

2008 Hamilton County Agenda for Growth and Positive Change

Presented by Hamilton County Commission President Todd Portune

Wednesday January 16, 2008

After spending a year, 2007, largely getting the County's house in order and paving the way to provide the foundation for growth, change and positive development, 2008 represents an exciting opportunity in the history of Hamilton County to take dramatic steps ahead. 2008 represents the beginning of a new era of collaboration and cooperation that grows and rebuilds Hamilton County providing an exciting and positive future for the people who arrive here in order to live, work and visit.

The budget goals, recently adopted by the Board, outline three primary areas of attention for this year. They are:

1. Keep the County's fiscal house in order and stabilize our budget, revenue streams and reserves;
2. Continue the progress made in all areas of public safety and in particular, complete the necessary reforms and advances that are required to solve our corrections space and criminal justice problems; and
3. Attend to all of the things that affect quality of life and quality of experience in the County.

In each of these three areas we must devote our time and attention. I propose that we, through cooperation across party lines and with collaboration among all governmental bodies locally and regionally and with our State and Federal Delegations, develop a three-pronged policy, legislative and programmatic agenda for the County.

I. Keeping the County's Fiscal House in Order.

Maintaining good fiscal health for Hamilton County involves much more than watching the pennies that we spend. While fiscal discipline is one critical, primary element of good fiscal stewardship for the County, it is not the only measure of our success and cannot comprise the only element of our effort. Equally important is maintaining a growing and healthy tax base; reducing the demands for public service by improving the quality of life and livelihoods of others; strategically investing in those businesses and other measures that create new business and employment opportunities in the County and that generate greater returns on our investments and reducing the costs of goods and services through smart and effective decision making and via developing partnerships and alliances with other governmental bodies in ways that increase returns or reduce costs. To succeed in this area, we must:

1. Develop a strategy for business growth and investment by **convening and empowering the County Cabinet of Economic Advisors** (first meeting scheduled for Monday, January 29, 2008). The Cabinet must be given requisite staff and consulting support such that the advisors may present an aggressive strategy of strategic investments that are guaranteed to increase the County's earnings on investments and that are guaranteed to create a positive growth climate for business expansion, retention, startup and relocation in those businesses that generate sales tax revenues and put real estate to a higher and more productive use.

2. **Reformat the existing Cincinnati-Hamilton County Port Development Authority** in a manner that provides greater powers and authority to the body allowing it to function in a manner similar to other full-powered authorities such as Cuyahoga and Lucas County, Ohio. The Port Development Authority could negotiate operating agreements in conjunction with terminals along the Ohio River and/or for the use of certain rail facilities that afford the Port additional revenue and economic development potential. The new Port has the opportunity to partner with Ohio Treasurer Richard Cordray under new Linked Deposit Business Retention and Support Programs that the Treasurer is developing specifically for the purpose of assisting full-bodied Port Authorities.

3. **Targeting poverty and unemployment** needs to be a priority in 2008. We will make declaring a war on poverty a critical element of keeping the county's fiscal house in order because the result of our initiatives should produce greater earnings potential and business growth in the county that in turn provides more of the tax receipts that sustain county operations and by increasing earnings power we reduce demands for service. We will attack poverty, hunger unemployment and underemployment by:
 - a.) Aggressively **implementing the Worker Readiness Programs and Small Business Contracting and Development elements** created under the Banks Riverfront Redevelopment Program.
 - b.) As an adjunct to rounding out the workforce and business development under the Banks, we must **adopt the Banks Development Policies for contracting and employment as policy for the County** in ways that require the introduction of the same elements into other contracting that the County is engaged in.
 - c.) We further target unemployment and poverty via **convening a summit on poverty joint with the City of Cincinnati and other non-profit, civic and social service agencies**, in Hamilton County that is designed to result in a compact executed by the Summit participants, the local bodies of government involved and business leadership including without limitation the African American, Hispanic and Greater Cincinnati Chambers of Commerce.
 - d.) Further addressing the issues of poverty and unemployment in the region requires that we look to develop new economic policy for the

County that **requires including elements supplier contracting as a part of the County's overall policy and empowers the County's Small Business Office with the legislative support and the staff and financial support that will permit the certification of qualified supplier contractors** to occur and linkages to then be made under the direction of the County's' Small Business Office.

