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Revitalizing Cincinnati's Economic Foundation by Right Sizing Local City Government

by C.E. Winburn, M.Ed.

In December 2009, I recommended to the Mayor and City Council to cut \$17 million from the city administration and in December 2010 I made similar recommendations totaling \$28 million. Sadly, I did not get one council member to support me in making the tough decision to "right size" our local city government and create a structurally balanced budget either year.

I have only been on city council for the past thirteen months compared to some of my colleagues who have been on here for six years. The truth is that this council has failed for six straight years to achieve a structurally balanced city budget while continuing to proudly brag about how they have voted against the budget over the last few years. I guess they thought this was a solution to the budget problem. This action only kicks the can of delay further down the road.

I do commend Council Members Jeff Berding and Chris Bortz for their hard work and diligence to get five votes on their proposals in an attempt to get a balanced budget. Many of the reductions are due to their work.

In the end, I could not support imposing a trash tax, however to balance the 2011 budget. With no solution supported by a majority of Council, that left eight members of City Council looking to me for leadership. It appeared that several council members had cut me out of the original budget process in the beginning since I was an adamant supporter of core city services such as police, fire and sanitation

When the other eight council members' budget agreements fell apart, I was the last resort. If I had not voted to support the last minute 2011 budget plan, it would have been worse and another news story that would have read, "Winburn and Council lay off police and fire fighters, close five health clinics, eight recreation centers, layoff a total of 700 employees with a bi-weekly or monthly garbage pick up." That was unacceptable to me.

As we approach the 2012 budget, I am recommending that we consider fourteen strategies right now to revitalize the Cincinnati economic foundation by right sizing our local city government in order of the following priorities:

Establish Mayor and City Council Leadership Agenda

1. The Mayor and City Council should develop a 7-year declared vision business plan for the city outlining goals, outcomes, and strategies for revitalizing the city's economy. We must act now in appointing a blue ribbon committee to look at restructuring our entire city administration from top to bottom as it relates to efficiency. What is irresponsible is that the entire City Council has no leadership agenda to address long term budget issues.

COMMITTEES

Chairman: Job Creation | **Member:** Budget and Finance · Livable Communities · Public Safety · Strategic Growth

Create Citywide Job Plan

2. Cincinnati must develop a comprehensive plan to attract business and create jobs with a view towards creating new revenue for the general fund. We should begin by reforming the Small Business Enterprise Program with view toward expanding our tax base and creating jobs. As chair of the Job Creation Committee, I'm working on such a plan. I have created five Roundtables comprised of area business and community leaders who are providing input in the following areas:
 - a. Business Retention and Recruitment: Support current businesses and recruit new ones to Cincinnati
 - b. Small Business Development: Streamlining of residential and commercial construction
 - c. Workforce Development and Job Training: Identify and evaluate the effectiveness of current programs for adults and youth in Cincinnati
 - d. Small Business Enterprise Program Compliance: Determine best urban practices for implementation and effective SBE compliance with a view toward growing small businesses and creating thousands of new jobs
 - e. Cincinnati Dream Neighborhoods: Explore the feasibility of creating a neighborhood recovery and economic initiative in helping to revitalize all 52 neighborhoods

Cut City Manager's Administration

3. The Mayor and City Council should direct and mandate that the City Manager cut 10% or approximately \$34 million of his administration costs relative to the general fund budget each year. This process is simply called reducing government spending by right sizing the local government. The reality is we have fewer people living in Cincinnati and this means we have fewer people who need city services.

Consolidate County and City Services

4. The Mayor and City Council should look at consolidation of various county and city services such as 9-1-1 services, parks, and building and inspection departments in order to create savings and efficiencies wherever possible.

7 year Commitment to Fill Fewer Job Vacancies

5. The Mayor and City Council should request that the City Manager make a commitment right now to fill no more than 33% of all city job vacancies in any given year for the next seven years, with the exception for vacancies of sworn police officers and fire fighters, which shall be filled at a rate of no more than 10% during this time.

This will right size the city administration and result in millions of dollars in savings from attritions across the board. For example, by the end of 2011 the Cincinnati Police Department will lose approximately 100 officers resulting in \$6.4 million in savings. Similarly, the Cincinnati Fire Department will lose approximately 75 positions resulting in savings of \$8 million. These combined reductions of \$14.4 million for personnel and administrative costs in just police and fire will help balance the 2012 budget and beyond.

Additionally, during the 2010 budget discussions, it was suggested that the Administration ask the FOP to consider accepting no wage increase to their new contract in June 2011. For each 1% of wage increase forfeited, this could mean approximate savings of nearly \$2 million for in the 2011 and 2012 biennial budget. The City Administration should also consider these options during the CODE contract discussions in March 2011.

Use Managed Competition in Key Departments

6. The Mayor and City Council should apply managed competition to city departments such as Enterprise Technology Solutions, Transportation and Engineering and the Division of Purchasing.

Eliminate Department and Division Heads and Consolidate City Departments

7. The Mayor and City Council should eliminate some department heads, division heads, and top-level positions by consolidating various city departments and divisions. Government waste and fat is usually at the top of any company.

Eliminate Ordinances that Restrict Business

8. The Mayor and City Council should eliminate all ordinances, regulations, and red tape that restrict residential and commercial development so they can grow effective business in Cincinnati by creating jobs and expanding our tax base to help the general fund.

Support a City Charter Amendment for a Strong Executive Mayor

9. The Mayor and City Council should support a city charter amendment for a strong executive mayor, eliminating the city manager form of government which has been part of the problem in retaining this big bloated city bureaucracy wasting millions of taxpayer dollars.

Support a City Charter Amendment for Two Four-Year Staggered Terms for City Council

10. The Mayor and City Council should support a city charter amendment for two four-year staggered terms for city council. This will limit city council from campaigning every other year so that they can focus on a mayoral and city council leadership agenda in helping to rebuild our economic foundation.

Scrap the Streetcar

11. The Mayor and City Council should abandon the streetcar before it undermines our city's bonding capacity. Getting rid of the streetcar will open up \$64 million in new bonding capacity so that we can use the capital funds in attracting new businesses to Cincinnati and promoting economic development and GO Cincinnati.

Fix the Cincinnati Retirement System

12. The Mayor and City Council must find creative ways to resolve the devastating unfunded liability in the Cincinnati Retirement System. We may have to begin to sell off city assets or leverage city assets as a way to help save CRS. We may even have to appeal to the Ohio General Assembly requesting a special law to use city capital assets for leverage to fund CRS. The fund is a ticking time bomb and something must be done **now**.

Implement a Tax Amnesty Program

13. The City Manager should implement an aggressive tax amnesty program to help stabilize the 2011 and 2012 budget. This will generate a sizable infusion of cash from a revenue stream that previously has been unproductive.

Avoid Raising Taxes

14. The Mayor and City Council must not attempt to raise the earnings income tax, promote a property tax increase, or impose a trash tax, all of which I adamantly oppose.

I think City Council has at least twelve strategies that we can use to help right size our local government, reduce waste, and duplication of city services with a view towards a balanced budget in 2012. I still say we should love one another as a City Council and work together to improve the quality of life for all Cincinnatians.