RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING THE
2015 AND 2016 POLICY AGENDA OF THE HAMILTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY THE BOARD:

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners establishes the policy direction necessary to administer the 2015 budget; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners recognizes the need for long-term strategies and policy direction to impact the County budget for the upcoming and future years; and

WHEREAS, a two-year policy agenda enables concentration on key priorities which shall be the focus of County Administration for implementation and further development of the County budget; and

WHEREAS, the 2015-2016 Policy Agenda continues and affirms many of the prior policy initiatives of the Board; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners supports the attached policy agenda related to the mission of the 2015 budget and the development of the 2016 budget.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of County Commissioners of Hamilton County, Ohio, approves the attached 2015-2016 Policy Agenda of the Board of Commissioners.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the Board certify copies of this resolution to Christian Sigman, County Administrator; to all Elected Officials of Hamilton County; and to all County department heads under the authority of the Board of Commissioners.

ADOPTED at a regularly adjourned meeting of the Board of County Commissioners of Hamilton County, Ohio this 4th day of March, 2015.

Mr. Hartmann _____ Mr. Monzel _____ Mr. Portune _____

CERTIFICATE OF CLERK

IT IS HEREBY CERTIFIED that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of a resolution adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, Hamilton County, Ohio, in session this 4th day of March, 2015.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the official seal of the Office of County Commissioners, Hamilton County, Ohio, this 4th day of March, 2015.

_____
Jacqueline Panioto, Clerk
Hamilton County Commissioners
Hamilton County, Ohio

Hamilton County

Board of County Commissioners

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March 4, 2015

2015-2016 Policy Agenda for Hamilton County, Ohio

Commissioner Greg Hartmann
President, Hamilton County Board of Commissioners

Hamilton County has weathered the worst of the economic downturn over the past five years, and is poised for success over the next several years. The County's balance sheet is stronger now than it has been in over a decade, due in large part to our focus on providing core services to residents in a cost-effective manner, while limiting the burden on taxpayers. The shared sacrifice by the various County elected officials and our workforce has been critical to Hamilton County's rebound and progress.

As we move forward in 2015 and 2016, the County should continue on the path to economic growth by prioritizing key investments in initiatives and policies that are delivering results, while capitalizing on our stabilized budgetary position to prudently invest in new strategies for success. The Board will continue to work with Administration to focus on fiscal management of the General Fund and capital budgets, as well as identify funding priorities within those budgets to foster economic development and address needs within specific County departments and functions.

The next two years will not be without challenges, and it is incumbent upon the Board of Commissioners to also focus on addressing those issues that will affect the County's long-term growth and fiscal health. Additionally, we have a responsibility to the families of Hamilton County to support policies and initiatives that will mitigate the impact of some of our community's most pressing issues.

I look forward to implementing the policy priorities in this document to ensure continued success for Hamilton County in the years ahead.

Strong Fiscal Stewardship

Hands-On Approach to Departmental Budgets

After years of General Fund budgets balanced through large cuts to virtually all County departments, many departments have faced challenges in presenting a balanced budget during the 2015 budget process due to depleted restricted funds and deferred costs that must be funded over the next two years. During the first quarter of 2015 and throughout the year, County Administration and the budget office should work closely with those departments requiring assistance to stay within their approved 2015 General Fund budget allocation.

Of particular focus will be the Sheriff's Department, due to the department's increased spending over its allocated budget in previous years, and the likelihood that its represented personnel will receive employment agreements with compensation increases. The County budget office should work closely with the Sheriff's Department in the first quarter of 2015 to identify operational and capital expenditures that will likely put the department over budget, and develop a plan to address these costs.

Targeted Capital Investments

Several County departments face significant capital expenditures that have been deferred due to the challenging budgets over the past five years. In 2015, the County will begin prioritizing and making targeted capital investments to ensure we continue to provide top-notch service to County residents and taxpayers.

Specifically, upgrades of the jail management and records management systems at the Justice Center, referenced as significantly lacking in effectiveness in the Sheriff's independent audit and in the state's inspection of the Justice Center, will be addressed this year, as well as some incremental capital repairs and upgrades at the Courthouse, Public Defender's office, Recorder's office, County Facilities, and the Communications Center; and planned Board of Elections technology upgrades (including e-poll books) in preparation for the 2016 presidential election.

Shared Services

Local governments have a responsibility to ensure the delivery of services to residents is as cost-effective and efficient as possible. Hamilton County currently collaborates and shares services with the local municipalities and townships within the County, as well as neighboring counties and the state. However, the identification of opportunities to partner with other jurisdictions for the delivery of services should continue to be a priority in 2015 and 2016.

The creation of the joint City-County Shared Services Committee with the City of Cincinnati in November 2014 will facilitate ongoing discussion between City and County leadership on opportunities to collaborate on services for residents. In 2015, Commissioners and County Administration will engage City leadership on small-scale partnerships, such as shared management of the County and City's dual 800MHz radio and computer-aided dispatching systems, an agreement for County fire hydrant maintenance within the City, and an agreement for Hamilton County Public Health to administer medical gas permitting and inspection for facilities within the City.

