



Mark Jeffreys Councilmember

On February 2, 2026, Cincinnati City Council began the annual review of the City Manager with a multi-phase process, similar to the one we used two years ago in the last review.

PHASE ONE: The City Manager presented her Year-End review in December 2025 – a self-evaluation based on the previously reviewed and aligned categories. A copy of that presentation is attached.

PHASE TWO: Council passed a motion that laid out the 10 categories to review the City Manager, which were consistent with the categories from the last few reviews.

The first five categories reflect the budget priorities:

1. Public Safety & Health
2. Growing Economic Opportunities
3. Thriving Neighborhoods
4. Fiscal Stability
5. Excellent & Equitable Service Delivery

The second five categories reflect Council priorities:

6. Management: recruitment, retention, employee morale, major hires, culture of “yes and”, remove bottlenecks
7. Leadership: ability to prioritize, delegate and lead
8. Government Efficiencies: remove unnecessary bureaucracy, move projects forward, use data-driven approach
9. Relationship and Collaboration with Council, Mayor and Community Partners
10. Communication Skills: Internal and External

PHASE THREE: Councilmembers engaged with internal and external stakeholders to provide information feedback to consider for their own review of the City Manager.

PHASE FOUR: Council considered the City Manager evaluation. Council unanimously voted to enter into executive session on February 2nd to consider the employment and compensation of an employee and to ask the City Manager questions after her self-evaluation.

PHASE FIVE: Council unanimously voted to enter into executive session on February 9th to consider the employment and compensation of an employee and to do their own internal review of the City Manager across those 10 categories.

PHASE SIX: Council unanimously voted to enter into executive session on March 3 for a third time to consider the employment and compensation of an employee and have a discussion with the City Manager on Council's evaluation.

PHASE SEVEN: Council publicly releases and discusses the final City Manager review in committee. The review organizes each of the ten categories into four segments:

1. Successes – areas City Manager exceeded expectations
2. Challenges – areas City Manager did not meet expectations
3. Opportunities – areas to improve to exceed expectations
4. Metrics – key performance indicators to track for successive reviews

City Manager Performance Review – February/March 2026

SUMMARY: Sheryl Long is the right person to lead the City of Cincinnati as City Manager. Ms. Long has provided continuity in city government over the past few years with significant progress across departments in performance-based management and a focus on improving service delivery as well as fiscal health. There will always be challenges for any City Manager, and the mark of a good leader is one that continuously improves and “ups their game” in the face of those challenges – City Manager Long has proven that she will always do just that. When there were challenges with the snow removal in January 2025, she course-corrected with new leadership in charge of Department of Public Services, which has seen significant improvement based on recent snow emergencies. When she faced a tough public safety environment at Government Square and in the Summer 2025, she worked closely with City Council and the Mayor to determine the resources needed to turn it around – and she did. When she faced a budget deficit with the exhaustion of federal ARPA dollars, she stepped up to make reductions while still maintaining core services and investments in public safety and delivering a structurally balanced budget.

The City Manager has acknowledged an opportunity for improvement in solidifying a more robust human resource performance improvement process for her leadership team, which will ensure a better alignment with expectations when performance issues arise. The City Manager also plans to implement a Crisis Communications framework to ensure that we have a more formal process for responding to crises such as the brawl in the Summer of 2025. Additionally, she has plans to put in place a single-point-of-contact to deploy Cincy on Track rail dollars as efficiently and effectively as possible.

For its part, Council recognizes that we need to provide the City Manager the resources needed in order to continue this process of continuous improvement. Council also recognizes that it must provide clarity around budget priorities, realistic expectations around timing of report motions, and a commitment to keeping the City Manager up-to-date on new initiatives so there are no surprises for her.

1. PUBLIC SAFETY & HEALTH

- a) **Successes:** Launched Achieving Change Together (ACT) for Cincy – the city’s holistic, comprehensive, community-driven plan to reduce gun violence reducing overall shootings by 12.5% in the first year including implementing the \$5.4M in summer investment to reduce violence downtown and around Government Square. Launched the hospital-based program to reduce recidivism and Rec @ Night to make sure kids had productive outlets in the summer months along with pools remaining open. Continued to invest in police and fire new recruit classes, which helped the fire department reach full complement for the first time in years and the police department to get closer to full complement. Expanded the PIVOT team to an 8-person team for more targeted crime reduction. Continued to build a stronger Emergency Communication Center (ECC) including exceeding statewide 911 call-answering standards.
- b) **Challenges:** Having a crisis communications plan, which the City Manager proactively has been developing, will help build trust and confidence when there is a crisis that the city is doing everything possible to keep its citizens safe with clear leadership from her, the ACMs and the entire administration.
- c) **Opportunities:** The persistence of youth violence reinforces the need for continued vigilance across local government, non-profit and community partners, which will require close collaboration with City Council and the Mayor to tackle.

