

Cranley outlines big projects, new programs in first State of the City address

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A rendering of a proposed Avondale grocery store.

CINCINNATI -- A beer garden in Mount Airy. A grocery store in Avondale. A new bike trail from Evanston to Newtown.

In his first "State of the City" address Thursday, Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley outlined a lengthy list of priority projects and new programs he said are critical to tackling poverty, stepping up basic services and improving the city's 52 neighborhoods.

Cranley even appointed a first-ever "Commissioner of Fun" – Frank Wood, the mastermind behind WEBN fireworks.

"We need more fun in Cincinnati," Cranley said. "Fun transcends politics...Fun is good for the heart and for the soul. Fun is somehow related to love."

Wood won't draw a city salary.

"He will do it just for the fun of it," Cranley said.

Fun aside, Cranley spent most of his talk outlining plans for the city's more serious challenges. Here's a recap:

On poverty: Cranley wants to launch "The Hand Up Initiative" – a program that aims to move at least 4,000 Cincinnatians living in poverty into long-term employment over the next four years. The program, which is in partnership with Cincinnati State, will be coming before council "in the next few weeks," Cranley said.

On minority inclusion: Cincinnati "has a lousy record of minority inclusion, which is unacceptable," Cranley said. He's created an Economic Advisory Inclusion Council, led by former councilman Paul Booth and Kevin Kline, of the Horseshoe Casino. Already, the group has brought 25 minority- and women-owned businesses to the city to take part in a pilot program.

On balancing the budget: Cranley said he's tasked new city manager Harry Black with outlining a 10-year financial plan "to make sure that we are in balance not just for tomorrow, but for the future."

On basic services: "In too many ways, the city's policies over the last several years have failed our neighborhoods in the very areas that make the biggest difference: safety, basic service delivery and issues involving quality of life and blight," Cranley said.

Specifically, he said, the city's roads are deteriorating and 55 percent the city's fleet of fire, police and garbage vehicles are out of life cycle.

"We will have to level with the citizens about this bad news and develop a practical long-term strategy to fix it," he said.

He also announced plans to do away with the city's one-can policy for garbage collection. It will be part of an overhaul of the city's trash collection program expected to be rolled out by March 1.

On neighborhood investment: "We must dare to dream," Cranley said. "Nothing impactful happens without first having the courage to envision it."

Taking a queue from his own success building the Public House restaurant in Price Hill's Incline District, Cranley says he'd like to see similar investments elsewhere in the city.

Projects coming before city council soon could include plans for a German-style beer garden in Mount Airy Forest, and a full-service grocery store to the Avondale Town Center, in partnership with the Center for Closing the Health Gap.

The city also plans to announce a deal later this year in which it will buy land needed to complete a bike trail from Xavier University to the Little Miami Bike Trail in Newtown.

"Great effort is needed again to start our neighborhoods renaissance," Cranley said.