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# Milwaukee streetcar plan energizes supporters, spurs opposition

Nov 19, 2014, 5:42pm CST



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The expanded plan for the downtown streetcar has garnered support from members of the downtown Milwaukee business community, but also prompted a move by Ald. [Robert Donovan](#) to oppose the project.

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett will seek Common Council approval for \$49.3 million in tax incremental financing for the streetcar. That money would allow the [downtown loop to proceed](#), despite uncertainties over utility relocation costs, and would finance a new spur leading to the downtown lakefront. The envisioned 4.6 miles of track would cost \$123.9 million, with the original \$64.6 million plan and backed by additional funds from a \$10 million federal grant the city will seek.

The TIF districts would let the city borrow money to finance the streetcar project and repay the debt using property taxes on new developments or increased property values in areas of the lakefront and 3rd Ward. Donovan, the Common Council's most vocal critic of the streetcar, opposes Barrett's plan, citing other needs for city spending, including public schools and central-city unemployment.

Donovan also sent a letter to state Rep. [Dale Kooyenga](#) (R-Brookfield), asking the state legislator to "take whatever steps you deem appropriate" to block Barrett's TIF proposal. Kooyenga [last year wrote a state bill](#) that would force the city, not private utility companies, pay to relocate underground utilities for the streetcar.

Donovan was among five members of the Common Council who opposed the downtown streetcar loop in 2011 when it got its last major approval. Donovan said he does not know how the council may vote on Barrett's latest proposal.

"That remains to be seen," he said. "It may very well pass. I hope it won't."

One new TIF district the council will consider would channel property taxes from Barrett

Visionary Development's proposed Couture high-rise to the streetcar. The district would provide \$31 million for the streetcar and \$17.5 million to build out [public spaces in the Couture's base](#), including a street-level concourse with a streetcar stop.

Developer [Rick Barrett](#) said the streetcar would help attract workers and companies to the area.

"Around the country, we are seeing that streetcars are spurring new development, which creates new jobs and builds the property tax base," [Rick Barrett](#) said.

"The Couture is designed from the ground up to serve as a key thoroughfare connecting our lakefront and cultural amenities with downtown — through pedestrian walkways and bridges, bus connections and the proposed streetcar," Barrett added. "It is very much a public-private partnership."

[Beth Weirick](#), CEO of the Downtown Business Improvement District, also supported the mayor's proposal.

"I know it's a difficult conversation for some folks to have, but I encourage people to think bolder," she said. "I hope we can dig deep and make this happen. I hope we can be far-sighted on this."

Reporter Sean Ryan covers commercial and residential real estate for the Milwaukee Business Journal and through the [Real Estate Roundup blog](#) on the website. He also covers construction, highways and public transit.