

SETH WALSH

Candidate for City Council – Responses

The Chamber reserves the right to publish responses to this questionnaire across various channels in the process of informing our members and the public about the election.

- 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?**

In my time with the College Hill Community Urban Redevelopment Corporation I found the city's process for developing and giving resources for all 52 neighborhoods was flawed. While I led over \$85 million in redevelopment, it was in large part due to the force of will by the community and it was clear to me our vision for the whole City could not be achieved with this relaxed approach. I am on council to deliver for all neighborhoods and to keep Cincinnati growing, vibrant, and safe.

- 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?**
 - b. Do you support the creation of the Office of Strategic Growth?**
 - c. Are there recommendations you believe the City should not pursue?**

I not only do support the creation of the Office of Strategic Growth, I have attempted to create it through the budget process only to be rejected by the City Manager. I do not believe we need to pursue the earnings tax increase for the City. I believe that the Futures Commission can be implemented through (1) creating an ad hoc committee to evaluate the Waters Works proposal; (2) creating an ad hoc committee to evaluate the Pension proposal; (3) having the Mayor and City Council unite in creating the Office of Strategic Growth; and (4) create the Future's Commission Pipeline funding for economic growth, utilizing the waterfall funding and offsetting any need for an earnings tax increase. This last point is a partnership with CDF and the Port and something Jeff Cramerding and I are actively working on.

- 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?**

- a. I reject the premise that the City budget is constrained. This last year alone we had a \$10 million deficit, yet we are trending toward another \$65 million surplus without ARPA money. What we have is faulty projections that are manipulated downward to suggest a larger gap than I believe is appropriate. The belief that we do not have the funding to prioritize growth is a dangerous mindset for our City and one we must fight against. My priorities while on Council have been to honor union contracts and ensure we take care of all public safety and public work endeavors and then to prioritize as much economic development as we possibly can. During my time on Council, I have made a reputation for being one of the few Councilmembers who knows the budget and I make budget change recommendations each year of over \$5 million each (this past year over \$12 million) to achieve these goals.
- 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?**
 - a. No, we do not need to increase the earning tax to fund all of the city services.
- 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. Yes
 - b. **Do you support continuing to fund the Affordable Housing Leverage Fund with the City's waterfall?**
 - i. Yes
 - c. **What actions would you take to support job growth and site development?**
 - i. Jeff Cramerding and I are working to prioritize the creation of the "Cincinnati Future's Economic Development" pipeline that prioritizes excess funding from the waterfall for site acquisition and gap closure in partnership with CDF and the Port that I believe will be critical for supporting job growth and continued site development.
- 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?**
 - a. Absolutely, keeping Cincinnati growing is key to a successful future in Cincinnati. I am in favor of utilizing TIFs, aba, and other tax incentives to bring development and jobs to our city. We sit on over \$150 million in our TIFs with \$50 million coming in each year. They must be utilized to the maximum extent to jump start

our City's growth and make us a city on the leading edge of growth in the country. I believe bonding is also a tremendously underutilized tool at the city, especially with TIFs.

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?

- a. Yes. I voted for it proudly. I am already working with members of the Chamber to discuss the next step for the next term that includes minimum lot size cuts and single stair policy changes, among others.

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?

- i. We need to be inviting developers to build in Cincinnati. This means streamlining the building permit and plan review process. Ensuring inspections happen quickly and do not take weeks to occur. Additionally, we need to continue to improve upon the zoning, planning and building codes to ensure that Cincinnati is pro-development while still being safe. Finally, we need to continue to fund the Cincinnati Futures Economic Development Pipeline so that when developments do hit roadblocks council has the resources to push a project across the finish line.

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

- c. Yes this is a vote that I regret having made in the first place.

d. 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?

- e. I believe TIFs are critical for our growth. As mentioned above, we have \$150 million in our TIFs right now and we have an additional \$50 million a year coming into our TIFs. We need to bond these TIFs because that could be \$500 million immediately for development, growth, site readiness, etc. We need to show the world that Cincinnati is open for business and create policies around our TIF to make them the bucket of first thought to pursue aggressive growth in Cincinnati.

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

- g. I want us to admit that our permitting and development process is deeply flawed in the first place. Then start at scratch and reimagine how we can do it to be as seamless as we can. I think our problem has been that we continue to try to rebuild on a faulty foundation. During the pandemic, Chick-fil-a was called in to figure out how to create a drive through covid vaccinations. A similar mentality should be taken to improving permitting and development.

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?

- a. We must first become unapologetically pro-growth. We cannot simply type into a questionnaire that we are pro-growth and then every time a "controversial" development comes along tell the press and community we are undecided. I learned this lesson during Hyde Park. Why was I pretending to not know where I stood? So I announced my decision after meeting the community and being unswayed to why I should be opposed. If we as leaders are too afraid to be pro-growth, it will be impossible to make our City pro-growth. Shifting the narrative on Cincinnati being pro-growth begins at the top.

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?

- a. Development incentives are critical to the success and future of Cincinnati. I believe we need to unlock millions of dollars, not just through TIF but through excess waterfall funds, to ensure that incentives exist across the board to spur development. Projects that bring high quality jobs to Cincinnati are the most deserving of these credits.

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?

- a. Council can play a vital role in retaining our college students in Cincinnati. We have several top notch universities creating the workers of tomorrow. As team Cincinnati we need to ensure that there are entry level jobs, housing at every price point, and a vibrant community life is happening. This ensures our students stay in Cincinnati and offer their talents and resources to the development of our city.

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?

- a. Safety is a pillar of my platform. The city needs to deliver on the basic public services every city offers (police, fire, & trash pickup). We need to ensure we are investing and utilizing common sense to accomplish these tasks. In the short term we need to combat the narrative that Cincinnati is not a safe community. We do this by taking accountability for the actions that occurred over the summer and pivoting to show the actions we have taken to limit these issues. In the long term we need to look at the data and measure the actions we are taking to see if they are working. When incidents do occur they need to be resolved quickly, professionally, and with leadership from council.

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

- a. I have prioritized conversations with business leaders during my time on Council and will continue to do so. I believe the next conversation needs to be to lean on your expertise to better identify new incentives to spur business growth and retention in Cincinnati. I come with a background on community development and use that to lead on community development. I need your expertise to lead on business growth.

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

- a. Our small businesses are a key part of what makes Cincinnati a great place to live. We need to deliver on the promises of local government before extending services. This means excelling at collecting trash, plowing the roads, and ensuring our first responders are equipped to deal with issues that may occur.

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?

- a. We are great at launching small businesses but are terrible at providing the support after we launch them. I have worked closely with BlaCk Coffee the last three years to help keep them afloat through hard times. One area in particular I think we need to improve for small businesses is parking for their employees. If it's unclear, it can result in employees taking critical parking spaces that prevent customers coming in or it can result in employees leaving because they do not feel safe or are spending too much money. I think the City needs to step in and create a program for service workers to park (if not using bus rapid transit).

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?

- a. I am a big believer in big events for Cincinnati and I want to launch an events incubator. My proposal is to take the 15.5% increase in the ticket tax due to the loophole closing and set it aside to fund special events like BLINK every year. And 10% of that set aside should go into an incubator for future large events to grow.

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?

- a. The City needs to work with partners from federal, state, and county to ensure large investments are coming to Cincinnati. The current level of partisanship in our politics is detrimental to these efforts but do not stop them. I am a problem solver before partisan politico and am hopeful we can continue to collaborate with our partners to do what is best for Cincinnati. This means I need to take meetings with republicans, acknowledge their influence, and share the spotlight when we are able to deliver for Cincinnati.