- e.) We must **replicate the unrestricted County Economic Development Fund** that was discontinued two years ago and that provides last dollars in to support individual development projects, business district revitalizations, housing initiatives and other development matters that greatly benefit the work of the First Suburbs Consortium aimed at eliminating blight, restoring property to its higher and best use and sponsoring business district revitalization.
4. Maintaining good fiscal health also **requires that the taxes and fees paid by County residents be appropriate for the scope of services provided** but also **not be at levels that are unaffordable** and/or that are similarly not established at levels greater than required given the specific demands for services that are necessary. Essential elements of understanding the operation of the existing tax and fee structure on County operations, the delivery of services and the burden borne by individuals and businesses, we must **charge the County Tax Levy Review Commission with the duty and responsibility to conduct such analysis** and to report back to the Board in time that we can utilize the report and recommendations around budget deliberations for 2009 and beyond.
5. Such an effort further requires specific to the Metropolitan Sewer District that we continue the parallel tracks of **pressing for more cost efficient alternatives to meet the Department of Justice requirements in the Consent Decree** order that governs the scope of work and the County's legal responsibility, and Hamilton County taking the lead in **developing a coalition of similarly affected jurisdictions around the country and urging federal legislative intervention from the administration and/or Congress to reduce the local burden and share** of that burden by local parties elevating the Federal Government's responsibility in these areas and resulting in contributions from the same that in turn reduce the local contributions and make more affordable the rate increases that we will have to seek in the future in order to pay for the full scope of work.
6. In order to maintain good fiscal discipline we must be certain that budgets are adhered to. In county government with so many functions run by independently elected officials that becomes a challenge. Accordingly we must **develop a budget policy that has elected official buy-in and agreement** that covers yearly budgets, expenditures and revenues in ways that afford the Board certainty that budget decisions will be followed.
7. Fiscal discipline does not only happen at year end budget time. We must maintain vigilance on our spending and constantly look for ways to reduce.

Accordingly I propose **monthly budget status meetings that require reports from all departments and offices of county government on adherence to the approved budget** and that discuss ways in which costs are being reduced or evaluated by each. In addition the **commodities purchases for which as much as \$5 Million might be saved must be discussed monthly** with reports on progress toward reductions.

8. Maintaining good fiscal health and discipline requires that the County, in addition to adhering to and enforcing the aggressive budget reserve policy that we adopted in 2007, mandates that we **develop still further policies that limit expenditures and that work to grow revenues**. Accordingly, we must target as outcomes for the end of 2008;
 - a.) Being able to **deposit into the County Reserve the additional money necessary to bring the County Reserve above 5% of ongoing General Fund expenditures** and therefore within acceptable ranges according to generally accepted County principles; and
 - b.) That we **target**, [either in the form of reductions in costs through an overview of County operations or the ongoing work through the shared services committee, or an increase in revenues due to the specific investments made by the County], **through the combination of reductions in costs, or growth in revenues, to exceed the inflationary costs of General Fund expenditures on an annual basis**.
9. Bringing the Riverfront Stadium fund into structural balance both short and long term [the fund presently reflects deficit spending beginning in 2013 with a total deficit approximating \$191 Million]. Such an initiative will require developing a plan of action that either reduces expenses or grows revenues in favor of the benefit of the county. The effort could involve **the pursuit of naming rights sales** for the stadium, the field, the plaza areas or other elements of the stadium; and **developing a stadium entertainment authority** for the purpose of marketing the use of Paul Brown Stadium in ways that will regularly generate revenue to the benefit of the County. Our goal should be to embark on a path that brings us in structural and ongoing riverfront fund budget balance beginning in 2013.
10. **Reinstating the County Home Improvement and Small Business Improvement linked deposit program** that today have generated over \$20 Million in private money fixing up the ageing housing and business properties in the county.
11. Successfully **concluding the reforms at Hamilton County Job & Family Services** and the response to both the Auditor of State and Ohio Department of Job & Family Services Audit of the County's work from July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2004. Accomplishing this goal also means generating audited financial reports in doing so in ways that result in **protecting the County General Fund** from and

against any findings for recovery and demonstrating the County's position and the corrective actions taken by the County among other things, resulting in their being no harm, as alleged, and certainly none that jeopardize the County General Fund.

