



September 27, 2017

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Alderman Zielinski tells Mayor Barrett: Cut the streetcar, don't cut protective services

Statement by Alderman Tony Zielinski

Yesterday, Mayor Tom Barrett laid out his budget plans which include cuts to Milwaukee's Police and Fire Departments, all while the mayor continues to spend recklessly on the streetcar project. I am appalled that he would cut police and fire positions without first cutting exorbitant discretionary spending on the streetcar. Where are Mayor Barrett's priorities?

We need our police and fire to keep our neighborhoods and residents safe, and to make our city a desirable place for families, small businesses, and large corporations to invest in. With a high crime rate and slow response times by police, our department is already stretched.

It is abundantly clear what dire financial straits the city is in, yet the mayor continues to promote discretionary spending with the streetcar. The mayor is asking the state for a half-percent sales tax to help Milwaukee with its financial problems. However, the state believes the streetcar is a waste of taxpayer dollars and has inserted a budget amendment restricting the use of TIF dollars, so the city cannot use that money for the operation of the streetcar. The mayor has to understand that the state will not help the city as long as he continues to spend money we don't have on the streetcar.

The mayor has failed to identify a long-term funding source for the streetcar's operation and maintenance, and our police and fire departments could be footing the bill with their jobs. I truly believe public safety has to remain our highest priority, and I will continue to fight for the people of Milwaukee.

I am calling on the mayor to commit to no future expansion of the streetcar. Mr. Mayor, will you commit to no future expansion of the streetcar?