



September 10, 2026

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager *SM*

Subject: **2025 Community Perceptions Survey Follow-up**

Introduction

This memo provides follow-up analysis to the 2025 Community Perceptions Survey, building on results presented to Council on March 16, 2026. As discussed during that presentation, the survey showed notable declines in satisfaction across multiple measures compared to prior years. To provide additional context, the City conducted and reviewed three supplemental analyses to better understand the factors influencing resident perceptions and to inform ongoing improvement efforts.

- 1. Resident Focus Groups Conducted by the Cincinnati Innovation Team.** Four focus groups were conducted with 41 residents representing neighborhoods across all six survey zones. Discussions focused on the four service areas identified through ETC Institute's Importance-Satisfaction analysis as having the highest importance and lowest satisfaction ratings. As a result, the findings in Appendix I are intentionally centered on areas where residents believe improvement is needed and should be viewed as providing deeper insight into the City's opportunities and challenges rather than a comprehensive assessment of all City services.
- 2. Peer City Benchmark Comparisons Provided by ETC Institute.** In addition to the national, regional, and large-city benchmarks included in the survey report, ETC Institute prepared the analysis in Appendix II comparing Cincinnati with a similarly sized Midwest city and a smaller Ohio city. These comparisons provide additional context on how Cincinnati's results compare to comparable communities.
- 3. Cross-Tabulations of Survey Responses by Selected Demographic Characteristics.** ETC Institute prepared the analysis in Appendix III examining differences across geographic and demographic groups. OPDA reviewed a targeted subset of results and applied additional screening criteria to identify patterns that were both statistically significant and substantively meaningful, helping to determine whether perception shifts were concentrated within particular resident groups or areas of the city.

Executive Summary

Findings reinforce the primary areas of opportunity: maintenance of streets and infrastructure, police services, code enforcement, and communication.

- **Perception declines are broad-based.** Changes are not driven by any single demographic group, and while Cincinnati experienced declines, many overall quality of

life and community perception ratings remain comparable to peers. Focus group findings indicate residents remain highly engaged, with frustration reflecting high expectations rather than disengagement.

- **Visible conditions drive perceptions.** Focus group input highlights road and sidewalk quality, lighting, litter, and property maintenance as key drivers. Residents expressed attachment to their neighborhoods and often interpret uneven conditions as signals of inequitable investment across communities.
- **Infrastructure and communication are the most consistent gaps.** Infrastructure measures, particularly street conditions and lighting, lag behind the similarly sized Midwest peer city by double-digit margins. Communication measures are generally 4–6 percentage points lower. In focus groups, residents reported limited awareness of services and inconsistent follow-up, though the City’s snow removal GPS rollout was cited as a positive example of clear communication and visible improvement.
- **Police services performance is mixed.** Cincinnati meets or exceeds the similarly sized Midwest peer city on measures such as neighborhood safety (50% vs. 28%) and response times (38% vs. 30%). Focus groups highlight that safety perceptions are shaped by more than crime statistics, and residents emphasized the importance of community-oriented approaches and upstream supports such as mental health and youth services.
- **Code enforcement challenges are not unique to Cincinnati.** Satisfaction levels are generally in the mid-20% to mid-30% range, consistent with peer cities. Focus groups highlighted resident concerns about effectiveness of enforcement, particularly for repeat violations.
- **Survey Zone 1, which includes East Price Hill, West Price Hill, and nearby neighborhoods, shows a pattern of lower satisfaction compared to other zones.** Residents reported lower satisfaction across multiple measures in priority service areas, with differences typically in the range of 10 to 20 percentage points. Focus group insights provide additional context, with West Side perspectives differing from others, particularly in public safety.

Ongoing Efforts in Priority Service Areas

The City is engaged in ongoing efforts to address the priorities identified in the survey, with findings also informing departmental budgets and performance goals for Fiscal Year 2027. The City plans to administer the survey again in Fall 2026 to assess the effectiveness of these efforts.

- **Infrastructure:** The City is pursuing a goal to increase lane miles resurfaced by 20 percent this year. Efforts also include improving pothole response by investing in better materials, addressing larger deteriorated segments, and using detection technology. In addition, the City has streamlined processes to facilitate paving activities across all public construction projects, ensuring roads are addressed alongside active construction work.
- **Public Safety:** The Cincinnati Police Department is strengthening staffing, visibility, and community engagement through increased recruit class frequency, updated performance measures emphasizing officer presence, a partnership with Zencity on a quarterly resident feedback tool, and expansion of the drone program. The City is also advancing alternative response models, including 311 Community Responders and the Alternative Response to Crisis (ARC) program. Additionally, the Cincinnati Recreation Commission has increased the number of Rec@Nite locations from two to four to provide structured youth programming and support broader community safety efforts.

- **Code Enforcement:** The Inspector Academy is building a pipeline of qualified inspectors, with the next graduating class expected to bring the department to full staffing. Additional efforts include strengthening vacant property enforcement, investing in CAGIS Edge technology to improve tracking and coordination, advancing the Litter Working Group, and piloting a more proactive approach to the Private Lot Abatement Program (PLAP) in East Price Hill.
- **Communication:** The City is expanding efforts to engage residents and share information proactively through improved departmental communication plans and enhanced enterprise communications. Departmental efforts focus on increasing awareness of specific programs, services, and initiatives, while enterprise efforts emphasize more accessible, community-based engagement supported by Sprout Social, the Main Street office location, Rock the Block events, and an upgraded City website. Most importantly, the City has launched an expansion to CincyAlerts – now including additional alert types to share information more proactively. Residents can sign up at <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/ecc/alerts/>. The City has also launched a monthly public newsletter that is available through the CincyAlert “Newsletter” category to be delivered directly to community members’ email addresses and is also available on the website.

Attachments: Appendix I – Focus Group Findings
 Appendix II – Additional Benchmarking Comparisons
 Appendix III – Cross-Tabular Analysis Summary

cc: William “Billy” Weber, Assistant City Manager
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Appendix I

Focus Group Findings



City of Cincinnati Resident Survey Findings

Qualitative Findings from
Resident Focus Groups,
Cincinnati 2026

Cincinnati Innovation Team

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Background & Purpose

Every two years, the City of Cincinnati conducts a Community Perceptions Survey to evaluate resident satisfaction with City services, identify priorities for future investment, and benchmark performance against peer cities. Developed by the Office of Performance and Data Analytics (OPDA) in partnership with ETC Institute, the survey gathers resident feedback on a wide range of topics, including public safety, infrastructure, neighborhood services, and communications. The survey also helps City leadership understand which services residents believe should receive greater attention and investment in the years ahead.

While the 2025 Community Perceptions Survey provided valuable quantitative data on resident satisfaction and priorities, the results also raised important questions that could not be fully answered through survey responses alone. To better understand the experiences, perceptions, and motivations behind the data, OPDA partnered with the Cincinnati Innovation Team, a third-party grant-funded team housed within the City, to better understand resident perceptions. The Innovation Team was tasked with conducting a series of focus groups to explore key themes emerging from the survey and provide context that quantitative data alone could not capture.

In spring 2026, the Innovation Team facilitated four resident focus groups across multiple geographic zones of Cincinnati. Participants were recruited to represent a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences and included predominantly residents who had completed the Community Perceptions Survey in fall 2025. Most participants lived and worked within the city, keeping their neighborhood experiences and local observations at the center of the conversation. While participants were asked about the influence of broader state and national conditions, most separated that context from their assessment of Cincinnati, focusing instead on local performance, neighborhood-level conditions, and how the city compares to nearby suburbs and peer cities. Discussions explored resident perspectives on city services, communications, neighborhood conditions, infrastructure, transportation, public safety, and quality of life.

The purpose of this white paper is to build upon quantitative survey results and to provide deeper context and understanding of the resident experiences that shaped survey responses. The themes and insights presented throughout this report are intended to help City leaders better understand how residents experience City services, where trust is built or eroded, and how future investments may better align with community needs and expectations.

Executive Summary

The Cincinnati Innovation Team (i-Team) conducted focus groups in the Spring of 2026, engaging approximately 40 residents from neighborhoods across the city. The i-Team was tasked with organizing and facilitating focus group sessions and conducting thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected. The goal was to better understand how residents experience and perceive City services in their daily lives, and to surface the conditions, frustrations and opportunities that quantitative data alone cannot fully explain.

The i-Team implemented a thematic analysis approach using digital recordings and verbatim transcripts of each session, analyzed alongside field notes and moderator debriefs. Data was organized first by session and then synthesized across all four groups into overarching themes and subthemes. The findings presented in this report reflect the experiences and perspectives of residents representing a broad range of Cincinnati neighborhoods.

Qualitative data analysis revealed six overarching themes that cut across neighborhoods, income levels, and lived experiences.

Theme 1: Cincinnati Has Loyal Residents.