12. **Concluding the County negotiations with Moody's** in ways that demonstrate that the County through the work undertaken in 2007 and through the work that is identified in this agenda, addressed by a collaborative, cooperative and bipartisan approach with the County not being distracted by inflammatory partisan considerations, works **to retain the County's current bond rating** by Moody's.

II. Continue the progress made in all areas of public safety and in particular, complete the necessary reforms and advances that are required to solve our corrections space and criminal justice problems

Reducing crime countywide via the introduction of a multiple community-based enhanced law enforcement and high visibility presence involving:

1. **Utilizing the former Over-The-Rhine patrol deputies** retained by the Sheriff's Office and assigned into communities where the elected leadership has asked for assistance and local law enforcement has agreed to cooperate with the Sheriff's Deputies;
2. **Expanding community-based probation services** into a minimum of four new communities or neighborhoods throughout Hamilton County including within the City of Cincinnati.
3. Under the authority of **County Emergency Management convening an umbrella of support and organization that is designed to create dual Citizen Corps/Citizens on Patrol units operating in every community or precinct as deemed necessary by both the County Homeland Security Chief and by local law enforcement.** The units would be designed to function in the dual role of providing the weekly or daily additional eyes and visibility for traditional public safety purposes of fighting crime, preventing fires and responding to emergency medical needs, but also being in place and on duty to look out for any such other public safety issues that arise under the guise of Homeland Security and as attention may be called to bear upon specific known issues.
4. Fulfilling our Public Safety responsibilities will also require that we continue the work begun in 2007 that targets the county's inmate and criminal population with approaches that are both proactive and reactive but that result in reductions in the recidivism rates we experience and that result in transforming individual behaviors in ways that allow criminals to become productive members of our community. To that end we must:
 - a.) **maintain the work of the Hamilton County Criminal Justice Commission** as staffed by the Vera Institute and adopt an implementation process for their recommendations.
 - b.) Included must be **expanding the current Intake and Assessment Program** that results in every inmate being thoroughly assessed upon intake and directed as appropriate to the proper facility, community based or county run, and that the necessary wrap-around services be provided.
 - c.) Additionally, we must find a way to **fully develop and implement the proposed Community Certificate of Rehabilitation** program that

permits an individual to receive the help needed until completion of the required program elements whether incarcerated or not.

d.) I also propose that we look to **introducing Restitution and Restorative Justice as sentencing alternatives** and ask the CJC to bring forward best practices in the field in order that the county judiciary and adult probation may be fully informed and prepared to implement such an approach.

e.) I propose that we also **convene a summit of Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol Addiction professionals** and providers to consider the application of incremental community based treatment using incremental Levy dollars earmarked in a manner designed to expand availability of services.

5. Our efforts also require the completion of our work to **develop the right kind of facilities in use in our Corrections Division** of the Sheriff's Department that account for the current overcrowding situation and the pending loss of the Queensgate Facility. We have an **economical opportunity still at hand with the donated Sara Lee property in Camp Washington**. Prior to embarking on any new construction program we must utilize the data developed by the Vera Institute in a way that ensures any facility or facilities are constructed to address the needs of our population. We immediately are impressed with the **need of secure facilities for an inmate population that presents higher security risks** than can be safely accommodated at Queensgate and impressed also that **the poor physical condition of Queensgate argues in favor of removing all use of that facility as soon as possible** and preferably prior to the date of the county's first, or second year renewal period.. At the same time we are impressed by the **need for the development of a facility that permits a Work-Release or Day-Release component** given the high rate of employment among county jail inmates. To properly construct such a facility[ies] requires:

a.) a **change in Ohio Regulatory standards** and as such part of our work and policy or legislative agenda for the year must be interacting with the Governor and state legislative leadership to obtain revised standards of construction that are geared to our situation and reality of funding.

b.) Moreover, the legislative or policy agenda must also include consideration of **amnesty for old outstanding warrants of minor, non-violent criminal activity**. Most of those cases end up dismissed anyway while costing our community greatly in the form of crowded corrections facilities and unnecessary cost to the system, to law enforcement and to the community through lost productivity and lost employment.

c.) On Saturday February 16, 2008, the City of Cincinnati will be convening a Neighborhood Summit at which I have been asked to present on the next steps in the wake of Issue 27's defeat. I propose the presentation of a complete plan by then that addressed all issues.

