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ROBERT G. DONOVAN
Alderman, 8th District

Two more reasons to say “NO!” to the downtown streetcar

Alderman Donovan outlines potential huge cost overruns

Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan
January 30, 2013

Anyone who knows me knows that I occasionally let off steam about topics that I feel strongly about. Well, now I am letting off steam about a certain downtown transportation infrastructure project while also addressing real, actual steam.

While we have been informed for some time about potentially large costs associated with relocating utilities along the route of the proposed downtown streetcar project, **in my opinion the Barrett Administration has kept under wraps potentially HUGE cost overruns related to the possible relocation of underground steam tunnels located along portions of the proposed streetcar route.** Increased costs for this additional work will almost certainly be passed along to hundreds of downtown businesses.

But that’s not all...

I have also learned that water mains will also likely require relocation because of the project – adding massive costs to an already costly (and in my opinion, ill conceived) project. To my knowledge, this possibility also, has not been shared publicly by the administration.

The project has been touted by the mayor as a major catalyst for downtown businesses and economic development, yet **I am told the relocation of the steam tunnels (which provide heat and hot water to many downtown buildings) will possibly result in energy cost increases of up to 25% for downtown businesses and tenants.** The underground structures are very old, some dating back to the early 1900s, and most have asbestos insulation that will need to be properly abated (also very expensive).

-More-

I am sorry, but I don't see how up to 25% increases in energy costs give any downtown businesses an "economic boost!" The streetcar project, in my opinion, will be hurting downtown businesses before it even rolls down its first block.

I am aware that preliminary engineering for the project will be completed in early spring. However, in my opinion it is unconscionable that the mayor and other city officials are still "moving forward" with the project without yet knowing the true costs of relocating the steam tunnels and the water mains!

Why the mayor refuses to support a referendum on the project, why the mayor refuses to give the people a voice, and why the mayor remains adamant in his support of this boondoggle is, quite frankly, beyond me.

We should have ALL of the project cost information in hand, and that information should be made available to the public, before making decisions to move forward on the project.

By the way – I know the mayor often likes to reference the streetcar system in Portland, Oregon. Well, what the mayor doesn't say is that Portland does NOT have steam tunnels that needed to be relocated!

Again, I believe this information (about the possible need to relocate steam tunnels and water mains) has been kept hidden from the public and downtown stakeholders.

Why?