

## **COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS**

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- Anti-Graffiti Policy



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ALDERMAN, 8TH DISTRICT

# **History ought to be a lesson for Milwaukee**

## **City fails to net \$20 million grant for streetcar extension**

**Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan  
August 3, 2016**

I've heard it said that the only causes worth fighting for are the lost causes. Well, that must be my deep, primary motivation in my fight against the streetcar project.

We learned yesterday that the city was notified that it would not be receiving a \$20 million grant to provide an extension (of the not-yet-built streetcar line) north to the site of the future new Bucks arena. The loss of this important grant funding is big news, yet nothing, it seems, can put the brakes on the streetcar boondoggle.

It doesn't have any impact, grant or no grant, to the Barrett Administration or to the news media. Nothing to see here – the project will continue.

We haven't even determined who will operate the streetcar, yet we continue to plan and talk about extensions we don't have the money for.

What's also amazing to me is that we somehow find \$20 million here, or \$30 million there for various projects, but when it comes to funding public safety initiatives the money is never there. So without the \$20 million for the extension, I wonder if Mayor Barrett will just go ahead and create another TIF (district)?

I am reminded of a fairly similar styled Milwaukee public works project boondoggle from about 40 years ago: The narrowing of Mitchell St.

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For those who are too young to know what I am referring to, the city put on a full-court press 40 years ago to “save” Mitchell Street by narrowing the street and making the commercial hub more “pedestrian friendly” to help attract more shoppers to the stores and businesses there. So-called experts and editorial writers were strongly advising that the narrowing project would be just the thing to revive commerce along Mitchell Street, to bring back the bustle of shoppers and patrons.

After spending millions on that project, the “experts” joined city leaders and residents in watching the continued decline of Mitchell Street commerce. In fact, about 20 years after the project’s completion, the city went ahead and restored most of the street to its original width and condition!

All of that effort, and all of that money, flushed down the drain. That’s all too often what happens when government steps in to save the day.

So I wonder what Common Council members 20 or 30 years from now will be thinking about the streetcar. I bet they’ll be shaking their heads as they spend money to tear up the tracks of the failed system. I bet they’ll be wondering why today’s Council was so foolish to use 19<sup>th</sup> century technology – gussied up with paint and whistles – to create a supposed 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system.

Why I continue to fight this battle, I don’t know. Maybe it’s because I don’t like to lose. Or, maybe it’s because I don’t like to see a mistake repeated and amplified.

There’s also another saying: “Those who don’t study history are doomed to repeat it.”

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