



Mayor Kapszukiewicz previews future projects during 'State of the City'



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A huge economic development project on the horizon, a strong economy, and the soon-to-be naming of Toledo's next police chief have Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz feeling positive about the state of the city, despite the ongoing gun violence.

“We’re making some real progress in a lot of areas,” Mr. Kapszukiewicz said before his formal remarks at the 2023 State of the City address on Wednesday from the Frederick Douglass Community Center in central Toledo where about 100 people attended.

City officials must “be creative and think outside the box” to create opportunities that will draw future industries such as electric vehicle manufacturing, the mayor said.

For the past two years, he has been meeting with Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority officials and others about a plan to bring a battery plant or some type of electric vehicle industry to the area. The proposal, which is still in the very early stages, calls for converting more than 500 acres occupied by the Toledo Executive Airport into an industrial site for such a complex.

“That is our top economic development project,” the mayor said in an interview. “We’ve had folks from JobsOhio tell us that that is the No. 1 most attractive site in all of Ohio to attract such a plant.”

While the plan could bring thousands of jobs to the area and would be the “economic development project of the next generation,” it would also be a heavy undertaking and would include decommissioning the airport, among other things, he said.

The mayor said that gun violence needs to “be dealt with head-on.” Six homicides have occurred in Toledo this year. But none have been reported this month, which could be a record not seen in four years, Mr. Kapszukiewicz said.

He also referenced Cities United as an organization that could help Toledo create a comprehensive plan to address the issue and “connect the dots” between the organizations that work to address gun violence. The organization partners with municipalities across the country to create a comprehensive violence reduction plan.

Mr. Kapszukiewicz credited groups for organizing meetings and calling attention to the problem, including the city’s current four mayors, who formed the Coalition for Peaceful Toledo Neighborhoods and have been critical of the proposal to work with Cities United.

“I am thankful for the effort they have brought forth, maybe their ideas aren’t new,” Mr. Kapszukiewicz said. “But I am thankful that we have people in our community that care so much to solve our problems.”

The mayor will announce Thursday his choice for the next police chief of Toledo. The city initially received 29 applications to replace George Kral, who retired as chief on Jan. 9. “This has been one of the most difficult decisions that I have had to make as mayor,” Mr. Kapszukiewicz said.

He also discussed the need to make \$900 million in repairs to the city’s Bay View Wastewater Treatment Plant off North Summit Street. Funding for the plan could appear as a ballot initiative in November, but officials are still making that determination, he said.

The mayor touted the economic strength of the city, citing income tax revenue that increased by \$57 million in 2022. Citing sidewalk repair investment, he said that 1,300 properties will receive sidewalk improvements this year as opposed to 130 last year. In addition, 105 residential roads will also be improved through \$24 million in revenue generated from the 0.25 percent road tax approved by voters in 2020.

“It’s an incredible boom to Toledo neighborhoods,” he said. “We’re going to fix more roads this year than we ever have before,” he said. Even at this pace, it will take 15 to 20 years to fix all of the city’s roads, he said.

Mr. Kapszukiewicz also credited the city council for showing continued support for the city’s summer youth programming. The city has invested \$5.52 million to support programming and operations for Toledo’s 125 city parks. In addition, 110 programs will be offered this year, 10 more than last year when 60,000 participated, he said.

In keeping with the promise of honoring Irene Drouillard, a 15-year-old girl who 100 years ago opened a bank account and donated \$21 to the mayor of Toledo for “the betterment of our city,” Mr. Kapszukiewicz announced youth and adult award winners in her name.

One award went to Jaden Jefferson, a teenage multimedia journalist. The adult award went to Samanth Boyle for her efforts to create the Luken T Boyle Campaign for Kindness initiative following the death of her son who was bullied.

Wrapping up his speech with an optimistic tone, Mayor Kapszukiewicz said that challenges will be overcome by working together.

“We work together, and we turn our adversity times into triumphs,” he said. “That’s what we need to do to confront these challenges. We’re making so much progress here in Toledo.”

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