6. **Preserving the Peace and Security of the Public** extends beyond traditional public safety issues of crimes, fires and medical emergencies. In these days of the separate wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Global War on Terror, we are affected in Hamilton County by the cost of service of our men and women in uniform and through our statutory responsibilities to help veterans and their families through the county Veterans' Services Commission. The needs of area veterans and their families have not been thoroughly assessed nor provided for. Neither have we completed our countywide responsibility in Homeland Security via county Emergency Management. Both areas of county responsibility must receive priority attention in 2008. As such I am proposing that we:

- a) Complete the first Grant Funded phase of our emergency warning system repair by the start of the severe weather season to ensure that, at a minimum, we have **provided for full 100% coverage via audible warning signals in the entire populated areas of the county**, and that we continue the planning and grant development efforts for the further system enhancements such as Reverse 911 capability; voice messaging; geographic targeting; flash flood warning; rail line and spur monitoring and the like;
- b) **Complete a home readiness program** in conjunction with local retailers that results in yearend home readiness and neighborhood/community preparedness;
- c) **Convene community public hearings on the state of veterans and their families** to develop a thorough needs assessment that identifies the appropriate level of county VSC assistance required and allows us to approach our state and federal delegations for assistance in favor of veterans via state and federal support;
- d) As an element of assessing the state of veterans, **obtain a true reading on the population of homeless veterans and their needs; utilizing a portion of the incremental VSC allocation in favor of the Joseph House for Veterans** and its programmatic efforts of providing safe temporary shelter and immediate emergency needs;
- e) Convening a summit with Drake Hospital officials, the Friends of Drake, veterans, the Veterans Administration and Department of Defense about the opportunity of **continuing the turnaround of Drake Hospital by becoming a Center of Excellence in the Mid-West for long term therapeutic and rehabilitative care for returning veterans who have sustained debilitating injuries in combat** or otherwise affecting head and brain trauma, severe spinal cord injury or loss of limb.

III, Attend to all of the things that affect quality of life and quality of experience in the County.

It is a simple fact that people will choose to live, work or visit elsewhere if the quality of the experience in our county is substandard. In difficult budget times that stark reality places a heavy burden upon the county. It demands of us an approach that is creative, collaborative and cooperative. It requires full time and priority attention as opposed to the philosophy of some which is to reduce what we do.

The measures of Quality of Life are showing up in the many community and regional reports of key community indicators. They include our rates of people in poverty; children who are hungry; number of homes in foreclosure and the rate at which babies die before their first birthday. They include the performance levels of our schools and students, including the numbers that graduate and those who drop out. Performance measures include the carbon footprints we leave, the energy we use, waste or conserve and the cleanliness of our streets, waterways, parks and neighborhoods. They include the livability of our homes and the welcoming nature, or not of our buildings and public spaces. They include the availability, accessibility and affordability of our entertainment and culture. And they include the stability of the family unit, together with the standard of living conditions and the economic levels of attainment.

Those measures of the overall quality of our collective human experience in Hamilton County are the standards by which our effort must be rated and guide the policy and programmatic Agenda for the county in 2008. Accordingly, I propose that we:

1. **Immediately initiate an aggressive Environmental Agenda** that;
 - a.) Commits Hamilton County to reducing its use of global warming emissions by a minimum of 2% per year; and
 - b.) Partners with other major institutions in leading the way toward the use of alternate energy, “Green” design, purchase and construction in county operations and projects;
 - c.) Commits to the full utilization of environmentally sensitive construction in the Metropolitan Sewer District improvements;
 - d.) Develops protocols for the use of water permeable and absorbing materials in roadway construction;
 - e.) Develops a countywide plan for the construction of green roofs in public facilities and that incentivizes and encourages the same with homeowners and in the private sector;
 - f.) Strategically partners with the State of Ohio to position Hamilton County and the SW Ohio region to fully benefit from the Governor’s initiatives in making alternate energy and “Green” initiatives a pillar of economic development; support the efforts at developing a true regional transportation system designed to introduce multi-modal transportation options into regular use in the county;

