

# EDITORIAL: City must fight for intangibles

Oct. 26, 2013 |

*Come Nov. 5, voters will elect a new mayor and a Cincinnati City Council whose members will, for the first time, serve four years instead of two. The longer terms should give them time to forget about campaigning and focus on governing. That task will require persistence, creativity and collaboration, along with the ability to ignore distractions and stay focused on the big priorities.*

More jobs, more residents and a balanced budget are quantifiable outcomes that, over the last three days, we've urged Cincinnati's new mayor and council to prioritize.

But city leaders need to work on intangibles, too. Even as officials fund the pension plan and recruit new businesses, they must make efforts to create a city that's attractive and livable. People need reasons to come to Cincinnati, whether for an evening, a few years or forever.

Cincinnati must balance the nuts and bolts of removing blight and improving infrastructure with supporting amenities like good libraries and parks. In an era of dwindling resources, sometimes the most important role for city government is as a facilitator, making connections and drawing attention to efforts that benefit the city.

- **Combat blight.** Too many neighborhoods simply look rundown, with litter-strewn sidewalks and dilapidated housing. While funding for cleaning up private lots has been cut, council candidate Kevin Flynn proposes a good idea for placing liens and assessments on nuisance properties, then using that money to pay community councils to clean them up. The councils have a direct interest in cleaning up the properties, and they'd be able to use the money for other neighborhood projects. Combating blight also will require continuing to fund the building and health inspectors that catch problems early on, before they become bigger problems.

- **Repair infrastructure.** Like combating blight, fixing infrastructure isn't glamorous. In an older city like Cincinnati, though, it's essential that the storm drains work and the streets are free of potholes. Years ago, the Smale Commission examined the city's infrastructure and made recommendations on its upkeep and a way to fund it. Those promises need to be kept. Like pension payments, infrastructure spending is an easy item to scrimp on when times are tough. But like the pension, shortchanging infrastructure will eventually catch up with us. Do it now.

- **Safety (and schools) first.** People cite crime and schools as two primary reasons not to live in the city. While these concerns are often baseless, City Hall needs to combat the perception and the reality whenever possible. Cincinnati's police department has made huge strides since the 2001 riots. While no one wants a mayor or council members meddling regularly in police

matters, we do need leadership that recognizes safety is a top concern for residents and visitors. Work with the new police chief, Jeffrey Blackwell, to make streets safer and prevent crime. **Cincinnati Public Schools has a great model for student and community improvement in its Community Learning Centers. City Hall should promote their use and create alliances with schools, because good schools and strong neighborhoods go hand in hand.**

- **Keep building on the success of Downtown and Over-the-Rhine.** This campaign season has featured lots of grumbling about how the neighborhoods have suffered as the Central Business District and adjacent neighborhood has revitalized. This overlooks the miracle that's happened there, especially in Over-the-Rhine. Successful cities and regions need a thriving urban core. Even as the city seeks to redevelop other neighborhoods, make sure Downtown and Over-the-Rhine continue their momentum.

- **Support festivals and community-wide events.** In 2010, the city of Austin reaped about \$50 million in tax revenue from cultural tourism, including music and arts festivals. Cincinnati has a proud history of arts and cultural festivals, from the May Festival to the Macy's Jazz Festival, Bunbury and the MidPoint Music Festival, as well as one-off events like Lumenocity. They bring visitors, money, great publicity and potential new residents as well. While the city shouldn't be underwriting festivals, they need to help organizers with introductions, logistics and other details. Making sure the city is a good host will enable this sector to grow.

- **Partner with the city's anchor institutions.** Cincinnati has world-class parks, libraries, arts organizations and other institutions that raise the city's quality of life. Make sure those institutions are getting what they need from City Hall. As with cultural tourism, it doesn't need to be funding. Streamlining the process for them to fulfill their goals and involving them in planning for neighborhood revitalization will benefit everyone.

- **Help people realize their great ideas.** We've urged city officials to make it easier for people with business ideas to open up shop in the city, but that extends beyond just businesses. Neighborhoods know what they need to thrive, and city government can provide support, whether it's help from the planning department or data about neighborhood retail needs. It's not about solving problems from the top down; it's about giving residents, neighborhoods, businesses and nonprofits the tools they need. Engaging them is the surest way to move Cincinnati forward. ■