The overwhelming majority of participants described Cincinnati as home and expressed a genuine desire to stay, contribute, and see the city succeed. Frustration throughout the sessions reflected high expectations, not disengagement. Residents are already acting as civic partners, filling service gaps through their own effort and engaging city systems regularly. Though aware of broader national narratives, participants often set that context aside and grounded their assessments in what they see and experience in Cincinnati specifically. The city has a strong foundation to build from.

Theme 2: Litter, Vacant Lots, and Neglected Infrastructure Drive Resident Satisfaction.

Residents evaluate the city primarily through what they observe in their daily environment. Litter, illegal dumping, vacant and abandoned buildings, and uneven infrastructure maintenance are the most consistent drivers of neighborhood dissatisfaction. These conditions are also interpreted as signals of inequitable investment, with residents drawing sharp comparisons between well-maintained and neglected neighborhoods within the same city. Targeted, visible improvements in underserved areas represent one of the highest-leverage opportunities available to the city.

Theme 3: Public Safety Requires an Upstream Approach.

Residents brought nuanced views to the topic of safety, consistently distinguishing between direct experiences with crime and the broader conditions that shape how safe a neighborhood feels. Visible disorder, poor lighting, reckless driving, and mental health visibility were cited as safety concerns as frequently as crime itself. Community-oriented policing models were strongly preferred over generalized

patrol, and residents across all sessions called for greater investment in mental health response, youth programming, and family support as upstream safety infrastructure.

Theme 4: Code Enforcement Must Be Consistent and Consequential.

Residents described a wide gap between the city's enforcement tools and their on-the-ground effectiveness. Serial violators, particularly absentee landlords, absorb fines without changing behavior while residents who report problems sometimes receive citations themselves. At the same time, participants described 311 as a genuinely useful tool when it works well, and cited programs like Keep Cincinnati Beautiful and Port Authority lot conversions as models for what proactive, community-centered enforcement can look like.

Theme 5: Sidewalk and Pedestrian Infrastructure Signal Whether Neighborhoods Are Valued.

Sidewalks generated some of the strongest discussions around infrastructure responsibilities. Many participants were unsure where responsibility for maintenance, repairs, and ongoing upkeep falls, particularly when sidewalks, streets, curbs, and drainage systems appear interconnected. Residents expressed frustration when they were held accountable for infrastructure adjacent to their property while nearby public infrastructure remained in poor condition.

Theme 6: Residents Want Proactive, Multi-Source Communication

Residents want to hear from and be heard by the city. Across all four groups, residents described not knowing about city programs and services, 311 capabilities, policy changes, or planned improvements. Residents want timely, clear, and consistent communication that comes from multiple sources. Traditional communications, city leadership, specific departments, and in-person engagement staff each play a distinct role in keeping residents informed about decisions, services, and changes that affect their neighborhoods.

Across all six themes, a consistent throughline emerged: residents want follow-through, visible equity in service delivery, and honest communication about what the city is doing and why. Many residents are engaged, opinionated, and ready to be partners. The opportunity for the city is to meet that energy with the consistency and transparency residents are asking for.

Methodology

The Cincinnati i-Team implemented a thematic analysis approach to the qualitative data collected across four focus group sessions conducted between April 30 and May 19, 2026. Sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcribed data was analyzed alongside field notes constructed by the moderator of each focus group and notes extracted from post-session debriefs with staff. Data was initially organized by session and then synthesized across all four groups into overarching themes and subthemes for the purposes of this report.

Recruitment

Participant recruitment was designed to ensure geographic representation across Cincinnati's diverse neighborhoods and to capture a range of lived experiences with city services. ETC Institute, which administered the City of Cincinnati's community survey, distributed invitations to all residents who had completed the survey and expressed interest in further participation. These individuals were then contacted directly and scheduled for a focus group session.

To ensure each session reached its target of approximately ten participants and to broaden representation beyond residents already engaged in formal civic processes, the i-Team partnered with a community organizer to identify and recruit a small number of additional participants as needed.

Focus groups were organized by geographic zone, following the neighborhood groupings established by ETC Institute, to allow for place-based analysis and to create conditions where participants shared a common frame of reference around local conditions and city service experiences. The six zones and their corresponding neighborhoods are as follows:

Zone 1: East Price Hill, Lower Price Hill, Queensgate, Saylor Park, Riverside, Sedamsville, West Price Hill

Zone 2: Camp Washington, East Westwood, English Woods, Millvale, Mt. Airy, North Fairmount, South Cumminsville, South Fairmount, Villages at Roll Hill

Zone 3: Corryville, CUF, Downtown, Mt. Adams, Mt. Auburn, OTR, Pendleton, West End

Zone 4: Avondale, Clifton, East Walnut Hills, Evanston, North Avondale, Paddock Hills, Northside, Walnut Hills

Zone 5: Bond Hill, Carthage, Hartwell, Kennedy Heights, Pleasant Ridge, Roselawn, Spring Grove Village, Winton Hills

Zone 6: California, Columbia Tusculum, East End, Hyde Park, Linwood, Madisonville, Mt. Lookout, Mt. Washington, Oakley

Theme 1: Cincinnati Has Loyal Residents

Residents across all four focus groups expressed genuine pride in their neighborhoods and a deep investment in Cincinnati's future. Their frustrations with city services did not reflect disengagement or indifference. They reflected the high expectations of people who have chosen this city, stayed in it, and continued showing up for it. Participants described Cincinnati's architecture, parks, culture, and sense of community as things worth fighting for, and many framed their critiques as the natural result of caring about a place enough to want it to be better.

Residents demonstrated strong neighborhood identity and active civic participation.

Participants across sessions described an engaged relationship with their city, not a passive one. Many attend community council meetings, follow local policy conversations closely, and use reporting tools like 311 as a regular part of how they interact with their neighborhoods. This is not a disengaged population waiting to be activated. It is a population that is already engaged and asking to be met with equivalent effort from the city.

"I see myself staying in Cincinnati. I love living here, and I feel I'm always trying to sell other people on it like a PR person."

"I can contribute here. And I think that's the difference."

"You don't have to have a lot of money to have fun in the city, which I really love. When I think of Cincinnati, I think of home."

"...this is a fantastic place for children. The city has focused very well on children's activities, features and recreation. I know some about schools too, you know, that's a mixed bag, but it always is. But as far as activities for kids...[I] give it a very high grade for that..."

Residents are actively filling service gaps through their own effort.

When city systems fall short, residents describe stepping in themselves rather than simply accepting the gap. Participants described purchasing and installing trash cans at their own expense, hauling debris from creek beds the city identified as outside its jurisdiction, picking up bags of litter from their own blocks weekly, and organizing neighborhood cleanups without city support. These acts of individual maintenance are a form of civic loyalty. They are also a signal that the city is leaving willing partners underserved.

"We actually bought a trash can as neighbors and installed it ourselves. The city picks it up because they know where it is, but we had to buy it."

"Behind my house near I-71 there's a creek bed with a ton of weird trash, tires and stuff. I called the city about it and they said it was at the interstate level, so it's not them. I've just been slowly hauling it up myself."

"There's just trash all the time. I at least pick up a full bag of trash once a week. And then you look across the street and it's just abandoned, it attracts crime, trash. I've seen rats."

Residents compared Cincinnati to other cities and suburbs, not broader national challenges.

Residents did not evaluate Cincinnati in isolation, but they largely separated national conditions from their assessment of the city. When asked about broader national sentiment, participants stated that they focus primarily on Cincinnati's local performance and priorities. Instead, they compared their neighborhoods to nearby suburbs and other cities where they perceived greater progress and investment.

"You go to some suburban communities and everything feels polished, organized, maintained, and then people come back and compare that to what they see here."

"Whether you agree with somebody like Mamdani or not, I think people respond to seeing someone aggressively trying to get things done instead of endless conversations."

West Side residents expressed deeper skepticism about the city.

While loyalty ran through all four sessions, participants from West Side neighborhoods including Westwood, Price Hill, and Saylor Park expressed a more guarded version of that investment. Their civic pride was evident, but so was a skepticism rooted in accumulated experience: 311 cases closed with no visible action, infrastructure that deteriorates season after season without permanent repair, and a persistent sense that some neighborhoods are consistently on the losing end of the city's attention.

"In Hyde Park, you would never see the roads looking like ours."

"You go into Hyde Park, you don't see the absolute tumbleweeds of trash that are all over the place...like in my neighborhood, there's trash everywhere, just trash everywhere all the time."

"I would like to know, you get this information now from us, what happens after that? What are you doing with this? How effective is it that we [tell] you this? Is it for nothing, or do we report it to somebody? And what will happen after that?"

"When they started to combine the districts... it's made it too big to where they cannot adequately respond when something is happening. So...a lot of times... I don't even bother to call..."

Theme 2: Litter, Vacant Lots, and Neglected Infrastructure Drive Resident Satisfaction

Residents often evaluate Cincinnati through what they see when they walk out the front door. Litter on the corner, a boarded-up building down the block, a lot that has become a dumping ground with no visible response from the city. These daily conditions function as the city's most consistent communication to its residents. In too many neighborhoods, that communication signals uneven investment and a reactive rather than proactive approach to the environment residents share. Across all four sessions, visible environmental conditions surfaced as the single most consistent driver of how residents feel about Cincinnati.