- g.) Embraces the ongoing work of the Solid Waste District that is offering new recycling opportunities for traditional municipal solid waste and for organics and food products in the stated effort at moving Hamilton County toward becoming a “Zero Waste” community; and
- h.) Creating a major development or project in conjunction with key partners in the private sector [i.e. the Homebuilders] that highlights the benefits and opportunities of pro-environmental development such as a new county “Homerama” that is designed and built using recycled products and fosters the daily use of recycled materials in traditional home operations [“Recyclarama”?] or that involves an entire neighborhood built to sustain the homes solely with the use of sustainable, renewable and alternative energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydroelectric, etc.

2. Continue and **expand the Collaboration with Local School Districts** around an Agenda of Mutual Interest by:

- a.) Prioritizing county aid and assistance, including after-school programming for those school jurisdictions that reflect the poorest student achievement and carry that initiative to school districts other than Cincinnati Public Schools;
- b.) Schedule a series of Bi-annual or quarterly meetings with school districts to discuss issues of mutual concern; shared services; shared purchasing; pooling of contracts for services, materials, energy, and health care, and to discuss the potential for pooled investments to maximize returns;
- c.) Develop a Compact for the use of incremental collected property tax revenues in favor of schools arising out of the county’s sale of delinquent tax lien certificates for the purpose of introducing new and helpful services and assistance such as the Children First Plan program into multiple new schools determined by need, all of which work to improve children’s health, mental health and address factors that work to prevent dropping out of school;
- d.) Assess the potential for shared contracting in transportation in ways that benefit the schools and local communities. [i.e. explore the potential for shared use of school busses in providing transit for students to and from school and school related events and to serve as community shuttles for citizens either to get to and from school buildings being used as community resources, or to serve as shuttles to benefit residents getting to and from places of need and interest such as shopping, business appointments, groceries, etc.]

3. **Making Certain that the Public’s Health and Access to Health Care remain Priorities for Attention** and that specific steps are taken to **stabilize and augment Access to Health Care** and to **reduce specific Disease or Conditional concerns such as Infant Mortality and SIDS** by:

- a.) Enrolling all Medicaid eligible Hamilton County citizens in the program through the full implementation of the county's existing Medicaid outreach and enrollment program, begun in 2007, and partnering with others to do the same;
- b.) Providing financial support from incremental health care revenues realized through the sale of delinquent tax lien certificates in support of expanded public health and clinical health delivery including without limitation assisting the county, city and non-profit health clinics; expanding the hours of operation and services available at the Lincoln Heights Health Center; and supporting the various campaigns of the Center for Closing the Gap;
- c.) Targeting specific public health nuisances and utilizing existing and newly realized revenues for strategic approaches designed to attack bed bug infestation and to reduce exposures to, and expand treatment required for, lead exposure and poisoning;
- d.) Fully supporting the Infant Mortality Reduction Task Force and its operations that are designed to reduce the county's Infant Mortality rate to below the national average within five years

4. **Advancing the County's and the Region's Public**

Transportation Options and conveying a legitimate sense of hope and promise that Public Transit will be a priority service offered to the citizens of the region by:

- a.) Completing the outreach with our regional partners and developing the governance framework for a true regional transportation authority that is both regionally governed and funded and that includes the outline for growth of the system in terms of coverage and modality of service available;
- b.) Complete all work necessary to allow for visible work on the Eastern Corridor multimodal transportation and land use plan to commence including arranging for demonstration project experience along the Oasis Line of a commuter DMU experience;
- c.) Commence construction and confirm the deadline for completion of the temporary Loveland to downtown bike trail;
- d.) Secure the confirmed inclusion of Cincinnati and Hamilton County in the ORDC High Speed Rail project across Ohio and in the MRRI from Cincinnati to Indianapolis and secure commitment from the City of Cincinnati as to the preferred Inter-City rail station location;
- e.) Commence negotiations with Montgomery County officials designed to develop a compact around creating a regional Joint Economic Development District that includes as a principal element the development of a high speed rail connector between Dayton and Cincinnati.

