riverfront is a huge opportunity for growth. Our architecture is another asset. Over 50 movies have been filmed in Cincinnati due to the architecture and topography. It is important to invest in this. Transportation is another opportunity. Developing a long term all-inclusive plan for transportation mapping out busses, BRT, bike paths, streetcar expansion etc. in a master plan would exponentially promote growth.

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?

I am in support of making building easier in order to gain more housing. However, I am not in favor of Connected Communities. The needs of all 52 neighborhoods are different. Establishing a one size fits all is dangerous. It doesn't address the specific density needs of each neighborhood. It also does not take into consideration the infrastructure of each neighborhood or the topography. I also have some concerns that it is being promoted as a vehicle for affordable housing. We should definitely evaluate ways to streamline zoning and perhaps refine Connected Communities to address some of the issues I addressed above. We should also streamline the variance process. I believe Form Based Code may be another proven way to address development that takes into consideration some of the issues that Connected Communities does not.

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?

The city should streamline variance processes. Evaluate opportunities within the land bank and port authority. Investigate repurposing commercial and or manufacturing spaces. Develop large vacant spaces such as a vast space along Spring Grove Ave. heading into Downtown and similar areas.

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

I am in support of tax abatement programs and view them as an investment. On new builds they typically encourage higher and better uses of land and usually yield higher tax revenue than original use even with the abatement. In addition, these properties usually bring in higher income tax revenue.

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?

TIF districts are an ideal way to advance growth. Presents an opportunity to invest in revitalizing expanding distressed areas. We should use TIF funds towards affordable housing initiatives and rehabilitation of naturally occurring affordable housing opportunities. They should also be used in conjunction with development or purchasing of blighted properties. Council should evaluate based on needs and potential investment outcome and community growth potential.

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

I would work to streamline and shorten the process. Evaluate if there are steps to remove, people that can be taken out of the process and any automation or technology that we can implement to expedite.

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?

As public servants, Council has a duty to its constituents and their interests. That said, I also have a respect for property rights and ownership. I believe Council should serve as a catalyst to create win-win growth opportunities and establish buy-in.

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?

Small and minority-owned business grants and incentives can be an important variable in business start-up. Incentives for housing such as tax abatements are

important in creating housing and attracting people to the area to live and support businesses.

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?

Attracting and retaining families and young professionals and talent should be a priority of City Council. Policies that are made should have this goal in mind. Ensuring that adequate housing is afforded and relevant businesses are encouraged to be opened and thrive are paramount to this effort. In addition, ensuring public safety and quality of life issues are also crucial in this effort.

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 am working on a recruitment and retention program for police. It involves a two-prong effort. The first effort is developing a bonus structure for recruiting and retaining officers. The second measure is to encourage police officers to move into the city with down payment match programs or rent subsidies. This will bring leadership to the city and break down barriers. It also brings police into the neighborhoods they serve which builds trust and also makes the communities safer.

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

We need to bring together local employers, chambers of commerce, and small business owners to collaborate directly with law enforcement, city officials, and community organizations on the specific needs of our businesses. Businesses of all types have different safety needs and concerns, and there should be an established point-of-contact at CPD, CFD, and City Hall to field communication.

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

I would ensure that growth and development projects are designed to drive traffic to business districts. Be cognizant of existing businesses and secure that growth and development does not impede or displace businesses. Implement plans to help businesses through financially difficult periods such as rent subsidies.

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?

I have a personal friend that recently opened a small business. The permitting process was cumbersome and expensive (\$8700) I believe if there is a way to streamline this process and evaluate cost savings of permitting, this would open up opportunities across the board.

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?

Cincinnati has many signature events that draw people to the city and bring financial influx. Events like Blink, Oktoberfest, Taste and Opening Day are crucial. They drive hotel, restaurant and business commerce. We should prioritize events like this and continue to develop more. It is important to have room in the city budget to assist in supporting these efforts.

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?

The basic needs of the city are and should be non-partisan and I would approach it from this angle. I would engage in a collaborative manner and emphasize need and priority. I would seek common ground on issues and facilitate a favorable outcome.