Litter and illegal dumping undermine civic pride.

Participants described litter and dumping as chronic, demoralizing conditions that wear residents down over time and signal to everyone who passes through that a neighborhood is not valued. The frustration was sharpened by the fact that many residents are actively working to keep their blocks clean on their own, often picking up after others with no expectation of recognition or help from the city. Many recognized that part of the gap is behavioral rather than infrastructural, and several pointed to the "Don't Trash the Nati" campaign as a model worth further investment and broader promotion.

"There's just trash all the time...It makes a neighborhood look so bad...I at least pick up a full bag of trash once a week. And then you look across the street at an abandoned building and it just attracts crime [and] trash...I've seen rats."

"People will park and they'll empty their cars, all the trash that's at the bottom of their cars, right in the gutter, even though there's a garbage can on every corner."

"Back in the day when 'Don't Trash the Nati' came out, it was like a shame [to litter]. It was on billboards, posters, T-shirts, a constant reminder. I really wish they would redo that, especially now with social media and digital stuff. You could really push it out."

Illegal dumping added another layer of frustration, particularly where city-owned parcels are involved or where jurisdictional ambiguity leaves messes unresolved for years. Several participants described attempting to report dumping near their own properties and encountering either no response or, in the most pointed cases, receiving the fine themselves for conditions they did not create and were actively trying to address.

"I reported some illegal dumping and then I was fined for it. It was on my property, and I reported it, and then I got fined for it."

"The lot next to my house, I called it in. I said, 'Hey, you've got this couch here,' and they fined me for it. I didn't throw it there."

"Behind my house near I-71 there's a creek bed with a ton of weird trash, tires and stuff. I called the city about it and they said it was at the interstate level, so it's not them. I've just been slowly hauling it up myself."

Vacant and abandoned buildings amplify visible disorder and reduce feelings of safety.

Abandoned properties came up in every session as a compounding problem, one that is simultaneously a physical condition, a safety concern, and a symbol of neglect. Participants described how a single vacant building changes the character of a block, attracting dumping, rodents, and criminal activity while signaling to everyone nearby that no one in authority is watching. The emotional weight participants placed on these properties went beyond inconvenience. Several described abandoned buildings as the most visible evidence that certain neighborhoods have been written off.

"When streets aren't lit up and there aren't enough people around, it just feels uncomfortable."

"A single abandoned property can change the whole feeling of a block."

"When businesses and coffee shops and restaurants are active, people gather there and streets feel safer. But when things are boarded up or sitting vacant, it changes the entire feeling of the area."

"You start seeing overflowing trash, boarded-up spaces, weeds everywhere. Eventually people stop wanting to spend time there."

Residents consistently compared well-maintained and neglected neighborhoods within Cincinnati.

Participants drew direct comparisons between neighborhoods, describing polished, well-maintained streets in some areas and chronic neglect in others, and interpreting that contrast as a deliberate signal about whose communities the city prioritizes. Hyde Park was named most frequently as a reference point for what investment looks like.

"Every community should have the same things, the same benefits. There should never be one community that is less kept than another."

"You shouldn't notice when you cross from one Cincinnati neighborhood into another Cincinnati neighborhood."

"Some neighborhoods clearly look invested in and others don't. Residents notice that immediately."

Theme 3: Public Safety Requires a Balanced, Upstream Approach

Cincinnati residents brought nuanced and sometimes conflicting views to the topic of safety. There was no single picture of what feeling safe in Cincinnati looks like, and participants were careful to distinguish between their direct experiences with crime and the broader conditions that shape how safe a neighborhood feels day to day. Residents expressed a consistent desire for a more holistic, prevention-oriented approach to public safety.

Safety perceptions are shaped more by visible disorder and media than by direct crime experience.

Many participants acknowledged that their feelings about the safety of certain areas, particularly downtown, OTR, and The Banks, were driven less by personal experience and more by what they see online, hear from others, or observe in the physical environment around them. Vacant storefronts, poor lighting, visible mental health crises, and unpredictable behavior in public spaces were cited repeatedly as the conditions that make people uncomfortable, often more than crime itself. Participants were candid about this distinction, and several noted that media coverage and social media amplify negative perceptions in ways that do not always reflect what is actually happening.

"It's really just the general perception of it. You hear about fights and incidents and things getting wild at night, and even if you know the truth is probably somewhere in the middle, it still impacts whether you go there."

"Similarly to the social spaces like the Banks and OTR, it's not always that someone's doing something directly to you, but you don't know what might happen. It's the unpredictability."

"A lot of perception locally is based on just terrible communication. Crime is not worse. It's just the communication around what's happening and what's being done that has been terrible."

Reckless driving was raised in every session as one of the most personally and consistently experienced safety concerns.

Red light running, aggressive driving near pedestrians and cyclists, and the absence of meaningful traffic enforcement were described as daily hazards that residents have largely come to expect and work around. While a select few individuals cited frustrations with new speed humps and design upgrades, the majority of participants praised the city for expanding its citywide traffic calming measures.

"There is not a culture of traffic enforcement in Cincinnati, and I think that leads to speeding, pedestrians being hit, and red light running. It is not pleasant walking with a preschooler because people drive so aggressively."

"...there are a lot of people with disabilities, at least on my street, and the way that cars fly when people are trying to cross, it's just so dangerous. So there's things like that that I worry about, like pedestrian safety..."

"Speed humps. Also pedestrian safety... they're everywhere. Some people hate them. I think they are particularly helpful on my [street]."

"I don't see a speed bump as suffering. I'll happily slow down to keep pedestrians safe."

Community-oriented policing models were consistently preferred over generalized patrol.

Views on police presence varied sharply by neighborhood. Residents in Downtown, OTR, Walnut Hills and adjacent neighborhoods described feeling surveilled rather than protected by heavy police presence. Several residents of color described police activity in their neighborhoods as targeted and uncomfortable. For these participants, the ask was not more policing but different policing, with a visible shift toward relationship-building, community engagement, and a less escalating presence. West Side residents described a different but equally urgent gap. Rather than too much presence, they described too little follow-through. Officers who do not attend neighborhood meetings, slow response times, and a perceived hands-off posture on persistent issues were the frustrations here.

Across both sets of experiences, residents converged on the same underlying preference: officers who are known to the community, present in non-threatening ways, and accountable to the neighborhoods they serve. Programs like Citizens on Patrol were recalled with genuine appreciation and called for explicitly as models that had worked and been cut.

"I think seeing them in a different capacity would change the way that we view police officers, having them in your community in a non-threatening way."

"I actually feel less safe when there are police lights everywhere on a whole block. Every Friday and Saturday night we have six police cars sitting outside my house. That doesn't make me feel safer. It actually makes me feel less safe."

"It doesn't feel safe to me, and it feels like it's more targeted at people of color in my neighborhood. I rely on my neighbors more so than anything the police are doing for me there, besides making me feel uncomfortable."

"Community oriented policing, community led policing, is always going to be the answer. I would like to see Citizens on Patrol brought back. They were eyes, they were ears, people that the neighbors got to know. When they cut a lot of that out, you lost a lot of that community based policing that has statistically proven to keep crime down."

"My house was burglarized, it took them two hours to get there, and they were not interested in any kind of investigation."

Mental health, youth programming, and family support are seen as necessary complements to enforcement.

Participants across all sessions pushed back on the idea that policing alone can address what they observe in their neighborhoods. The conditions they described, visible mental health crises, young people without structure or opportunity, families under economic strain, were understood as upstream causes of the disorder and crime that enforcement is then asked to absorb. Residents did not frame this as an argument against policing. They framed it as a case for doing more than policing, investing earlier and more broadly in the conditions that make neighborhoods stable. Mental health crisis response teams and social workers were raised as concrete alternatives or complements to police response in situations where a uniformed officer may not be the right tool. Youth employment and after-school programming were described as safety infrastructure in the same breath as lighting or patrol. The city's existing investments in this space, particularly Rec @ Nite, were acknowledged as steps in the right direction, but participants were clear that the scale and consistency of those investments needs to grow.

"We have someone who [appears to be experiencing serious mental illness] frequently walk up and down the street, sometimes in a way that's frightening to me... but I don't know how to help that person."

"No one's just waking up on the street one day and talking to themselves. [It's a lack of] resources...a lack of access to medical care. Then it just becomes compounding, and then it becomes self medicating, and then it becomes criminalizing that self medication. And then it becomes can't find housing because they have criminal history, [can't] find a job. So it becomes compounding, right? And even before they become adults...There's a larger issue that maybe the city can help with, for prevention."

"These kids don't have a chance...until we can invest in families, schools, and something for them to come home to."

"...when I was a teenager, I remember [having a summer job through a city youth...And I would love it if they could bring something like that back...some employment...something to do to keep them busy. You talk to the teenagers now, and those opportunities that I know of just aren't there. So it'd be nice if tax dollars can go toward that, because I know we have an issue with youth violence in our city."