- d) Metrics: reduction in violent crime vs previous year and 3-year average, implementation of crisis communications strategy and plan, communication schedule to share ongoing projects and strategies with the public.

2. GROWING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

- a) Successes: Under the manager's leadership, Cincinnati has led the country in office-to-residential conversions in the past few years. This past year, under her leadership, the city has advanced a significant number of major projects including: Convention Center Hotel, Findlay Community Center, Fourth & Walnut Center Hotel Conversion, The Avant Downtown, FC Cincinnati North Campus and Talbert House Crisis Center. Added a strong pipeline of affordable units in coordination with the Cincinnati Development Fund. Launched the Office of Opportunity to grow wealth including medical debt relief, introducing the CityWise Housing Platform, Career Pathways, continued to advance Access to Counsel, etc. The City Manager also successfully negotiated an extension of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts with Cincinnati Public Schools, which will provide certainty in development.
- b) Challenges: Economic development is critical to growing our tax base in the future and needs to be a continued focus. Housing production is growing, but still below where it needs to be in order to bring down housing costs, which is a result of a lot of external factors. To expedite housing and growth in the city overall, the manager is working to launch the Office of Strategic Growth, which will be a critical building block for spurring that growth.
- c) Opportunities: With the Office of Strategic Growth, the manager has the opportunity to streamline the bureaucracy involved in getting approval for development and leveraging TIF districts more effectively in partnership with City Council. Continued partnership with external stakeholders in the development and business community is going to be critical to determine how to continue to unlock growth.
- d) Metrics: Development performance indicators are better than other peer cities, housing pipelines and permits issued, problem solving around bottlenecks.

3. THRIVING NEIGHBORHOODS

- a) Successes: The city's Quality of Life team has taken a more proactive role in using all legal tools to combat bad actors whether it be through legal action such as Vinebrook, Williamsburg, Vision & Beyond, etc. Advanced pedestrian safety in neighborhoods that in part resulted in 2x fewer pedestrian deaths than the previous year. Continued to advance the Green Cincinnati plan strategic actions including launching the Center Hill Solar Farm, which will provide the equivalent power of 1,200 homes. Greater Cincinnati Water Works continues to be a national model, replacing 1,640 lead service lines to reduce health risk. B&I also has a national model in their B&I Academy, which is training more qualified inspectors. The manager has also done a great job at getting the administration out into neighborhoods for service days and to hear from residents.
- b) Challenges: The manager's team has put great effort to improve the city's 311 system, which still has more opportunity to be fully effective not just as a one-off reporting of incidents but

as a systemic way to identify issues and resolve them. Issues around blighted properties and litter in certain neighborhoods is particularly an issue that needs to be addressed.

- c) **Opportunities:** Outline a clear plan for step-changing 311 with key metrics and milestones for leveraging it not only reactively to respond to issues but more proactively to address systemic issues. Clear, regular reporting to council through FYI memos on progress against blighted property issues and litter issues.
- d) **Metrics:** 311 communications plan deployed, key performance indicators around blighted properties compared to previous years.

