

Three Northeast Ohio groups make requests for more state cash

Cuyahoga County asks for \$20.4 million from capital budget, including \$7 million to go toward proposed pedestrian walkway

By JAY MILLER
February 23, 2014

Three groups chosen by Gov. John Kasich have put together a \$39.6 million wish list for Northeast Ohio now that the governor is re-opening the capital budget to projects around the state.

The Greater Cleveland Partnership has focused its requests for Cleveland and Cuyahoga County on opening up the lakefront. In the Akron area, the Greater Akron Chamber put the emphasis on boosting startup businesses. And a governor-appointed statewide arts panel is seeking state money for investments in more than a dozen cultural attractions in Northeast Ohio.

At the top of the \$20.4 million list for Cuyahoga County is a \$7 million request to help move forward a \$47 million pedestrian walkway and attached parking garage proposed by the city of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County to connect the Lake Erie waterfront with the rest of downtown. The list also includes \$6 million of the expected \$16.7 million cost for a riverfront park on the east bank of the Flats.

The biggest single piece of the Akron area's \$10.6 million request is \$3.7 million for the Center for Bits and Atoms, an expansion of the Akron Global Business Accelerator. The plan, said Anthony Margida, the accelerator's CEO, is to convert an existing building into "a place for anyone to make anything and make a business of it."

In both cases, the groups made the top priority for inclusion on their lists a project's expected impact on the region's economy. To make the capital budget, a proposal must involve the acquisition of property, new construction or a major renovation.

Separately, the arts panel is recommending \$8.6 million in spending for upgrades to 16 museums and cultural institutions in the region. That list includes improvements to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, Severance Hall's Reinberger Auditorium and Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens in Akron.

The Cleveland list also includes \$1 million for the last piece of the Cleveland Museum of Art's \$323 million overhaul.

Policy reversal

During the recession, the state trimmed its capital spending to about \$1.7 billion and limited it to construction and renovation projects sought by state agencies, colleges and universities. As part of its cuts, the state did not offer matching funds for "community projects," such as the construction of new stadiums or improvements to handicap accessibility at small museums.

The state late last year reversed that policy, perhaps only coincidentally, months before Kasich begins his re-election campaign. The governor may hope that spending on these projects is enough to offset the complaints about earlier budget decisions that cut nearly \$2 billion in biennial support to local government from the state general fund budget.

This capital budget likely will exceed the last biennial budget's \$1.7 billion, though it's not known yet by how much. At least 90% of the capital budget will go to higher education capital expenditures as well as spending by state agencies. Those expenditures still should leave more than \$100 million for community projects.

The money comes from bonds issued by the state against its general tax revenue. The state money is typically only a portion of a project's total cost.

When the governor last fall said community projects would be eligible for state capital spending dollars, he put the task of creating wish lists in the hands of six community organizations from the state's metropolitan areas. Proposals also may come directly from legislators, especially from smaller counties outside the metro areas.

Which projects actually will end up with state money won't be known until the governor and the Legislature's leaders release a final bill. Originally, that bill was planned for a February introduction.

However, Michael Dittoe, spokesman for the Republican majority in the Ohio House, said last Thursday, Feb. 20, in an email that no timetable has been set.

"Those details are still being worked out but I expect it will be introduced soon," Dittoe wrote.

Eyes on the waterfront

In Cleveland, after a call for proposals, Greater Cleveland Partnership winnowed a list of 46 projects to nine.

"We still don't know" how much money will be allocated, said Carol Caruso, GCP senior vice president for advocacy. "But that's OK because they may be thinking about growing the pie."

Caruso said state officials told her to look at history in deciding for how much to seek. That look back, she said, showed Cuyahoga County securing state capital dollars in the \$12 million to \$19 million range.

The focus for the county is on developing the waterfront to attract tourism and more broadly boost economic development.

Four of the nine projects are aimed at opening the waterfront to the public. Two others help with the rebuilding of two Cleveland neighborhoods. The Cuyahoga County wish list also includes a community health center in Cleveland's Central neighborhood, a hiking trail that ends at the lake and renovations at the former St. Luke's Hospital in Cleveland.

"We cast a very wide net," Caruso said. "There was a lot of pent-up demand."

The keystone of the Cleveland waterfront plan is a pedestrian bridge and garage that would link the Mall above the new Cleveland Convention Center with the lakefront. Not only would that make FirstEnergy Stadium and the lakefront museums more accessible, but it also would make the city's hoped-for commercial redevelopment of the lakefront an easier sell to developers.

The city and the county each have pledged \$10 million to this plan, which has been turned down three times for a federal transportation grant.

Lofty lists

Rep. Nickie Antonio, a Democrat whose 13th House District runs from the Cuyahoga River to the Rocky River along Lake Erie, said she hopes three projects in her district will end up in the final bill.

"Those dollars would be well spent," she said. "But we know they all can't be funded."

The projects in her district are \$350,000 to build a \$1.4 million terraced park along the shore in Lakewood; \$402,349 to make the Beck Center for the Arts in Lakewood more energy efficient and more accessible to the disabled; and \$1 million to renovate the Cleveland Public and Near West theaters in the Gordon Square Arts District on Cleveland's West Side.

In addition to the Global Business Accelerator project, the Akron chamber is requesting \$1.5 million for its medical device prototyping center in a building near the business center and is seeking \$450,000 that the Medina Economic Development Corp. wants for a study to see if a new freeway interchange to ease traffic and attract new business is justified.

The arts list, meanwhile, includes \$255,000 to renovate the Burke Mansion in University Circle, a part of The Music Settlement; \$150,000 for the restoration and expansion of the Cleveland African American Museum; \$1.06 million for theater renovations at Cleveland's Karamu House; and \$800,000 to allow the new Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland to close out its \$34.5 million building campaign.

Capital budget requests

A look at the local projects and the amounts requested from the state:

- **Cleveland Lakefront Access:** \$7,000,000
- **Flats East Gateway and Riverfront:** \$6,000,000
- **Akron Global Business Accelerator:** \$3,700,000
- **New Economy Neighborhood Fairfax Renaissance:** \$3,000,000
- **Cascade Plaza Renovation:** \$2,500,000
- **Austen BioInnovation Institute, Advanced Prototyping and Preparedness Structure:** \$1,500,000
- **Cleveland Museum of Art:** \$1,060,522
- **Karamu House renovation:** \$1,060,522
- **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame theater renovation:** \$1,060,522
- **Severance Hall Reinberger Auditorium renovation:** \$1,060,522
- **Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens restoration:** \$1,060,522
- **Akron Mayflower Manor Redevelopment Area:** \$1,000,000
- **Central Neighborhood Care Alliance Health Center:** \$1,000,000
- **Gordon Square Arts District:** \$1,000,000
- **Euclid Waterfront improvements:** \$1,000,000

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