5. Positioning Hamilton County to **Provide for competitive, affordable and livable housing** that is an attractive alternative to housing being constructed around the county; and introducing needed reforms to lending and foreclosure practices that eliminate the blight in neighborhoods and predatory practices of others. The needs of our citizens and the interests of the county's 49 jurisdictions make developing a progressive housing agenda a critical element in our comprehensive strategy aimed at retaining businesses and population by making the county an attractive place to be.
- a.) We can begin by developing a Land Banking program in conjunction with local jurisdictions, and especially the First Suburbs Consortium that will allow for the acquisition of blighted properties, vacant and unproductive land in ways that can lead to the efficient and economical construction of new housing; renovation or conversion of existing housing; and development of in-fill, or new neighborhood housing.
 - b.) Meetings with the regional office of the Ohio Attorney General have identified the opportunity to create a new Consumer Protection arm of the AG's office in collaboration with the County that will provide Homeowner assistance and protection against predatory lending and unscrupulous foreclosure practices. It can also become a proactive vehicle of government that targets the property flippers and predators that prey upon senior citizens, homeowners beset with personal tragedy and upon those who lack the ability to fully comprehend the fleecing practices that are underway.
 - c.) We must lobby the Ohio General Assembly to adopt legislation permitting counties to use unallocated DTAC [Delinquent Tax Accounting and Collection] dollars that are not used by the Treasurer or Prosecutor but that can become the foundation of a fund for land banking and other needed reforms.
 - d.) In order to generate a booming housing market, I propose the Board engage the HomeBuilders Association for the purpose of developing a Compact aimed at constructing a Homerama style development in the county every year and to commit toward constructing an incremental 1000 new homes each year above current construction levels.
 - e.) During the 2007 budget process we funded a model program designed to begin attacking the growing foreclosure problem in Hamilton County. This effort provided homeowner assistance; individual counseling about foreclosure issuers, assistance to combat individual predatory lending practices and the like.
 - f.) We expanded the county's HIP program during 2007 for individual home improvement, small business property improvement and condo conversions. Our efforts proved successful as total loans exceeded 2000 and private funding leveraged topped \$20 Million to make the county's housing stock more attractive. While the program was

temporarily suspended at the start of this year due to budget limitations we must re-start the program quickly and with emphasis to assist in making our aged housing stock attractive and competitive.

- g.) We adopted model policy provisions in MSD that will produce a better climate for the development of new and affordable housing in the county. There are additional policy changes that should be considered that will promote new housing, or business development and retention in Hamilton County.

6. **Completing the Various Reforms begun in the County's**

Human Services Delivery to make the experience more beneficial for the customers we serve and to make the process more efficient and economical in favor of the taxpayers of the county, and safe on behalf of the individual clients we serve. County Job & Family Services has come under a lot of fire this past year in its Foster Care and Adoption Services programs and in its general performance and service delivery. We instituted model oversight provisions in the area of Foster care to better ensure that our child placements are only to homes with responsible adults and safe environments. We have named a new Director of the Department and empowered her with a sweeping series of reform proposals designed to address all deficiencies in the department. The completion of those reforms will become the focus of priority attention over the next year. In addition we must:

- a.) Conclude the ODJFS audit; update all accounting processes within the department and embark upon a new collaborative and cooperative relationship with ODJFS as our partner in the delivery of needed human services.
- b.) Continue the recruitment of Foster Parents and Adoptive Parents such that we have an adequate roster of qualified adults to assist in this most necessary service;
- c.) Adopt new policies regarding kinship and respite care that provide the support Foster and Adoptive parents need to be successful and that eliminate the disparities in support of related care providers in order that the policy of first trying to keep children within the broad family structure can be supported and become a reality;
- d.) Complete the development of the "Benefits Bank" that allows for those in need of assistance and care to be able to quickly determine what is available; whether they are qualified to receive; and results in speedier eligibility determinations and provision of assistance.

IV. Conclusion

All in all this is a comprehensive Agenda filled with hope, excitement and promise. Multiple Partners around the region are waiting for Hamilton County to take the initiative and lead the way on numerous fronts. We have the capability of doing so. The only question is whether we have the will. I believe we do and am excited about the possibilities for our success. With my colleagues' capable assistance and with the support and prayers of our citizens we will succeed.

Respectfully submitted,

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