West Side residents described more direct and acute experiences with violence.

While most participants across the sessions discussed safety in terms of perception and environment, West Side participants brought a different kind of testimony. Residents from Westwood, Price Hill, and

surrounding neighborhoods described adjusting their daily lives around persistent violence and disorder in ways that participants from other parts of the city largely did not. Staying inside after a certain hour, avoiding public spaces they once used regularly with their families, hearing gunshots and street races from their homes at night. These were not abstract concerns about neighborhood feel. They were practical accommodations to conditions that have become normalized.

This group's frustration with the city's response was strong. The gap between what they are experiencing and what they feel the city is doing about it has worn down confidence in ways that go beyond any individual service failure. Safety on the West Side is not primarily a perception problem. It is a conditions problem, and residents there are asking for a response that matches the scale of what they are actually living with.

"Still seeing people fighting on the street, the overdoses on Warsaw. Me personally, I don't come out at night after 9 or 10 o'clock. I'm in the house."

"I live at Kingsbury Apartments. I can hear the street races, I can hear the guns, I can hear the ambulance. Does it bother me? Yeah. At night I'm scared."

Theme 4: Code Enforcement Must Be Stronger and More Consistent

Code enforcement emerged as a quality-of-life, equity, and trust issue for residents. Participants consistently linked neighborhood conditions, property maintenance, and responsiveness to broader perceptions of fairness and city effectiveness. Across discussions, two themes surfaced repeatedly: residents perceive uneven enforcement and responsiveness across neighborhoods, and they want enforcement efforts focused on solving problems and holding the appropriate parties accountable. Together, these concerns reflect a desire for code enforcement systems that are consistent, transparent, and effective at improving neighborhood conditions citywide.

Residents perceive code enforcement and neighborhood maintenance efforts as unevenly distributed, reinforcing feelings of inequity and affecting trust in local government.

Across focus groups, participants consistently observed disparities in maintenance, investment, and responsiveness between neighborhoods. Residents described noticing differences in property upkeep, infrastructure conditions, litter, abandoned buildings, and the speed at which issues are addressed. Many felt that these visible conditions communicate which neighborhoods are prioritized and which are not. Participants emphasized that trust is built when residents see consistent standards and follow-through across all communities.

“Some neighborhoods clearly look invested in and others don’t. Residents notice that immediately.”

“People absolutely notice when one neighborhood gets immediate action and another waits forever.”

“Even if you can’t fix everything immediately, people want to feel like someone is paying attention.”

Experiences with 311 and code enforcement varied widely, from genuine praise for responsiveness to frustration.

For participants in some neighborhoods, 311 and code enforcement were among the most highly praised city services, with residents describing tangible, visible improvements as a direct result of consistent engagement with the system. Others were unfamiliar with 311 entirely, and some who had used it described a feedback loop that goes dark after submission, leaving residents uncertain whether anything was actually done.

“The communication through the app is outstanding.”

“Code enforcement is usually very responsive.”

"I've been using city services for years. My email and phone numbers are in the system. I call and the city responds. They respond every time."

"311 is really nice. When I'm out walking and I see things, I can just take care of it right then and there and they respond fairly quickly."

Participants in some neighborhoods, particularly on the west side and areas with more vacant lots, described major frustration. Residents reported cases being closed without visible action, difficulty reaching inspectors, and properties remaining in violation for extended periods. These participants viewed 311 and code enforcement as systems that appear responsive on paper but do not consistently deliver results in practice.

"I go in and look at it, it's been closed and nothing's been done. I'm like, what's that? Did you not see all the siding hanging off the side of that house when you went there?"

"I would like a real SLA with those services. You call 311 [and they say], 'We'll have this taken care of in 48 hours.'... That would be nice."

Unaddressed or improperly addressed illegal dumping is a source of frustration.

A common grievance was illegal dumping. Several participants described reporting dumped furniture, trash, or debris on or near their property only to receive citations themselves because the material was located on land they owned. Residents felt these experiences discouraged reporting and created a sense that people trying to improve their neighborhoods were being penalized rather than supported.

"I reported some illegal dumping, and then I was fined for it... It was on [my] property, and I reported it, and then I got fined for [it]."

"The lot next to my house... I called it in. I said, 'Hey, you've got this couch here,' and they fined me for it... I didn't throw it there."

Residents want code enforcement to focus on solving problems, holding the appropriate parties accountable, and producing visible results.

Participants also pointed to absentee and out-of-town property owners as a significant enforcement challenge. Large multifamily buildings and neglected properties owned through layers of LLCs were described as difficult to contact and difficult to hold accountable. Residents expressed frustration that these properties could become ongoing sources of blight, dumping, safety concerns, or deterioration while neighbors struggled to identify anyone responsible for addressing the problem.

"Sometimes it's a private property lot and there's nothing to do about it. But it's frustrating when you can report an overflowing can and get a response in four hours, but an empty lot that's been a dumping ground for years just sits there."

"Probably every neighborhood... has a big multifamily apartment complex owned by somebody in San Jose, some LLC, three tiers deep. You can never talk to anybody."

Residents want to ensure that there is a level of flexibility in code enforcement for the elderly, mobility limited individuals and busy families.

Many participants contrasted these challenges with enforcement actions aimed at minor property maintenance issues, such as grass height violations. While residents generally supported basic neighborhood standards, some felt enforcement lacked flexibility for elderly residents, working families, or others facing temporary hardships. Participants repeatedly emphasized that enforcement should distinguish between residents making a good-faith effort and chronic offenders whose actions negatively impact the broader community.

"Ask someone who has had the city call on them because their grass was too tall. Fining someone \$500 because they didn't have time to mow because they're working two jobs...that's not super useful."

"We don't want to cite, you know, an elderly person who just can't get outside to cut their grass... but then there are a lot of bad actors."

Theme 5: Sidewalks, Roads, and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Sidewalks generated some of the strongest discussions around infrastructure responsibilities. Many participants were unsure where responsibility for maintenance, repairs, and ongoing upkeep falls, particularly when sidewalks, streets, curbs, and drainage systems appear interconnected. Residents expressed frustration when they were held accountable for infrastructure adjacent to their property while nearby public infrastructure remained in poor condition.

Residents experience confusion and uncertainty about who is responsible for maintaining, repairing, and communicating about public infrastructure.

Participants also described uncertainty during infrastructure projects, noting that communication and follow-through can be inconsistent. When projects extend beyond their expected timeline or involve multiple departments and contractors, residents often struggle to determine who is responsible for completing work or addressing concerns. This lack of clarity can leave residents feeling disconnected from decision-making and unsure where to seek answers.

“They replaced the sidewalk behind my house, took down my fence, said they’d put it back, and then everybody disappeared.”

“Sometimes it feels like projects start and then residents are left trying to figure out who’s responsible.”

“The city is no longer touching sidewalks, that’s on the resident. So if you didn’t fill them, you got fines and penalties. But if the street three feet away didn’t have curbs, didn’t have drains, didn’t have any pavement done for 30 years, that was fine.”

Residents view the condition of roads, sidewalks, and pedestrian infrastructure as a visible signal of neighborhood investment, shaping both quality of life and perceptions of whether their community is valued.

Participants frequently pointed to infrastructure conditions as evidence of where public resources and attention are directed. Well-maintained sidewalks, roads, and public spaces were seen as signals that a neighborhood matters, while deteriorating infrastructure conveyed neglect. Residents described noticing these differences immediately when moving between neighborhoods and felt that infrastructure conditions often reinforce perceptions of inequity across the city.

Participants emphasized that sidewalks, walkability, and pedestrian infrastructure are about more than mobility. The ability to move comfortably, safely, and with dignity affects independence, social connection, and access to everyday opportunities. Broken sidewalks, missing curb ramps, poor road

conditions, and recurring maintenance issues were described as barriers that disproportionately impact older adults, people with disabilities, and residents who rely on walking or transit.

Many participants also expressed frustration with recurring temporary repairs that fail to address underlying problems. Potholes, patchwork fixes, and infrastructure issues that reappear year after year were viewed as symbols of deferred investment rather than lasting solutions. For these residents, infrastructure communicates whether a neighborhood is receiving the attention and long-term investment afforded to other parts of the city.

"The whole feeling changes when places look abandoned or uncared for. It feels like nobody's paying attention."

"I pay a lot every year in taxes and I can't get sidewalks, I can't get curbs, I can't exit my street without running over metal plate after metal plate and potholes. And this is probably the wealthiest community in Cincinnati. If we can't get it done here, how is it getting done in other neighborhoods that don't have people with resources?"

"[In] Hyde Park you would never see the roads looking like [ours]... But other neighborhoods, the whole street can be potholes forever."

"There's a spot near my house that becomes a massive pothole... every time it snows... we're just continuing to fix these things. We could invest in more permanent solutions that might cost a little more... [and] save money in the long run."

Residents report that traveling without a car often feels unsafe, uncomfortable, or impractical, limiting mobility and access to opportunity.

