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**ALERT** **FEATURED** **URGENT**

## **WATCH NOW: McDermott sets sights on big changes to downtown Hammond, Hessville**

Molly DeVore  
Jan 21, 2022

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Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. talks about development throughout Hammond on Thursday.

Connor Burge, The Times

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Molly DeVore

Watch Now: Mayor McDermott Discusses Redevelopment in Downtown Hammond ...

HAMMOND — Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. reflected on the city's recent accomplishments and discussed the major developments on the horizon Thursday during his "favorite day of the year," the State of the City address.

"I want to thank the Hammond residents for 18 years of support and encouragement," McDermott said. "As long as I am sitting in the mayor's office, I want to be moving forward."

School administrators, City Council members, library representatives and more gathered at the Dynasty Banquet Center, listening as Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Dave Ryan asked McDermott a wide range of questions about city progress. Much of the discussion focused on upcoming and ongoing development projects, with emphasis placed on the downtown redevelopment.

The process started in 2018 when the city hired "rock star city planner" Jeff Speck, McDermott said. The project involves a "complete redesign" of Hohman Avenue, doubling the width of the sidewalk to drop Hohman down to two lanes and adding street parking. McDermott said the goal is to slow traffic to make shoppers and retailers more comfortable when convening downtown.

The project will transform Hohman from "basically a four-lane highway" to a corridor similar to the "neighborly" stretch of Hohman that cuts through Munster.

The downtown will also see a flood of residential development, McDermott said.

#### **Nearly-century-old bank tower to bring downtown-style apartments: 'It will be pretty spectacular'**

The former Bank Calumet building is set to **undergo a \$24 million redesign** that will include 100 residential units, and construction on a \$15 million, five-story, 54-unit development called the Madison Lofts is slated to break ground this spring. McDermott said the Madison Lofts project will include 8,700 feet of retail space and 20 permanent jobs. Work on Rimbach Plaza, a 208-unit apartment building planned for the 5000 block of Hohman Avenue, is also set to start this spring.

The downtown redevelopment will prepare the city for the South Shore Line's West Lake Corridor commuter railroad expansion. McDermott said as soon as the trains begin running, the city will start construction on a downtown train station situated right near the federal courthouse.

"With all of these things going on for us in downtown Hammond, it's going to be a different place," McDermott said. "I'm not going to tell you that I don't have skeptics on this, because we've seen what's become of downtown Hammond over the last three, four decades, and it's hard for people to appreciate that we can turn this around. But we can turn this around."

Big development projects are coming to other parts of the city as well. Inspired by the Hohman Avenue redesign, changes are also coming to Kennedy Avenue in the Hessville neighborhood. The busy roadway will be cut down to two lanes, pushing traffic onto Cline Avenue, "where it belongs," McDermott said.

### ► **Hammond full steam ahead on railroad bridge; environmental concerns persist**

Also coming to the Hessville neighborhood is **an \$11 million bridge** connecting 173rd and 169th Street. McDermott said the number one complaint he has heard throughout his tenure as mayor is the freight trains that cut through the city, especially in Hessville where the trains often stop.

The **project has received ample pushback from residents** concerned about the environmental impact of the bridge, which will cut through about 12 acres of undisturbed wooded dune and swale land. Despite criticism, in a survey distributed by the city, the project received largely favorable responses and the bridge is currently in the design phase.

### 📄 **Bridge project would end train delays but threaten 4,000-year-old dunes and woods in Hessville**

During his address, McDermott also looked back on the progress the city made throughout 2021. McDermott proudly shared that Hammond was the first city in the state to pass an American Rescue Act funds spending plan, allocating all \$51,395,851 to infrastructure. Hammond was also able to open the newly constructed \$100 million Hammond Central High School and complete the final phase of the Oxbow Landing.

Formerly a multi-residential complex, the mixed-use development is now home to hotels, office buildings, Byway Brewing and Buffalo Wild Wings. Construction is underway on the last two parcels of land in the development, which sits southeast of the Kennedy Avenue interchange on the Borman Expressway.

"It was like a stain on our community," McDermott said of the site previous to its redevelopment. Now, "It's one of the striking examples of 'We can do it.' So when I think about downtown Hammond, I think about Oxbow and I know we did that."

Looking forward, McDermott said he will continue to focus on bringing housing to the city, finding ways to slow speeding and reduce traffic and attract commercial development.

"There are so many important people in here that have worked over the years to make Hammond as great as it is, and we've got a lot of work to still do," McDermott said. "I don't think I'll ever be satisfied with where we are, but I'm really happy I've taken this job and real happy the residents support me. I couldn't do it without you."