The County will also engage City leadership on the issue of consolidation of County and City municipal prosecution functions as allowed by the Ohio Revised Code, which could save taxpayer money by eliminating duplicate jobs.

911 Emergency Communications

The 911 Emergency Communications System is a critical public safety function here in Hamilton County. The County Communications Center provides exemplary service to 105 Police, Fire and EMS agencies. The current funding model is no longer sustainable. Efforts will continue in 2015 to evaluate the funding mechanism(s) for this function, turning from just a charge to jurisdictions and general fund subsidy, to a more equitable hybrid of funding solutions that can help limit the burden on local municipalities. In 2015, the County was forced to increase the detail rate to local municipalities by 5%, and in the next two years the County is facing a necessary capital upgrade in order to keep our public safety radio system in working order.

Investing in Our County Workforce

The County will continue to prioritize the development and support of its workforce. In 2013, the County began the process of instituting wellness programming and transparency initiatives to aid County employees in their healthcare decisions and to improve the delivery of health benefits to the workforce. These efforts will continue in 2015 to implement wellness incentives based on the results of the voluntary employee health screenings.

Consistent with the previous two years, County Administration will closely monitor the budget throughout the year to evaluate the ability to provide mid-year compensation adjustments to employees. Administration should also engage in a process to evaluate pay ranges of departments with key job classes that have fallen behind market, or that face issues with attracting or retaining high-quality employees.

Economic Development

Investments in Partners Delivering Results

Continued investment of County resources into our economic development partners is critical to the economic growth of Hamilton County. In 2015 and 2016, the County will maintain its funding of partners Port Authority, the Hamilton County Development Company (HCDC) and REDI Cincinnati, as well as evaluate the need and ability to increase these investments based on results generated. Specifically, in 2015, the County will fulfill its commitment to the Port Authority to seed a Bond Fund to leverage other resources for larger-scale economic development in the County.

The County will also continue its commitment in 2015 and 2016 to the Land Bank, an innovative solution to help redevelop and revitalize neighborhoods across the County under the management of the Port Authority. Utilizing Moving Ohio Forward funding, the Land Bank has demolished 725 blighted properties since 2013, and is also engaged in a targeted neighborhood strategy for the focused revitalization of communities in the County.

Supporting Economic Growth in the County's Municipalities

This year the County will prioritize funding to assist communities in the 49 various townships, cities and villages in Hamilton County. HCDC will begin work on the implementation of the County's Five-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The approved budget includes funding for business mentoring to entrepreneurs and assistance with commercial district marketing and infrastructure enhancements that will help businesses thrive and grow. In 2015, several municipalities in the County will also receive approximately $2.1 million in community development block grants to improve and maintain their streets, landscape, public facilities and critical services.

2015 will be the first year the County will begin providing funding support to grow tourism and visitors in Hamilton County, outside of the Sharonville Convention Center and the downtown Cincinnati USA CVB. In addition to the funding the County provides to these entities for marketing and promotion of our region through the Transit Occupancy Tax (TOT), the County will also allocate up to $300,000 in capital support from TOT proceeds to eligible projects in communities that improve the attraction of conventions, events and visitors.

Continued Success at The Banks

The Banks Project, a joint City-County development project on the riverfront, has seen more and more success over the past few years, Last year, the City and the County celebrated the announcement that GE's new Global Operations Center will be located at The Banks, a $90 million investment that will land 1,800 jobs in Hamilton County and Cincinnati.

Since 2005, the County has invested $33.5 million with the City in building the parking garages and infrastructure at The Banks, resulting in $255 million in private infrastructure investment – not to mention the economic impact by turning the undeveloped riverfront into a thriving development for residential, retail, dining and office tenants. Work will continue at The Banks over the next two years, including preparation for the 2015 All Star Game, the start of a hotel development and the partnership with the Cincinnati Parks Board to continue the growth of the Smale Riverfront Park.

Addressing Long-Term Strategic Issues

Facilities Planning

Over the past year, the County has conducted a Master Space Study to determine our facilities needs. Since 2008, the County has decreased 1,500 employee positions, requiring less space for the County workforce. At the same time, we have specific facilities needs that we must address, including increased space for:

- the County's crime lab functions,
- the operations and storage for the County Board of Elections,
- the Public Defender's office, and more.

Last year, the County was offered a unique opportunity to take ownership of the former Mercy Health Mt. Airy hospital, a 500,000 square foot facility, to address some of these pressing space needs. The County has spent the last year evaluating this opportunity, as well as identifying the costs of operating our facilities and the future long-term maintenance needs.

