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Mayor Barrett says streetcar project a job creation “vehicle”

By Thomas E. Mitchell, Jr.

Aside from being a “vehicle” that can grow Milwaukee’s economy and make it a world-class city with a 21st century transit system, the proposed Milwaukee streetcar would create jobs and improve access to jobs according to Mayor Tom Barrett.

During a Monday phone interview, Barrett touted the federally funded \$123 million project as a major generator of jobs for the Black and Latino communities in the construction and maintenance of the streetcar system, which would eventually be expanded into communities of color.

The mayor has emphasized construction of the streetcar system alone could create 720 jobs. The project would be paid for with grant money, an already approved TIF district and \$54 million in federal dollars earmarked specifically for the streetcar project. There will also be no property tax increase.

“I want people in the community to have jobs; to build this (streetcar),” Barrett said, admitting that the streetcar would help spur economic activity downtown and the Third Ward.

But he also stressed he wanted to expand the streetcar system beyond downtown to outlying areas of the city which includes the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (eastside), Bronzeville (northside), the Fifth Ward (south).

The mayor said he has been touting job creation as the key reason for pushing the streetcar project. “Jobs is a big part of this. I want investment in other areas of the city.

“We have to make investment (in the streetcar) so that the investment will grow.”

Saying the process for getting the streetcar system off the ground has been totally transparent, Barrett questioned why opponents of the streetcar, led by Alderman and Mayoral Candidate Bob Donovan, are now calling for a referendum on whether or not a streetcar is needed in Milwaukee. Donovan believes the money earmarked for the streetcar can be used to address more pending issues confronting the city.

Barrett called the opposition’s push of a petition for a referendum during a future election a “last ditch effort to delay the project.

Donovan, and Ald. Joe Davis—who is also a mayoral candidate who has joined the southside alderman in opposing the streetcar project—must collect 31,000 signatures in the next two months to force the issue to a binding referendum.

“They had four years to get a petition drive going,” Barrett added. “I haven’t seen a lot of evidence for its success. They’re calling for a referendum on a referendum. Why did they wait so long? It’s part of a legal strategy to slow it (the streetcar project) down.”

The Common Council is scheduled to vote on the project next Tuesday, January 21. If the Council approves the project and the petition drive fails, the streetcar could reportedly be up and running by 2018.

Sources for this story:fox6now.com



Mayor Tom Barrett