



# County of Hamilton

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## **SPENDING ON FRILLS** County Auditor Dusty Rhodes

The Preliminary Forecast Hamilton County budget for 2013 raises more questions than it answers. It's no surprise that next year's available funds will fall short of this year's by as much as \$20 million. Some of us have been predicting these kinds of shortfalls for years and warning the big spenders their joyride was just about over.

This is the inevitable and cumulative result of bad, politically weak budgetary decisions by willful individuals who put their policy preferences above Ohio law. A series of County Commissioners have caved to the loudest voices in our community that said we are not a successful people if we fail to thoroughly redevelop the City of Cincinnati's riverfront.

There is no requirement in state law that counties spend our tax dollars on such "economic development". It's a local version of "crony capitalism", government picking winners and losers in the market place. I realize the vaunted "Port Authority" is some kind of sacred cow to local movers and shakers. But how can anyone justify spending money on this while suggesting basic, required services be severely shortchanged?

Our Auditor's office is charged, among other things, with paying the bills, completing the payroll, reporting to appropriate agencies, and preparing the County's Annual Financial Report. We work closely with the State Auditor on annual audits and serve every local community and school district with vital fiscal information. Our Weights and Measures work is mandated by the State as a critical consumer protection effort and our computer center supports many other county agencies as well as ours.

In spite of our required duties and the fact that we have been reducing staff for twenty years while other County offices have not, the proposed budget suggests a 17.8% reduction for our office while increasing Economic Development funding to almost \$2 million. While we are asked to take a \$327,121 reduction in our funding, the County spent \$580,000 on a contract with an "inclusion consultant" since 2008 for various County construction projects.

This just scratches the surface. As noted, I have been predicting these shortfalls for many years. Perhaps now they might listen when I predict the ultimate result of this folly will be a series of mandamus actions with the Courts being asked to force adequate funding for that which state law says we must do. It is time for the County Commissioners to recognize their proper role.

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