Across all focus groups, participants described safety concerns while walking, biking, using transit, and navigating public spaces. Residents frequently pointed to aggressive driving, poor pedestrian conditions, incomplete bicycle infrastructure, and accessibility barriers as factors that make moving around the city feel difficult and, at times, dangerous.

Pedestrian safety emerged as a particular concern. Participants described deteriorating sidewalks, inaccessible infrastructure, and driver behavior that requires constant vigilance. Older adults, people with disabilities, families with young children, and residents without access to a vehicle were described as facing disproportionate challenges. Many participants framed walkability as a quality-of-life issue that affects independence, social connection, and the ability to participate fully in community life.

"People run red lights constantly. I honestly feel like I have to assume somebody's going to fly through the intersection."

"It is not pleasant walking with a preschooler because people drive so aggressively."

"You feel like you have to be defensive all the time just to cross the street."

"If you can't comfortably walk in your own neighborhood, it changes your whole relationship with the city."

"I know the guy in Oakley who was a very persistent advocate for pedestrian safety. They got one of the first raised crosswalks in the city because of it. People who actually lived there were like, 'This is great, so thankful.' The people complaining clearly didn't live anywhere near it they just wanted the convenience to drive through without thinking about it."

Cyclists described similar concerns. Participants viewed bicycle infrastructure as fragmented and often unsafe in practice, citing vehicle speeds, and a lack of respect for bike lanes. Several compared Cincinnati unfavorably to European cities where bicycle infrastructure is physically protected and widely respected. For these residents, cycling as a means of transportation is something they would like to become the norm, but is far from safely achievable.

"I'd like to see more bike safety... I've been biking... and it's dangerous... Riding in a city is really precarious, especially when so many cars park on the side of the street. I'm also worried too, somebody's gonna open the door."

"[In Europe] I rode a bike more than I would ever... as a means of getting to a place... people respect the bike lane. I did not feel one bit of danger whatsoever... I just wish we had that here where people just respected the bike lane."

"... I would never ride a bike on Central Parkway. It just seems like you're just waiting to get run over."

Residents noticed meaningful improvements in snow removal this past winter and viewed it as an example of effective service improvement and communication.

Snow removal was one of the few city services where participants described a clear and broadly recognized improvement compared with the previous winter. Many residents credited the City's use of GPS-based truck coordination and better storm preparation for faster, more efficient plowing and broader coverage during recent snow events. Participants also appreciated that the City actively communicated about these improvements through multiple channels, which helped rebuild confidence after earlier frustrations with snow response.

At the same time, participants noted that improvements were not universal. Some questioned whether staffing, equipment, and budget limitations still constrain the system, while others pointed out inconsistencies between public tracking tools and real-time street conditions. As with confusion around

sidewalk maintenance, snow removal on sidewalks and at bus stops continued to be a point of both concern for accessibility and confusion as to who was responsible.

"It seems to me the city promoted a new GPS system and they said they were more prepared. When we had a couple big storms this past winter, it did seem a lot better...more efficient, quicker, more streets got done. I can see a difference."

"When they had the snow removal disaster a few years ago, the news was terrible. But when they improved it, the city did a great job communicating...multiple mediums, people heard about it. They were trying to fix it and they got credit for that."

"Two years ago we were trapped in our house for multiple days. This past winter I was able to get to work when I needed to. They were super nice, they plowed my street and didn't mess up my driveway."

"The map was showing where plows should be going, not where they were. So residents could see on the map it said they'd been down their street — but it was fresh snow."

Theme 6: Residents Want Proactive, Multi-Source Communication

Residents want to hear from and be heard by the City. Across all four groups, residents described not knowing about city programs and services, 311 capabilities, policy changes, or planned improvements. Residents want communication that comes from multiple sources, including city leadership, specific departments, and engagement staff, each playing a distinct role in keeping residents informed about decisions, services, and changes that affect their neighborhoods.

Residents want timely, accessible information from multiple sources about city projects and decisions, with enough context to understand why changes are happening.

Participants frequently described learning about projects only after implementation or not hearing about them at all. Many expressed frustrations with reactive communication, noting that updates often arrive after concerns have escalated. Residents want more than notifications, but explanations of the purpose, data, and decision-making behind projects both on the city level and in their own neighborhoods. While some participants acknowledged they actively seek out city information, they questioned whether less-engaged residents have easy ways to stay informed. In this way, improved, multi-medium communication can be an avenue for increased resident engagement.

"I signed up for text messages and emails from the city. Not everything comes through and a lot of the stuff that does is pretty surface level. You get a road closure notification but not an explanation of why a raised crosswalk appeared on your street."

"Give us the information. What is happening on this corner? What are the statistics? Why is it necessary here? That's part of the problem that makes people feel disconnected from what the city is doing."

"The point isn't that information doesn't exist...it's that the city doesn't communicate proactively. If you care, you can find it. But how do you get information to the people who aren't already engaged?"

"Residents often do not know where to report issues... communication should happen before problems escalate, not afterward."

Residents notice when the City prioritizes communication and when it doesn't, often recognizing it shapes their own perception.

Participants pointed to examples where proactive communication improved public confidence, particularly when paired with visible action. Several contrasted the City's response to recent winter weather events with previous years, noting that improvements in both service delivery and communication helped rebuild trust. At the same time, participants felt the City is less effective at communicating around other issues such as public safety, allowing media narratives and speculation to fill information gaps. Residents expressed appreciation for clear updates, transparency, and communication that explains not only what is happening, but what is being done in response.

"When they had the snow removal disaster a few years ago, the news was terrible. But when they improved it, the city did a great job communicating...multiple mediums, people heard about it. They were trying to fix it and they got credit for that."

"It's really just the general perception of it. You hear about fights and incidents and things getting wild at night, and even if you know the truth is probably somewhere in the middle, it still impacts whether you go there."

"I'm sure there's media bias in what gets reported, but you only hear about these out-of-control situations."

"You hear one story online and suddenly everyone acts like an entire neighborhood is dangerous."

Residents want information delivered through multiple channels and voices and in ways that are easy to discover, access, and act upon.

Participants laid out the diverse ways they want to hear from the City. Several participants are signed up for the new text alert systems and are eager to see that scaled. Beyond utilizing social media, participants requested physical media like mailers and door hangers, while others requested in-person neighborhood-scale outreach. Several participants requested a city newsletter that gave updates on city services, and initiatives. The city's current communication methods are appreciated by those who use them, but they desire to see those methods scaled, investment in more diverse methods, and communication coming from multiple sources to improve reach and accessibility for more residents.

"Columbia Township mails out a newsletter. You can also grab a stack of them at any business in the township. It has updates 'hey, this street is being repaved next month, this will be torn up.' That's all people want."

"Email works for me. You see the top five headlines, you click if you want to read more. If it comes every week you get used to it. Consistent, formatted, easy to skim."

"Flyers actually work, even for younger people, a lot more than people expect. We used quarter-sheet flyers printed free at the library and got real turnout."

"There are people who seem to be really tuned in into what's going on... and could be on some sort of a master list of people who could connect others in the neighborhood."

Additional Themes for Consideration

The additional themes below reflect secondary findings that surfaced consistently across all four sessions. While not directly tied to immediate city service delivery, they represent persistent resident concerns that provide important context for understanding the broader conditions shaping how residents experience and evaluate the city.

Residents are increasingly concerned about affordability and whether Cincinnati will remain a place where they can build a future.

Across focus groups, participants described growing concerns about the cost of living, rising property taxes, and housing affordability. While residents generally recognized the city's growth and investment, many questioned whether those benefits are reaching low and middle-income households and longtime residents. Participants frequently expressed concern that new development appears concentrated in higher-end housing while affordable options become increasingly difficult to find.

These concerns often extended beyond housing alone. Residents compared Cincinnati to peer cities, neighboring suburbs, and other regions where they felt public services, infrastructure, or quality of life better matched the cost of living. Several participants questioned whether rising costs were being accompanied by sufficient improvements in city services and neighborhood conditions.

For some residents, affordability concerns translated into uncertainty about their long-term future in Cincinnati. This sentiment was particularly strong in one focus group, where both longtime residents and newer arrivals described difficulty imagining themselves remaining in the city over the next several years if current trends continue. While Cincinnati was frequently cited across focus groups to be a great place to raise kids, new parents in particular described stress around attempting to find affordable homes in their community that could accommodate growing families.

"People absolutely compare Cincinnati to what they're seeing in Columbus, Indianapolis, Nashville, or even just the suburbs right outside the city."

"I was gonna say I think the city is kind of hurting housing affordability. They approve these projects, you know, they're all, you know, pretty much luxury developments. So not a lot of affordable housing options for people."

"We need more affordable housing... We should protect these people [senior citizens] with fixed incomes. These are people trying to finish out their life."

"As I mentioned, and this young lady down here mentioned, this is a fantastic place for children. The city government has focused very well on children's activities, features and recreation... as far as activities for kids which is also for parents and grandparents, give it a very high grade for

that — everything from riverfront redevelopment, fantastic for children, to parks to pools, rec centers."

