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FOR INFORMATION CALL

June 1, 2007

Ald. Michael D'Amato
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Alderman D'Amato Renews Call For TIF Policy To Help Direct City Development

Zoning Chair Reiterates Need for a Downtown and Park East Parking Plan; Calls for TIFs to Contribute to Downtown Streetcar Plan

Third district alderman and chair of the Common Council's Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee Michael D'Amato today reiterated his long-time request for the administration of Mayor Tom Barrett to take the lead on creating a tax incremental financing (TIF) policy for the City of Milwaukee that creates certainty for developers, directs investment where it is most needed and to discourage speculative development.

"Over the past three years the Common Council has been demanding a TIF policy that will assist us in decision-making regarding the future development of our city," Ald. D'Amato said. "Despite the urging of economic experts and examples of such a policy from other cities, the Department of City Development (DCD) has refused to create a set of guidelines that provides a clear direction to policy-makers and developers."

Ald. D'Amato pointed to the recent public outcry from Park East developers as evidence that the lack of a policy is hurting city development efforts.

"The lack of such direction has led to massive discontent in the real estate community and an inability for the council to fairly evaluate proposals," he said.

"When the official policy of the Barrett administration is to react to the market on a case-by-case basis, you're creating chaos in the development community that's not good for anyone," the alderman said.

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City TIF Policy Needed/ADD ONE

Ald. D'Amato points to cities like Chicago and Madison as two that have clearly defined TIF policies which have helped them to make better use of this very important economic development tool.

Creating a specific public assistance policy for public parking is critical, Ald. D'Amato said.

"I'm afraid that any study of the use of TIF dollars for hotels or retail is misdirected," he said.

"The real demand for TIF funding is for the structured parking required in the city, especially downtown. It's that additional cost that accounts for the difference between suburban and urban development and is the subject of the majority of requests for city financing," he said.

He said public parking is the subject of several TIF requests in the city, stretching from Brady Street, to the Park East to the red-hot 5th Ward.

"Until we create a comprehensive parking plan for downtown and near downtown neighborhoods we will continue to allow developers to dictate our planning efforts," Ald. D'Amato said. "It's important that we determine the optimal location for public parking that best serves the area rather than allowing the developer who may have the inside edge determine that for us. If such a structure is integrated into existing projects it creates a win-win for all involved."

Ald. D'Amato said he asked for such a plan from DCD for the Park East months ago and still has not received a response.

In addition, Ald. D'Amato indicated that beginning with the next proposed TIF in the downtown and near downtown area, he will insist that there be funds set aside for mass transit. He pointed to the Council's successful initiative to include job-training funds in TIFs for the past two years.

"Until we can offer developers, hoteliers, employers and just plain folks an attractive alternative to driving downtown, there will continue to be requests for subsidized structured parking," he said.

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City TIF Policy Needed/ADD TWO

“We need to change the paradigm by offering an in-line transit connector downtown that sets us apart from alternative locations,” the alderman said. “We can no longer wait for others to act -- the City of Milwaukee and the Common Council must take the lead on this issue.”

At a recent ZND meeting the committee heard testimony regarding a study on TIFs that determined the real long lasting benefit of public assistance in development projects is in the public infrastructure built that catalyzed future development. Such an example in Milwaukee is the downtown Riverwalk, Ald. D’Amato said.

“The lack of an attractive, in-line transit option that runs on clean fuel and connects attractions and neighborhoods is the most limiting factor to the future growth of our city,” he said.

“Our downtown and near downtown area are ready to take off, and the only thing that can stand in the way is a lack of vision and the lack of courage to implement that vision,” said Ald. D’Amato.