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Real estate industry goes to bat for downtown streetcar

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Although the Milwaukee streetcar has become a lightning rod of debate in the past weeks, most, if not all, of the public comments during city hearings have supported the project.

A bulk of the input is from the business community, particularly people in real estate. Those showing up to support the streetcar during hearings include Milwaukee-based Fix Development's Juli Kaufmann, Schlitz Park's [Gary Grunau](#), [Mandel Group Inc.'s Bob Monnat](#) and philanthropist [Michael Cudahy](#). Letters of support also have come from the downtown business associations, [Milwaukee Art Museum](#), and Wisconsin Avenue redevelopment group WAM DC.

Others such as Mandel Group's [Barry Mandel](#) are urging support in private forums. Mandel's list of reasons he supports the project are a good summation of other statements from the business community.

"It acts as a beacon to those who look at Milwaukee, that they have joined the ranks of other progressive cities throughout the nation," Mandel said. "That, in fact, will help retain and attract intellectual capital, the scale-up of businesses, possibly the attraction of other businesses."

Mandel called the spending on the streetcar, and the annual operating subsidy, an "investment."

"It is an investment that I believe — and this is where the leap of faith comes in — will lead toward other benefits in the form of development, attraction to the city of Milwaukee by millennials and other intellectual capital that in the end will far outweigh the subsidy that we may have to provide," Mandel said.

The \$123.9 million downtown streetcar proposal has several opponents on the city's Common Council, where it will go for a vote on Tuesday. Those opponents have provided all of the criticism of the project during the Common Council's review. Aldermen have questioned the spending on the project, arguing the money is better used elsewhere. Ald. [Joe Davis](#) criticized the project's downtown location, saying it will not help city neighborhoods that are hardest hit with crime and unemployment.

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Reporter Sean Ryan covers commercial and residential real estate for the Milwaukee Business Journal and through the [Real Estate Roundup blog](#) on the website. He also covers construction, highways and public transit.

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