"We need to move because we want to have a second kid and 1000 square foot... so that's just not going to work... it's tough to, like, how far away we have to move for a family of four."

"I don't see myself here in five years. It's becoming more expensive. And I'm thinking if I'm going to pay more money just to live, then I could go to a more progressive city with more services."

Residents believe strong communities are built by neighbors, not government alone, and want the City to help foster the relationships, culture, and civic participation that make neighborhoods thrive.

Participants described stepping in where they felt systems or services fell short, such as picking up litter, maintaining public spaces, purchasing neighborhood amenities, checking on neighbors, and organizing informal support networks. While residents valued effective city services, many argued that long-term neighborhood wellbeing depends just as much on the strength of relationships between residents as it does on government action. Residents described feeling safest not when additional enforcement or infrastructure was present, but when they knew their neighbors, trusted one another, and felt a shared sense of responsibility for their community.

Participants expressed a desire for the City to play a more active role in supporting these connections and viewed these efforts as investments in the social fabric of neighborhoods and a complement to traditional city services.

"We actually bought a trash can as neighbors and installed it ourselves. The city picks it up because they know where it is... but we had to buy it."

"What makes me feel safe, what I trust is knowing my neighbors, and I know them, and I will know them more if there was more like resources."

"So this past week, I looked out the window and I saw one neighbor mowing another neighbor's grass... and so I texted the family, like, Hey, what's going on? Why are y'all mowing, you know, Kyle's grass, and their dog was needing to be put down... and so the neighbor on the other side was bringing him soup... and so I feel like, when you know your neighbor, you know something's up, and you can't go talk to them or just go over there to have the grass form in a different way."

"Even having community cookouts. Maybe recreation, you know, the city sponsor family cookout, just some neighbors need to know each other."

"I wonder what resources does the city have to make these connections because ... it sounds like it's more of a cultural issue, cultural safety, culture of just reaching out and connecting with one another, getting information out...that's not something you can police your way out of. It's not something you can put up cameras or speed humps. It's really a messaging issue, but what can the city do as a body to get this messaging out so that we can change the culture, starting schools as a start with the neighborhood councils being more intentional."

Conclusion

Cincinnati's greatest asset is its people. Residents are invested, observant and loyal. They want the city to live up to what they already believe it can be. The foundation is strong, but residents want the city to build on it. Participants acknowledged real progress in areas like snow removal, Vision Zero infrastructure, and programs like Rec @ Nite, and they gave the city credit for it. The foundation is solid and the momentum is real. The opportunity now is to build on it more consistently and more equitably across all neighborhoods.

What residents want most is for the physical environment to reflect the city they know Cincinnati to be. Litter, abandoned buildings, broken sidewalks, and neglected lots are not minor inconveniences to the people who live alongside them every day. Sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure came up in every session not as a luxury but as a basic element of neighborhood dignity, and the unevenness of investment across the city was described in terms of inequity and inconvenience. When a neighborhood looks and feels cared for, residents feel valued. When it does not, they draw conclusions about whose communities matter. Targeted, visible investment in neighborhood conditions delivered consistently across all zones of the city is one of the most direct paths available to the city for strengthening resident trust and satisfaction.

On safety, residents were clear that they want a city willing to think upstream. They are not asking for less public safety investment. They are asking for a broader definition of what safety investment looks like, one that includes mental health response, youth programming, community-oriented policing, and the kinds of neighborhood conditions that make disorder less likely in the first place. The appetite for a more holistic approach was consistent across all four sessions and across neighborhoods with very different relationships to crime and police presence.

Finally, residents want the city to take the lead on code enforcement with greater consistency and follow-through. They understand the difference between a neighbor who needs support and a bad actor who has learned to absorb fines without changing behavior, and they want the city to make that same distinction and act on it. 311 works well when it works, and residents who have experienced that responsiveness become the city's strongest advocates. The goal is to make that experience reliable and universal. More than any single program or initiative, consistent follow-through on the commitments the city makes to its residents is what will deepen the trust that already exists and give residents every reason to keep believing in the city they already love.

Appendix: Focus Group Session Details

Four focus group sessions were conducted in Spring 2026. Participants were recruited to represent a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences and included predominantly residents who had completed the Community Perceptions Survey in fall 2025. Session details are as follows:

- Focus Group 1: April 30, 2026 | Zone(s): 5 | Participants: 9
- Focus Group 2: May 6, 2026 | Zone(s): 6 | Participants: 7
- Focus Group 3: May 14, 2026 | Zone(s): 3, 4 | Participants: 13
- Focus Group 4: May 19, 2026 | Zone(s): 1, 2 | Participants: 13

All four focus group sessions were conducted using a consistent facilitation guide to ensure comparability of findings across groups. The guide was organized into several topic areas. The full facilitation guide used across all session is included below:

Introduction & Ice Breaker:

Name, Neighborhood, Where you work, What is the first image that comes to mind when you think about living in Cincinnati?

General Perceptions:

1. Thinking about different stages of your life (buying a home, raising a family, or retiring) how does living in the city support you or challenge you?
2. When you think about the taxes you pay to the city, where do you expect to see the results, and do you actually see them where you live?
3. In what ways do things happening at the state, national or federal level shape how you experience or think about the city?

Streets & Sidewalks (*Neighborhood Level and City Experiences*)

1. When you walk or drive in your neighborhood, what stands out most about the condition of the streets, sidewalks, or pavement—and how does that compare to major city roads or thoroughfares you use?
2. Have you noticed any recent changes or improvements in your neighborhood, such as pothole repairs or snow removal, or does it feel mostly the same compared to what you see on main roads?

Public Safety (*Neighborhood Level and City Experiences*)

1. What does feeling safe—or unsafe—look like for you in your neighborhood and in the city’s main areas you regularly visit (such as downtown, business districts, or transit corridors) on a day-to-day basis?
2. Where do you typically notice police presence in your neighborhood and across the city, and how does that presence affect your sense of safety—or lack of safety—in both places, if at all?
3. Compared to previous years, do you feel your neighborhood and the city overall have become safer, less safe, or stayed about the same? What changes, actions, or supports—from the city, police, or community—would help you feel safer moving forward in both your local area and the city’s main spaces?

Code Enforcement

1. What cleanliness or maintenance issues do you notice most often (such as trash, illegal dumping, overgrown areas, or abandoned items), and where do they tend to show up?
2. When you think about vacant or abandoned properties nearby, what role do you think the city should play (maintenance, enforcement, communication, clean-ups)?

Communications

1. In an ideal world, how would information from the city reach you, and how would you give input or feedback?
2. In the past few months, have you learned about any new city services or programs that caught your attention? If yes, how did you hear about them?

Final Question

1. Looking ahead, do you see yourself living in Cincinnati five years from now? Why or why not?

Individual focus group summaries, including full narrative overviews and key themes by session, are available upon request.

Appendix II

Additional Benchmarking Comparisons



Helping Organizations Make Better Decisions

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May 13, 2026

Subject: Additional Benchmarking for the City of Cincinnati, Ohio

Introduction

ETC Institute is providing the City of Cincinnati with additional benchmarking comparisons to help further put the City's 2025/2026 survey results into context. The results included in this supplemental summary are drawn from two sources: (1) survey results from a regional peer city in the State of Ohio that regularly conducts similar resident surveys with ETC Institute, and (2) a similarly sized peer community in the Midwest that regularly conducts similar surveys with ETC Institute. These comparisons are intended to supplement the broader benchmarking and trend analysis already provided to the City by showing how Cincinnati's results compare with communities that share more direct regional, operational, and demographic similarities.

Benchmarking is important because resident survey results are most useful when interpreted within a larger frame of reference. A single percentage can show how residents feel about a service at one point in time, but it does not always explain whether that result is high, low, typical, or unusual compared with other communities. Peer comparisons help distinguish between issues that may reflect broader municipal challenges and issues that may be more specific to Cincinnati. The additional peer benchmarks are especially useful because a regional Ohio peer can help account for shared expectations, climate, and service delivery conditions, while a similarly sized Midwestern peer provides a practical comparison point for infrastructure, public safety, communications, and overall quality-of-life measures. ETC Institute is maintaining the anonymity of the other clients included in this analysis; therefore, the results are identified only as a regional peer city and a similarly sized peer city.

Summary of Benchmarking Results

Across the broad service categories, Cincinnati's results are mixed, with several areas where the City is generally comparable to or above peers and several areas where the comparisons reinforce known improvement priorities. Cincinnati's rating for the maintenance of streets, sidewalks, and infrastructure was nearly identical to the regional peer city (23% for the peer city compared with 23% for Cincinnati) and was higher than the similarly sized peer city (18%). Cincinnati also rated higher than the similarly sized peer for city parks and recreation programs and facilities (68% compared with 56%) and fire and ambulance services (76% compared with 66%). These results suggest that residents continue to recognize strengths in parks/recreation and emergency response services. At the same time, Cincinnati was below the regional peer city for police services (42% compared with 55%) and city water utilities (52% compared with 67%), and below the similarly sized peer city for code enforcement and overall effectiveness of city communication with the public.