While the Board has ultimately decided against the acquisition of the Mt. Airy property due to the large expense of renovation and build out, this discussion has opened up other opportunities for addressing the space needs of the County. In 2015, identifying a solution to the County's cramped and outdated crime lab facility will be a priority, with the Board considering several options. Solutions may include an alternative facility for the crime lab, a regional partnership with the state Bureau of Criminal Investigation to share some of these crime lab functions, or even a creative solution utilizing our existing County facilities.

The County will enter Phase III of the Master Space Study in 2015 to evaluate the opportunities for renovation, consolidation and capital investment in our existing County facilities.

Transportation

The County will continue through the work of the Transportation Improvement District (TID) and partners OKI and SORTA to serve as a convener for regional discussions on transportation and infrastructure needs, as well as transit opportunities that have broad community support. Regional priorities include the replacement of the Brent Spence Bridge and the Western Hills Viaduct, which is already receiving support from the County Engineer's office.

Over the past several years, the County has partnered with the state to study and plan for the Eastern Corridor program of projects. The state has indicated its plans to provide additional guidance to the County in the first half of 2015 as it relates to specific segments of the project and the County will continue efforts through the TID on this project based on the state's funding and support.

Metropolitan Sewer District

MSD is underway implementing a $3 billion program of projects over the next few decades, due to a federal consent decree from the U.S. EPA to upgrade our sewer system, improve water quality and reduce sewer overflows. In 2015 alone, MSD will embark on 35 projects within the consent decree, costing $211 million.

Implementing the consent decree program of projects has resulted in sewer rate increases year over year. This year, the County will continue efforts to minimize the impact of these increases to ratepayers through the County monitoring team and the empanelling of an Affordability Committee, made up of community stakeholders, sewer ratepayers and the business community.

Discussions will continue with the City of Cincinnati leadership to encourage collaboration and partnership to provide oversight and governance of MSD as we near the termination of the 50-year operating agreement between the County and the City.

Serving Those In Need

Impact Health Outcomes

The County serves an important role, through partnerships with local nonprofits and health entities, to impact local health outcomes. This work will continue in 2015 with support for Cradle Cincinnati to reduce the high infant mortality rate in Hamilton County and Cincinnati.

The County will also continue the efforts approved in 2014 to strategically address the issue of homelessness. A strong indicator of Hamilton County's economic health and the well-being of our residents is the level of poverty and homelessness in our community. With over 7,000 homeless individuals in Hamilton County in 2013 – including 750 veterans – it's critical we address the issue of homelessness in our communities through a comprehensive approach that addresses its root causes and supports homeless individuals as they transition to stable living.

Over the past year, the County has made significant commitments to help combat homelessness through a partnership with the supporters of the Homeless to Homes plan, including Strategies to End Homelessness (STEH). STEH, along with 3CDC and several other partners in the community, have been instrumental in the opening of four new shelters in downtown and Queensgate, including the new Drop Inn Center.

In 2014 the Board approved funding commitments within the County's Indigent Care Levy to provide healthcare services and case management to individuals right at the shelters – helping to diagnose and treat the underlying issues for homelessness in a safe setting. In addition, the Board will approve a funding plan this year for our federal community development dollars that will include significant support for housing assistance to help homeless individuals with transitioning to independent living after treatment. The County will continue to support the current efforts to support homeless individuals in our community, as well as the evolving efforts to address the issue of family homelessness in Hamilton County.

Address the Heroin Epidemic

In response to scourge of heroin abuse that has dramatically increased regionally in the past two years, the County should engage in efforts to put a laser focus on addressing this community health issue in 2015 by setting impactful, actionable goals to achieve this year. Initial specific actions should include:

- Working with the state Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections to institute best practices that can be implemented under Sheriff Neil's leadership in the Hamilton County Justice Center. Over 10,000 heroin addicts came through the Justice Center in 2014, including two heroin-related inmate deaths last year. New policies can help keep drugs out of the jail, and help treat inmates while they're within the walls of the Justice Center.

- Working with the existing treatment service providers within County levies to identify opportunities for funding changes or reprogramming to more specifically target and address treatment for heroin addiction. The County funds treatment and addiction services through the Mental Health Levy, in partnership with the Mental Health & Recovery Services Board, as well as the Family Services and Treatment Levy, and also funds healthcare services to residents through partners within the indigent care levy.

This effort will require collaboration and partnership across multiple stakeholder groups, including social services, education, law enforcement and public health entities. These targeted partnerships can help combat the pressing community issue of heroin abuse in Hamilton County.

CONCLUSION

The County's rebound from the economic downturn means we can continue taking a strategic, long-term perspective on several issues that will affect the future fiscal health of the County. Our plans in 2015 represent an opportunity to grow our investments in innovative and effective strategies for improving our local climate for job creation, while serving the taxpayers and residents in the 49 townships, cities and villages in Hamilton County.

Through continued policies that keep our fiscal house in order, grow our local economy, address the long-term issues affecting the County and support the most at-risk in our community, Hamilton County is poised for success in the years to come.