Mayor speaks at State of the City

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Cleveland's Mayor Frank G. Jackson held his annual State of the City address at the Cleveland Public Auditorium hosted by the City Club where this year he changed his format.

This year he decided on an unscripted, live interview in front of an audience of approximately 1,000 people that was followed by a Q&A session with the audience. Instead of a 30 minute written speech, he elected to be interview by the one and only Leon Bibb of WEWS TV 5.

Jackson changed the format because he said he got tired of listening to himself speak. "30 minutes to just read a speech is a long time, I didn't believe people got a true understanding of what the state of the city really is," Jackson said.

At the opening of the program, the Mayor expressed in plain and simple language, how he looks at his role in building and maintaining the city. “The measure of a great city is what the city does for the least of us,” Mayor Jackson said.

The Mayor made it very clear that he is known as the “Education Mayor.” Jackson stated many times how he is steadily trying to improve the education system. Last year hes stated he would give up everything in trade for a better education.

In his comments about schools he told everyone he expects the community will hold him and CMSD schools CEO Eric Gordon accountable for rebuilding the school system. “I just believe this is so essential for this region,” I just believe it is that important. You should have high expectations and demand accountability,” Jackson said.

In many of his responses, he focused on the health of the city's school system, the problems he had with the water department and problems regarding vacant housing.

The mayor acknowledged that in the past the water department had terrible customer service until about two years ago when the city hired a consulting firm and a project manager to turn the operation around. He told the audience that the problems have been solved and an improved collections process has yielded about $14 million in new revenue for the department.

The question was asked regarding why his plans for lakefront development will succeed where those of past administrations have failed; the mayor said his vision was practical.
Jackson
's plan decisively states that the port and
Burke Lakefront Airport
will remain where they are and left earlier lakefront proposals in limbo.

With regard to vacant housing, the Mayor shared his thoughts. On one side are some city leaders and community development gurus who say demolition is the answer. On the other side are preservationists who say the city should invest in restoring its once livable and architecturally valuable homes.

Jackson said the city has spent more than $50 million in the past six years on demolition, and still thousands of vacant and blighted structures must be razed. He added, however, that the preservationist philosophy deserves attention, even though decisions on which houses are salvageable hinge on market demands.

The Mayor answered questions pertaining to the fate of Cleveland Hopkins Airport and how he also has hope for improving the lakefront and maintaining high-quality air service at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport
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He said as he offers city-owned lakefront land for development, his goal will be to create a 24-hour city and “no more East Side and West Side” but a city “oriented toward the water.”

As for the airport, and concerns that United Airlines could drop Cleveland Hopkins as a hub, the mayor said, “We have to position Cleveland Hopkins so, regardless of the industry (conditions), we will be competitive.”