Question	Cincinnati	Regional Peer City (2026)	Similarly Sized Peer City (2026)
The maintenance of city streets, sidewalks, and infrastructure	23%	23%	18%
Code enforcement	27%	23%	35%
Overall effectiveness of city communication with the public	30%	-	37%
The City's stormwater runoff/stormwater management system	39%	-	-
Police services	42%	55%	-
Customer service you receive from city employees	47%	-	-
City water utilities	52%	67%	48%
City parks and recreation programs/facilities	68%	-	56%
Fire and ambulance services	76%	76%	66%

The public safety comparisons show Cincinnati performing particularly well on fire, rescue, and emergency medical services, while police-related measures present a more nuanced picture. Cincinnati's rating for the overall quality of local fire protection and rescue services (78%) was slightly above the regional peer city (76%) and well above the similarly sized peer city (66%). Ratings for how quickly fire and rescue personnel respond to emergencies (79%), the quality of local emergency medical service (7+%), and how quickly emergency medical personnel respond to emergencies (76%) were also higher than the similarly sized peer city. Police-related results were more varied. Cincinnati was slightly below the regional peer city for how quickly police respond to emergencies, but above the similarly sized peer city on that same measure. Cincinnati also rated higher than the regional peer city for overall police performance in residents' neighborhoods and higher than the similarly sized peer city for the attitude and behavior of officers toward citizens in residents' neighborhoods. This suggests that Cincinnati's strongest benchmark position within public safety is tied to fire, rescue, and EMS services, with neighborhood-level police perceptions comparing more favorably than some broader police service ratings.

Question	Cincinnati	Regional Peer City	Similarly Sized Peer City
The City's overall efforts to prevent crime	25%	-	25%
How quickly police respond to emergencies	38%	40%	30%
Fire education programs	43%	-	53%
Overall police performance in your neighborhood	44%	37%	-
Fire inspections	46%	-	-

Attitude and behavior of officers towards citizens in your neighborhood	58%	-	42%
How quickly emergency medical personnel respond to emergencies	75%	-	70%
Quality of local emergency medical service	76%	-	70%
Overall quality of local fire protection and rescue services	78%	76%	66%
How quickly fire and rescue personnel respond to emergencies	79%	-	67%

Street, sidewalk, and infrastructure results continue to stand out as one of the City's most important opportunity areas. Cincinnati's ratings for the condition of city streets (12%), the condition of streets in residents' neighborhoods (19%), and the condition of sidewalks (18%) were all low in absolute terms. Compared with the similarly sized peer city, Cincinnati was lower for the condition of city streets, neighborhood streets, snow removal on major city streets, adequacy of street lighting, and maintenance of street signs and traffic signals. Cincinnati was more competitive on street and pavement markings, overall cleanliness of streets and public areas, and accessibility of streets, sidewalks, and buildings for people with disabilities. These comparisons reinforce that infrastructure ratings are not only among the City's lower-rated items, but in several cases lag behind a similarly sized Midwestern community. Streets, sidewalks, pavement conditions, lighting, and traffic-related maintenance should remain logical priorities for continued investment, operational improvement, and resident-facing communication about planned work and progress.

Question	Cincinnati	Regional Peer City	Similarly Sized Peer City
Condition of city streets (potholes)	12%	-	19%
Condition of sidewalks in the City (broken, cracked, uneven, etc.)	18%	-	19%
Condition of streets in your neighborhood (potholes)	19%	-	30%
Maintenance of city streets (street/pavement markings)	24%	23%	18%
Snow removal on residential streets	24%	-	-
Overall cleanliness of City streets and other public areas	28%	-	28%
Quality of on-street bicycle infrastructure (bike lanes/wayfinding signs)	31%		34%
Snow removal on major City streets	39%	43%	51%

Mowing and tree trimming along city streets and other public areas	39%	39%	-
Adequacy of city street lighting	40%	-	58%
Accessibility of streets, sidewalks, and buildings for people with disabilities	42%	-	37%
Maintenance of street signs and traffic signals	45%	-	50%

Code enforcement and solid waste services show a clearer divide between enforcement-related items and collection-service items. Cincinnati's code enforcement ratings were generally similar to or slightly above the similarly sized peer city on specific enforcement functions, including exterior property maintenance, cleanup of trash and debris on private property, and mowing/cutting weeds on private property. However, these items remain relatively low overall, with most Cincinnati results in the upper 20% to low 30% range. In contrast, Cincinnati's ratings for solid waste and related collection services were substantially stronger. Overall quality of curbside recycling services was 71%, compared with 65% for the regional peer city and 72% for the similarly sized peer city. Trash collection services were also strong at 68.3%, though slightly below the similarly sized peer city (71%). Leaf and brush pickup and bulky item pickup were both higher than the similarly sized peer city. These results suggest collection-based services are generally performing well when compared with peers, while enforcement-related services remain an area where resident expectations are not being fully met.

Question	Cincinnati	Regional Peer City	Similarly Sized Peer City
Enforcing the exterior maintenance of residential, commercial, and business property	27%	-	26%
Enforcing the clean-up of trash and debris on private property	30%	-	27%
Enforcing trash, weeds, and exterior maintenance in your neighborhood	30%	-	-
Enforcing the mowing and cutting of weeds on private property	30%	-	27%
Overall quality of recycling drop-off centers	52%	-	-
Overall quality of leaf and brush pick-up services	57%	-	50%
Overall quality of bulky item pick-up services	61%	-	57%
Overall quality of trash collection services	68%	-	71%
Overall quality of curbside recycling services	71%	65%	72%

Communication, engagement, and broader perceptions are areas where the additional benchmarks provide important strategic context. Cincinnati's ratings for opportunities to engage or provide

input into decisions made by elected officials (22.1%), City government efforts to keep residents informed (26.8%), availability of information about City programs and services (29.7%), and overall usefulness of the City website (35.6%) were generally below the available peer comparisons. The largest gap in this group was for City government efforts to keep residents informed, where the regional peer city was at 41% compared with 26.8% for Cincinnati. These results indicate that communication and engagement are likely connected to how residents interpret the value, responsiveness, and effectiveness of City government overall.

Question	Cincinnati	Regional Peer City	Similarly Sized Peer City
Opportunity to engage/provide input into decisions made by Elected Officials	22%	-	26%
City Administration's use of social media	26%	-	-
City government efforts to keep you informed about City services, issues, events, and programs	27%	41%	-
Availability of information about City programs and services	30%	-	36%
Quality of City video programming (television channel and web streaming)	33%	-	-
Overall usefulness of City website	36%	-	42%

The broader quality-of-life and community perception measures show Cincinnati maintaining several competitive strengths, even though some overall ratings trail peers. Cincinnati's overall value rating for City tax dollars and fees (31%) was below the regional peer city (39%) but above the similarly sized peer city (28%). Overall quality of City services (45%) was slightly above the similarly sized peer city (42%), while overall quality of life (48%) was below both the regional peer city (55%) and the similarly sized peer city (51%). However, Cincinnati matched both peers as a place to live (64%), was above the similarly sized peer as a place to raise children, and was generally comparable as a place to work.

Question	Cincinnati	Regional Peer City	Similarly Sized Peer City
Overall value you receive for your City tax dollars and fees	31%	39%	28%
Overall feeling of safety in the City	32%	-	-
Overall quality of the City's public transportation system	38%	-	43%
Overall image of the City	42%	-	-
Overall quality of services provided by the City	45%	-	42%

Physical appearance of your neighborhood	47%	-	-
Overall quality of life in the City	48%	55%	51%
How safe you feel in your neighborhood	50%	-	28%
As a place to live	64%	64%	64%
As a place to raise children	53%	-	49%
As a place to work	60%	-	62%
As a place to retire	42%	-	-

Conclusion

Overall, the peer city comparisons show that Cincinnati's results are not uniformly below peers; rather, performance is uneven across service areas. The City has clear comparative strengths in fire/EMS, parks and recreation, recycling, and several neighborhood-level public safety measures, while infrastructure conditions, communication and engagement, perceived value, and select enforcement and police-service measures should remain high priorities for continued attention.

Appendix III

Cross-Tabular Analysis Summary

2025 Community Survey Cross-Tabular Analysis

Introduction

ETC Institute conducted a cross-tabular analysis of the 2025 survey results to examine differences across geographic and demographic groups. The results of their analysis can be found in the attached report. The Office of Performance and Data Analytics (OPDA) reviewed a targeted subset of these results to identify meaningful differences.

Review Criteria

OPDA reviewed the following categories of survey items:

- Items with a satisfaction decline of more than 15 percentage points compared to 2023
- Items related to the four priority service areas identified in the survey

The review focused on identifying meaningful differences based on the following criteria:

- Results were significant at the 99% confidence level (p-value of 0.01) and reflected both lower satisfaction and higher dissatisfaction, excluding patterns driven by neutral responses
- For age, years lived in the city, and income, differences reflected consistent patterns across contiguous groups rather than isolated variation
- For binary demographic groups (e.g., homeownership status), differences were at least 10 percentage points in magnitude

Summary of Findings

The analysis does not indicate that any single geographic or demographic group is driving the broader changes in overall perceptions observed in the 2025 survey. However, several distinct patterns provide additional context.

