

OPINION *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Opinion: Time to overhaul Cincinnati's budget process

Bill Frost Opinion contributor

Published 11:15 a.m. ET Jun. 25, 2020

One thing that has become clear about our city of Cincinnati budget process is that it is not working. It's time to overhaul the process to manage the budget like a large enterprise.

Budgeting needs to be continuous, with quarterly reports to the public.

We must create a team looking for revenue and spending improvements year round.

The effective policy that any one part of the budget is untouchable needs to end.

EVERY department must benchmark its mission and methods against global best practices.

Public review and input must be much more than 12 days before an up or down vote.

Regular independent reviews are critical.

Now that our city funding is unencumbered by transport after November and March ballots, our 1.8% earnings tax rate versus up to 2.5% in other major Ohio cities illustrates our funding problems. If we want to stay at 1.8%, Cincinnati needs to find other sources of income, particularly if we want to continue to attract investment in the city with tax abatements as we have in recent years.

Finally, the potential to eliminate duplication of services between the city and Hamilton County, plus neighboring townships needs another hard look. A 2007 independent study for the city by Management Partners Inc. showed numerous options for elimination of waste and sharing of services. Many of these, like MSD, Recycling, Parks, etc., are all regularly discussed – others are just low-hanging fruit. This study needs to be refreshed, and a commitment made by City Council and throughout our region to bite the bullet and finally complete this waste elimination program.

In these turbulent times, when we are making tough decisions about funding safety, let's also make sure we are doing the absolute best that can be done with the tax dollars in our region.

Bill Frost is a Charter Committee board member and candidate for Cincinnati City Council in 2021. Twitter: @frostforcinc.