

# Focus 52 to spread up to \$180M across the city

Bonds, casino funds to aid neighborhoods

By Cindi Andrews  
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The city of Cincinnati is creating a fund to spark up to \$180 million for improvements in city neighborhoods.

Called Focus 52, it will be funded with bonds and \$4 million in casino revenues, according to city officials. It's a tool for the city to fulfill many of its goals in Plan Cincinnati, the new comprehensive plan that makes the health of neighborhood business districts a top city priority.

In addition, City Manager Milton Dohoney said in a memo to council, bringing more economic development to neighborhoods will help the city's bottom line. Plan Cincinnati calls for revitalized business districts to promote walkability and health, and battle gaps in access to healthful food.

"Growth is what we need, and we need to accelerate it to bring stability and more effi-

ciency into our operations," he said.

The first beneficiary of Focus 52 is Jordan Crossing: The city is giving the Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority \$6.2 million from the fund for the redevelopment of the Bond Hill property into a mix of retail, office and housing.

Madisonville, Walnut Hills and College Hill are also at the front of the line for money — in some cases as soon as mid-2013.

"They have spent many years acquiring property, putting together a coherent plan and have other resources that they can bring to the table," Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls said. "But they're just the beginning.

"The expectation is that the key for any neighborhood to access this money is that the project is transformative, leverages private investment, creates jobs and increases the value of surrounding properties," she said.

Economic Development Director Odis Jones said he expects at least \$3 of private investment for every \$1 from the city, ultimately generating up to \$180 million worth of community reinvestment.

Bonds will be purchased as needed to buy, build and renovate key properties in communities' business districts, Dohoney said. As properties are improved and sold, the proceeds will be reinvested. In addition, the city will have a new option for lending money on some projects through a U.S. Housing and Urban Development program.

Focus 52 received a warm reception from Livable Communities Committee members at a meeting Tuesday afternoon.

"People who come to us and say Over-the-Rhine is the only neighborhood that gets love, Downtown is the only neighborhood that gets love — Focus 52 is about showing our neighborhoods that we really do care, that we're willing to make these investments," said Councilwoman Yvette Simpson. "It's a good time for neighborhoods in the city of Cincinnati."

From: Peppers, Alex

Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2013 3:50 PM

I wanted to share with you the exciting news that is happening within the Department of City Planning and Buildings. In November, City Council adopted Plan Cincinnati, our City's new Comprehensive Plan, for the first time in over 30 years.

This Plan will act as a guide in the future development of Cincinnati and will be implemented by a collaboration of all groups and individuals here, including stakeholders, residents, developers, City staff, and many more. The Department of City Planning and Building's story was highlighted in the January 2013 edition of American Planning Association's Planning magazine which is a national publication. I will let you read the story below for yourself.

### Planning Makes a Comeback in Cincinnati

Ten years ago, Liz Blume was forced out of her job as head of Cincinnati's Department of Planning when the city disbanded the department and abandoned comprehensive planning. Ask Blume, now executive director of the Community Building Institute, if she could have imagined Cincinnati a decade later with a planning department and a progressive, forward-looking comprehensive plan - the first in 30 years. Her simple answer: "No."

But that is what the city has done. Cincinnati has returned to planning with a vengeance, reinstating the department (and adding buildings and inspections) five years ago. The department took a year to build and train a staff of 77, including nine planners, and then spent three years and countless hours in meetings with engaged stakeholders to craft a plan that city officials see as a model for a modern city.

Charles Graves, who became the new planning director in 2007, says that the plan resulted from a dynamic process encouraged by a steering committee of about 40 civic leaders and business leaders plus 400 community members who served on 12 working groups. "I think the community rallied around the idea they needed planners to work with them and articulate a vision for the city," says Graves, who returned to Cincinnati after management positions in planning departments in Baltimore, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., over two decades.

Plan Cincinnati, which was approved by the city council in November, focuses on the city's existing assets and embraces renewed urbanization. The goal is to attract more people into this city of nearly 300,000 – its population has dipped 41 percent since 1950 - by building on Cincinnati's parks and green space, compact layout, and amenities like culture and recreation.

Forty neighborhoods were identified to serve as centers of activity and categorized by whether they are walkable or need to become more so. The idea is to create

pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods of mixed uses. The plan calls for the adoption of a form-based code that will be applied at first to neighborhood commercial areas to make them denser and easier for pedestrians to get around in. But Graves says form-based codes can be applied to any area of two acres or more at the request of the community or the developer. The plan also embraces complete streets, and calls for a number of transportation initiatives, including the development of bike and car sharing and improvements in public transportation, notably the development of a streetcar project that will eventually link the downtown riverfront with the Uptown area, which includes the University of Cincinnati. The project is expected to be completed within three years.

"They did this in a comprehensive way," says Blume, who served on the plan's steering committee. "A lot of these contemporary planning best practices get applied in pilot situations or a particular project, but in this plan Cincinnati is really making an attempt to apply them broadly across the city, which I think is unusual and takes a lot of guts."

Graves notes that the city also is revising its unified development code and streamlining its development process, with help from a \$2.4 million Community Challenge Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "We're doing the two things at the same time which is unique," he says.

There is strong support for the plan among city officials. Graves notes that city manager Milton Dohoney Jr. said he wanted every pertinent city document imprinted with the Plan Cincinnati logo to show it met the plan's goals.

"The city does really want to implement this plan. We are not doing this as an exercise," Graves says. "I don't know any other city where the administration has said every ordinance, every capital project; every budget item has to be viewed as in compliance with the plan and has to be stamped."

- Jim Morrison

Morrison is a freelance writer in Norfolk, Virginia.