

November 13, 2025

Mayor Andrew J. Ginther:

Contained herein is the 2026 Operating Budget totaling \$2.7 billion across all funds, with \$1.26 billion budgeted for general fund operating expenses.

The Mayor's 2026 Budget is balanced and continues to invest in critical city services. These investments are organized around your strategic priorities, which include housing, neighborhood safety & violence prevention, as well as mobility, prosperity, operations, and culture.

While the city's financial position remains strong, there is a measure of uncertainty regarding the current (and near-term) economic and political outlook. Municipalities across the nation are facing an environment of rising costs, flattening revenues, reduced (or uncertain) federal support, and the evolving needs of their communities. The fiscal uncertainty posed by the effects of the recent federal government shutdown, along with federal policy changes have required cities to fill programmatic and funding gaps not previously required or contemplated. In addition, policy discussions at the state level have provided potential fiscal exposure related to property tax revenues as well as certain pension fund requirements. In response to these factors, the proposed 2026 Operating Budget balances the needs of our community while maintaining fiscal conservatism.

The health and safety of our residents is a central focus, and this budget continues to invest in neighborhood safety, both in terms of personnel and programs. The Division of Police will add two recruit classes, providing for up to 120 new officers. The Division of Fire will add a new recruit class, with the ability to onboard 45 new fire fighters. Both are funded to help ensure adequate staffing levels to meet the needs of the communities they serve. The 2026 budget also includes continued support of

innovative community safety programs, such as the Comprehensive Neighborhood Safety Strategy, Alternative Response, and Right Response Programs. Violence prevention is also a priority, with over \$6.3 million allocated to the Office of Violence Prevention, whose personnel and community partnerships address a range of programmatic needs in our neighborhoods. In addition, \$3.7 million is included to address the recent rise in domestic violence.



This budget also reflects continued investment in our city's youth, with \$16.7 million set aside for summer programming to keep Columbus youth active and engaged. Funding is also allocated to the younger populations, with \$9.4 million budgeted for the Early Start Program, which is projected to serve over 1,500 children, as well as \$2.4 million in After School Programming, which focuses on middle-school aged children.

Affordable Housing remains a top priority, both in terms of creating new housing stock, but also providing programs that allow Columbus residents to remain in their existing homes. Therefore, this budget includes over \$18 million for the newly formed Division of Housing Stability, which focuses on tenant engagement, eviction prevention, and enforcement of the city's fair housing policies. A portion of these dollars will also be used to administer the recent voter-approved \$500 million bond package. Furthermore, to continue housing support to vulnerable residents, this budget also includes \$5 million in emergency rental assistance for low-income households.

Aligning with the safety and stability of our communities, the 2026 budget also continues investment in mobility. The connection of our residents to resources (and to one another) is essential to quality of life and prosperity. As such, this budget includes \$230 thousand for Vision Zero, which serves as a cross-departmental initiative to



eliminate traffic and pedestrian fatalities. It also allocates over \$31 million to the Division of Mobility & Parking Services, whose mission includes providing safe, equitable and predictable mobility and parking options for all residents.

The strength of the city's budget is a function of its revenue growth, which in turn is dependent on the underlying economy. Columbus' regional economy remains strong, stable, and diversified. We are experiencing steady population growth as well as job stability and growth in key industries such as government, higher education, technology & advanced manufacturing, and healthcare. Given the city's strong leadership and sound fiscal management, along with the strength of our local and regional economies, I remain optimistic about the near and long-term financial stability of the city.

The city's non-enterprise revenue growth is largely dependent upon income tax, which comprises approximately 78 percent of total general fund revenues. The income tax growth rate for 2025 is projected at 6 percent and the 2026 income tax revenue growth rate is projected at 4 percent. This growth is reflective of the strength and resilience of our local economy. It should also be noted that 25 percent of income tax revenues are set aside for the debt service associated with the city's AAA rated capital program.

Property tax and investment earnings represent other significant (non-enterprise) revenue sources. Property tax revenues are projected to remain strong, with approximately \$86.4 million expected in 2026. Property tax revenues represent roughly 7 percent of non-enterprise revenues. Investment earnings are also expected to remain strong, at a projected level of \$47.6 million in 2026. This is a modest decrease relative to 2025, due to an expected easing of interest rates. Investment earnings represent approximately 4 percent of non-enterprise revenues. Collectively, income tax, property tax, and investment earnings represent almost 90 percent of general fund revenues.

A final note on revenue - in 2023, the sale of marijuana to individuals 21 and over was approved by Ohio voters. A 10 percent tax on these sales is collected by dispensaries and under the voter-approved law, 36 percent of this excise tax revenue is intended for the "host communities" where dispensaries are located. The City of Columbus is one of these host communities. Marijuana sales began in 2024 and payments to municipalities have yet to be issued. We continue to monitor this issue to determine the likelihood and timing of any future payments to the city.

In closing, the 2026 Operating Budget invests in the safety, stability, and prosperity of Columbus residents, while maintaining fiscal conservatism in a time of financial and political uncertainty.

I would like to thank the Department of Finance and Management budget team, as well as department directors and their staff for their partnership in preparing this budget.

The Department of Finance and Management will continue its mission to provide financial leadership to ensure the future health of the city's finances.

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher S Long
Director
Department of Finance and Management





ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR

CITY OF COLUMBUS PROPOSED 2026 BUDGET

Mayor Andrew J. Ginther

Presented to Columbus City Council
November 13, 2025

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