4. FISCAL STABILITY

- a. **Successes:** Since taking over in her role, the City Manager has stepchanged the level of discipline in the budget process across departments by working with the Office of Performance and Data Analytics – through performance-based budgeting. The fact that Cincinnati’s AA bond rating was affirmed reflects this strong fiscal management. Each department has clear performance indicators and a Green/Yellow/Red honest assessment of how well they are doing – all of which did not exist four years ago. That is a sign of a healthy culture when her teams feel comfortable being honest about their own performance in public. The City Manager also has a mindset of optimizing revenue (e.g. admissions tax, parking revenue, etc.) and a drive toward efficiency (e.g. fleet maintenance compliance now has an 88% vs 90% goal). In the past year, she made the difficult, but necessary, step in the budget process to propose a 2% reduction. She has also outlined the right long-term Cincy on Track plan for deploying railroad dollars to tackle our deferred maintenance needs. Finally, under her administration, the City of Cincinnati continues to pursue grants aggressively, which has been a point of leverage for city dollars.
- b. **Challenges:** Given headwinds of deficits in the next few years, budget presentations and communications to Council will need to include details on critical needs to reaching goals and KPIs even in the face of reductions. Deployment of the Cincy on Track dollars faster is another key challenge – building up the organizational capacity to ensure those dollars are effectively and efficiently gotten out the door.
- c. **Opportunities:** There’s an opportunity to have a single-point-of-contact leader within the city manager’s office who is quarterbacking the deployment of Cincy on Track dollars including updating City Council quarterly on progress in building the organizational capacity to put them in place. This is going to be critical in the next few months, which the manager agrees.
- d. **Metrics:** Bond rating, service delivery excellence despite reductions in budgets in the next year given projected deficits, deployment of Cincy of Track dollars.

5. EXCELLENT & EQUITABLE SERVICE DELIVERY

- a. **Successes:** The stepchange in the snow response over the past year is the clearest example of excellent service delivery – and it happened due to the manager’s leadership in modernizing the operations and being prepared. Police and fire service delivery remains strong in terms of response times vs benchmarks. Significant progress has been also made with modernizing and streamlining the procurement systems in the city as well as performance management

and community engagement. Finally, the launch of opt-in text messages for citizens has helped advance an improvement in service delivery.

- b. **Challenges:** The slow deployment of the railroad dollars has been disappointing due to organizational capacity to scale these projects more quickly than in the past. The manager is clear on the source of the challenge and has put together an action plan for expediting the deployment of Cincy on Track dollars. There still remain lags in responding to the more complex CSR requests with an opportunity for clearer follow-up, tracking and management of closed cases.
- c. **Opportunities:** With CSR requests, there continues to be an opportunity to ensure they are being addressed adequately and with speed. With Cincy on Track dollars, it would be helpful to have quarterly updates even with a FYI memo of how we are speeding up deployment of these dollars.
- d. **Metrics:** Getting % Cincy on Track spend year-to-date in line, using the Community Perception Survey as a guide for KPIs and focus areas, constituent responses to CSR requests and speed with which those are closed.

6. MANAGEMENT

- a. **Successes:** The City Manager's embrace of performance-based metrics is a stepchange in the management of city leadership. The City Manager completed all major collective bargaining agreements despite significant challenges. Deployment of the Strategic Initiative Execution Teams (SIET) program has been a key enabler of improving process mapping. Meetings with City Councilmembers to provide updates regularly on upcoming issues have been extremely helpful in improving communication with City Council and the administration. Updating Council on critical issues (e.g. snow response, public safety crisis information, etc.) has been helpful to keep City Council up to date.
- b. **Challenges:** With personnel challenges, the city manager is rightfully improving upon the HR processes for sharing performance challenges (i.e. performance improvement plan). This system is important not only for the employee but also for clear communication with the public. On public safety and the issues last summer, the City Manager has recognized the need for a Crisis Communication framework and has proactively put plans in place to shape that. One department had a \$1 million cost this past year, which the Director does not report to the City Manager as per the Administrative Code. In response, the City Manager rightfully is putting in place greater controls to ensure that directors report the need for more funding in advance of spending.
- c. **Opportunities:** During a crisis, especially when there are legal issues, while it may not be possible to provide details to the public, it is important for the City Manager to proactively face the media to answer whatever questions she is able to and provide reassurance as the leader of the city. She has done this in the past, and we encourage her to do more of it especially in a crisis situation.
- d. **Metrics:** Employee perception Survey (similar to the community perception survey) to keep the pulse on responses should be done annually and fed into this review next year.

7. LEADERSHIP

- a. **Successes:** The City Manager continues to step up as the city's leader. She is clearly respected by City Council and the Mayor and continues to strengthen relationships with external stakeholders whether it be residents, non-profit and business leaders or other important leaders in the city. She does a great job in recognizing employees through employee events including things like Rock the Block. She also continues to push a mindset among her team of "yes, and" and "what has to be true" – the idea of not immediately saying "no" but rather asking what factors need to happen in order to make something take place with data-driven decisions.
- b. **Challenges:** The City Manager is working on a Crisis Communications Response framework which will help better inform how she and the administration respond to a crisis such as the public safety one last summer. Even if there are clear guardrails – especially due to legal concerns – it may be challenging to speak extensively but still important for the public to see the CEO of the city say whatever can be said in those situations to steady the ship.
- c. **Opportunities:** The City Manager has been clear that she wants to continue to push decisions down – empowering her team to build more director-level capability. That is going to be critical for her and her top Assistant City Managers to prevent burnout.
- d. **Metrics:** Crisis Communication framework developed, employee survey feedback to measure burnout among leadership team.

8. GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCIES

- a. **Successes:** The City Manager has demonstrated through the years a data-driven approach to operating the city government and aiding in decision-making. SIET initiatives have increased interdepartmental collaboration, which is so critical to greater efficiency. She also has empowered departments to innovate and look for efficiencies especially in light of a 2% reduction this past fiscal year.
- b. **Challenges:** City Council continues to hear complaints about delays in contracts being signed and processes being inconsistent particularly between DCED and B&I. We continue to hear how difficult it is to do business in the city, which the external benchmarking study should help address.
- c. **Opportunities:** With significant deficits on the horizon in the next few years, exploring how to deliver excellent service with fewer resources is going to be a fact of life. The City Manager has shared that she is committed to using a data-driven approach across departments to drive efficiency with the support of City Council. That will be critical to track, monitor and course-correct where there are delays in contract signing, development approvals, etc. There is also an opportunity to implement several of the Futures Commission recommendations on which the administration has been working, including around Parks/Rec collaboration.
- d. **Metrics:** Service delivery across departments hit goals despite fewer resources, new/innovative ways to deliver services, implementation of more of the Futures Commission recommendations particularly relative to Parks/Rec and advancing conversations with Great Parks and other external stakeholders on efficiencies.

9. RELATIONSHIP WITH COUNCIL, MAYOR AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- a. **Successes:** The City Manager has strong relationships with City Council and the Mayor with clear communication not only in 1:1 meetings, but in phone/text communication when needed. The lines of communication are always open, and she is incredibly responsive. That includes pushing back on City Council when necessary if the administration has a different point of view than City Council. The City Manager should be commended for “bringing the city to the community” with increased presence in the neighborhoods. The City Manager and her administration also continue to build stronger relationships with other stakeholders whether it be in the non-profit or business community.
- b. **Challenges:** Some community stakeholders are frustrated with the lack of prioritization and implementation of major initiatives especially around the Futures Commission, which is on the Mayor and City Council as much as the administration. Having a clearer roadmap of how the city is pursuing some of those major initiatives will be important to communicate to the public going forward.
- c. **Opportunities:** The City Manager has made a concerted effort to give City Council a heads-up on issues with meetings with Councilmembers, proactive calls, etc. As a part of a Crisis Communication Framework, integrating how to keep council up-to-date on fast-moving issues will be a key part of that framework.
- d. **Metrics:** Formal feedback from external stakeholders should be included as a part of a 360 review of the City Manager going forward.

10. COMMUNICATION

- a. **Successes:** The emergency alert system that the City Manager implemented to keep city officials informed of issues has been very effective. She also has done a great job when there are high-profile issues happening (e.g. a shooting, a severe fire, a major snow emergency, etc.) of keeping City Council up-to-date to provide those real-time updates. Additionally, the implementation of meetings with Councilmembers has been helpful to provide a forum for the administration to brief City Councilmembers on important issues.
- b. **Challenges:** The aforementioned Crisis Communication Framework, which is being developed, has been a challenge that is now being addressed.
- c. **Opportunities:** Continuing to use the FYI memos to provide updates to City Council is going to be another tool to leverage along with meetings with Councilmembers. Additionally, the City Manager getting in front of cameras immediately and often when there is a crisis to answer whatever questions she can will be another important step as she has done to communicate to citizens what she can at that given moment.
- d. **Metrics:** Regularly scheduled meetings with Councilmembers, increased use of FYI memos, deployment of a Crisis Communications Framework.

CONCLUSION: Council is fully supportive of City Manager Sheryl Long as the leader of this City. The highest priorities should be tackling the challenges in public safety, economic development and government efficiencies to ensure we have a stable financial picture with strong service delivery in the coming years. Council is committed to providing the City Manager with the resources needed to help

coming years. Council is committed to providing the City Manager with the resources needed to help continue making the changes she is making and support her with the mindset of continuous improvement. An increase in the City Manager's salary was not discussed, per the City Manager's request. She advised Council that due to budget cuts she will forgo an increase in her salary even if recommended by City Council.