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ALDERMAN, 8TH DISTRICT

On the Use of Tax Dollars for the Streetcar, Mayor Barrett is Either Deceitful or Incompetent

Residents are Forced to Decide Which

Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan June 28, 2019

I am still trying to get over the remarks of Mr. Dave Windsor, identified by the press as the Milwaukee Streetcar's system manager, to the Public Works Committee on Wednesday.

He testified that he is projecting a 2020 operating deficit for the streetcar of as much as \$1.5 million. Asked how he would fill this gap, he said they were seeking corporate sponsorships, grants, and advertising. When pressed by my colleague, Ald. Robert Bauman, a staunch streetcar supporter, as to what would happen if none of these options came through, Mr. Windsor unhesitatingly said he would draw money from the Parking Fund. Ald. Bauman, whose line of questioning in this matter deserves great credit, asked incredulously if Mr. Windsor believed he had the authority to do that without further Common Council action. Mr. Windsor indicated that he believed he did.

From this, the media chose not to make headlines of the remarkable admission that the Barrett Administration was, despite all its representations to the contrary, closer than anyone thought to needing to use real revenues, revenues the City Budget has relied on for years, to keep the streetcar moving. **They did not choose to herald the fact that unless the City comes up with this operating money and does so every year for the useful life of the streetcar – estimated by some as 25 years – the City will owe the federal government tens of millions of dollars in federal grants spent on the project's construction.** They did not even choose to emphasize the decision made by the streetcar's operators not to purchase – much less install – the devices necessary to collect fares; a decision that seemed to surprise many on the committee. Without this reporting, how are our citizens to know the facts?

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No, the media's headlines tried desperately to make it seem as if the Mayor had benevolently decided to make the streetcar free for another year. This is dangerous nonsense. Surely each of us has been told by a parent or wise elder that nothing in this world is free. The revenue from fare boxes had always been part of the Mayor's pitch to assure us all that the cost of the streetcar would not appear on our straining levy. Now it is clear that even this mite will not be available to help offset the cost of the streetcar to Milwaukee's tax-payers.

It would seem the Public Works Committee tripped over the truth on Wednesday. Now the only question that remains is whether the Mayor knew it would come to this all along or he really did hope that things would turn out better and was just woefully, pitifully unable to make it so.

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