Survey Zone

Residents in Survey Zone 1, which includes East Price Hill, West Price Hill, and nearby neighborhoods, reported lower satisfaction than other zones on 17 of the 60 measures reviewed by OPDA, often by margins of 10 to 20 percentage points (Table 1). These differences span all four priority service areas and include several of the largest year-over-year declines.

While declines in satisfaction are not limited to Zone 1, the cross-tabulation results, based on within-year comparisons, indicate that residents in this area report lower satisfaction across multiple measures.

Survey Zone 1 includes East Price Hill, Lower Price Hill, Queensgate, Sayler Park, Riverside, Sedamsville, and West Price Hill.

Table 1. Survey items where zone 1 reported lower satisfaction compared to other zones*

Survey Item	Scale	Citywide (+%)	Zone 1 (+%)	Finding
As a place to live	Excellence	64%	46%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5,6
As a place to raise children	Excellence	52%	36%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5,6
As a place where I feel welcome	Excellence	58%	43%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5,6
Overall quality of life in the City	Satisfaction	48%	35%	Zone 1 < 4,5,6
Mowing and tree trimming along city streets and other public areas	Satisfaction	39%	27%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
Condition of streets in your neighborhood (potholes)	Satisfaction	19%	9%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
Traffic calming measures throughout the City (speed cushions/humps, raised intersections/crosswalks, dedicated on-street parking, etc.)	Satisfaction	31%	20%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
Overall cleanliness of City streets and other public areas	Satisfaction	28%	18%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
Condition of city streets (potholes)	Satisfaction	12%	6%	Zones 1&6 < 3,4,5
Enforcing the mowing and cutting of weeds on private property	Satisfaction	30%	20%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
Physical appearance of your neighborhood	Satisfaction	47%	33%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5,6
The City's overall efforts to prevent crime	Satisfaction	25%	17%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
How safe you feel in your neighborhood	Satisfaction	50%	36%	Zone 1&2 < 4,5,6
Overall feeling of safety in the City	Satisfaction	32%	20%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5,6
Elected officials' efforts to support a dialogue with City residents	Satisfaction	26%	16%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
Opportunity to engage/provide input regarding City operations in public engagement opportunities provided by the City Administration	Satisfaction	24%	15%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5
Overall effectiveness of city communication with the public	Satisfaction	30%	21%	Zone 1 < 3,4,5

* Positive ratings for citywide and Zone 1 are provided for context; analysis compares responses between each zone and across positive and negative ratings.

Homeownership Status

Differences between Renters and Homeowners were identified on 20 of the 60 measures reviewed by OPDA, primarily within three service areas (Table 2). In general, Homeowners reported lower satisfaction than Renters across multiple code enforcement and communication measures, while renters reported lower satisfaction on several items related to police services.

Table 2. Survey items where renters and owner perceptions differed*

Survey Question	Scale	Citywide (+%)	Renters (+%)	Owners (+%)	Finding
Enforcing trash, weeds, and exterior maintenance in your neighborhood	Satisfaction	30%	39%	24%	Owners<renters
Enforcing the mowing and cutting of weeds on private property	Satisfaction	30%	39%	24%	Owners<renters
Enforcing the exterior maintenance of residential, commercial, and business property (e.g., condition of buildings)	Satisfaction	27%	35%	21%	Owners<renters
Enforcing the clean-up of trash and debris on private property	Satisfaction	30%	38%	25%	Owners<renters
Code enforcement (enforcing condition standards of residential, commercial, and business property in the city)	Satisfaction	27%	34%	23%	Owners<renters
Overall image of the City	Satisfaction	42%	51%	37%	Owners<renters
Overall cleanliness of City streets and other public areas	Satisfaction	28%	36%	24%	Owners<renters
Overall effectiveness of city communication with the public	Satisfaction	30%	38%	25%	Owners<renters
City Administration's use of social media	Satisfaction	26%	36%	20%	Owners<renters
City government efforts to keep you informed about City services, issues, events, and programs	Satisfaction	27%	34%	22%	Owners<renters
Access to information about Finance and Budget information	Satisfaction	22%	30%	17%	Owners<renters
Opportunity to engage/provide input regarding City operations in public engagement opportunities provided by the City Administration	Satisfaction	24%	31%	19%	Owners<renters
Opportunity to engage/provide input into decisions made by Elected Officials	Satisfaction	22%	29%	18%	Owners<renters
Access to information about Campaign finance and lobbyist disclosures	Satisfaction	22%	31%	15%	Owners<renters

Professionalism of police officers	Satisfaction	59%	46%	67%	Renters<owners
Attitude and behavior of officers towards citizens in your neighborhood	Satisfaction	58%	44%	67%	Renters<owners
Police have appropriate training on how to handle confrontations with civilians	Agreement	43%	34%	48%	Renters<owners
Police are held accountable for any misconduct	Agreement	47%	38%	53%	Renters<owners
Police use good judgement in the use of force	Agreement	47%	32%	57%	Renters<owners
Police treat residents of different races/ethnicities equally	Agreement	44%	38%	49%	Renters<owners

**Positive ratings are provided for context; analysis compares responses across positive and negative ratings.*

Race

Differences between residents of different races were identified on 10 of the 60 measures reviewed by OPDA (Table 2). The majority of these were clustered in the communication service area, with White residents reporting lower satisfaction compared to Black or African American residents.

Table 5. Survey items where perceptions differed by race*

Survey Question	Scale	Citywide (+%)	White (+%)	Black (+%)	Hispanic (+%)	Finding
Police have appropriate training on how to handle confrontations with civilians	Agreement	43%	50%	36%	37%	Black<White
Police use good judgement in the use of force	Agreement	47%	54%	37%	45%	Black<White
Enforcing the clean-up of trash and debris on private property	Satisfaction	30%	24%	37%	40%	White<Black
City Administration's use of social media	Satisfaction	26%	21%	33%	29%	White<Black
Access to information about Finance and Budget information	Satisfaction	22%	16%	31%	24%	White<Black
Opportunity to engage/provide input regarding City operations in public engagement opportunities provided by the City Administration	Satisfaction	24%	18%	32%	29%	White<Black
Opportunity to engage/provide input into decisions made by Elected Officials	Satisfaction	22%	18%	29%	25%	White<Black

Access to information about Campaign finance and lobbyist disclosures	Satisfaction	22%	15%	31%	21%	White<Black
Overall cleanliness of City streets and other public areas	Satisfaction	28%	25%	31%	44%	White<Hispanic
Overall feeling of safety in the City	Satisfaction	32%	28%	35%	47%	White<Hispanic

** Positive ratings are provided for context; analysis compares responses across positive and negative ratings.*

Other Groups

For other demographic groups analyzed (age, gender, income, and years living in Cincinnati), fewer statistically significant differences met the criteria outlined above. The tables below present survey items where differences were observed; however, these differences were limited in number and did not form consistent patterns across multiple measures.

Gender

Table 3. Survey items where perceptions differed by gender*

Survey Question	Scale	Citywide (+%)	Male (+%)	Female (+%)	Finding
Overall effectiveness of city communication with the public	Satisfaction	30%	25%	35%	Male<Female
Police have appropriate training on how to handle confrontations with civilians	Agreement	43%	49%	38%	Female<Male
Police use good judgement in the use of force	Agreement	47%	54%	40%	Female<Male
Police treat residents of different races/ethnicities equally	Agreement	44%	50%	39%	Female<Male

** Positive ratings are provided for context; analysis compares responses across positive and negative ratings.*

Age

Table 4. Survey items where perceptions differed by age group*

Survey Question	Scale	Citywide (+%)	18-24 (+%)	45-54 (+%)	Finding
Overall image of the City	Satisfaction	42%	66%	29%	45+<18-34
Condition of city streets (potholes)	Satisfaction	12%	29%	9%	45+<18-34
Maintenance of city streets (street/pavement markings)	Satisfaction	24%	44%	20%	55+<18-34
Mowing and tree trimming along city streets and other public areas	Satisfaction	39%	57%	33%	45+<18-34
Enforcing trash, weeds, and exterior maintenance in your neighborhood	Satisfaction	30%	49%	27%	45+<18-34
Enforcing the mowing and cutting of weeds on private property	Satisfaction	30%	46%	27%	55+<18-34
Overall effectiveness of city communication with the public	Satisfaction	30%	53%	20%	45+<18-34
City government efforts to keep you informed about City services, issues, events, and programs	Satisfaction	27%	51%	21%	45+<18-34

Opportunity to engage/provide input regarding City operations in public engagement opportunities provided by the City Administration	Satisfaction	24%	52%	18%	45+<18-34
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**Positive ratings for citywide and select age groups are provided for context; but analysis compares responses between each group and across positive and negative ratings.*